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SOME FACTORS RELATED TO ACADEMIC STRESS COPING STRATEGIES AMONG STUDENTS OF THE FACULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES, THANG LONG UNIVERSITY, ACADEMIC YEAR 2021–2022

Tran Quynh Anh[1], Tran Thi Nguyet[2*], Dang Thi Hai[1], Ngo Toan Anh[3]

[1]School of Preventive Medicine and Public Health, Hanoi Medical University - 01 Ton That Tung Street, Kim Lien Ward, Hanoi City, Vietnam
[2]VNU University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Vietnam National University, Hanoi- 144 Xuan Thuy Street, Cau Giay Ward, Hanoi City, Vietnam
[3]National Hospital of Obstetrics and Gynecology - No. 1 Trieu Quoc Dat, Cua Nam Ward, Hanoi City, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To analyze several factors related to coping strategies for academic stress among students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Thang Long University, in the 2021–2022 academic year.

Methods: A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted on 452 students from the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Thang Long University.

Results: Students majoring in English, with average or above-average economic conditions, living independently, not under academic pressure from family, and who had not repeated any courses in the previous semester were more likely to adopt approach coping strategies ($p<0.05$). In contrast, students majoring in Japanese and those experiencing academic pressure from lecturers or family tended to use avoidant coping strategies ($p<0.05$). Additionally, students under pressure from lecturers were more likely to seek social support as a coping mechanism.

Conclusion: Students' coping strategies for academic stress are influenced by both individual and environmental factors. Targeted psychological interventions are needed, particularly for at-risk student groups.

Keywords: Students, Stress, Thang Long University.

1. INTRODUCTION

Coping with stress is defined as the cognitive and behavioral efforts an individual undertakes to manage, reduce, or endure demands arising from stress-related issues[1]. According to a study by Pham Thi Thanh Ha et al. (2021) among students at Hanoi Medical University, the proportion of students employing approach coping strategies was the highest—ranging from 70.3% to 89.4% among first-year students and from 58.2% to 77.3% among final-year students—followed by social support seeking strategies, with avoidant coping strategies being the least used (25.7% to 77.6% among first-year students and 39.3% to 69.1% among final-year students)[2].

International research has indicated that students who adopt approach coping strategies tend to achieve better academic outcomes and experience fewer mental health disorders compared to those who rely on avoidant coping[3]. However, the choice of coping strategies is not universal; it is influenced by multiple personal and social factors such as gender, academic major, academic pressure, economic conditions, and social relationships. A study by Huynh Ho Ngoc Quynh et al. (2025) identified several factors associated with coping strategies, including infrequent sharing with friends, lack of participation in extracurricular activities, frequent academic pressure from family, concerns about family finances, and poor relationships with family members ($p < 0.05$)[4].

In Vietnam, research on coping strategies for academic stress remains limited, particularly among students in foreign language disciplines—a group characterized by unique academic requirements and career trajectories that demand high levels of linguistic competence,

*Corresponding author
Email: tranthinguyet1402@gmail.com **Phone**: (+84) 912452980 **DOI:** 10.52163/yhc.v66i8.3241

communication skills, and cross-cultural adaptability. Identifying factors associated with coping strategies can help educational administrators, school psychologists, and other stakeholders design appropriate psychosocial interventions, thereby enhancing students' adaptability and mental well-being. Therefore, this study was conducted with the objective: "To analyze factors associated with coping strategies for academic stress among students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Thang Long University, 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:

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

+ n: minimum sample size

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

+ σ: standard deviation (obtained from a pilot study),

+ ε : relative error, set at 4%.

+ μ : population mean

Based on a pilot study conducted among 30 students, the mean and standard deviation for the Approach coping strategy were 3.42 ± 0.92, for the Avoidance coping strategy were 2.49 ± 1.08, and for the Social Support coping strategy were 2.94 ± 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[3]. 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.

2.4. Variables

- Independent variables: Gender, religion, academic year, major, part-time work outside of study hours, place of residence, parents' marital status, family economic condition, romantic relationship status, friendships, academic performance in the previous semester, academic pressure, and retaking examinations in the most recent semester.

- Dependent variables: Mean scores for coping strategies with academic stress: Avoidant coping, Approach coping, and Social support seeking.

2.5. Data Analysis

Data were entered and analyzed using SPSS version 25.0. Means and standard deviations were used to describe quantitative variables, while frequencies and percentages were used to describe qualitative variables. Independent t-tests and ANOVA were performed to identify factors associated with students' coping strategies for academic stress.

2.6. 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

3.1. General characteristics of the study participants

Table 1. General characteristics of study participants (n = 452)

Characteristic	n	%
Age		
Mean ± SD	19,4 ± 0,88	
Gender		
Male	87	19.3

Characteristic	n	%
Female	365	80.7
Religion		
No	373	82.5
Yes	79	17.5
Academic year		
Year 1	208	46.0
Years 2–4	244	54.0
Major		
English Language	114	25.2
Japanese Language	136	30.1
Chinese Language	85	18.8
Korean Language	117	25.9
Part-time work outside study hours		
Yes	171	37.8
No	281	62.2
Current living arrangement		
Living alone	257	56.9
Living with parents/relatives	195	43.1
Parents' marital status		
Living together	405	89.6
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	47	10.4
Family economic condition		
Poor/near poor	25	5.5
Average	400	88.5
Well-off/wealthy	27	6.0
Ended a friendship in the past year		
Yes	113	25.0
No	339	75.0
Ended a romantic relationship in the past year		
Yes	89	19.7
No	363	80.3

The mean age of the students was 19.4 ± 0.88 years, with females comprising the majority (80.7%). A total of 17.5% of students reported having a religious affiliation. The most considerable proportions were enrolled in Japanese Language (30.1%) and Korean Language (25.9%) majors. Additionally, 37.8% of students had part-time jobs, and more than half (56.9%) were not living with their families. Parental marital separation, divorce, or widowhood was reported by 10.4% of students. Most students described their family's economic condition as average (88.5%). Within the past year, 25.0% had ended a friendship, and 19.7% had ended a romantic relationship.

Table 2. Characteristics related to the academic process of the study participants (n = 452)

Characteristic	n	%
Previous semester's academic performance		
Excellent	193	42.7
Good	242	53.5
Average	17	3.8
Sources of academic pressure (multiple responses)		
From the course content and curriculum	313	69.2
From peers	231	51.1
From lecturers	168	37.2
From family	130	28.8
No pressure	81	17.9
Re-taking exams in the previous semester		
Yes	134	29.7
No	318	70.3

The majority of students had academic performance rated as "Good" (53.5%) or "Excellent" (42.7%). Most reported feeling pressured by the course content and curriculum (69.2%). Additionally, 29.7% of students had to retake an exam during the previous semester.

3.2. Coping strategies for academic stress among students in the faculty, based on the acss scale

Table 3. Mean scores of coping strategies for academic stress according to the ACSS scale (n=452)

Coping strategy	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Approach coping	51.29	6.84	25	72
Avoidant coping	27.15	6.02	13	45
Social support seeking	23.15	4.78	8	32

The mean score for the approach coping strategy was 51.29 ± 6.84, the avoidant coping strategy 27.15 ± 6.02, and the social support seeking strategy 23.15 ± 4.78.

3.3. Factors associated with coping strategies for academic stress among students

Table 4. Association between general characteristics and coping strategies for academic stress among students (n = 452)

Characteristic	Mean±SD		
	Approach coping	Avoidant coping	Social support seeking
Gender			
Male	50.94 ± 8.61	27.61 ± 5.67	22.25 ± 4.26
Female	51.36 ± 6.36	27.04 ± 6.11	23.37 ± 4.88

Characteristic	Mean±SD		
	Approach coping	Avoidant coping	Social support seeking
p-value*	0.60	0.43	0.05
Religion			
Yes	52.24 ± 5.78	26.10 ± 5.61	22.41 ± 4.83
No	51.08 ± 7.04	27.37 ± 6.09	23.31 ± 4.76
p-value*	0.17	0.09	0.13
Academic year			
Year 1	51.78 ± 6.56	27.97 ± 6.01	23.33 ± 4.82
Years 2–4	50.86 ± 7.06	27.22 ± 6.05	23.01 ± 4.75
p-value*	0.16	0.81	0.48
Major			
English Language	52.69 ± 7.70	26.40 ± 6.82	22.67 ± 5.64
Japanese Language	51.05 ± 6.41	28.32 ± 6.18	23.00 ± 4.59
Chinese Language	48.52 ± 6.51	26.96 ± 4.76	22.91 ± 3.97
Korean Language	52.19 ± 6.11	26.66 ± 5.70	24.00 ± 4.58
p-value**	0.0001	0.04	0.21
Part-time work outside study hours			
Yes	51.53 ± 6.38	26.64 ± 5.93	23.61 ± 4.37
No	51.14 ± 7.11	27.46 ± 6.07	22.87 ± 5.00
p-value*	0.56	0.15	0.11
Current living arrangement			
Living alone	51.83 ±7.08	26.89 ± 5.91	23.06 ± 4.80
Living with parents/ relatives	50.56 ± 6.46	27.48 ± 6.18	23.27 ± 4.76
p-value*	0.049	0.30	0.65
Parents' marital status			
Living together	51.43 ± 6.84	27.10 ± 5.95	23.11 ± 4.85
Divorced/Separated/Widowed			
	49.98 ± 6.74	27.60 ± 6.67	23.46 ± 4.10
p-value*	0.17	0.60	0.64
Family economic condition			
Poor/near poor	46.12 ± 4.78	28.56 ± 4.63	23.44 ± 2.10
Average	51.67 ± 6.74	27.06 ± 6.11	23.20 ± 4.88
Well-off/ wealthy	50.44 ± 8.08	27.30 ± 6.01	22.18 ± 5.05
p-value**	0.0001	0.24	0.64
Ended a friendship in the past year			
Yes	51.25 ± 6.78	27.82 ± 6.27	23.45 ± 4.46
No	51.29 ± 6.87	26.92 ± 5.94	23.05 ± 4.88
p-value*	0.94	0.17	0.44
Ended a romantic relationship in the past year			
Yes	51.23 ± 6.49	27.44 ± 6.53	23.56 ± 4.60
No	51.29 ± 6.93	27.08 ± 5.91	23.06 ± 4.82
p-value*	0.94	0.62	0.37

T-Test ,ANOVA Test*

There was a statistically significant difference in the mean scores for both the Approach and Avoidant coping strategies among students from the four different language majors ($p < 0.05$). The Approach coping strategy was most frequently used by English-language students (mean = 52.69 ± 7.70), whereas the Avoidant coping strategy was most commonly used by Japanese-language students (mean = 28.32 ± 6.18). Additionally, students who resided in rented accommodations and those with an average family economic status had significantly higher Approach coping scores compared to other groups ($p < 0.05$).

Table 5. The degree of application of three coping strategies according to academic-related characteristics of the study participants (n = 452)

Characteristic	Mean±SD		
	Approach coping	Avoidant coping	Social support seeking
Previous semester's academic performance			
Excellent	52.06 ± 7.27	27.16 ± 5.82	23.21 ± 4.57
Good	50.75 ± 6.51	27.06 ± 6.25	23.17 ± 4.80
Average	50.17 ± 5.89	28.41 ± 5.30	22.23 ± 6.71
p-value**	0.06	0.63	0.78
Pressure from academic content and curriculum			
Yes	51.29 ± 6.43	27.39 ± 6.23	23.41 ± 4.74
No	51.25 ± 7.71	26.61 ± 5.51	22.58 ± 4.83
p-value*	0.95	0.20	0.09
Academic pressure from peers			
Yes	51.38 ± 6.74	27.29 ± 6.31	23.15 ± 5.09

Characteristic	Mean±SD		
	Approach coping	Avoidant coping	Social support seeking
No	51.17 ± 6.96	27.00 ± 5.72	23.15 ± 4.45
p-value*	0.74	0.61	0.99
Academic pressure from lecturers			
Yes	50.90 ± 6.08	27.98 ± 5.98	23.81 ± 4.44
No	51.51 ± 7.25	26.66 ± 6.01	22.76 ± 4.94
p-value*	0.36	0.02	0.02
Academic pressure from family			
Yes	50.22 ± 7.07	28.65 ± 6.26	23.63 ± 4.83
No	51.71 ± 6.71	26.55 ± 5.83	22.96 ± 4.75
p-value*	0.04	0.0007	0.18
Re-taking exams in the previous semester			
Yes	49.76 ± 6.36	27.74 ± 6.24	22.59 ± 4.76
No	51.93 ± 6.95	26.90 ± 5.93	23.38 ± 4.78
p-value*	0.002	0.17	0.11

T-test,ANOVA test*

The mean scores for Approach and Avoidant coping strategies among students experiencing academic pressure from lecturers were significantly higher than those among students without such pressure ($p < 0.05$). Similarly, the mean scores for both Approach and Avoidant coping strategies were significantly higher among students experiencing academic pressure from family than among those without family-related pressure ($p < 0.05$). Furthermore, the mean score for the Approach coping strategy was significantly higher among students who had to retake exams in the previous semester compared to those who did not ($p = 0.002$).

4. DISCUSSION

In this study, the most frequently adopted coping strategy among students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages was the Approach coping strategy (mean = 51.29 ± 6.84), followed by Social Support seeking (23.15 ± 4.78) and Avoidant coping (27.15 ± 6.02). This finding is consistent with Sullivan's (2010) development of the ACSS scale, in which Approach coping emerged as the most prevalent adaptive strategy among students[3]. Similarly, the study by Pham Thi Thanh Ha et al. (2021) at Hanoi Medical University also demonstrated that students prioritized Approach and Social Support strategies over Avoidant coping[2]. Thus, despite differences in academic disciplines, students in Vietnam and globally tend to favor proactive coping strategies when confronted with academic stress.

Academic major had a significant influence on coping strategies ($p < 0.05$). English language majors had the highest mean score for Approach coping, whereas Japanese language majors showed a greater inclination toward Avoidant coping. This difference may stem from the distinct demands of each program. Japanese language studies involve a large volume of content, high-precision requirements (three writing systems, complex grammatical structures), and a persistent workload, potentially leading to cognitive overload and avoidance behaviors. A study by Pérez-Jorge et al. (2025) in Spain similarly found that students enrolled in highly technical and high-pressure programs tended to employ more avoidance or passive strategies in managing stress[5]. These findings highlight the need for discipline-specific psychological and academic support interventions. Current living arrangements also affected Approach coping ($p = 0.049$). Students living alone had higher Approach coping scores than those living with family or relatives. Independent living requires students to take responsibility for their daily lives, fostering self-management skills and the ability to address academic challenges. Freire et al. (2020) reported that independent living environments promote adaptability and enhance effective coping[6]. Conversely, living with family may foster dependency, limiting direct engagement with academic challenges. This suggests that the living environment plays a role in shaping proactive coping capacity. Family economic status was another strong determinant of Approach coping ($p < 0.001$). Students from poor or near-poor households scored significantly lower on Approach coping than those from average or affluent backgrounds. This aligns with findings by Huynh Ho Ngoc Quynh et al. (2025), which showed that financially disadvantaged students were more likely to use Avoidant coping[4]. Limited resources and prolonged financial concerns may undermine concentration and problem-solving, thereby reducing proactive coping.

Academic pressure from lecturers was associated with increased use of Avoidant ($p = 0.02$) and Social Support ($p = 0.02$) strategies. In the Vietnamese context, classroom instruction often remains one-directional, with some lecturers maintaining strict attitudes and discouraging open dialogue. This dynamic may foster a fear of making mistakes, prompting students to avoid engagement to avoid confrontation or perceived failure. Waterhouse's (2024) systematic review of 42 studies concluded that teacher–student relationships directly shape coping strategies: higher levels of lecturer control correlated with greater avoidance[7]. Nevertheless, the increase in Social Support among these students is encouraging, suggesting that they still seek peer support to manage stress, reflecting adaptive behavioral adjustment rather than total disengagement.

Family-related academic pressure was linked to higher Avoidant coping ($p < 0.001$) and lower Approach coping ($p = 0.04$). In East Asian cultures, educational achievement is often heavily emphasized, and parental expectations

can inadvertently generate guilt and anxiety, particularly in young students. Barbayannis et al. (2022) found that U.S. students experiencing parental pressure were less willing to confront failure and more likely to avoid academic challenges[8]. Conversely, students receiving emotional support rather than pressure from their families tended to sustain proactive coping. Thus, family interactions can act as either a facilitator or a barrier to effective coping, and this should be considered in school-based psychological counseling. Having to retake exams was a clear marker of poorer coping performance. Students who had retaken exams had significantly lower Approach coping scores than those who had not ($p = 0.002$), reflecting a negative feedback loop: non-proactive coping leads to poorer academic performance, which in turn erodes self-confidence and further reinforces avoidance. Olson et al. (2025) noted that "academic burnout" can arise when students lose faith in the effectiveness of their coping strategies, resulting in avoidance, unbalanced study habits, or procrastination, thereby perpetuating repeated failures[9].

5. CONCLUSION

Academic coping strategies among students are influenced by academic major, living arrangements, family economic status, academic pressure from lecturers, academic pressure from family, and having to retake exams in the previous semester. It is essential to develop tailored school-based psychological interventions targeting students at risk.

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