JCALS

ORIGINAL RESEARCH
E-ISSN: 2981-1678
Volume 2, Issue 2, pp 75-106

Journal of Critical Applied Linguistics Studies

Gonbad Kavous University

From Potential to Practice: A Critical Examination of Affordances for Mitigating Boredom in Second Language Classrooms

Linguistics Society of Iran

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ABSTRACT

While certain investigations have explored boredom in foreign language students, there remains a void in research addressing the possible affordances for alleviating foreign language boredom (FLB) inside the classroom's immediate environment, the prerequisites for realizing these affordances, and the role of instructors in cultivating them—especially via a critical framework that scrutinizes organizational barriers. To address this shortfall, adopting a critical ecological viewpoint, this single-case study aimed to explore how various potential affordances for diminishing FLB are brought to fruition in a foreign language class, drawing upon the modern social science hermeneutics approach. Subsequently, the study endeavored to produce precise understandings of the situational dynamics in realizing these affordances for mitigating FLB in the classroom's micro-environment. Information was gathered through semi-structured interviews with a purposefully selected EFL instructor, supplemented by direct classroom observations. Results indicated that not every potential affordance for mitigating FLB is employed within the classroom setting, with only a limited few being transformed into actualized ones, frequently obstructed by rules in institutions that limit language education in rigid boundaries. The evidence also showed that harmony or discord between institutional guidelines and the teacher's viewpoint profoundly influences the actualization of these affordances, highlighting the tension between teacher agency and institutional constraints. Moreover, educators can shape these affordances through their personal agency, leveraging their extensive academic training and prior instructional history to promote heightened awareness and anti-dominant strategies. These results were analyzed in the context of wider ramifications for innovative approaches in language teaching.

Article History

Received:
2025-05-01
Revised:
2025-05-25
Accepted:
2025-06-01
Published:
2025-07-01

Key Words:
Foreign Language Boredom, Affordances, Perceived Affordances, Utilized Affordances, Shaped Affordances

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Article Citation: Vafaei Ghahremanloo, S .Elahi Shirvan, M., Robatjazi, M. A., & . (2025). From potential to practice: A critical examination of affordances for mitigating boredom in second language classrooms. *Journal of Critical Applied Linguistics Studies*, *2(*2), 75-106. [DOI]

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[DOI: 10.22034/jcals.2.2.4]

1. Introduction

Defined as a transient affective state marked by disengagement, inattention, and reduced motivation (Danckert & Allman, 2005; Fahlman, 2009), Foreign Language Boredom (FLB), particularly salient among L2 learners, is often bound to rigid syllabi and repetitive tasks (Kruk & Zawodniak, 2018). Teachers frequently misattribute FLB to laziness or anxiety, overlooking its distinct role in hindering learning (Macklem, 2015). Recent research has begun to address FLB (e.g., Chen et al., 2024; Elahi Shirvan et al., 2025; Kruk et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024), yet the potential affordances—opportunities for action embedded in the classroom environment (Gibson, 1979)—for mitigating FLB have remained largely unexamined. From an ecological perspective, affordances emerge through dynamic interactions within the classroom microsystem, encompassing tasks, roles, and interpersonal relationships (Van Lier, 2004; Larsen-Freeman, 2016b). In the context of a private Iranian language institute, where learners face constraints like English-only policies and fixed curricula (Tajik & Babaee, 2025), no studies have explored how teachers perceive and actualize these affordances to reduce FLB from a critical ecological perspective. This study addresses this gap by investigating the perception, utilization, and shaping of affordances for reducing FLB, offering insights into fostering engagement among L2 learners. By doing so, it equips educators with strategies to navigate institutional constraints through their agency and contributes to the ecological framework of SLA by highlighting context-specific approaches to mitigating boredom.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Ecological perspectives in SLA

The relationship between language learning and the environment has been acknowledged in SLA research studies since researchers turned out to focus more on the process of language than its structure and form. This relationship led SLA researchers to the ecological approach. Ecology, as Van Lier (2004) mentioned, refers to the association between organisms and their environment. Given the crucial role of the environment, Van Lier (2004) highlighted that according to the ecological approach, no language can be studied without considering the context; the approach analyzes phenomena in a context-dependent manner and seeks to study language in a contextualized way alongside related elements such as events. Thus, the ecological perspective offers a viable alternative to other approaches to language learning. Learners are immersed in an environment rich with potential opportunities

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[DOI: 10.22034/jcals.2.2.4]

that emerge through their relationship with surroundings (Van Lier, 2000, 2004). The concept of affordances has been applied across cultural, cognitive, and social domains (Van Lier, 2004).

2.2. Concept of Affordances (Gibson → Van Lier → SLA applications)

Regarding affordances, Larsen-Freeman (2016a) noted that affordances refer first to anything in the environment, which may be helpful for language learning and second to the relationship between learners and the environment around them. In fact, affordances emerge as a result of the learner's understanding of the environment and their relationship with it. Likewise, in a previous investigation, Van Lier (2004) asserted that affordances arise out of the interaction between the organism and its environment and they should not be ascribed to habitual characteristics embedded in an organism's environment. In 1979, Gibson defined affordance as "a characteristic embedded in an environment that an organism perceives as being helpful (or not) at a particular point in time." In this study, affordance for the reduction of FLB is a characteristic embedded in a foreign language classroom that a teacher, who has a pivotal role in the reduction of FLB, perceives as being helpful in his or her learners' sense of the reduction of boredom. According to Thoms (2014), in the context of L2 learning, affordances should be considered as learning opportunities presented by a student who is actively engaged in the L2 learning environment, which may include virtual or physical classroom settings. As Larsen-Freeman (2019) noted, agency and affordances are related to each other; therefore, they are ecological. Agency and affordance are connected to emergence. In other words, the teacher's agency is activated following the actualization of potential affordances in the foreign language classroom and vice versa.

2.3. Kyttä's (2002) Levels of Affordance Actualization

Kyttä's (2002) actualization level of potential affordances is one of these extensions. In 2002, Kyttä identified four levels of affordances: "potential, perceived, utilized, and shaped affordances." Perceived, utilized, and shaped affordances result from the actualization of potential affordances. When it comes to the actualization of affordances, it should be noted that teachers have a crucial role in this process because, according to previous studies on FLB, the reduction of FLB depends more on the teacher's action in the context of L2 learning. According to Kyttä (2002), it is assumed that the actualization of potential affordances which begins with the second level, perceived affordances, depends on the teacher of that class. This process, which involves the actualization of potential affordances, is linked to how the teacher

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perceive three main groups of affordances: those associated with the teacher, those related to learners, and those linked to classroom activities and materials. All of these categories are rooted in an ecological understanding of the learning environment. In fact, the actualization of these types of potential affordances depends on the teacher's agency. Regarding these potential affordances and the significant role of the teacher in the actualization of them, utilized affordances refer to the teacher's utilization of her or his perceived affordances. The emergence of shaped affordances is the result of an individual's action in her or his environment. In this study, shaped affordances emerge when a teacher, considering the limitations of her or his workplace, utilizes affordances related to the reduction of FLB with the help of her or his sense of agency. Thus, the process of actualization depends on the teacher's agency. According to Adam and Gupta (2017), a teacher functions as an agent who knows how to get and utilize affordances can also generate new affordances that are not already present while teaching in a foreign language classroom.

2.4. Potential Affordances for Mitigating FLB

According to the literature of FLB, there are various potential affordances for the reduction of FLB, categorized into three main groups: teacher-related, learner-related, and activities and materials-related affordances (see Appendix A for detailed descriptions and full citations). These are synthesized in the table below for conciseness.

Table 1

Categories and Key Potential Affordances in English Language Learning

Category	Key Potential Affordances	Example Sources (see Appendix A for full list)
Teacher-related	Providing optimal challenge; engaging students; being supportive; giving feedback; being well-organized; promoting cooperation; being energetic; creating learner autonomy	Amiri et al. (2022); Li (2021); Kruk & Zawodniak (2017, 2018); Pawlak et al. (2020a); Zawodniak et al. (2017, 2021)
Learner-related	Improving proficiency level; positive attitudes toward English; positive attitudes toward teacher; being physically energetic	Li (2021); Amiri et al. (2022); Chapman (2013); Kruk et al. (2021); Nakamura et al. (2021)
Activities and materials-related	Adequately challenging; meaningful and useful; interesting; novel and varied	Amiri et al. (2022); Chapman (2013); Kruk & Zawodniak (2017, 2018); Li (2021); Pawlak et al. (2020a, 2020b); Zawodniak et al. (2017)

Teacher-related affordances depend primarily on the teacher's role, learner-related on students themselves, and activities/materials-related on tasks and resources in the classroom.

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2.5. The Nested Ecosystem Model

Given the aim of this study, which focuses on how various potential affordances for reducing FLB are actualized in a foreign language classroom and on the ecological nature of the classroom context (Larsen-Freeman, 2016b), this process might be influenced by different factors of the ecosystem. The nested ecosystem model can provide more detailed explanations regarding this point. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), there are four systems within the nested ecosystem model: microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, and macrosystem. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) noted, the microsystem as an immediate setting, refers to the activities and tasks patterns, the patterns of roles and the social interactions encountered by the individual as they grow and participate in exchanges with others and with the surrounding objects. In this study, I consider the classroom environment as the microsystem. Mesosystem refers to the interaction of a developing individual in the microsystem with other situations outside the immediate setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this study, it involves the teacher's past teaching and learning experiences. Exosystem refers the exosystem involves the interplay between multiple settings, and at least one of these contexts does not directly include the developing individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Regarding this definition, in this study, rules of workplace, curriculum design, course assessment criteria are considered as the exosystem. Finally, the macrosystem contains the overall patterns of micro-, meso-, and ecosystem (e.g., culture, lifestyle, social structure).

Drawing on the potential affordances for reducing Foreign Language Boredom (FLB) identified in the literature (see Appendix A) and the ecological nature of foreign a language learning environment, this study sought to investigate the actualization of these affordances within an ecological framework, guided by Kyttä's (2002) model. Given the exploratory nature of this research, the emergent themes may reflect interactions within specific ecosystems of the nested ecological model, such as the microsystem of the classroom, or extend to broader interactions across all ecosystem levels. To address this objective, the following research question was developed:

How are the potential affordances for the reduction of FLB actualized in the foreign language environment?

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3. Methodology

3.1. Design

In this qualitative study, the ecological perspective guided the adoption of a modern social science hermeneutics approach to investigate how affordances for the reduction of FLB were actualized within the classroom environment. Lueger and Vettori (2014) describe modern social science hermeneutics as a qualitative methodology designed to interpret the social meanings that arise within interactions. This includes interactions between researchers and participants, between participants and their surrounding context, and among participants themselves, such as a teacher and students. According to Lueger and Vettori (2014), based on the interactions between the participant and the researcher, we sought to explore the experiential perspectives of the participating teacher's experiences from her point of view by using the modern social science hermeneutics approach. Based on this approach, the findings result from the researcher's interpretive analysis of the participant's experiences (Lueger & Vettori, 2014).

3.2. Participant

Purposive sampling was used to select a participant who met specific criteria relevant to the study's aims. A teacher from a private English language institute was chosen who was capable of offering more precise insights into how different potential affordances were actualized to reduce FLB in a foreign language classroom while taking contextual constraints into account. The participant was a non-native English instructor working with young learners. She was twenty-seven years old and held an M.A. degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. She had been teaching at the current institute for three years and had accumulated five years of teaching experience in private English language schools. Her class consisted of 12 teenage learners (aged 13–16) at an intermediate (B1) proficiency level, following a general English curriculum.

3.3. Researcher Positionality

As co-authors, we designed the study and collaborated on data interpretation and writing. The first author, drawing from personal experience as an EFL teacher and researcher in similar Iranian private institute contexts, conducted the interviews and classroom observations. This insider perspective likely enhanced empathy and contextual understanding of the participant's experiences, while posing a risk of over-identification or interpretive bias. We addressed potential bias through data triangulation (interviews + observations), prolonged

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engagement in the field, and ongoing reflective discussions among the research team during analysis.

3.4. Data Collection

In line with the modern social-science hermeneutic approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. This methodological orientation requires researchers to enter the participant's life world (Lueger & Vettori, 2014) to achieve a more accurate interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation. To adhere to this principle, the teacher was asked a set of open-ended and non-directive questions during the first round of interviews. These questions were designed to allow the teacher to express her personal experiences as well as the routine decisions she made regarding the management of FLB within her classroom microsystem. Additionally, focused questions informed by the FLB literature served as guiding items in the interview protocol, as detailed in Appendix B. The interview lasted approximately an hour and a half and was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Furthermore, to interpret the findings obtained from multiple sources, a non-observational role was adopted during the course observations. The course encompassed 14 sessions, and ten of these sessions were observed. Each observed session lasted approximately 75 minutes. Prior to conducting the second-round interview with the teacher, the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews, the observation field notes, and the interpretations of all collected data were returned to the teacher two weeks after the first-round interview for the purpose of validating the interpretations and to request a follow-up interview. The teacher was asked to provide feedback on the researcher's interpretation of all collected data before the second-round interview. Through this procedure, the trustworthiness of the findings was enhanced by incorporating the teacher's comments. According to the modern social-science hermeneutic approach, participants also contribute to the analytical process, allowing for a more accurate interpretation of the data—a procedure referred to as member validation. With the support of member validation during the second-round interview, the themes that emerged from the first-round interviews were revisited. After this second round, some themes were refined and combined, while others were removed due to insufficient supporting evidence.

3.5. Trustworthiness and Credibility

Beyond member validation, trustworthiness was enhanced through prolonged engagement (10 observation sessions over the full course), triangulation of data sources

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(interviews and observations), and maintaining an audit trail of field notes, transcripts, and analytical decisions. These strategies supported the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the interpretive findings.

3.6. Data Analysis

Following the modern social science hermeneutics approach, qualitative analysis of the data was done on four steps (Lueger & Vettori, 2014): the researchers' initial encounter with the text, identification of themes, clustering of themes, and production of a summary table. The first step of the data analysis involved repeatedly examining the interview transcripts, and the observation field notes. Extensive exploratory notes were generated focusing on how the affordances for reducing FLB were actualize. In the second step, themes related to different affordances for reducing FLB were recognized and coded, appearing along the margin of the text. In the third step of data analysis, the themes that emerged from the second step were arranged based on the extent to which they were actualized, resulting in three levels of perceived, utilized, and shaped affordances. Finally, I produced a summary table which included summary structured themes and some quotations, which described them.

4. Results

4.1. Overview of Affordance Actualization

The findings revealed that the perception and actualization of affordances for reducing Foreign Language Boredom (FLB) are profoundly shaped by ecological factors within the microsystem of the classroom, with some influences from the exosystem, such as institutional policies. Not all perceived affordances were actualized, as their implementation depended on contextual constraints, including student characteristics, institutional regulations, and external pressures like school schedules. Some affordances were successfully utilized, others remained unutilized, and a few were creatively shaped through the teacher's agency. The pattern of actualization followed four levels (perceived → utilized → not utilized → shaped), but not all affordances progressed beyond perception. To provide a clear synthesis, Table 2 summarizes the actualization status across the three categories (teacher-related, learner-related, and activity/material-related), integrating key evidence from interviews and observations (previously deferred to Appendices C–E).

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Table 2

Summary of Affordance Actualization Across Categories

Category	Perceived (All/Most)	Utilized	Not Utilized	Shaped
Teacher-related	Optimal challenge; supportive teacher; learner autonomy; emotionally safe environment; enhancing self-belief; engaging students; feedback; cooperation; comprehensible discourse; energy/enthusiasm	Optimal challenge; cooperation; engagement; autonomy; supportive teacher; feedback; energy/enthusiasm; emotionally safe environment	Enhancing self-belief (due to external family/societal pressures)	Comprehensible discourse (via translanguaging despite English-only policy)
Learner-related	Positive attitudes toward English/teacher; improving proficiency; physical energy	Positive attitudes toward English/teacher; improving proficiency	Physical energy (due to school fatigue/exams)	None
Activities and materials-related	Meaningful/useful; interesting; proficiency-appropriate; novel/varied	Meaningful/useful; interesting	Proficiency-appropriate (rigid syllabus/mixed levels)	Novel/varied (supplementary worksheets; time management)

This table highlights that teacher-related affordances were most extensively actualized, while constraints limited learner- and activity-related ones.

4.2. The Teacher's Perceived Affordances for the Reduction of FLB Related to Her Role as a Teacher

The findings suggested that the teacher identified most, though not all, of potential affordances related to her role for reducing FLB in the class (see Appendix C). As Appendix C demonstrates, her awareness of these affordances stemmed not only from her familiarity with the literature but also from her past teaching experiences, as a mesosystemic factor. Moreover, her ecological awareness of learners' individual characteristics further informed how she perceived these affordances. For instance, her knowledge of the literature combined with practical experience raised her awareness of providing optimal challenge, being a supportive teacher, and creating learners' autonomy as key strategies to prevent boredom.

When it comes to affordances triggered by her past experiences and awareness of learners' personality attributes and belief in their abilities, two were distinctly extracted: providing an emotionally safe environment and enhancing learners' belief in their abilities. Regarding the former, she recognized that an emotionally safe space depends on accommodating individual differences; learners feel secure and enjoy class when the atmosphere allows them to express themselves without fear of judgment, thereby reducing boredom. For the latter, she

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understood that building self-belief motivates learners to exert greater effort in overcoming weaknesses, directly lowering boredom levels.

Furthermore, based solely on her past teaching experiences, she fully perceived engaging students, giving feedback, promoting cooperation among learners, producing comprehensible discourse, and having energy and enthusiasm as critical affordances. She noted that disengagement signals boredom, sufficient and positive feedback sustains effort, cooperative tasks boost energy and enjoyment, clear input prevents withdrawal, and teacher vitality directly influences learner mood and participation.

4.3. Utilized Affordances of the Classroom for the Reduction of FLB Related to the Role of Teacher

The obtained results of qualitative data demonstrated while the teacher utilized the majority of the potential affordances related to her role for mitigating FLB, some were not utilized in the classroom (see Appendix C). According to Appendix C, the extent to which she could utilize these affordances depended on how well her perception of affordances aligned with the institutional regulations and policies within her teaching environment. These policies allowed her freedom to incorporate supplementary tasks and apply diverse teaching methods beyond the predetermined syllabus. The institute determined the main course book, but she was allowed to design additional activities and vary instructional approaches within each session. This flexibility enabled the teacher to provide her students with optimal challenge and promote cooperation among learners by integrating extra tasks and group-based interactions into her lesson plans. Besides, based on her perception of the learners' motivational needs, her syllabus allowed her to exercise her sense of agency and adopt engagement-promoting techniques and autonomy-fostering strategies in her class.

Conversely, the utilization of some of the perceived affordances for FLB became feasible due to the institute's flexibility in interaction with the teacher, which provided her with a high level of sense of agency to create a positive classroom environment. For instance, being a supportive teacher, giving sufficient feedback, having energy and enthusiasm, and providing an emotionally safe environment were among the affordances that their utilization was supported by the institute's permissive structure. The teacher noted that her ability to utilize being a supportive teacher facilitated the realization of providing an emotionally safe environment, indicating that the use of one affordance can support the utilization of another.

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4.4. Not Utilized Teacher-Related Perceived Affordances

One perceived affordance for mitigating FLB, namely enhancing students' self-belief in their own abilities, could not be utilized by the teacher in her course. Highlighting the difference between her students' negative self-perceptions and her own efforts to foster confidence, she noted:

> *In my class, when my language learners say that they do not know and they cannot, and they do not try, it takes a long time to prove that they can if they try. Since the utilization of this affordance is affected by many factors, including families, teachers, and learners themselves, I cannot enhance their belief in their abilities alone. For example, I used to give one of my learners hope that you may be weak in the listening section, but your writing skill is good, so you can improve this skill with your efforts. However, the next session, that learner said that her mother told her why she got such a grade and that she does not learn anything.*

Since her students had entered the language institute with negative self-perceptions, solidified by external pressures such as family expectations and societal emphasis on academic performance, their belief in their abilities was viewed as a primary factor for being motivated that was difficult to foster. This stance in opposition to the confidence-building approach the teacher aimed to develop by encouraging effort and highlighting strengths. However, the intended sense of self-efficacy in terms of recognizing individual progress, receiving positive reinforcement, and setting achievable goals is not met by the students, as their focus on external validation, such as parental approval or grades, hindered the teacher's efforts to enhance their belief in their abilities, contributing to boredom in the classroom.

4.5. Shaped Teacher-Related Affordances for the Reduction of FLB

Despite the contextual limitations of her classroom setting, the teacher was able to exercise her sense of agency to shape one of the perceived affordances for reducing foreign language boredom within the classroom micro-system, namely producing comprehensible discourse. Regarding this limitation, she reported:

> *The institution where I work forces us to use only English. I try to produce a comprehensible discourse in English as much as possible. Despite this, I shift to Farsi when I cannot find any simple English word for a complex structure or when learners do not understand even if I use examples and explanations. Although this is in contrast with the institution's policies, with the power of my words and my high experience in*

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teaching, I made them understand that, as a teacher, I cannot allow my students to leave the class without understanding a topic.

Due to the English-only policy of the institute, ensuring comprehensible discourse in the microsystem of the classroom seemed challenging because students, particularly those with lower proficiency levels, struggled with complex structures and often disengaged when confused. Thus, to promote a comprehensible learning experience for students, the teacher-centered English-only approach mandated by the institute, through the teacher's exercise of agency, was adapted through translanguaging. By occasionally switching to Persian for clarifications, the teacher fostered comprehension and engagement, reducing boredom among students who might otherwise have felt lost or disconnected.

4.6. Perceived Learner-Related Affordances for the Reduction of FLB

The analysis of the findings revealed that all potential affordances for reducing Foreign Language Boredom (FLB) related to learners were fully perceived by the teacher within the dynamic classroom context (see Appendix D). As clearly evidenced in Appendix D, these perceptions were predominantly shaped by her extensive teaching experience, a pivotal mesosystemic influence that provided deep insight into learner engagement dynamics. Specifically, her reflective professional practice illuminated the critical role of positive attitudes toward the English language (EL) and positive attitudes toward the FL teacher in effectively alleviating boredom and fostering intrinsic motivation. Moreover, her acute ecological awareness of learners' proficiency disparities within the microsystem underscored improving learners' language proficiency as a vital affordance for significantly diminishing FLB while simultaneously enhancing overall satisfaction and learning outcomes. Additionally, her systematic classroom observations enabled her to recognize being physically energetic as an essential learner-related affordance, acknowledging that students' physical vitality and alertness directly influence their engagement levels and significantly reduce disaffection during instructional activities. These multifaceted insights, rooted in her teaching experience and classroom awareness, enabled her to identify practical strategies to reduce Foreign Language Boredom (FLB) and foster a more engaging learning environment.

4.7. Utilized Learner-Related Affordances for the Reduction of FLB

The findings revealed that not all but some of the learner-related perceived affordances for the reduction of FLB were utilized in the class (see Appendix D). As demonstrated in Appendix D, the utilization of these perceived affordances was under the influence of the

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teacher-related potential affordances for the reduction of FLB. In other words, learner-related affordances are actualized through the prior utilization of teacher-related affordances. For instance, the teacher's ability to create a supportive and flexible environment enabled the realization of learner-related affordances. Therefore, she could foster having positive attitudes toward the FL teacher and having positive attitudes toward the FL by maintaining amicable relationships and implementing varied teaching methods and activities. Besides, her freedom in exercising agency and applying diverse techniques allowed her to support improving learners' proficiency through tasks such as video-based vocabulary instruction, sentence construction, and research-oriented discussions, all of which contributed to reducing boredom and enhancing engagement.

4.8. Not Utilized Learner-Related Affordances for the Reduction of FLB

The teacher was unable to utilize one of her perceived affordances for FLB in her course, namely being energetic physically. Drawing attention to the difference between her students' fatigue and her own efforts to foster energy, she noted:

> *Since learners have to take exams every day at school, they tell me that they had many exams today and are tired. In addition, those who have class on the evening shift and come to the institute immediately after school, their minds are no longer helping, and they are bored in class. I try my best to enthuse them to be engaged, but I cannot because they are tired of physical tiredness. For example, sometimes I use games to cheer them up, and they cooperate to some extent, but as soon as I shift to teaching, they stop cooperating.*

Since her students had demanding school schedules, particularly those attending evening classes, their physical energy was significantly depleted, rooted in the exosystem of their broader educational context. This fatigue was regarded as a major barrier to engagement, which stood at odds with the energetic classroom atmosphere the teacher attempted to create through interactive activities like games. However, the intended sense of energy in terms of active participation, enthusiasm for tasks, and sustained attention is not met by the students, as their exhaustion from school commitments hindered the teacher's efforts to foster physical energy, contributing to boredom in the classroom.

4.9. Perceived Activity and Material-Related Affordances for the Reduction of FLB

The teacher could perceive all the potential material- and activity-related affordances mentioned in Appendix A in terms of her studies in the domain of psychology regarding

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language teaching and her past teaching experiences. As shown in Appendix E, her perceptions stemmed from her academic grounding in language teaching psychology and her rich prior teaching experiences, key mesosystemic factors. In particular, her scholarly knowledge and practical expertise enabled her to recognize meaningful activities as essential for linking language tasks to real-world communication and minimizing boredom. She also identified interesting activities as crucial for sustaining learner attention and enjoyment. Furthermore, her understanding of individual differences led her to perceive activities appropriate to learners' proficiency as vital for maintaining optimal challenge and engagement. Lastly, her emphasis on creativity highlighted novel activities as powerful tools for introducing variety and stimulating curiosity. These four affordances were all clearly understood as effective means to counteract disengagement and promote a more pleasurable and productive learning atmosphere. Nevertheless, not all perceived affordances were utilized, yet the teacher managed to shape them.

4.10. Utilized Activity and Material-Related Affordances

As shown in Appendix E, the utilization of perceived affordances within this category was made possible due to the teacher's freedom in selecting and adapting classroom activities, which was aligned with the institute's flexible policies. This autonomy enabled her to prioritize activities that are meaningful, useful, and helpful by emphasizing real-life communicative tasks such as idiomatic expressions, practical vocabulary, and contextually relevant readings, which learners found more engaging than abstract drills. Additionally, she effectively utilized interesting activities by transforming routine exercises into interactive formats, including storytelling with target vocabulary, group-based competitions, and learner-selected conversation topics, all of which sustained engagement and reduced disaffection during lessons.

4.11. Not Utilized Activity and Material-Related Affordances

Highlighting the mismatch between her students' diverse proficiency levels and the institute's rigid syllabus, she could not utilize one of the activity-related affordances, namely designing tasks aligned with students' proficiency levels, as she explained:

> *As I said, not all language learners are at the same level in a class. Since we have to do the activities in the book, when an activity is too easy, those with a high level of proficiency get bored. On the other hand, when an activity is too difficult, those with*

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[DOI: 10.22034/jcals.2.2.4]

lower levels get anxious and bored. Briefly, I have to cover all the book assignments whether they are too difficult or easy.

Given that her students had varying proficiency levels, solidified by their prior educational experiences and the institute's requirement to follow a standardized textbook, tailoring activities to individual proficiency levels was regarded as a major challenge. This situation conflicted with the adaptive approach the teacher sought to develop by aligning tasks with students' abilities. However, the intended sense of engagement in terms of appropriately challenging tasks, balanced difficulty, and personalized learning is not met by the students, as the rigid syllabus and diverse proficiency levels hindered the teacher's efforts to tailor activities, contributing to boredom in the classroom.

4.12. Shaped Material and Activity-Related Affordances for the Reduction of FLB

Considering the constraints imposed by her classroom environment, the teacher succeeded in shaping one of the perceived affordances for lessening FLB within the microsystem of the classroom by employing her sense of agency, namely by designing activities with novelty and variety. Regarding this limitation, she reported:

Of course. As I have read in many papers and based on my experiences in teaching, a teacher must be creative and use various activities and materials in the classroom. Repetitive activities make the learners bored. If you want to focus only on book activities every session, the learners will be bored. Although these activities are pre-planned and I have to cover all of them until the end of the semester, I use a variety of activities beyond the syllabus by managing the class time, for example, using worksheets.

Due to the rigid syllabus imposed by the institute, fostering novelty and variety in the microsystem of the classroom seemed challenging because repetitive textbook activities often led to disengagement among students, particularly teenagers seeking engaging content. Accordingly, to give students a stronger sense of variety, the teacher took advantage of her agency to adjust the institute's fixed curriculum through the incorporation of supplementary materials like teacher-made worksheets on grammar, vocabulary, and idioms. By creatively managing classroom time, the teacher introduced diverse tasks that aligned with students' interests, enhancing engagement and reducing boredom in the classroom.

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4.13. Ecological Influences on Actualization (alignment/misalignment)

Actualization was profoundly influenced by alignment/misalignment between the teacher's perceptions and broader ecological systems. Alignment with permissive institute policies enabled utilization of most teacher-related and some activity-related affordances. Misalignment—e.g., English-only policy (exosystem) vs. comprehension needs, rigid syllabus vs. mixed proficiency, school fatigue vs. energy demands—led to non-utilization. Teacher agency (bolstered by experience/mesosystem) allowed shaping in misaligned cases (translanguaging, supplementary materials), highlighting anti-dominant strategies against institutional constraints.

5. Discussion

In order to address the research question, we delve deeper into the research question based on the qualitative analysis of the teacher's interview and my classroom observations. The findings of the current study align with the previous research in the literature (e.g., Chen et al., 2024**;** Elahi Shirvan et al., 2025; Kruk et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024), emphasizing the important role teachers play in helping foreign language learners in reducing FLB. Furthermore, the findings of this study build upon this contribution by providing an insight into the ecological factors that influence the actualization of potential affordances for the reduction of FLB. In more detail, they demonstrated that not all potential affordances for reducing FLB in the classroom's microsystem are actualized. Some of these potential affordances are only actualized as perceived affordances and do not progress to be utilized or shaped in the classroom. The elaboration of this complicated process of the actualization of affordances is possible in terms of the variables affecting the classroom's microsystem. To begin with, the teacher's teaching experience has a significant impact on the perception of the potential affordances for reducing the learners' boredom. In relation to the perception of some of these affordances, along with the teacher's experiences, her familiarity with literature as well as her evaluation of the characteristics of language learners was highlighted. This perception process aligns with but extends Kruk & Zawodniak (2018)'s early insights on boredom trajectories in practical classes: their individual/micro-focus on predictable/unexpected tasks is enriched here by mesosystemic teacher experience enabling broader affordance recognition in a policy-constrained Iranian setting.

In this study, the participating teacher was an M.A graduate with five years of teaching experience at English language institutes and three years in the current institute. Based on her

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studies on psychology related academic articles, she was aware of the literature of FLB. In addition, her awareness of her learners' emotional repertoire, such as their wants, interests, and concerns in the classroom, has been influenced by her five years of professional experience. Therefore, the findings showed that, in numerous instances, the teacher was fully aware of the potential affordances offered by the classroom's microsystem to reduce FLB. This is demonstrated by her adequate knowledge of various potential affordances relating to the teacher's role, activities, and materials that could affect reducing the level of boredom of her language learners.

With respect to the utilization of the perceived affordances, the impact of the interaction between the teachers' perception of affordances for the reduction of FLB and the institute's rules and regulations is highlighted. In other words, the institute's rules allowed the teacher to operationalize some of the perceived affordances for the reduction of FLB in her classroom. For instance, the institute valued providing a pleasant and positive environment, using fun tasks, and humor. Thus, the teacher's perception of the potential affordances for the reduction of FLB was in alignment with the institute' rules and regulations. It is important to mention that the use of the affordances for the reduction of FLB that are related to learners and activities was influenced by the affordances related to the teacher. In other words, the use of learner-related potential affordances is influenced by teacher-related potential affordances. In sum, the alignment between the teacher's mindset and the institute's rules and policies in some cases enabled her to implement what would make the classroom less boring and enjoyable for the learners.

However, due to constraints within the microsystem and exosystem, some of the perceived affordances for the reduction of FLB were not utilized in the class. For example; the failure to enhance learners' belief in their own abilities can be attributed to the misalignment between teacher's positive, forward-looking mindset and attitude of language learners as well as that of their families. More specifically, the teacher intended to change the attitude of language learners towards their own competence. She tried to provide them with the view that with effort they could overcome their weaknesses in different skills. However, this was not in tandem with the mindsets of learners and their families.

The development of shaped affordances in the classroom's microsystem appeared to be mainly influenced by the power or the agency of the teacher in the current study. According to Adam and Gupta (2017), a teacher functions as an agent who knows how to get and utilize

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affordances can also generate new affordances that are not already present while teaching in a foreign language classroom. According to the findings of this study, sometimes, the teacher' agency was restricted by the institute's policies and rules. These limitations caused the affordances contributing to the reduction of FLB to remain at the perception level within the classroom' s microsystem. Nevertheless, as demonstrated in the findings, the teacher's agency capacity can sometimes dominate the institute's policies and regulations, which can lead to the emergence of shaping affordances. For example, the teacher could incorporate novel activities by managing time appropriately, and she could also exercise translanguaging by convincing the institute's director via her sense of agency. Furthermore, due to her past teaching experiences and her high level of education, she could lessen the effect of institute's policies on her classroom's microsystem. On the other hand, it is important to emphasize that the teacher's sphere of influence was recognized by the institute's policies. As a result, based on her own agency, she was able to make decisions regarding her perception of potential affordances in her class. If the teacher's agency were under the strict rules of the institute, she would not have been able to provide her learners with a comprehensible discourse in the required parts. Therefore, it can be concluded that the ability to adjust the classroom environment to shape the affordances for the reduction of FLB depends on the teacher's agency. This agency interpretation contrasts Kruk et al. (2024)'s longitudinal subdomains in online practical classes, where boredom curves were more individual/task-driven; here, agency actively shapes affordances against physical policies, extending their trajectories to critical resistance in face-to-face institutes. Similarly, Elahi Shirvan et al. (2025)'s bifactor modeling of FLB/FLE with savouring moderation is extended ecologically: shaping (e.g., translanguaging) fosters savouring-like awareness, countering dominant policies absent in their global/specific associations.

The teacher in this study found that by utilizing the various affordances for reducing foreign language boredom she was able to decrease the learners' boredom. This was because she was free to use those affordances effectively, such as engaging learners, promoting cooperation among learners, and providing an emotionally safe environment. By doing so, the learners felt more pleasure about their learning experience. This is in consistence with previous research that highlights the significant impact teachers can have on reducing boredom in learners (e.g., Chen et al., 2024; Elahi Shirvan & Taherian, 2020; Elahi Shirvan et al., 2025; Kruk et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024; Pawlak et al., 2020a, 2020b; Zawodniak et al., 2021).

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The results showed that the teacher's ability to perceive and use one affordance helps the emergence of other affordances. In other words, the perception and utilization of some affordances lead to the perception and use of other related affordances. For example, the teacher mentioned that she was able to provide her language learners with a safe and positive atmosphere through having a friendly relationship with language learners and supporting them, which is one of the affordances perceived by the teacher to reduce boredom. The findings also manifested that the teacher-related affordances for the reduction of FLB made it possible to use some of learner- related affordances. In other words, teacher-related potential affordances impact on the utilization of learner-related affordances. For example, the teacher expressed that since she had amicable relationships with her learners and was positive towards them, they were positive towards her. These two interpretations of findings are in alignment with Elahi Shirvan and Taherian (2020).

The findings indicated that the teacher could shape some affordances. The present study suggests that the teachers need to be aware of their classroom environment in order to actualize the potential affordances for the reduction of FLB, such as providing the learners with a comprehensible discourse and using novel activities and materials. This ability in shaping these affordances originated from the teachers' awareness of the classroom environment and their academic knowledge. If the teachers are aware of their spheres of influence within the classroom, sometimes, they can effectively actualize the affordances assisting in reducing FLB. This is in line with Elahi Shirvan and Taherian (2020) statement that teachers should consider how their perception of affordance is in consistence or contrast with the rules and policies of their workplace.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the realization of potential affordances for reducing Foreign Language Boredom (FLB) among teenage learners in a private Iranian language institute, adopting an ecological perspective grounded in a hermeneutic approach. The findings indicated that while the teacher perceived most affordances related to her role, including fostering optimal challenges, learner autonomy, supportive environments, and constructive feedback, not all were fully realized due to institutional constraints such as rigid syllabi and English-only policies. In contrast, all learner-related affordances, such as positive attitudes toward the teacher and language, improved proficiency, and physical energy, and all activity-related affordances, including meaningful, engaging, and level-appropriate tasks, were

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successfully perceived, though their implementation was occasionally hindered by students' fatigue from school schedules and regulatory misalignments. Notably, the teacher's agency enabled her to occasionally influence institute policies, thereby shaping affordances to enhance student engagement. The pedagogical implications of this study are substantial and actionable for language educators in constrained institutional contexts like private Iranian institutes. Teachers can proactively mitigate FLB by: (1) incorporating supplementary materials (e.g., teacher-made worksheets on idioms or real-life topics) to add novelty and variety despite fixed syllabi; (2) strategically using translanguaging for key clarifications to ensure comprehension under English-only policies; (3) building emotionally safe environments through consistent positive feedback and amicable relationships to foster learner attitudes; and (4) managing class time to balance book-required tasks with engaging, cooperative activities that promote autonomy and optimal challenge. By deepening their understanding of the classroom's ecological dynamics and exercising agency against misalignments, teachers can adapt practices to sustain motivation and reduce boredom more effectively. Despite its insights, this study is not without limitations. Relying on interviews with a single teacher knowledgeable about FLB literature may limit the generalizability of the findings, particularly given the contextual specificity of a private Iranian language institute with its unique constraints (e.g., English-only policies, rigid curricula, and teenage learners' school fatigue). Additionally, as the researcher served as the observer, this insider role may have introduced potential bias through over-identification with the participant. Including teachers with diverse backgrounds could reveal varied perspectives on affordance realization. Future research could address this by exploring affordances in different educational settings, incorporating learners' perspectives to understand their own awareness and utilization of these affordances, or employing longitudinal designs to track how affordance actualization and FLB evolve over time. Additionally, investigating how affordances for reducing FLB interact across various ecological systems could further enrich strategies for enhancing language learning engagement.

Authors' Contributions

Each author contributed meaningfully to the research process.

Declaration

We affirm that the manuscript is original and has not been previously submitted or published in any journal.

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[DOI: 10.22034/jcals.2.2.4]

Transparency Statements

The authors affirm that the data supporting the conclusions of this study are available in the article.

Acknowledgements

We sincerely appreciate the assistance of all individuals involved in this project.

Declaration of Interests

The authors report that there are no conflicts of interest.

Funding

The authors do not have any financial or non-financial competing interests.

Ethical Consideration

The study adheres to the ethical standards set forth by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

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[DOI: 10.22034/jcals.2.2.4]

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Appendices

Appendix A: Potential Affordances for the Reduction of FLB

1. Teacher-Related Potential Affordances for the Reduction of FLB

Description	References
Providing optimal challenge	(Amiri et al., 2022; Li, 2021; Li et al., 2021)
Being a supportive teacher	(Li, 2022; Zawodniak et al., 2017)
Creating learner autonomy	(Kruk & Zawodniak, 2018; Kruk et al., 2021; Pawlak et al., 2020a; Zawodniak et al., 2017)
Providing an emotionally safe environment	(Amiri et al., 2022; Li, 2022)
Enhancing learners' belief in their own abilities	(Zawodniak & Kruk, 2018; Zawodniak et al., 2017)
Engaging students	(Chapman, 2013; Kruk & Zawodniak, 2017, 2020; Pawlak et al., 2020a, 2020b; Zawodniak et al., 2017)
Giving feedback to students	(Kruk & Zawodniak, 2017, 2018; Zawodniak et al., 2017)
Providing cooperation among learners	(Zawodniak et al., 2021)
Producing comprehensible discourse	(Nakamura et al., 2021)
Having energy and enthusiasm	(Li, 2022; Kruk & Zawodniak, 2020; Zawodniak & Kruk, 2018)

2. Learner-Related Potential Affordances for the Reduction of FLB

Description	References
Having positive attitudes toward FL teacher	(Amiri et al., 2022; Chapman, 2013; Li et al., 2021; Li, 2022)
Having positive attitudes toward English learning	(Li, 2021, 2022)
Improving learners' proficiency	(Li, 2021, 2022; Nakamura et al., 2021)
Being energetic physically	(Kruk et al., 2021; Nakamura et al., 2021; Zawodniak & Kruk, 2018)

3. Activity and Material-Related Potential Affordances for the Reduction of FLB

Description	References
Activities that are meaningful, useful, and helpful	(Amiri et al., 2022; Kruk & Zawodniak, 2018, 2020; Li, 2021; Zawodniak et al., 2017; Zawodniak & Kruk, 2018)
Interesting activities	(Kruk & Zawodniak, 2018, 2020; Kruk et al., 2021; Zawodniak et al., 2017)
Activities appropriate to the students' proficiency level	(Chapman, 2013; Kruk & Zawodniak, 2017, 2018, 2020; Li, 2020; Li et al., 2021; Nakamura et al., 2021; Pawlak et al., 2020a, 2020b)
Activities with novelty and variety	(Kruk & Zawodniak, 2017, 2018; Kruk et al., 2021; Li, 2021; Pawlak et al., 2020a, 2020b; Zawodniak & Kruk, 2018; Zawodniak et al., 2017)

Appendix B: Interview Questions in the First Round Interview with the Teacher

1. Based on your experiences in this course, which of the following affordances for the reduction of FLB could you perceive in the classroom environment?

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2. From the ones perceived by you in the class, which ones could be utilized in the classroom environment? Why?
3. From the ones perceived by you in the class, which ones could not be utilized in the classroom environment? Why?
4. Considering the limitations you mentioned, were there any affordances which you could shape in the environment of the classroom?

Appendix C: Teacher-Related Potential Affordances for the Reduction of FLB in the Course

Potential Affordances	Perceived	Utilized	Not Utilized	Shaped
Providing optimal challenge As studied in previous literature, providing learners with challenge is one important part of learning. Furthermore, based on my experiences in teaching, when the level of challenge is beyond the learners' proficiency level, the learners are reluctant to do it. for providing optimal challenge, I give the same amount of time to everyone to do the task. Those who find the task too easy finish early and get bored. In these situations, I want those learners to do extra activities so they stay busy and do not feel bored—for example, giving more examples or reading another text. Using these techniques has helped reduce my learners' boredom.	Familiarity with literature and teaching experience	The institute sets the syllabus, while the teacher has freedom to use activities and challenges that support students' learning.		
Being a supportive teacher According to my studies on psychology-related articles and my teaching experience over the years, I have learned that if, as a teacher, we play the role of a supporter for language learners, they will come to class with more enthusiasm. I mostly try to be a friend with my language learners in class; for example, I ask them to talk and express what is on their mind. This	Literature and teaching experience.	This affordance is supported by the institute's policies, so the teacher can use it easily.		

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behaviour increases learners' sense of belonging. **Creating learner autonomy** Of course, autonomous learning helps the learners to be deeply involved in their learning process. I ask them that according to the grammar you learned today, everyone depends on their interest should choose a topic and write a text, then present it in the class. **Providing an emotionally safe environment** Considering different characteristics and individual differences, I have understood that, as a teacher, I should provide a better atmosphere so that language learners feel safe. Because I have always been friends with learners and have created a friendly atmosphere in the class, we all trust each other.	Literature-informed perception. Awareness of learners' characteristics.	This affordance is supported by the institute's policies, so the teacher can use it easily. This feature is supported by the institute's policies, so the teacher can use it easily	
Enhancing learners' belief in their own abilities Language learners who believe in their own abilities are motivated to increase their efforts	Teaching experience and learner characteristics.		Family expectations and low self-confidence hindered utilization. **Quote**: "In my class, many learners say they don't know anything and can't do the tasks, and it takes a long time to convince them that they actually can if they try. Their confidence is shaped by many things like their families and previous teachers, so I cannot build their self-belief on my own. I sometimes try to encourage them by telling them what they are good at, but then their parents tell them negative things about their grades, and they lose all

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			motivation again. Some of them end up believing they are not capable of learning the language and get bored easily. Sometimes even when I talk to them, they just look at me like I'm talking to myself."
Engaging students When there is no engagement on the part of language learners; for example, when they are distracted, the learners experience boredom. Based on classroom observation: She used various techniques and tasks to get them involved, such as taking short breaks and spontaneously calling on them to answer questions.	Teaching experience	The institute sets the syllabus, while the teacher has freedom to use activities and challenges for enhancing students' engagement.	
Giving feedback to students As I have learned from my past teaching experiences, if a language learner does not receive enough feedback, they are likely to become bored. I always try to ensure that all my language learners receive feedback on what they do because when learners realize their performance is important to me, their efforts increase.	Teaching experience	The teacher has the freedom to guide her students' learning process. Constructive feedback to boost effort.	
Providing cooperation among learners One important factor that helps learners to be engaged in the process of learning is cooperation among learners. In the reading and speaking sections, I always try to use different methods and further activities to promote cooperation among my learners.	Teaching experience	Although the institute determines the syllabus, the teacher is free to add cooperative activities that stay aligned with it.	

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			Translanguaging for clarity. **Quote**: "The institution where I work forces us to use only English. I try to produce a comprehensible discourse in English as much as possible. Despite this, I shift to Farsi when I cannot find any simple English word for a complex structure or when learners do not understand even if I use examples and explanations. Although this is in contrast with the institution's policies, with the power of my words and my high experience in teaching, I made them understand that, as a teacher, I cannot allow my students to leave the class without understanding a topic."
Producing comprehensible discourse When the teacher's discourse is not understandable to the language learners, they do not like to talk or participate in class	Teaching experience		
Having energy and enthusiasm I have noticed that it is very important for learners that a teacher enters the classroom with energy and enthusiasm. When I go to the class, I always try to be full of energy, because I have understood that having positive energy give the learners good vibes.	Teaching experience	This affordance is appreciated by the institute's policies.	

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Appendix D: Learner-Related Potential Affordances for the Reduction of FLB in the Course

Descriptions	Perceived	Utilized	Not Utilized
Having positive attitudes toward FL teacher The teacher had a full perception of how having positive attitudes towards the FL teacher could help reduce boredom. As she explained: One of the effective factors in increasing pleasure and reducing boredom is having a positive attitude toward the teacher. I always try to have a supportive and friendly relationship with my language teachers.	Teaching experience		
Having positive attitudes toward FL The teacher had a full perception of how her students' positive attitude towards English could help reduce boredom. As she mentioned: Language learners who love English are eager to learn it. I improve the interest of language learners who like English and are motivated through this amicable relationship and variety of teaching methods.	Teaching experience		
Improving learners' proficiency The reduction of FLB could be influenced by increasing the level of language proficiency. I use a various technique to improve my language learners' proficiency so that they become motivated to try. For example, when I teach vocabulary and grammar, I use the short video and sentence construction method.			
Being energetic physically The teacher had a full perception of how being energetic physically could help reduce boredom.	Teaching experience		Fatigue from school schedules and lack of sleep. **Quote**: "My students often come to class already tired because they have several exams at school every day. Some of them attend the evening shift and come straight from school, so they are mentally exhausted and get bored easily. I try to motivate them—for example, by playing games—and they respond for a short time, but as soon as I start teaching again, they lose interest. Some students are also bored simply because they stay up too late at night, and even though I remind them to sleep earlier, it doesn't really change their habit."

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Appendix E: Activity and Material-Related Potential Affordances for the Reduction of FLB in the Course

Descriptions	Perceived	Utilized	Not Utilized	Shaped
Activities that are meaningful, useful, and helpful According to the teacher's familiarity with the findings of related papers and her experiences in teaching, she emphasizes the importance of using activities that are relevant to real life. Useless activities bore my students, but meaningful and practical tasks interest them more. I focus on things like idioms, vocabulary, and real-life readings. Learners think intonation practice is boring, so I either mix it with other tasks or turn it into a game.	Literature and experience	The teacher's flexibility in creating class activities has enabled her to use tasks that benefit students' learning.		
Interesting activities According to the teacher's familiarity with the findings of related papers and her experiences in teaching, she emphasizes the importance of using interesting activities. When the activity or topic is interesting, students feel excited instead of bored, so I use games and change the book exercises into creative tasks like making stories or new conversations. Since they enjoy things like crime and horror, I let them choose topics they like, which keeps them more engaged.	Literature and experience	It is in alignment with the policies of the institute.		
Activities appropriate to the students' proficiency level According to the teacher's familiarity with the findings of related papers and her experiences in teaching, she emphasizes the importance of using activities that are adequately challenging.	Literature and experience		Syllabus constraints and diverse levels. **Quote**: "not all learners in the class are at the same level. We have to follow the book activities, so when a task is too easy, the higher-level students get bored. But when a task is too difficult, the lower-level students feel anxious and get bored too. In short, I have to cover all the book assignments	

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		whether they are too easy or too hard."	
Activities with novelty and variety not all learners in the class are at the same level. We have to follow the book activities, so when a task is too easy, the higher-level students get bored. But when a task is too difficult, the lower-level students feel anxious and get bored too. In short, I have to cover all the book assignments whether they are too easy or too hard.	Literature and experience		Worksheets for variety. **Quote**: "If you want to focus only on book activities every session, the learners will be bored. Although these activities are pre-planned and I have to cover all of them until the end of the semester, I use a variety of activities beyond the syllabus by managing the class time, for example, using worksheets. I use worksheets related to grammar, listening, vocabulary, and idioms. Because the use of worksheets is different from the book activities, the learners are not bored."

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