Sources and Consequences of Boredom in Arab Education

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Abstract

This study aimed at examining the sources and consequences of boredom in Arab education. It specified teachers, curricula and students as the main sources of boredom in Arab educational institutions. Also it focused on the major consequences of boredom on Arab education.

Keywords: Boredom - Arab Education - Sources – Consequences

Introduction

Boredom is a lack of the ability to generate interest (Gana, et al., 2001). It can be defined as a state of low arousal and dissatisfaction attributed to an inadequately stimulating situation, or a tendency to experience tedium and lack of personal involvement and enthusiasm, or a general or a frequent lack of sufficient interest in one’s life, surrounding and future (Gana, Delating & Metais, 2000).

Boredom contributes to many problems such as drug use, vandalism, gambling, eating disorder, excessive cigarette smoking, increased drinking (Bargdill, 2000), poor performance in educational and organizational settings, depression, loneliness, and impulsivity (Rupp & Vodanovich, 1997). In addition, some research findings indicate that boredom causes hopelessness, guilt, subjective perception of slow passage of time, impulsiveness, introspectiveness, procrastination, narcissism, (Gana, Delating & Metais, 2000) hostility, and poor work performance (Sommers & Vodanovich, 2000). Bored individuals lack self-actualization, motivation, goals, ambition and sense of meaning (Gana, et al., 2001). In spite of the destructive consequences of boredom, it has not been given enough attention in the Arab educational field.

Aim and Questions

The study aims at exploring the sources and consequences of boredom in education in the Arab world through answering the following questions:

9. What are the main sources of boredom in Arab education?
10. What are the main consequences of boredom in Arab education?

Significance

The significance of this study lies in the following points:

1. It may arouse interest in studying the various aspects of, and reasons for boredom in Arab education, and draw the attention of Arab educators and researchers to the catastrophic effects of boredom on individuals.
2. Its findings may stimulate Arab education policy makers to adopt and apply actions and measures to reduce the rate of boredom in Arab educational institutions through avoiding its causes and sources.

3. There has been surprisingly little research about boredom in spite of its importance (Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993), and existing research, as Caldwell, et al. (1999) point out, lays only little emphasis on its sources.

Method
The theoretical nature of this study necessitates using the analytic method. The researcher referred to some articles, books and documents, in addition to analyzing the views of a number of experts and authorities in the field. To achieve the aim of the study and answer its questions, the data collected were processed and analyzed.

Review of Literature
A number of researchers and scholars have conducted studies and done research about boredom. The following are some examples:

Vandewiele (1980) investigated the frequency and structure of boredom, as well as the means of escaping it for 694 male and female secondary school students in Senegal. The results showed that a third of the students were often bored, nearly a quarter of them were bored at school. They experienced the following feelings: fatigue, dissatisfaction, anxiety, uneasy bodily feelings such as illness, headaches and discomfort, aggressiveness and irritability, and loneliness. For the other students, the main means of escaping boredom were as follows: reading, homework, visits to friends, music and debates.

Kanevsky & Keighley (2003) conducted a study in which they explored the factors contributing to boredom of gifted high school students who had disengaged from learning. The major findings were: Learning is the opposite of boredom, learning is the antidote to boredom and increasing boredom is attributed to decline in control, choice, challenge, complexity and caring teachers in middle and high school. Watt & Vodanovich (1999) studied the effect of boredom, as measured by Boredom Proneness Scale (BPS), on college students’ psychosocial development, as measured by the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (SDTLA). The results revealed that low boredom-prone students had significantly higher scores on the following SDTLA measures: Career planning, lifestyle planning, peer relationship, educational involvement, instrumental autonomy, emotional autonomy, interdependence, academic autonomy, and salubrious lifestyle.

Goldberg (1999) studied student explanations of truancy and dropout and associated demographic and academic variables among random sample of 23 Cambodian students at a comprehensive high school in the United States. One of the main reasons given for chronic truancy, which typically precedes dropout, was boredom.

Sommers & Vodanovich (2000) examined the relationship between boredom proneness and health-symptom reporting. The findings indicated that the individuals with high boredom proneness total scores reported significantly higher ratings on all five subscales of the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (Obsessive-Compulsive, Somatization, Anxiety, Interpersonal Sensitivity, and Depression.)

Rupp & Vodanovich (1997) dealt with the effects of boredom proneness on different aspects of anger and aggression. The results showed that boredom proneness is associated with anger and aggression.

Caldwell, et al. (1999) investigated the causes of boredom among adolescents. The psychological explanations suggest that boredom stems from a lack of awareness of a) stimulating things to do in leisure; b) a lack of intrinsic motivation; c) a mismatch between one’s skill and
challenge at hand. According to the social control explanations, boredom occurs when individuals are forced to expend cognitive energy and effort on tasks construed as homogeneous.

Small, et al., (1996) identified the sources of boring and interesting learning situations. The findings of their study include:

1. Colorful instruction, which incorporates a variety of attention-gaining and maintaining strategies, is the most effective way to generate interest and prevent boredom.
2. Instruction that incorporates surprise, novelty and variety may help reduce predictability, which promotes learning boredom.
3. Instructional materials that do not capture students’ attention, and are not relevant to content and goals of the instruction may promote boredom.
4. Instructors are perceived by learners as having the prime responsibility for learner interest or boredom.

White (2002) presented the following suggestions to eliminate boredom in the middle school mathematics classes:

1. Changing the physical environment and class work routines, and being more creative with assignments.
2. Making math instruction relevant to students’ lives by providing concrete examples of how concepts might be applied.
3. Incorporating students’ interests into lessons.
4. Using creative strategies to help students remember what they have learned.
5. Using games to help students have fun while they are learning.
6. The review of the literature related to boredom suggests that although the phenomenon is increasingly gaining more attention, analyzing the sources and consequences of boredom is still relatively neglected. Also, in spite of the fact that many studies have been conducted about boredom allover the world, one can hardly find one of them done in the Arab world.

Answering the Study Questions
1. Answering the First Question: What are the Main Sources of Boredom in Arab Education?

The main Sources of boredom in Arab education are:

1.1. Teachers

Some researchers believe that boredom is situational, attributing it to the nature of the setting (e.g. the school system, classroom or the teaching) (Kanevsky & Keigley, 2003). Teachers play an essential role in creating boredom, which is generally thought to result from lack of environmental stimulation (Kelly & Marcos, 2000). Many teachers fail to provide learners with a healthy physical and psychological environment that arouses interest in learning and activities. They are unable to generate stimuli in classroom, nor are they capable of helping learners to develop internal stimuli. They give students difficult and routine homework and classwork. They do not help students to have clear vocational and educational goals. In addition, they use tedious teaching strategies. The inevitable consequence will be causing boredom proneness as a result of teachers’ inability to appropriately challenge students who associate boredom with copying, memorizing, repetition, waiting, and so on (Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003).

Boredom is achieved when teachers force students to do mentally paralyzing drill work of no intellectual value, and memorize unintegrated information. Many students will resist, so, their teachers resort to intimidation which makes learners more bored with subjects, schools and teachers, and destroys their self-esteem (David, 1986).

Boredom arises when teachers force students not to do what they want, or do what they do not want. That is why it was found that boredom was greatest in teacher-directed activities. Teachers can be a source of boredom when they can not address the interest, nor satisfy the curiosity of students,
(Kanesky & Keighley, 2003) or when they give students little control over learning. In this case, boredom represents student resistance, as the findings of the study of Chen (1998) suggested. Teachers whose lessons are neither alive nor amazing, but dull, repetitions, prosaic and routine are a main source of boredom (Guhin, 1992).

On the other hand, teachers have the prime responsibility for learner interest (Small. et al., 1996). Caring teachers honor students’ need to talk, question, challenge, be challenged and dig deeper. They respect their students’ wishes to be respected, use discovery, inquiry-based and hands-on methods, varying their techniques and media, give students control over some aspects of their learning relevant to students’ skills, abilities and interests, allowing individual explorations and group work with real in-class interaction, and show concern for all individuals’ well being. Many students who become interested in an academic subject do so because they have had caring teachers who were able to pique the students’ interests, (Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003) or evoke their excitement by having them engage in interesting activities (Polio & Humphreys, 1996).

Many learners blame their teachers for boredom. As Gatto (2003), who taught for thirty years, pointed out:

“Boredom was everywhere in my world, and if you asked the kids, as I often did, why they felt so bored, they always gave the same answers: They said the work was stupid, that it made no sense, that they already knew it. They said they wanted to be doing something real, not just sitting around. They said teachers didn’t seem to know much about their subjects, and clearly weren’t interested in learning more.”

Boring teachers lack creativity, energy and passion. They discourage their students’ thinking. They fail to stimulate their students’ interests (Morgan, 2002).

Generally speaking, many teachers in the Arab world contribute to their students’ boredom for the following reasons:

A. Their job satisfaction is low, for instance 47. 3% of Arab teachers were dissatisfied with their profession (AL-Farhan, et al., 1982).
B. They lack social respect (AL-Rasheed, 1988).
C. Their interest in, and motivation for teaching are low (Hamada, 1984).
D. Their competency is weak (Sara, 1990).
E. Many of them chose their profession reluctantly (Sara, 1990).

So, it is logical that the teachers who have serious problems with job satisfaction, social respect, motivation and competency will be a source of tedium for their students.

1.2. Curricula
The curriculum can be a source of boredom when it is characterized by the following features:

a) It is irrelevant to students’ aims, needs, concerns and experiences (Hoostein, 1994).
b) It provides no real connection between classrooms and students’ lives (Schultz, 2006).
c) It is overloaded and tedious (Guy, 2006).
d) It does not promote thinking, or the joy of discovery (Kohn, 2004).
e) It is not based on the natural human interests: the drive toward mastery, the drive to understand, the drive toward self-expression, and the need to relate (Strong, et al., 2003).
f) It lacks inspiration, creativity, energy and passion (Morgan, 2002).
g) Students do not realize the necessity of its subjects, nor do they like them, or feel successful at them, or feel they were fun (Zuga, 1983).
h) It encourages passivity and convergent thinking (McCutcheon & Burton, 1981).
i) It is static and academic, with little relevance to the real world (Linton, 1974).
j) It focuses on routine repetitive activities (Caldwell, et al., 1999).

In the light of the previously mentioned characteristics of boring curriculum, the curricula in the Arab world in general contribute to students’ boredom, for such curricula:
A. Provide students with huge information and facts, irrespective of their relevance to students’ lives and experiences.
B. Require students to memorize and remember the content of many tedious separate subjects.
C. Focus on theory rather than practice.
D. Ignore students’ interests, needs and problems.
E. Stress the cognitive domain, and neglect the affective and psycho-motor domains.
F. Lay little emphasis on activities.
G. Have no close relation to human and social development (Mina, 1992; Hajji, 1994; Mahshi, 1985).

1.3. Students
Students can be a source of boredom for their teachers. Some teachers specify their students as the cause for their own boredom. They consider the shallowness of students as one of the most boring aspects of their work. One of such teachers, for example, believed that the low reading level and low commitment level of students kept her from doing exciting things with them in the classroom, thus making the classes tedious (Gehrke, 2001). Teachers lose much of their enthusiasm and arousal when their students lose their interest in learning and become interested in grades only (Gatto, 2003).

Many Arab students contribute to their teachers’ boredom in the following ways:
- The findings of a number of studies conducted in some Arab countries indicated that teachers are dissatisfied with their students’ indifference, carelessness, absence, interest in grades, cheating, lack of discipline, passivity, weak motivation for learning, interest in summaries, and low academic level. (Al-Amayra, 2003; Soraty, 2000; Rida, 1990; Qaraeen, 2000). Such sources of teachers’ dissatisfaction are sources of boredom to them.

2. Answering the Second Question: What are the Main Consequences of Boredom in Arab Education?

Boredom is associated with some negative educational consequences such as: Poor academic performance (Rupp & Vodanovich, 1997), school absence (Sommers & Vodanovich, 2000), school drop out (Farmer & Sundberg, 1986), students’ anxiety and lack of attention to lessons (Kelley & Marcos, 2001; Ahmed, 1990), lack of discipline (Buck, 1992), and violence and aggression (Gana, Delating & Metais, 2000).

The findings of a number of studies conducted in the Arab world revealed that most of such negative consequences are available in the Arab educational scene. For example, many Arab students have the problems of: absence (AL-Amayra, 2003), school drop out (Khalifa, 2004), poor academic performance (Soraty, 2000), anxiety and depression (AL-Mousawi, 2005) attacking teachers (Oweidat, 1999), students’ lack of discipline, cheating and carelessness about lessons and assignments (Soraty, 2000).

Conclusions
Teachers, curricula and students in the Arab world in general are sources of boredom which hinders learning. So, to improve education quality, boredom should be eliminated, or at least alleviated through developing teachers, curricula and students. Teaching should incorporate, as Small, et al., (1996) point out, surprise, novelty and variety as well as a number of attention gaining and maintaining strategies to generate interest and prevent boredom.
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