

# ACADEMIC STRESS COPING STRATEGIES AMONG STUDENTS OF THE FACULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES, THANG LONG UNIVERSITY, HANOI, ACADEMIC YEAR 2021–2022

Tran Quynh Anh<sup>1</sup>, Tran Thi Nguyet<sup>2\*</sup>, Dang Thi Hai<sup>1</sup>, Ngo Toan Anh<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hanoi Medical University - 01 Ton That Tung, Kim Lien Ward, Hanoi City, Vietnam

<sup>2</sup>University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Vietnam National University, Hanoi -  
144 Xuan Thuy Street, Cau Giay Ward, Hanoi City, Vietnam

<sup>3</sup>National Hospital of Obstetrics and Gynecology - No. 1 Trieu Quoc Dat, Cua Nam Ward, Hanoi City, Vietnam

Received: 15/08/2025

Revised: 19/09/2025; Accepted: 18/12/2025

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To describe the coping strategies for academic stress among students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Thang Long University during the 2021–2022 academic year.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted on students from the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Thang Long University. The Academic Coping Strategies Scale (ACSS) was used to assess students' responses to stress, consisting of three categories: approach strategies, avoidance strategies, and social support. Higher scores indicate greater use of the respective coping strategy.

**Results:** A total of 452 students participated in the study, with the majority being female (80.7%) and an average age of 19.4. The average total ACSS score was  $101.59 \pm 10.45$  (range 34 to 170); specifically, the mean score for approach strategies was  $51.29 \pm 6.84$  (range 15 to 75), avoidance strategies  $27.15 \pm 6.02$  (range 11 to 55), and social support strategies  $23.15 \pm 4.78$  (range 8 to 40).

**Conclusion:** Students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Thang Long University predominantly employed active coping strategies in response to academic stress, while avoidance and social support strategies were used to a lesser extent.

**Keywords:** Stress, students, Thang Long University.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Stress is a term that refers to the combination of an individual's physical, mental, and emotional strain. The feeling of stress results from the interaction between an individual and their surrounding environment—perceived as external pressure or exceeding the person's adaptive capacity—and poses a threat to both physical and mental well-being. University students are particularly vulnerable to stress due to numerous pressures in their academic and personal lives. A study conducted at Thai Nguyen University of Education involving 207 students found that two-thirds of participants experienced very high levels of stress ("Very stressed" – 13.5% and "Stressed" – 56.5%)[1]. Another study of 134 final-year pharmacy students, assessed using the DASS-21 scale, reported a stress prevalence of 16.4%[2].

Numerous studies have demonstrated that negative

coping strategies for academic stress among students lead to poor academic performance, depression, anxiety, and alcohol consumption. In contrast, proactive and positive coping strategies can help reduce stress levels. A study conducted in Saudi Arabia involving 556 dental students revealed that the coping strategies most frequently chosen by students were "Taking action to try to improve the situation" (a positive coping strategy), "Thinking carefully about what steps to take" and "Trying to develop a strategy for what to do" (planning strategies), and "Praying or meditating" (religious coping strategies). In contrast, strategies related to denial, humor, and venting were the least commonly employed[3].

In Vietnam, research on students' coping strategies for stress is scarce, particularly among those majoring in foreign languages. To gain a deeper understanding of the coping methods employed by this specific population,

\*Corresponding author

Email: tranthinguyet1402@gmail.com Phone: (+84) 912452980 DOI: 10.52163/yhc.v66i8.3239

and thereby propose recommendations for support measures that can help students address stress more positively, we conducted this study with the objective: “To describe coping strategies for academic stress among students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Thang Long University, Hanoi, in the academic year 2021–2022.”

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1. Subjects

- Inclusion criteria: Students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages currently enrolled in the regular undergraduate program at Thang Long University.

- Exclusion criteria: Students absent at the time of the study or those who did not agree to participate in the research.

### 2.2. Study Period and Location

The study was conducted at Thang Long University in Hanoi from April 2021 to May 2022. 2.3. Research Methods

**2.3.1. Study Design:** A cross-sectional descriptive study.

**2.3.2. Sample Size:** Calculated using the formula for estimating a mean value:

$$n = \frac{Z_{1-\alpha/2}^2 \sigma^2}{\varepsilon^2 \mu^2}$$

+ n: minimum sample size

+  $Z_{1-\alpha/2}$ : with a significance level of 5%,  $Z_{1-\alpha/2} = 1,96$

+  $\sigma$ : standard deviation (obtained from a pilot study),

+  $\varepsilon$ : relative error, set at 4%.

+  $\mu$ : population mean

Based on a pilot study conducted among 30 students, the mean and standard deviation for the Approach coping strategy were  $3.42 \pm 0.92$ , for the Avoidance coping strategy were  $2.49 \pm 1.08$ , and for the Social Support coping strategy were  $2.94 \pm 1.07$ . Substituting these values into the formula yielded a minimum sample size of 451 students. In practice, 452 students met the eligibility criteria and participated in the study.

A stratified sampling method was employed, stratified by academic major (English Language, Chinese Language, Japanese Language, and Korean Language). The sample sizes for each stratum were as follows: 114 English Language students, 136 Japanese Language students, 85 Chinese Language students, and 117 Korean Language students

### 2.3.3. Data Collection Tools

The questionnaire was designed in a self-administered format, including general information and details on

coping strategies for stress. The study employed the Academic Coping Strategy Scale (ACSS), comprising 34 items grouped into three categories: problem-focused coping strategies (15 items), avoidance coping strategies (11 items), and social support strategies (8 items). Sullivan validated this scale in a study involving 393 undergraduate students in the United States in 2010[4]. A five-point Likert scale (ranging from Never – 1 point to Almost always – 5 points) was used for each item. The total score range was 34 to 170; problem-focused coping ranged from 15 to 75 points, avoidance coping from 11 to 55 points, and social support coping from 8 to 40 points.

### 2.3.4. Data Collection Procedure

- Step 1: Investigator training: Three investigators were trained on the questionnaire completion method and on minimizing errors during data collection.

- Step 2: Institutional approval: Permission was obtained from the university administration and the Faculty of Foreign Languages. Class lists and data collection plans were subsequently prepared.

- Step 3: Data collection: Contact was made with a selected class via the class representative to arrange a suitable time. Data were collected through in-class administration of the questionnaires, taking approximately 30 minutes.

- Step 4: Completion of data collection: All collected questionnaires were reviewed for completeness and data quality.

## 2.4. Data Analysis

Data were entered and analyzed using SPSS version 25.0. Mean values and standard deviations were used to describe quantitative variables, while frequencies and percentages were used for qualitative variables.

## 2.5. Research Ethics

Before the study commenced, participants were informed of the study's content, purpose, and significance, and assured of the confidentiality of all collected information. The results were used solely for research purposes.

## 3. RESULTS

Our study included 452 students. The mean age of the language students was 19.4 years. Female students constituted the majority (80.7%). Most respondents were from the Japanese and Korean language majors, accounting for 30.1% and 25.9% of the sample, respectively.

**Table 1. Mean Scores for Problem-Focused Coping Strategies (n = 452)**

No.	Item	Mean	SD
1	Develop a detailed action plan to address the problem	3.00	0.85
2	Persist in efforts to resolve and fix the problem	3.34	0.77
4	Ask questions about your problem	3.37	0.93
8	Strive to maintain control over the problem	3.15	0.87
9	Try to learn from your mistakes	3.65	0.84
11	Try to determine where you went wrong	3.60	0.88
15	Set specific goals to address the problem	3.38	0.76
17	Think about multiple possible solutions to the problem	3.46	0.89
20	Think positively about the problem	3.35	0.92
23	Use your past experiences to help solve the problem	3.71	0.78
25	Put all effort into developing skills to master the problem	3.28	0.78
28	Try to learn something from the experience	3.60	0.84
29	Work hard to solve the problem	3.51	0.81
30	Carefully think about the problem before taking action	3.61	0.82
33	Gather additional information about the problem to gain more insight	3.23	0.82

Among the 15 items assessing problem-focused coping strategies, the highest mean score was for “Using past experiences to help solve the problem” (Mean = 3.71). This was followed by “Trying to learn from one’s mistakes” (Mean = 3.65) and “Carefully thinking about the problem before taking action” (Mean = 3.61)

**Table 2. Mean Scores for Avoidance Coping Strategies (n = 452)**

No.	Item	Mean	SD
3	Doing nothing to solve the problem	2.01	0.94
7	Accepting that you cannot do anything about the problem	2.53	0.91
12	Denying the existence of the problem	2.02	0.91
13	Trying to avoid thinking about the problem	2.47	0.98

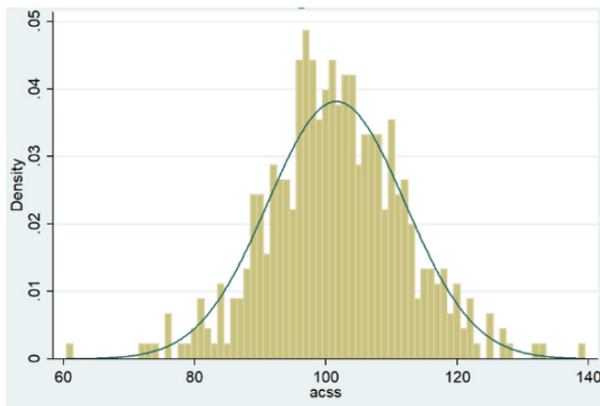
No.	Item	Mean	SD
16	Hoping the problem will resolve on its own	2.46	1.12
18	Telling yourself that the problem is not important	2.52	0.99
19	Ignoring the problem	1.98	0.93
22	Wishing you had a greater ability to handle the situation	3.71	0.94
24	Leaving the situation to itself	2.13	1.01
26	Engaging in activities to distract yourself and forget the problem (reading, watching TV, listening to music)	3.19	1.05
31	Staying away from people	2.11	0.98

Among the 11 avoidance coping strategies, the item with the highest mean score was “Wishing you had greater ability to handle the situation” (Mean = 3.71). This was followed by “Engaging in activities to distract yourself and forget the problem” (Mean = 3.19). The strategy “Accepting that you cannot do anything about the problem” had a mean score of 2.53.

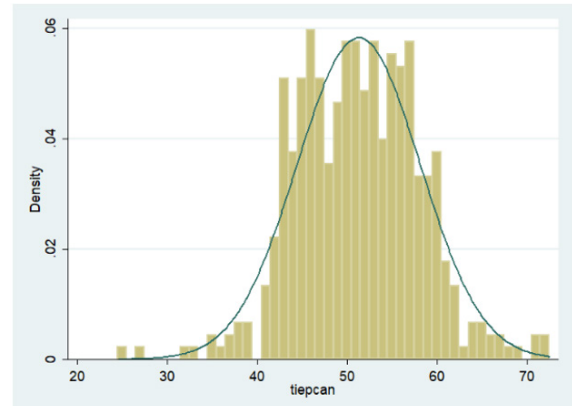
**Table 3. Mean Scores of Social Support Coping Strategies (n = 452)**

No.	Item	Mean	SD
5	Talking to a teacher or advisor for comfort and encouragement	2.31	0.96
6	Expressing your feelings to someone	3.12	1.06
10	Talking to a friend outside school or a family member for specific advice on how to handle the problem	3.16	1.07
14	Talking to another student for specific advice on how to handle the problem	2.89	0.95
21	Talking to another student for encouragement and comfort	2.90	1.08
27	Crying to express your emotions	2.71	1.17
32	Talking to a friend outside school or a family member for encouragement and comfort	2.98	1.09
34	Getting other people’s perspectives on the problem	3.09	0.89

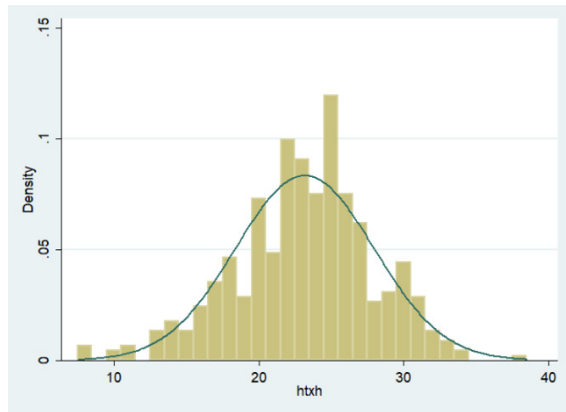
Among the eight items measuring social support coping strategies, the highest mean score was for “Talking to a friend outside school or a family member for specific advice on how to handle the problem” (Mean = 3.16). This was followed by “Expressing your feelings to someone” (Mean = 3.12). The item “Getting other people’s perspectives on the problem” also had a relatively high mean score (Mean = 3.09)



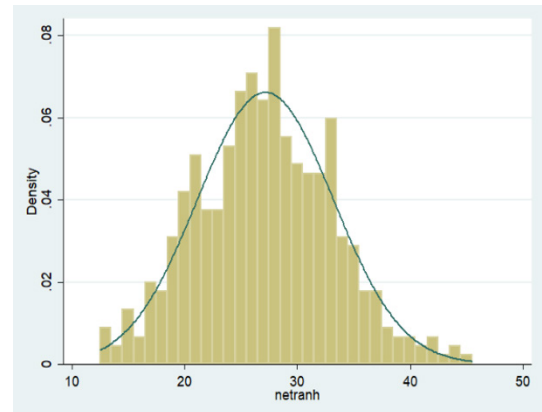
**A) Total score of the three coping strategy groups**



**B) Approach coping**



**C) Social support coping**



**D) Avoidance coping**

**Figure 1. Mean scores on the overall ACSS scale (A), approach coping (B), social support (C), and avoidance coping (D)**

The mean score on the ACSS scale was  $101.59 \pm 10.45$ , with the approach coping strategy scoring an average of  $51.29 \pm 6.84$ , the avoidance coping strategy scoring  $27.15 \pm 6.02$ , and the social support coping strategy scoring  $23.15 \pm 4.78$ .

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Our study indicated that students employed a combination of coping strategies—problem-focused, avoidance, and social support—to manage academic stress. Among these, problem-focused coping (Mean =  $51.29 \pm 6.84$ ) and social support coping (Mean =  $23.15 \pm 4.78$ ) were used more frequently, whereas avoidance coping (Mean =  $27.15 \pm 6.02$ ) was less commonly adopted. These results are consistent with the findings of Tran Quynh Anh et al. (2021), conducted among medical students, in which problem-focused strategies were the most frequently chosen (Mean = 52.5)[5]. Similarly, the study by Pham Thi Thanh Ha et al. (2021) among first-and final-year students at Hanoi Medical University found that the proportion of students using approach coping strategies was the highest, ranging from 70.3% to 89.4% in first-year students and from 58.2% to 77.3% in final-year students[6]. High-frequency items within this category included “Using past experiences to help solve the problem” (84.2%), “Trying to learn something from

the experience” (93.4%), and “Thinking carefully about the problem before acting” (83.2%)[6]. Internationally, university students tend to use positive coping strategies such as planning, problem-solving, and taking active steps to address stress. This finding is consistent with the results of Andrei S. et al. (2022), who, in a study involving 3,000 European students, reported that active strategies—such as directly addressing the problem or creating a plan—were the most frequently used, with mean scores ranging from 2.0 to 2.1 on a 0–3 scale[7]. Such consistency across studies indicates that, regardless of cultural context or academic discipline, proactive coping remains a preferred and potentially practical approach to managing academic stress.

Social support coping was the second most commonly used strategy (Mean =  $23.15 \pm 4.78$ , range 8–40). Widely reported methods within this strategy included “Expressing feelings to someone” (Mean = 3.12/5) and “Talking to a friend outside school or a family member for specific advice on how to handle the problem” (Mean = 3.16/5). These results align with those of Pham Thi Thanh Ha et al., who also identified social support as the second-most frequently used strategy after problem-focused coping, with the same two items being the most common[6]. While social support seeking is a widely used coping mechanism across cultures, the sources of support vary. In East Asian contexts, including Vietnam,

students tend to rely on family and friends rather than formal resources such as lecturers or mental health counselors. In contrast, in many Western countries, psychological counseling and academic advising services are widely available in universities (present in approximately 95% of institutions),<sup>8</sup> providing students with direct access to professional help when facing difficulties.

In addition, some students used avoidance or short-term stress-relief strategies. Stallman et al. (2020) noted that American students often engaged in distraction activities (e.g., watching television, listening to music), relaxation techniques (deep breathing), rest, and socializing as positive coping methods<sup>[9]</sup>. In the study by Pham Thi Thanh Ha et al. (2021), avoidance was the least commonly chosen strategy, with “Engaging in activities to distract from the problem” being notable (64.6%)<sup>[6]</sup>. In our study, many students also participated in recreational activities to forget about the problem (Mean = 3.19/5) when under stress. However, avoidance strategies tend to be less effective and may be associated with negative consequences. Multiple studies have shown that excessive reliance on avoidance coping—such as denial, evading responsibilities, or substance use—is correlated with higher stress levels and increased risk of depression.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Thang Long University predominantly employ approach (proactive) coping strategies to manage academic stress, whereas avoidance and social support-seeking strategies are utilized to a lesser extent.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Phi Thi Hieu and Pham Thi Quy. The level of stress among students in learning activities at Thai Nguyen University of Education. *Journal of Science & Technology*. 2014;118(4):21–25.
- [2] Nguyen Thanh Truc and Nguyen Thi Bich Tuyen. Factors affecting stress, anxiety, and depression among final-year pharmacy students in Dong Nai. *Journal of Science and Technology – University of Danang*. October 31, 2020;18(10):10–13.
- [3] Al-Sowayh ZH. Academic distress, perceived stress, and coping strategies among dental students in Saudi Arabia. *Saudi Dent J*. Jul 2013;25(3):97-105. doi:10.1016/j.sdentj.2013.05.002
- [4] Sullivan J. Preliminary Psychometric Data for the Academic Coping Strategies Scale. *Assessment for Effective Intervention*. 03/01 2010;35:114-127. doi:10.1177/1534508408327609
- [5] Tran Quynh Anh, Le Vu Thuy Huong, Hoang Thi Thu Ha, et al. Coping strategies in learning among students of Preventive Medicine and Public Health. *Journal of Medical Research*. 2020;130(6):182–188..
- [6] Pham Thi Thanh Ha, Bui Thi Huong, Kim Bao Giang, et al. Coping strategies for academic stress among students at Hanoi Medical University, academic year 2018–2019. *Journal of Medical Research*. 2021;138(2):163–171.
- [7] Shpakou A, Krajewska-Kutak E, Cybulski M, et al. Stress Perception and Coping Strategies of Students on Both Sides of the EU’s Eastern Border during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2022;19(16):10275.
- [8] Arif SA, Moran K, Quiñones-Boex A, El-Ibiary SY. Student Stress Management and Wellness Programs among Colleges of Pharmacy. *Innov Pharm*. 2021;12(2)doi:10.24926/iip.v12i2.3478
- [9] Stallman HM, Lipson SK, Zhou S, Eisenberg D. How do university students cope? An exploration of the health theory of coping in a US sample. *J Am Coll Health*. May-Jun 2022;70(4):1179-1185. doi:10.1080/07448481.2020.1789149

