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## From boredom to breakthrough: Teacher and student engagement in online and face-to-face contexts in English as a Foreign Language classrooms

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### Abstract

Teacher boredom is a significant yet underexplored issue in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in Saudi Arabia, often intertwined with student disengagement, particularly in the context of dual teaching modalities: offline and online. This qualitative study aimed to investigate the factors contributing to teacher boredom, the strategies employed to mitigate it, and the interrelationship between teacher and student boredom in both teaching environments. Seventy-one EFL teachers from diverse backgrounds participated in the study, completing an open-ended questionnaire. Thematic analysis revealed that monotonous routines, technological challenges, and student disengagement were the primary factors contributing to teacher boredom. Teachers employed various coping strategies, including interactive activities, multimedia tools, and humour, to address these challenges. However, the effectiveness of these strategies varied between offline and online settings. In offline classrooms, teachers relied on direct interaction and relational pedagogical methods, while online environments necessitated the use of technological and multimedia resources. The findings also revealed a cyclical relationship between teacher and student boredom, showing the need for targeted interventions that address the needs of both groups. This study contributes to a nuanced understanding of teacher boredom in the Saudi EFL context and provides practical insights for fostering engagement in diverse teaching modalities. The findings call for professional development, curriculum flexibility, and stronger technological infrastructure to support effective teaching.

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### Practitioner Notes

1. Treat teacher boredom as a professional signal for pedagogical redesign, not a personal failing.
2. Use humor, role-play, and direct interaction to restore energy and engagement in physical classrooms.
3. In online teaching, maintain student focus through personalized interaction and rich visual media.
4. Build engagement resilience through structured reflection, adaptive methods, and student feedback.
5. Demand institutional reforms that enable flexible curricula, smaller class sizes, and digital training.

### Keywords

Engagement, Online Teaching, Professional Development, Saudi EFL Classrooms, Teacher Boredom.

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## Introduction

Teacher engagement is fundamental for effective classroom dynamics and successful educational outcomes. Despite its critical importance, teacher boredom has received limited attention in educational research, particularly in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Fallah et al., 2024). Similar to student boredom, teacher boredom poses a significant challenge to the learning process, leading to diminished motivation, reduced instructional quality, and a decline in overall classroom effectiveness (Zheng & Feng, 2023). The complexities of this issue are further amplified in the context of dual teaching modalities: offline (face-to-face) and online classrooms, each of which presents distinct pedagogical and technological demands that influence teachers' experiences and engagement levels (Mahmoudi-Gahrouei et al., 2024).

In the Saudi EFL context, teacher boredom is particularly notable due to the evolving nature of educational practices and the increasing reliance on online teaching platforms. Teachers are frequently required to navigate technological advancements, adapt pedagogical approaches, and simultaneously manage their engagement while addressing student boredom (Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020). Evidence suggests that teacher boredom can negatively impact student motivation and willingness to communicate, underscoring the crucial role of teacher enthusiasm and enjoyment in fostering a positive and interactive classroom environment (Fallah et al., 2024). Furthermore, the reciprocal relationship between teacher and student boredom suggests a cyclical dynamic: Disengaged teachers struggle to inspire active student participation, perpetuating a cycle of disinterest and underperformance (Zheng & Feng, 2023).

While research into student boredom in EFL contexts has gained traction in recent years (Mousavian Rad et al., 2024), much less attention has been paid to the emotional experiences of teachers, mainly boredom, and its impact on their motivation, instructional quality, and classroom presence. This lack of attention is especially concerning given the reciprocal link between teacher and student disengagement, where boredom on one side can reinforce disengagement on the other (Haque et al., 2023; Tam et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2023). Given its potential to undermine teaching quality and increase attrition, teacher boredom should be recognized as a critical institutional concern, not just an individual challenge. The issue is even more pressing in the Saudi context, where cultural norms, rigid curricula, and growing dependence on online instruction add additional layers of pressure. Despite these realities, teacher boredom remains under-researched, particularly in how it differs between offline and online modalities. Therefore, this study was necessary to explore the root causes of teacher boredom and identify practical strategies that can support engagement in both teaching environments.

This study aimed to understand the causes of boredom among teachers in Saudi EFL classrooms, how they address it personally, and how they help students remain engaged. It also examines whether the strategies employed differ between offline and online classes. The goal is to provide practical ideas to enhance teaching engagement and improve the classroom experience for teachers and students.

## Literature

### Teacher Boredom: Definitions, Causes, and Implications

Teacher boredom, characterized by disengagement and a lack of enthusiasm for teaching activities, is a significant yet underexplored issue in education. It frequently arises from repetitive tasks, predictable routines, and a perceived lack of control or value in teaching activities (Fallah et al., 2024; Qin, 2022). These conditions negatively affect teacher motivation and engagement, diminishing classroom dynamics and student outcomes. Audrin and Hascoët (2021) asserted that teacher boredom can create a cascading effect, reducing student motivation and fostering a cycle of disengagement.

The monotonous nature of many EFL tasks significantly contributes to teacher boredom. Grammar drills and vocabulary exercises dominate EFL instruction, providing limited opportunities for variety and intellectual stimulation (Derakhshan et al., 2021). Predictable routines impede creativity and increase disengagement (Kruk et al., 2021). These challenges are amplified in online teaching, where technological issues, such as unstable Internet connections and interruptions, disrupt lesson flow and exacerbate boredom (Wang, 2024). Wang also noted that the sudden transition to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic intensified these issues, making it difficult for teachers to maintain their enthusiasm.

Another critical factor was the lack of student participation. Disengaged students can leave teachers feeling unmotivated and unappreciated, deepening their sense of monotony (Yan et al., 2023). As Tam et al. (2020) and Li and Zeng (2024) pointed out, this dynamic often creates a feedback loop; when teachers perceive students as bored, their engagement decreases, further undermining classroom energy and effectiveness.

Professional commitment, immediacy, and psychological closeness between teachers and students also play an essential role. Teachers who struggle to connect with their students often experience detachment, which diminishes their engagement in the teaching process (Qin, 2022). This challenge is particularly acute in online classrooms, where limited interaction reduces opportunities to build rapport (Yan et al., 2023). Teachers' boredom is likely to persist without institutional support to address these challenges. Institutional constraints exacerbate this issue in Saudi EFL classrooms. Large class sizes, administrative demands, and insufficient professional development opportunities restrict teachers' ability to personalize instruction and explore creative methodologies (Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020; Yacek & Gary, 2023). These limitations prolong teacher boredom and negatively impact classroom dynamics and student outcomes (Fallah et al., 2024).

The consequences of teacher boredom are far-reaching. Disengaged teachers are less likely to implement dynamic teaching strategies, which in turn reduces student participation and motivation (Yan et al., 2023). In Saudi EFL classrooms, where students heavily rely on teachers for language input, teacher disengagement can impede language acquisition and overall learning progress. Moreover, as noted by Tam et al. (2020), students' perceptions of teacher boredom can amplify their disengagement, perpetuate a cycle of low energy, and negatively impact learning outcomes. Interestingly, some studies suggest that boredom occasionally leads to positive outcomes. Elahi Shirvan et al. (2024) observed that boredom might prompt teachers to seek innovative approaches, transforming dissatisfaction into creativity under certain conditions. However, these benefits are contingent on institutional support and professional development frameworks. Without these, boredom remains a significant obstacle to effective teaching.

## **Teacher and Student Boredom in Offline and Online Classrooms**

The prevalence of teacher and student boredom in Saudi EFL classrooms exhibits significant variation between offline and online environments due to the distinct characteristics and demands of each teaching context (Luong & Hoa, 2023; Tam et al., 2020). Offline classrooms often feature repetitive instructional routines, limited pedagogical flexibility, and large class sizes. The traditional emphasis on grammar-focused lessons and rote memorization, which predominate in EFL curricula, often precludes the use of interactive or student-centred approaches (Pawlak et al., 2021). Physical classroom settings in Saudi educational institutions, typically categorized by rigid seating arrangements and limited technological integration, further constrain teachers' capacity to diversify their methodologies and effectively engage students. These observations align with the findings of Derakhshan et al. (2021), who identified monotony and a lack of creative instructional strategies as significant contributors to boredom in EFL classrooms.

In online classrooms, the sources of boredom are distinct but equally challenging. The rapid transition to virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated that teachers adapt to unfamiliar platforms with minimal preparation, frequently resulting in increased technical difficulties and disrupted lesson flows (Derakhshan et al., 2021). Wang (2024) shows that such technical issues, coupled with the absence of non-verbal cues, impeded teachers' ability to sustain engagement and connect effectively with their students. Furthermore, Kruk et al. (2022) suggest that the ecological complexity of online classes, including technological limitations, reduced spontaneity, and a lack of immediacy, significantly contributes to teacher and student boredom. Similarly, Al-khresheh (2023) examined online engagement among Jordanian EFL students during the pandemic and found that virtual instruction often resulted in low interactivity, weak student presence, and reduced participation, conditions that align with teacher-reported experiences of emotional fatigue and disconnection in the present study. This phenomenon has also been observed in studies of Vietnamese EFL classrooms, where students expressed frustration with limited interaction and repetitive online activities (Luong & Hoa, 2023).

For students, boredom in offline classrooms often originates from teacher-centred instruction, where passive listening and note-taking dominate the learning process. Many Saudi EFL students rely heavily on classroom instruction for their primary exposure to English, but the paucity of interactive and communicative activities diminishes their motivation and interest in learning (Pawlak et al., 2020). Riaz et al. (2023) observe that students generally prefer offline learning for its opportunities for engagement and interaction. However, this preference did not mitigate the effects of monotonous and rigid instructional methods. In online classrooms, student boredom is further exacerbated by technical challenges, distractions in the home environment, and a lack of immediate feedback (Derakhshan et al., 2022). Frequently employed in online learning, asynchronous formats often fail to provide meaningful participation opportunities, leading to student disengagement and demotivation (Huang & Zheng, 2022).

The interaction between teacher and student boredom constitutes a critical dynamic in offline and online educational environments. Tam et al. (2020) characterize this relationship as cyclical, wherein disengaged teachers can diminish students' motivation, and disengaged students, in turn, reciprocally demotivate their instructors. Dewaele and Li (2021) stressed the mediating role of student enjoyment in this relationship, noting that teacher enthusiasm, or its absence, directly affects students' engagement and perceptions of boredom. In offline classrooms, inattentive or disruptive student behaviour can lead to teacher frustration. In contrast, in online settings, the lack

of student interaction or response exacerbates teachers' feelings of isolation and monotony (Wang, 2024). This cyclical relationship highlights the importance of addressing boredom at both levels to create a more engaging and productive learning environment in the Saudi EFL context.

Although boredom is often perceived as an impediment, it can stimulate reflection and creativity under certain conditions. Derakhshan et al. (2022) highlighted that activity-induced boredom occasionally prompts teachers and students to seek innovative solutions. However, the potential for positive outcomes is heavily contingent on the availability of institutional support and opportunities for professional development. Without these frameworks, boredom remains a significant obstacle to effective teaching and learning.

### **Strategies to Mitigate Boredom and Enhance Engagement**

Mitigating boredom and fostering engagement in educational settings, particularly offline and online EFL classrooms, requires multifaceted strategies informed by evidence-based practices. Teachers can create more dynamic and engaging learning environments by addressing the curricular, technological, interpersonal, and self-regulatory dimensions. Effective curriculum design that balances challenge and engagement is essential for reducing boredom. Westgate (2020) identified boredom as a response to tasks that lack sufficient complexity or fail to capture learners' intrinsic interests. Incorporating tasks that challenge students without overwhelming them fosters a sustained engagement. Similarly, Sharp et al. (2020) stressed the importance of varied and stimulating content to maintain academic interest, particularly in higher education contexts.

In EFL classrooms, Pawlak et al. (2021) stressed the importance of integrating interactive and diverse activities to reduce monotony, particularly in online settings, where engagement levels are often lower. Rezaee and Seyri (2022) drew attention to the effectiveness of autonomy-oriented interventions, which empower students by allowing them greater control over their learning processes. This approach reduces boredom and enhances students' sense of ownership and educational investment. Zhang (2023) further points out the role of teacher-supported autonomy in fostering active participation and mitigating disengagement.

Leveraging technology to enhance engagement has been shown to mitigate boredom, particularly in online classrooms. This aligns with findings by Al-khresheh and Alkursheh (2024), who demonstrated that integrating platforms like Blackboard supports English proficiency and contributes to learners' academic success. Samrose et al. (2020) claimed the potential of integrating empathetic conversational agents into educational platforms to improve mood and sustain focus. Such tools personalize interactions, foster a sense of connection, and reduce monotony. Similarly, adaptive digital platforms that balance task complexity with individual capabilities effectively maintain attention and engagement (Struk et al., 2021).

Kruk et al. (2022) advocate incorporating gamified elements, such as quizzes or competitive activities, to counteract boredom in online environments. These elements are particularly effective in contexts with low mental workload, providing an additional layer of engagement (Ji et al., 2021). In offline classrooms, integrating technology with traditional teaching methods can diversify instructional approaches and reduce repetitive practices, as highlighted by Sharp et al. (2020). The quality of teacher-student relationships is critical for mitigating boredom. Zhang (2023) confirms the role of teacher-student rapport in creating a supportive and engaging classroom

environment. Students who perceive their teachers as approachable and enthusiastic are likely to remain engaged and are less prone to boredom. Xie (2021) illustrates the importance of teacher immediacy and responsiveness, noting that timely feedback and positive interactions significantly reduce feelings of disengagement, particularly in online settings.

Gary (2022) and Dewaele and Li (2021) both asserted the mediating role of teacher enthusiasm in fostering student enjoyment and mitigating boredom. When Teachers demonstrate a passion for their subject and actively engage with students, they create a classroom atmosphere that encourages participation and sustains interest. This is particularly significant in online contexts, where physical separation can exacerbate feelings of isolation and disengagement (Rezaee & Seyri, 2022). Promoting self-regulation is another effective strategy to combat boredom. Westgate (2020) posited that boredom often results from an imbalance between task demands and an individual's ability to sustain attention. Instructing students to regulate their engagement through goal-setting and reflective practices can help them actively navigate periods of monotony. Struk et al. (2021) declare the importance of perceived control, noting that students who perceive agency over their learning are likelier to remain engaged. However, they caution that excessive or insufficient control can lead to disengagement, highlighting the necessity for balance.

Teachers play a critical role in reducing boredom through innovative and flexible teaching practices. Dishon-Berkovits et al. (2023) advocated for playful work design, wherein lessons incorporate elements of creativity, competition, and enjoyment to transform routine tasks into engaging experiences. This approach aligns with Zhang's (2023) findings, which emphasize the importance of tailoring instructional methods to student preferences and needs. Sharp et al. (2020) also reported the importance of proactive communication, encouraging teachers to foster a deeper connection to the material and clarify its relevance to students' goals. Mitigating boredom in EFL classrooms requires a comprehensive approach that integrates curriculum design, technological tools, interpersonal rapport, and self-regulation strategies. Through fostering autonomy, leveraging adaptive technologies, and cultivating meaningful teacher-student relationships, teachers can address the root causes of boredom and transform the classroom into an engaging and productive environment. These strategies, supported by robust research, offer a practical framework for enhancing learning experiences in offline and online settings.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts the 'Functional Theory of Boredom' (FTB) as its conceptual foundation. As stated by Danckert and Elpidorou (2023), this theoretical perspective frames boredom not as a purely disruptive or negative emotional state but as an adaptive, functional signal that motivates individuals to reorient attention, reassess their current activity, and seek more meaningful or cognitively congruent engagements (Elpidorou, 2023; Westgate, 2020). From this standpoint, boredom arises when individuals perceive a task or environment as insufficiently stimulating, lacking in personal relevance, or failing to meet internal goals (Bieleke et al., 2021; Bieleke et al., 2024; Danckert & Elpidorou, 2023; Elpidorou, 2023; Finkielstein, 2025). Rather than being viewed as a passive condition, boredom is reinterpreted as a mechanism that encourages change, creativity, and re-engagement.

Within educational contexts, the functional view of boredom provides a powerful lens for understanding both the antecedents and consequences of disengagement, particularly among teachers (Audrin & Hascoët, 2021). Pedagogical routines characterized by repetition, constrained

autonomy, or minimal cognitive challenge may induce boredom; however, the theory suggests that such emotional discomfort can prompt proactive responses (Finkielstein, 2021; Wang & Xu, 2021). Teachers experiencing boredom may engage in reflective practice, pedagogical experimentation, or the redesign of classroom activities, responses that align with the theory's central claim that boredom has motivational value (Nakamura et al., 2021; Pekrun & Goetz, 2024; Shen, 2022). These adaptive behaviors may include the integration of multimedia, collaborative tasks, humor, or alternative classroom dynamics intended to re-establish engagement and instructional meaning.

Notably, the theory also accounts for the reciprocal emotional exchanges within classrooms, particularly the cyclical relationship between teacher and student boredom (Amiri et al., 2022). Previous studies have shown that boredom is not isolated to the individual but may emerge through shared classroom affective climates. For example, student disengagement may reduce teacher motivation, while teacher detachment may reinforce student apathy (Mousavian Rad et al., 2024; Yan et al., 2023). The functional perspective accommodates this bidirectional influence, suggesting that teachers and students may interpret boredom as a signal to act, adjust, and re-engage. As such, boredom may serve as a catalyst for renewing emotional connections, instructional alignment, and cognitive involvement (Yacek & Gary, 2023). Given this, FTB offers a lens through which teacher boredom is understood not as a fixed psychological barrier but as a dynamic experience that can lead to meaningful pedagogical change. This perspective supports the central aim of the study, which is to explore how teachers recognize and respond to boredom through deliberate strategy use and classroom adaptation. When constructively addressed, boredom has the potential to foster innovation, strengthen professional agency, and support more engaged and responsive teaching practices.

## **Research Gap**

Despite the increasing focus on student boredom in EFL research, teacher boredom remains insufficiently explored, particularly within the Saudi context. Most existing studies emphasize student outcomes, leaving a gap in understanding the causes, manifestations, and mitigation strategies for teacher disengagement (Fallah et al., 2024; Zheng & Feng, 2023). This oversight is critical given the cyclical dynamic between teacher and student boredom, wherein a lack of teacher engagement diminishes student motivation, perpetuating a feedback loop of disengagement on both sides (Tam et al., 2020; Mousavian Rad et al., 2024). Furthermore, research rarely differentiates how teacher boredom manifests in offline versus online classrooms, despite the distinct pedagogical and technological challenges each modality presents (Derakhshan et al., 2021; Wang, 2024). In Saudi EFL classrooms, institutional constraints such as large class sizes, inflexible curricula, and limited access to professional development exacerbate the issue; however, these factors remain underexplored (Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020). Although some strategies to combat boredom have been proposed, few studies have offered practical, context-specific interventions tailored to the unique demands of dual teaching modalities. Addressing these gaps, this study examines teacher boredom in Saudi EFL classrooms. It investigates its underlying causes, relationship with student engagement, and strategies to foster greater teacher involvement in offline and online learning environments. To achieve these objectives, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What key factors contribute to teacher boredom in offline and online Saudi EFL classrooms and what coping strategies are employed to address these challenges?
2. How do teachers in Saudi EFL classrooms identify and mitigate student boredom in offline and online teaching environments and what strategies are utilized to enhance student engagement?
3. What strategies do teachers in Saudi EFL classrooms recommend to address teacher and student boredom in offline and online settings, and how do these strategies vary between the two modalities?

## Method

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine teacher boredom in Saudi EFL classrooms. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate, as it facilitates a good understanding of complex, context-specific phenomena by focusing on personal accounts and subjective experiences (Dehalwar & Sharma, 2024). This methodological approach enables a more in-depth examination of how boredom manifests in both offline and online teaching environments, emphasizing the perspectives of teachers and the contextual realities they navigate.

### Participants

This study included 71 EFL teachers employed in the Saudi EFL context, representing diverse nationalities, qualifications, and academic ranks. A stratified purposive sampling method was employed to ensure well-adjusted representation across key demographic and professional categories, including gender, age, teaching experience, and academic qualifications. These strata were selected based on their potential influence on teachers' experiences of boredom in both offline and online teaching contexts. Participants were purposefully selected to represent variation within each category, enabling the study to capture a broader range of perspectives and generate a more nuanced understanding of teacher boredom in the Saudi EFL higher education setting. All participants were teaching in higher education institutions, including public and private universities across Saudi Arabia. This setting was chosen because university instructors frequently navigate both offline and online modalities, face large class sizes, and work within fixed curricular frameworks, all factors closely linked to the experience of teacher boredom and student disengagement.

As shown in Table 1, the sample comprised 33 male (46.48%) and 38 female (53.52%) teachers. The predominant age group was 36-45 years (42.25%), followed by over 45 years (36.62%), with the youngest group, aged 25-35 years, constituting 21.13% of the sample. Teaching experience also varied, with the majority (38.03%) having more than 15 years of experience. Teachers with 6-10 years of experience constituted 9.86% of the sample, while those with 11-15 years and 0-5 years each represented 8.45%. This range encompasses both highly experienced teachers and those just starting their careers.

The participants possessed diverse academic qualifications, with most holding master's and doctoral degrees. They occupy various academic positions, ranging from teaching assistants to senior faculty members, and are employed across different institutions in Saudi Arabia. This diversity reflects the broader teaching setting and facilitates the examination of institutional,

cultural, and professional influences on teacher boredom. The sample composition provides a robust foundation for exploring how demographic factors, professional backgrounds, and institutional contexts contribute to the causes and manifestations of teacher boredom. This diversity is crucial for deriving meaningful insights into strategies for addressing boredom in offline and online teaching environments.

**Table 1**

*Sample Characteristics of EFL Teachers*

<b>Variables</b>		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	33	46.48
	Female	38	53.52
<b>Age</b>	25-35	15	21.13
	36-45	30	42.25
	More than 45	26	36.62
<b>Teaching Experience</b>	0-5	6	8.45
	6-10	7	9.86
	11-15	6	8.45
	More than 15	27	38.03
	<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100</b>

**Instrument**

The primary instrument for this study was an open-ended questionnaire carefully designed to investigate teacher boredom within the Saudi EFL context. The questionnaire consisted of two sections, each tailored to gather specific information critical to addressing the research objectives.

**Demographic Information**

This section elicited critical participant demographics, including age, gender, and teaching experience. These variables provided contextual information for the analysis, ensuring that the findings could be interpreted by considering participants' backgrounds and professional profiles.

**Open-Ended Questions**

The second section comprised seven open-ended questions aligned with the study's research questions. These questions were formulated to investigate the factors contributing to teacher boredom, strategies to mitigate it, and the interrelationship between teacher and student boredom in offline and online educational environments. The items were developed by the researchers and were informed by themes and concepts found in the literature on teacher boredom, classroom engagement, and pedagogical challenges in EFL contexts. Table 2 summarises the qualitative questions:

**Table 2**

*Open Ended Questions*

<b>Part B: Open-Ended Questionnaire</b>	
<b>1</b>	Have you ever felt bored when teaching offline and online classes? If so, what coping strategies do you use to mitigate this feeling? Please explain.

- 2 Which classes do you find more boring: face-to-face classes or online classes? Why? Please explain.
  - 3 What are the causes of boredom when you taught English classes online? Please explain.
  - 4 Have you ever noticed any signs of boredom among your students? What do you do to mitigate this feeling among them? Please explain.
  - 5 What strategies do you employ to help your students get over feeling of boredom during specific activities you mentioned in the previous question? Please explain.
  - 6 What solutions can you suggest to overcome the signs of boredom in your face-to-face or online classes? Please explain.
  - 7 Do you think that the solutions to overcome the signs of boredom are valid for both face-to-face and online classes? In other words, are there specific solutions that are valid for online classes and others for face-to-face?
- 

### **Instrument validation**

The open-ended questionnaire utilized in this study underwent a rigorous validation process to ensure its reliability and appropriateness for investigating teacher boredom in the Saudi EFL context. This process encompasses several critical steps designed to refine the instrument and ensure its alignment with the research objectives and the cultural context.

#### ***Expert Review for Content Validity***

A panel of three experts in English language teaching reviewed the initial version of the questionnaire. The panel method is optimal for assessing content validity (Rusticus, 2024). The experts evaluated the clarity, relevance, and alignment of the questions with the objectives of the study. Their feedback identified areas for improvement, resulting in substantial refinement. These modifications included reducing the number of questions from ten to seven to maintain focus and eliminate redundancy. Moreover, a demographic question on teaching experience was incorporated, acknowledging its significant role in influencing teachers' boredom. These revisions ensured that the instrument effectively addressed the complexities of the phenomena under investigation.

#### ***Pilot Testing***

Following the expert review, the revised questionnaire was pilot-tested with 16 EFL teachers who represented the target population's demographic and professional characteristics. This phase assessed the instrument's clarity, practicality, and cultural relevance. The participants provided constructive feedback regarding the wording and structure of the questions, which necessitated further refinement. For instance, ambiguous terms were elucidated and the questions were modified to elicit thoughtful, detailed responses. Pilot testing corroborated the efficacy of the questionnaire in obtaining meaningful and context-rich data.

#### ***Construct Validity***

The instrument's construct validity was established by directly aligning open-ended questions with the study's research questions and objectives. This procedure was highly acknowledged by Piedmont (2024). Each of the seven questions examined specific aspects of teacher boredom,

including its aetiology, coping mechanisms, and interactions with student boredom across offline and online teaching modalities. This alignment ensured that the instrument comprehensively addressed the central focus of the study.

### ***Contextual Relevance***

The questionnaire was adapted to the specific context of EFL instruction in Saudi Arabia to ensure cultural and contextual appropriateness. The formulation of the questions was refined to align with the participants' experiences and to account for the region's distinctive educational and professional environment. This methodological approach was crucial for eliciting authentic and meaningful responses, thereby ensuring that the collected data accurately reflected the nuances in the Saudi EFL context.

### **Data collection procedures**

The data collection process was conducted during the first term of the 2023-2024 academic year. A validated open-ended questionnaire was distributed to 71 EFL teachers working in the Saudi context. To ensure accessibility and facilitate participation, the questionnaire was administered online, allowing participants to respond conveniently. Explicit instructions were provided, emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality of responses, and the importance of comprehensive and reflective input. Participants were given two weeks to complete the questionnaire, with follow-up reminders sent to encourage timely submission and optimize the response rate. All responses were securely stored, and participant anonymity was maintained throughout the process. This systematic and ethical approach ensured the efficient collection of qualitative data aligned with the objectives of the study.

### **Data analysis**

The data collected from the open-ended questionnaire were analyzed using thematic analysis to elucidate patterns and insights into teacher boredom in the Saudi EFL context. The analytical process involved the following steps:

1. **Data Organization:** Participant responses were transcribed, anonymized, and categorized according to the research questions.
2. **Initial Coding:** Two researchers independently conducted line-by-line coding, identifying recurring words, phrases, and ideas related to boredom triggers, coping mechanisms, and modality-based differences. Initial codes were generated inductively from raw data without applying pre-established categories.
3. **Code Refinement and Theme Development:** The codes were compared, merged, and refined through multiple rounds of discussion. Codes with conceptual similarities were grouped under broader sub-themes (e.g., "technological challenges," "humour and rapport-building"), which were then organized into overarching themes. This grouping was guided by the frequency, relevance, and contextual weight of the codes.
4. **Validation:** Two researchers reviewed the themes collaboratively to ensure consistency, reliability, and alignment with the study objectives. Discrepancies in coding or theme labeling were resolved through consensus-building sessions.

5. Interpretation: The finalized themes were analyzed to provide actionable insights, illustrated by excerpts from participant responses to add depth and context.

NVivo 14 software was used to manage and organize the qualitative data, facilitating systematic coding, retrieval of coded segments, and visualization of theme interrelations. This study followed reflexive thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021), using an inductive, data-driven approach that allowed themes to emerge organically from participants' responses rather than pre-established categories. The process was iterative and collaborative, involving ongoing comparison and refinement of codes until no substantially new themes emerged. Although formal saturation was not calculated, the analysis reached conceptual stability. Both coders maintained a reflexive journal and regularly revisited earlier coding decisions to enhance transparency and interpretive accuracy. Researcher reflexivity was actively upheld throughout the analysis via continuous dialogue and consensus-building to ensure the trustworthiness and clarity of thematic interpretations.

### **Ethical considerations**

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines and was approved by the Northern Border University's Ethical Review Committee. The participants provided informed consent and maintained anonymity and confidentiality throughout the research.

## **Results**

### **Factors contributing to teacher boredom and coping mechanisms**

The analysis elucidated several factors contributing to teacher boredom in Saudi EFL classrooms, including monotony in instructional routines, technological challenges, and student disengagement. These factors were accompanied by diverse coping mechanisms employed by teachers to mitigate boredom, with illustrative quotations providing insight into their experiences. Importantly, these themes are not isolated but deeply interrelated, with each reinforcing the others; for instance, student disengagement not only reflects but also intensifies repetitive routines, amplifying the teacher's sense of monotony and frustration.

A recurring concern among the participants was the monotony and predictability of teaching routines, particularly in online settings. Teachers frequently described their tasks as repetitive and uninspiring, leading to a sense of disengagement. One teacher explained, "*Online classes feel like I am on autopilot. Every session is the same, and it is exhausting.*" Another participant observed, "*In face-to-face classes, the rigid structure and lack of variety in lessons dull the teaching experience over time.*" This issue was particularly pronounced among teachers with over 15 years of experience, who often expressed a need for more dynamic and creative opportunities. These responses suggest that the lack of variety and autonomy in lesson delivery significantly contributes to teacher boredom, particularly among more experienced educators. Repetitive routines appear to diminish the cognitive challenge of teaching and reduce opportunities for professional stimulation. When tasks become predictable, teachers may feel emotionally disconnected from their work.

Technological challenges also play a significant role in contributing to teacher boredom, especially in online environments. Many teachers highlighted unstable Internet connections and technical disruptions as significant obstacles to enthusiasm. One respondent noted, "*Unstable internet connections ruin the flow of my lessons, leaving me feeling irritated and bored.*" Similarly, another

teacher stated, *“Technical glitches during class often distract me and make it harder to maintain enthusiasm for the lesson.”* These difficulties were frequently mentioned by teachers aged 36–45 years, the largest demographic group in the study, who expressed frustration over the added burden of managing technical issues. Such disruptions undermined teachers’ focus and energy during online instruction. Teachers often experienced a loss of instructional rhythm, contributing to emotional fatigue and decreased motivation. The absence of reliable tools to deliver lessons consistently was a significant barrier to engagement. When combined with student disengagement, these technological challenges created a compounded sense of detachment, teachers found themselves battling not only systems but also silence, amplifying feelings of ineffectiveness and boredom.

Another critical factor was student disengagement, which often left teachers unmotivated and unappreciated. A participant shared, *“In online classes, students rarely turn on their cameras or participate in discussions, making it feel like I am talking to a void.”* Large class sizes and passive student attitudes compounded this issue in face-to-face settings. One teacher remarked, *“In large face-to-face classes, students tend to zone out, and their lack of interest makes it hard to stay motivated.”* The teachers’ remarks indicate low student responsiveness—regardless of modality—contributes to emotional disconnection and reduced teaching motivation. A perceived lack of reciprocity in the learning environment may cause teachers to feel isolated and question the impact of their efforts. This lack of interaction further reinforces routine and monotony, showing how disengaged students do not merely reflect teacher boredom but also intensify it, leading to a cyclical pattern of mutual detachment.

Teachers employ various coping mechanisms to counteract these challenges, such as incorporating interactive activities. Many participants used games, quizzes, and group discussions to create a dynamic and engaging environment. One teacher explained, *“I often use quizzes and games in my online classes to break the monotony and engage students.”* Another added, *“Group discussions and collaborative projects have been very effective in bringing energy back to the classroom.”* These strategies were described as helpful in re-energizing the classroom and maintaining interest among both students and teachers. Interactive approaches offer psychological relief from routine and allow for more spontaneous engagement, primarily when used strategically in larger or technology-constrained environments. Moreover, these strategies address both student disengagement and teacher fatigue, thereby interrupting the boredom cycle between both parties.

The adoption of flexible pedagogical approaches has emerged as a critical coping strategy. The teachers adapted their methods to incorporate multimedia resources, role-playing, and other creative techniques to promote engagement. One participant shared, *“In face-to-face classes, I use role-playing exercises to make the lessons more engaging for myself and my students.”* Another noted, *“In online classes, I incorporate videos and multimedia presentations to add variety and keep students interested.”* Such flexibility is especially valued by teachers with 6–10 years of experience. Participants viewed these adjustments as essential for maintaining lesson variety and reducing repetitive fatigue. Teachers described how such creativity helped them feel more invested in the lesson and supported a sense of professional growth. This adaptability mitigated monotony and indirectly countered student disengagement, reinforcing how teacher strategies are shaped by and, in turn, influence classroom participation.

Using humour and building rapport with students is a common strategy to alleviate boredom. Teachers acknowledged the importance of creating a relaxed, enjoyable atmosphere to maintain engagement. One respondent remarked, *“A lighthearted joke or a funny story during class makes the environment more enjoyable for everyone.”* Another stated, *“Building a personal connection with my students helps me stay engaged, especially in online classes where interaction feels more distant.”* These comments disclose the perceived value of relational techniques for sustaining teacher engagement and classroom atmosphere. Several teachers described humour as a strategy for entertaining students and a tool to foster mutual comfort and break the monotony of formal instruction. Establishing these interpersonal connections often helped bridge the emotional distance caused by student disengagement, thus reinforcing the social dimension of classroom motivation.

Finally, professional reflection is highlighted to sustain motivation and improve teaching practices. Teachers regularly evaluated their methods and sought feedback to refine their approaches. One participant explained, *“After every lesson, I take a moment to evaluate what worked and what did not.” It helps me plan better and keep things fresh.* Another shared, *“Feedback from students is incredibly valuable. It helps me fine-tune my approach and stay motivated.”* These responses suggest that reflective practice was key to maintaining instructional effectiveness and personal engagement over time. Teachers noted that such ongoing evaluation enabled them to identify boredom triggers and make proactive instructional changes, contributing to a greater sense of autonomy and resilience.

### **Teacher Practices for Mitigating Student Boredom and Enhancing Engagement**

The analysis elucidated various strategies employed by teachers to identify and address student disengagement, tailored to the pedagogical context and specific needs of learners. These practices reflect diverse experiences shaped by factors such as pedagogical experience, age, and modality of instruction, underscoring the complex dynamics of fostering student engagement. Notably, these strategies also function as preemptive responses to teacher boredom, as educators seek to prevent the demotivating effects arising from prolonged student inattention and lack of interaction.

Teachers identified student boredom through observable behavioural indicators, including inattention, lack of participation, and diminished energy. One teacher noted, *“In online classes, I can tell when students are bored by the way they turn off their cameras or remain silent throughout the session.”* Similarly, another observed, *“In face-to-face classes, students avoiding eye contact or appearing distracted are clear signs of disengagement.”* These observations suggest that teachers rely heavily on nonverbal cues to detect boredom, with online platforms posing unique challenges due to the absence of physical presence. Younger teachers (aged 25–35) appeared more perceptive of these subtleties, suggesting that generational differences may influence how teachers monitor and respond to boredom. This could reflect a greater familiarity among younger teachers with digital communication styles and behavioral tones in online learning. Failure to recognize or address these cues early on often led to prolonged disengagement, which contributed to teachers’ sense of disconnection and lowered professional satisfaction, as shown in the previous section.

Interactive and collaborative strategies have been frequently cited as practical tools for mitigating boredom. Many participants highlighted group activities, discussions, and educational games as

methods for reengaging students. One teacher explained, *“Group discussions and problem-solving tasks often revitalize the classroom atmosphere, especially when students seem disengaged.”* Another shared, *“Introducing competitive elements like quizzes or games always excites students, particularly the younger ones.”* These strategies were beneficial for breaking passive learning cycles and creating a more socially connected environment. However, some teachers noted challenges in implementing these strategies, particularly in larger classes. One participant remarked, *“Interactive activities are difficult to manage effectively in a class with more than 30 students.”* This reflects the structural limitations that may inhibit active learning practices in overcrowded classrooms. Yet, many teachers persisted in adapting these methods to engage students and protect themselves from the monotony that emerges in teacher-centered instruction—further linking student boredom with teacher boredom.

Positive reinforcement and personalized feedback are also commonly used to sustain student engagement. The teachers accentuated the importance of recognizing students’ efforts to foster a sense of achievement. One respondent stated, *“Even small words of praise can make a big difference in keeping students motivated.”* Another shared, *“Providing individualized feedback during activities helps students feel connected to the lesson and reduces distractions.”* Experienced teachers, particularly those with 11–15 years in the field, appeared more confident in applying these techniques, likely drawing on accumulated pedagogical insight. These findings suggest tailored feedback and praise can help build rapport and sustain students’ attention during routine instruction. Teachers who regularly employed these strategies also reported lower levels of emotional fatigue, suggesting that such interactional feedback loops between teachers and students serve a dual motivational function.

Humour and a relaxed classroom atmosphere are additional practices used to combat boredom. Teachers often use lightheartedness and relatable content to reengage students. One teacher noted, *“A quick joke or anecdote can completely shift the mood and bring the class back on track.”* Another explained, *“Connecting the material to students’ real-life experiences helps them relate to the lesson and keeps them interested.”* Less experienced teachers (0–5 years) appeared especially reliant on relational strategies such as humor and personalization, using them to build rapport and foster classroom comfort. These practices were perceived not only as engagement tools but also as methods to humanize the learning experience. Moreover, they contributed to a more emotionally fulfilling teaching experience for educators, reducing the risk of disengagement from repetitive and impersonal routines.

Flexibility in instructional methods emerged as a crucial strategy, with teachers adapting their approaches based on classroom mood, student profiles, and content type. One teacher remarked, *“I adapt my teaching style depending on the class mood—sometimes discussions work better, while other times, visuals are more effective.”* This adaptability was essential to maintaining responsiveness to real-time engagement shifts, though teachers differed in their confidence and success with such modifications. Not all participants agreed on the efficacy of these strategies. One teacher stated, *“Interactive approaches do not always work in online classes because some students prefer passive learning styles.”* This comment highlights the variability of learner preferences, suggesting that even effective strategies must be balanced with an awareness of student readiness and contextual constraints. Such reflections reveal that attempts to address student boredom are often emotionally and cognitively taxing for teachers themselves, requiring them to continuously evaluate, adapt, and reconcile their professional values with the realities of

institutional and learner expectations. Overall, the findings point to a range of responsive teaching practices grounded in teachers' observations of student behavior. While diverse, these strategies converge on a shared aim: to sustain attention, boost participation, and reduce disengagement in physical and virtual learning spaces.

### **Comparative strategies for addressing boredom in offline and online modalities**

The analysis of responses revealed diverse strategies for mitigating boredom in offline and online educational environments, influenced by pedagogical experience, age, and gender. These practices demonstrate teachers' adaptability to varied instructional modalities while impacting their engagement and motivation.

Teachers in offline classrooms have leveraged face-to-face interactions to foster engagement. One participant with over 15 years of experience noted, *"In face-to-face classes, I use role-playing and discussions to actively involve students; it keeps them interested."* Another teacher in the 36-45 age group confirmed, *"Making students part of the lesson itself is the most effective way to engage them during physical classes."* These responses suggest that experienced educators rely on relational and interactive techniques that benefit from the immediacy and responsiveness of in-person instruction. Such strategies appear to support both student attentiveness and teacher enthusiasm.

Standard online classrooms are technology-driven solutions. Younger teachers (aged 25-35) frequently utilized multimedia tools, as one remarked, *"Activating video and using visuals during online lectures help to maintain attention."* Another participant with 6-10 years of experience shared, *"I call students by name during online classes to keep them alert and involved."* Another teacher indicated, *"During Online classes, I call the student by name and ask questions now and then. Face-to-face classes sometimes show them videos related to their syllabus or ask them to change their places."* These comments illustrate a proactive effort to personalize virtual instruction and maintain interaction despite the physical separation inherent to online learning. However, some teachers, particularly those with less experience, expressed concern over reduced responsiveness and the lack of immediate feedback in digital settings. One participant remarked, *"Some solutions do not work online because of the lack of immediate feedback and interaction."* This observation reflects a broader challenge in sustaining engagement in technology-mediated classrooms and suggests that specific modalities require greater instructional effort to achieve similar levels of connection.

The applicability of strategies across modalities generated mixed responses. Some teachers believed in the universality of engagement techniques, with one male teacher stating, *"Yes, most strategies can work in both online and offline classes if adjusted properly."* Others have clarified modality-specific differences. A female teacher with over 15 years of experience observed, *"In online classes, there is a need for constant visual engagement, unlike face-to-face, where direct interaction is enough."* Such variation highlights that teacher preferences and strategy effectiveness are strongly mediated by context and teaching experience. It also suggests that while several practices may be transferable, their implementation often requires adaptation to fit the affordances and constraints of each setting.

These findings reveal that while both modalities require targeted strategies, offline teaching benefits from direct interaction, whereas online instruction relies heavily on technological tools and adaptability. Teachers' experiences, age, and teaching context are crucial for shaping their

perceptions and practices. Based on thematic analysis, Table 3 summarizes the identified themes and subthemes, offering a concise overview of the critical findings supported by illustrative examples.

**Table 3**

*Themes, Sub-Themes, and Illustrative Quotes from Thematic Analysis*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>Illustrative Quotes</b>
Factors Contributing to Teacher Boredom and Coping Mechanisms	Monotonous instructional routines	Online classes feel like I am on autopilot. Every session is the same, and it is exhausting.
	Technological challenges	Unstable internet connections ruin the flow of my lessons, leaving me feeling irritated and bored.
	Student disengagement	In large face-to-face classes, students tend to zone out, and their lack of interest makes it hard to stay motivated.
	Interactive and flexible strategies	I often use quizzes and games in my online classes to break the monotony and engage students.
	Use of humor and rapport-building	A lighthearted joke or a funny story during class makes the environment more enjoyable for everyone.
	Professional reflection	After every lesson, I take a moment to evaluate what worked and what didn't. It helps me plan better and keep things fresh.
Teacher Practices for Mitigating Student Boredom and Enhancing Engagement	Behavioral cues and observation	In online classes, I can tell when students are bored by the way they turn off their cameras or remain silent.
	Interactive/collaborative strategies	Group discussions and problem-solving tasks often revitalize the classroom atmosphere.
	Positive reinforcement and feedback	Even small words of praise can make a big difference in keeping students motivated.
	Humor and personalization	Connecting the material to students' real-life experiences helps them relate to the lesson.
	Instructional flexibility	I adapt my teaching style depending on the class mood—sometimes discussions work better, while other times, visuals are more effective.
Comparative Strategies Across Modalities	Offline strategies (face-to-face engagement)	In face-to-face classes, I use role-playing and discussions to actively involve students.

Online strategies (tech and personalization)	Activating video and using visuals during online lectures help to maintain attention.
Cross-modal adaptability	Most strategies can work in both online and offline classes if adjusted properly.
Modality-specific challenges	Some solutions do not work online because of the lack of immediate feedback and interaction.

## Discussion

This study aimed to explore the causes of teacher boredom in Saudi EFL classrooms, the strategies teachers employ to cope with it, and the differences in these strategies between offline and online teaching contexts. To address these aims, the discussion is organized around three research questions. Each part explains the main findings and connects them to relevant studies, providing a clearer understanding of the issues.

### **What key factors contribute to teacher boredom in offline and online Saudi EFL classrooms and what coping strategies are employed to address these challenges?**

This study found that teacher boredom in Saudi EFL classrooms often stems from repetitive routines, technology-related issues, and a lack of student involvement. These findings are consistent with earlier research, showing that limited variety in classroom activities contributes to disengagement (Fallah et al., 2024; Qin, 2022). Similar to the observations of Derakhshan et al. (2021), teachers in this study described how predictable tasks and rigid curricula diminished their interest in teaching. The issue extends beyond individual factors; a mutual cycle of disengagement exists, where student passivity reduces teacher motivation, and teacher disinterest, in turn, affects student participation. This cycle has also been described by Tam et al. (2020) and Yan et al. (2023), who examined the reciprocal link between teacher and student boredom. Addressing this loop is particularly important in the Saudi context, where classroom interactions are significantly influenced by institutional constraints and cultural expectations (Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020). These patterns reflect what the ETB describes as a mismatch between task demands and psychological needs, prompting the emotional signal of boredom as a cue for change (Elpidorou, 2023; Westgate, 2020).

Repetitive routines, especially in online teaching, significantly contribute to monotony. Teachers often describe virtual lessons as lacking variety and intellectual stimulation. These experiences align with those of Derakhshan et al. (2021), who found that such monotony mainly affects experienced teachers seeking creative outlets. Technological disruptions, such as unstable Internet connections and technical glitches, further exacerbate boredom by disrupting lesson flows and undermining teacher motivation (Wang, 2024). In online settings, teachers frequently reported a lack of student engagement, with students turning off their cameras and avoiding participation. Similarly, large offline classes with passive students compound this issue, making it challenging for teachers to establish meaningful connections and maintain engagement (Yan et al., 2023). Within the framework of the ETB, such conditions represent a breakdown in cognitive engagement, which activates boredom to push the individual toward reassessing and modifying the situation (Danckert & Elpidorou, 2023). In this sense, boredom not only signals instructional

fatigue but also challenges teachers' sense of professional purpose, as they are forced to reconcile their aspirations for impactful teaching with the limiting structural realities of their institutions.

To address these challenges, teachers employ various coping strategies, including interactive activities, multimedia tools, and humor. Younger teachers often adopt less formal strategies, such as games and humour, reflecting their adaptability to modern pedagogical tools, while seasoned teachers rely on structured feedback and reflective practices. For instance, teachers reported incorporating quizzes and collaborative activities to reengage students and alleviate their monotony. These preferences demonstrate the influence of demographic factors on coping mechanisms, as Derakhshan et al. (2022) noted. The rigidity of the Saudi EFL curriculum and the relatively recent adoption of online teaching further limit teachers' ability to diversify their approaches (Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020). These teacher-initiated strategies support the core claim of the functional theory, namely, that boredom serves a constructive role by motivating individuals to seek meaningful, engaging alternatives to resolve the discomfort of unfulfilling tasks (Elpidorou, 2023; Finkielstein, 2025). Nevertheless, these coping efforts, often undertaken without institutional support, can be emotionally and cognitively exhausting. The burden of constantly generating student engagement falls squarely on the teacher, challenging their professional identity and diminishing their sense of agency over time.

This study also showcases the need for tailored professional development programs to address these challenges and equip teachers with innovative strategies. It is pretty clear that by identifying monotony, technological issues, and student disengagement as critical factors, this study not only validates existing findings but also provides context-specific insights into Saudi EFL classrooms, contributing to a deeper understanding of teacher boredom in both offline and online settings (Mousavian Rad et al., 2024; Zheng & Feng, 2023). Such insights also reveal the institutional dimensions of boredom, suggesting that without structural changes, even the most motivated teachers may experience recurring disengagement, ultimately threatening instructional quality and professional sustainability.

### **How do teachers in Saudi EFL classrooms identify and mitigate student boredom in offline and online teaching environments and what strategies are utilized to enhance student engagement?**

The findings suggest that Saudi EFL teachers employ various strategies to recognize and respond to student boredom, depending on the teaching format, classroom setting, and their own teaching experience. In online classes, teachers often picked up on boredom through signs like silence, lack of participation, and low energy. Without face-to-face interaction, many found it more challenging to read student reactions—an issue also described by Xie (2021) and Wang (2024), who pointed to the limitations of online settings in showing engagement. Several teachers in this study described feeling a “disconnect” from their students, echoing the experiences of Luong and Hoa (2023) in their study on Vietnamese EFL learners. In face-to-face classes, boredom was often evident through more subtle cues, such as students avoiding eye contact or not participating in activities. This aligns with observations made by Pawlak et al. (2020) and Derakhshan et al. (2021) in similar classroom environments. These identification strategies reflect the view within the FTB that boredom functions as a monitoring signal, prompting individuals and teachers, in this case, to assess emotional cues and adjust behavior in response to perceived disengagement

(Elpidorou, 2023). For teachers, identifying boredom in their students is not merely a classroom management concern; it touches on their sense of efficacy and professional identity. Repeated signs of student disengagement may cause teachers to question their instructional effectiveness, especially when constrained by institutional norms that limit their pedagogical freedom.

Interactive and collaborative teaching methods have emerged as effective strategies for combating boredom in offline and online contexts. Group discussions, problem-solving tasks, and educational games are commonly used to reengage students and foster dynamic learning environments. These methods are recommended for revitalizing classroom atmospheres, particularly in large groups with limited individual attention. This aligns with the importance of student-centred learning in sustaining interest and motivation, as highlighted in the literature (Zhang, 2023). Personalized feedback and positive reinforcement further supported engagement, accentuating the value of acknowledging student efforts and providing encouragement. Flexibility in instructional methods has also emerged as a critical factor, with teachers tailoring their approaches to meet their students' needs and adapt to the classroom dynamics. Offline classes benefit from direct interactions and relational strategies, whereas online modalities rely heavily on multimedia tools, visual aids, and adaptive teaching technologies. This finding stresses the importance of developing innovative, context-specific strategies to mitigate student boredom (Kruk et al., 2022; Xie, 2021). These pedagogical responses illustrate how boredom may serve an adaptive function, encouraging teachers to modify their instructional practices to restore engagement, as proposed by the functional theory (Finkielstein, 2025). Nevertheless, the repeated need to develop and implement such strategies, often with limited structural support, can lead to emotional depletion, affecting teachers' psychological well-being and ability to sustain enthusiasm.

The teachers' level of experience influenced their approaches. Seasoned teachers employed structured strategies such as reflective practices and feedback, while younger teachers preferred informal and interactive methods, reflecting generational differences in addressing engagement challenges. For instance, younger teachers often incorporate humour and games to create a more relaxed learning atmosphere, whereas experienced teachers rely on systematic feedback and professional reflection. This variation suggests that boredom-driven motivation to adapt can manifest differently across teacher profiles, reinforcing the functional view that boredom does not prescribe a fixed response but instead initiates context-sensitive action (Elpidorou, 2023). These adaptive efforts, while resourceful, often unfold in institutional environments where innovation may be constrained by time, policy, or resource limitations, placing additional stress on teachers as they balance innovation with compliance.

Institutional constraints, such as large class sizes and rigid curricula, pose significant challenges in offline settings, limiting opportunities for engaging in activities. In contrast, online classrooms face unique barriers, including technological limitations and a lack of immediate feedback, necessitating innovative solutions to foster interaction. These findings align with studies that highlight the impact of institutional and technological barriers on engagement strategies (Derakhshan et al., 2021). In both settings, the functional perspective helps explain how external constraints can amplify feelings of boredom and simultaneously motivate teachers to seek alternative strategies to maintain attention and classroom energy (Westgate, 2020; Yacek & Gary, 2023). Such constraints also influence teachers' perceived autonomy and control over their classrooms, key components of pedagogical agency. The persistent tension between their

professional values and systemic limitations can lead to internal conflict, potentially diminishing motivation and job satisfaction over time.

These findings elucidate the complex interrelationship between teaching modalities, student behaviours, and pedagogical strategies in addressing academic boredom. Interactive and adaptive methodologies demonstrate the significance of cultivating engaging learning environments tailored to student needs, corroborating prior research (Zhang, 2023; Xie, 2021). Individualized feedback and positive reinforcement further substantiate the critical role of instructor encouragement in maintaining motivation and mitigating boredom (Dewaele & Li, 2021). Institutional and technological challenges, however, complicate efforts to manage boredom effectively, particularly in virtual classrooms. Nonetheless, from a functional perspective, teachers' challenges may serve as catalysts for reflective practice and pedagogical renewal, aligning with the theory's core proposition that boredom promotes meaningful behavioral redirection (Danckert & Elpidorou, 2023). In this context, teacher boredom emerges not only as an emotional response but also as a reflection of deeper professional tensions between innovation and regulation, creativity and conformity, which must be acknowledged and addressed if sustained engagement is to be achieved. Equipping teachers with the skills and resources to navigate these challenges is essential for fostering more engaging and productive learning environments.

### **What strategies do teachers in Saudi EFL classrooms recommend to address teacher and student boredom in offline and online settings, and how do these strategies vary between the two modalities?**

The findings showed that Saudi EFL teachers recommend a range of strategies to deal with boredom, both their own and their students-with an understanding that these approaches must fit the specific demands of offline or online teaching. Many teachers focused on increasing classroom interaction, using technology to keep lessons fresh, and finding ways to make learning more active and enjoyable. While some strategies were used across both settings, their effectiveness often depended on the teaching format. For instance, online environments require more visual and tech-based tools to keep students engaged, which supports the observations made by Kruk et al. (2022) and Luong and Hoa (2023). In contrast, offline settings allowed teachers to rely more on direct communication, classroom dynamics, and spontaneous interaction. These differences reflect what Zhang (2023) described as the importance of adapting teaching methods to meet learners' needs within each context. Viewed through the lens of the FTB, these adaptive choices illustrate how boredom can prompt reflective instructional change and context-sensitive decision-making to restore engagement (Danckert & Elpidorou, 2023). More importantly, these strategies reflect teachers' efforts to preserve their sense of professional agency and instructional purpose, especially when systemic constraints, such as rigid curricula or limited autonomy, reduce their ability to innovate freely

In offline classrooms, teachers advocate strategies centred on direct interaction and relational pedagogical methods. Role-playing, group discussions, and collaborative projects are frequently recommended to maintain engagement and actively involve students in learning. Teachers have suggested interactive methods, such as debates and problem-solving tasks, which capitalize on the advantages of physical presence and opportunities for spontaneous interaction. Strategies such as incorporating real-life examples and employing humour have also been shown as

practical tools to establish rapport and enhance lesson enjoyment, particularly in face-to-face contexts where personal connections are more readily established (Zhang, 2023). These responses align with the functional view that boredom encourages individuals to adjust their approach to enhance cognitive stimulation and social connectedness, two components often lacking in monotonous classroom routines (Yacek & Gary, 2023). At the same time, the reliance on these interactive techniques speaks to teachers' desire to reclaim meaningful teaching practices that reflect their pedagogical values even in environments where institutional structures may push toward uniformity and control.

Online classrooms have shifted toward leveraging technological and multimedia resources to sustain attention and engagement. Teachers stressed the importance of visual aids, videos, and interactive platforms to introduce variety and maintain interest. Techniques such as addressing students by name, utilizing live polls, and employing breakout rooms for small-group discussions are frequently recommended to promote active participation and counteract the challenges of limited physical presence and delayed feedback (Kruk et al., 2022; Luong & Hoa, 2023; Xie, 2021). In these contexts, boredom often emerges from cognitive underload or social disconnection, and the functional theory accounts for how such discomfort motivates the search for novel, technology-driven engagement strategies (Finkielsztein, 2025). Though, such strategies also reflect teachers' emotional labour as they attempt to overcome student disengagement and their own sense of isolation in the virtual classroom. Installing interactivity in remote settings often demands a higher cognitive and emotional investment from instructors, who must continually experiment with unfamiliar tools and adjust to fluctuating technological constraints.

Flexibility and adaptability are the key factors in implementing these strategies. Teachers accentuated the need to innovate and adapt their approaches to accommodate the teaching modality. Interactive activities, such as games, are considered adequate across both offline and online settings, but their execution often requires adjustments. For instance, physical props and group work are effectual in offline contexts, whereas digital tools and virtual collaboration are necessary for online platforms (Rezaee & Seyri, 2022). While some strategies were perceived as universally applicable, such as personalized feedback and positive reinforcement, others were modality-specific. The teachers acknowledged that direct interaction and immediate feedback are inherently more impactful in offline classrooms. Simultaneously, online environments require creative uses of technology to achieve similar engagement dynamics (Dewaele & Li, 2021). These findings reveal the theoretical premise that boredom acts as a dynamic signal that pushes educators to adapt their methods based on environmental constraints and motivational misalignment (Elpidorou, 2023; Westgate, 2020). These adaptive shifts, however, are not made in a vacuum. They are shaped, and sometimes restricted, by systemic features of Saudi EFL institutions, including assessment-heavy curricula, a preference for didactic instruction, and inconsistent digital infrastructure. As such, the feasibility of these strategies often depends on how well teachers are supported structurally and professionally in implementing them.

These findings align with the literature that reports the role of context-specific strategies in managing engagement and addressing boredom across diverse teaching modalities. The utilization of interactive and collaborative methods reflects established approaches to fostering active learning and mitigating disengagement (Zhang, 2023; Xie, 2021). Similarly, reliance on technological tools in online classrooms supports digital pedagogy research, indicating the

efficacy of multimedia and adaptive platforms in maintaining engagement (Kruk et al., 2022). The emphasis on flexibility and adaptability aligns with studies that advocate for tailoring teaching strategies to the specific challenges and opportunities of each modality (Luong & Hoa, 2023; Rezaee & Seyri, 2022). The balance between universal and modality-specific approaches underscores the intricate relationship between teaching environments and engagement practices, offering educators valuable insights for navigating the dual demands of offline and online instruction. Taken together, these findings reinforce the FTB by illustrating how boredom serves as a response to disengagement and as a catalyst for pedagogical creativity and renewal when teachers are afforded the autonomy to respond to it (Danckert & Elpidorou, 2023).

## **Implications**

Based on the principal findings of this study, addressing teacher boredom in Saudi EFL classrooms necessitates targeted, context-specific interventions that effectively address the unique challenges of both offline and online teaching environments. Educational institutions should prioritize professional development programs that equip teachers with flexible and innovative strategies, focusing on interactive and adaptive methods that align with the demands of each modality. To address institutional challenges, such as rigid curricula and large class sizes, policymakers must advocate for greater curriculum flexibility and manageable student-teacher ratios to promote more engaging and dynamic teaching settings. The substantial reliance on technological tools in online classrooms highlights the urgent need to improve the technological infrastructure and provide comprehensive training for teachers to optimize the utilization of digital resources. Furthermore, disrupting the cyclical relationship between teacher and student boredom requires initiatives that simultaneously address both groups' needs by fostering open communication, identifying barriers to engagement, and encouraging collaborative student-centred pedagogical approaches. While the effectiveness of these strategies is well-supported in the literature, their practical implementation in the Saudi EFL context may be constrained by several institutional and cultural factors. Large class sizes, rigid assessment systems, and limited flexibility in instructional design can pose significant challenges to adopting interactive or autonomy-focused approaches. Moreover, prevailing cultural norms surrounding teacher authority and classroom dynamics may limit the acceptance of techniques such as gamification, humor, or peer-led tasks. Addressing these constraints requires institutional commitment to equip teachers with the necessary training and resources and create enabling environments that support innovation and sustained engagement in teaching practice. In addition to its immediate impact on classroom interaction, sustained teacher boredom may contribute to broader institutional consequences. If left unaddressed, it may gradually lead to emotional fatigue, reduced instructional quality, and increased teacher attrition.

Although situated in the Saudi EFL context, the issues identified in this study, such as instructional monotony, technological barriers, and fluctuating student engagement, are relevant to global higher education settings where similar challenges persist. These findings can, therefore, inform international policies and professional development frameworks aimed at promoting sustained engagement in EFL instruction across both traditional and digital learning environments. These risks affirm the importance of early intervention to enhance engagement and maintain long-term teacher well-being and institutional stability. Institutions should consider regular check-ins on teacher morale, promote professional autonomy in instructional design, and support wellness initiatives to reduce chronic disengagement. Implementing these strategies can create a more

supportive and dynamic educational ecosystem, enhance teacher engagement, mitigate boredom, and improve learning outcomes in Saudi EFL classrooms.

## Conclusion

This study elucidates the complexities of teacher boredom in Saudi EFL classrooms, revealing its multifaceted aetiology and the need for targeted interventions across both offline and online teaching contexts. The findings demonstrate the substantial impact of repetitive routines, technological challenges, and student disengagement, as well as the usefulness of interactive strategies, tailored instructional approaches, and personalized support in mitigating boredom. Institutional contributions, such as continuous professional development, curriculum flexibility, and reliable technological infrastructure, emerged as essential components for fostering engagement. The identified reciprocal relationship between teacher and student boredom further underscores the importance of collaborative, learner-centred classroom practices that support sustained motivation.

Despite these contributions, the study is subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, it exclusively focused on teachers' perspectives, omitting students' views, which are critical to gaining a fuller understanding of classroom engagement dynamics. Additionally, while the study addressed both teaching modalities, it did not explore in depth the unique pedagogical and technological challenges inherent to each. The qualitative design provided rich, context-specific insights but limited the generalizability of findings due to the absence of quantitative measurement. The cross-sectional nature of the data also restricted analysis of how teacher boredom and coping strategies may evolve over time. Lastly, as the focus was limited to EFL educators, the applicability of the findings to other academic disciplines remains uncertain.

Future research should address these limitations by incorporating student perspectives, adopting mixed-method or longitudinal designs, and expanding the scope to include other educational contexts. Doing so would enable a more comprehensive understanding of teacher boredom and inform the development of broader, evidence-based engagement strategies across diverse instructional settings.

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