

## A Study on Negative Emotions of Vietnamese Students

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**ABSTRACT** Negative emotion is a serious human problem because it is associated with the increase of students' misbehaviour and negatively affects students' learning process and learning outcomes. It is not clear whether the differences in students' negative emotions in terms of gender, grade level and family status exist. The objective of this study was to find out the current situation of Vietnamese students' negative emotions. The questionnaire was delivered to 1,200 students from lower-secondary school and upper-secondary schools in Vietnam. The SPSS software for Windows was used to analyse the data collected in the form of frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, t-tests and Anova test. The results showed that the mean score of students' negative emotions is 2,1556, which corresponds to 'Seldom' level. There were no significant differences in students' negative emotions in terms of gender and grade level. A significant difference in students' negative emotions and family status was found. These findings suggest that the characteristics of students' family should be paid attention to in order to help students' negative emotions.

### INTRODUCTION

Emotions are a complex set of psycho-physiological arousal, appraisal and response mechanisms that operate at multiple levels of experience (Schulkin et al. 2003) or response tendencies (Fredrickson 2001). Emotions may nowadays be construed as part of psychological life produced by culture and subject to cultural influence (Lyon 1995).

Emotions play a fundamental role in human existence. As human beings, one's emotions, as well as those of others around one influence conduct, attitudes, and thinking. In this manner, it is clear that one influences others by one's emotions (Rodrigo-Ruiz 2016). Emotions play a central role in intentional change (Howard 2006). Emotions and emotional expression are hallmarks of everyday life as a human being. People frequently express emotions to others, particularly to close relationship partners (Pennebaker 1995; Rimé 1995). Emotions are one of the factors that influence the students' learning process and learning outcomes. Human cognitive processes are affected by emotions, including attention (Vuilleumier 2005), learning and memory (Phelps 2004; Um et al. 2012), reasoning (Jung et al. 2014), and problem-solving (Isen et al. 1987). Children's emotional well-being depends on their current level of emotional development (Van Duijvenvoorde et al. 2014). Emotions also affect how

one copes with challenges and threats, set new goals, learn new behaviours and draw on others for help or support (Howard 2006). Emotions include positive emotions and negative emotions.

Many students express negative emotions during learning activities, and these can have a detrimental impact on behaviours and learning outcomes (Muldner et al. 2015). The positive effect is facilitative to cognitive functioning in general (Hidi 1990), and on creative problem solving in particular (Isen et al. 1987; Pekrun et al. 2009). In contrast, other emotions can hinder learning. For instance, boredom reduces task performance (Pekrun et al. 2010), and increases ineffective behaviours like gaming (Baker et al. 2010). Negative emotions are associated with depression symptoms (Leuet al. 2011). The more workers experience negative emotions in response to stressors, the more they are morally disengaged and, in turn, enact counterproductive work behaviour (Fida et al. 2014).

Negative emotions may cause a series of dysfunctional reactions and negative effects (Schmitz et al. 2009; Talarico et al. 2004) and provoke negative effects (Rodrigo-Ruiz 2016). Children develop negative feelings from various aspects of school life that lead to criticisms and dislikes for schools. Bullying among children and behavioural shortcomings of teachers (including coping with personal distress) are key

factors that cause a dislike of schools (Kutsara et al. 2019).

The differences in students' negative emotion in terms of gender and family status in Vietnam is an unspecified issue that deserves attention. Therefore, this research seeks to answer the question, is the occurrence of negative emotions among secondary school and high school students in Vietnam related to their gender, level of study and family status?

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Research Question and Hypothesis

Is the occurrence of negative emotions among secondary school and high school students in Vietnam related to their gender, level of study and family status?

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Vietnamese students have no kind of negative emotions.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There were no significant differences in students' negative emotions in terms of gender.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** There were no significant differences in students' negative emotions in terms of grade level.

**H<sub>04</sub>:** There were no significant differences in students' negative emotions in terms of family status.

### Study Design

Questionnaires were designed to survey 1,200 high school students from grade 6 to grade 12 in Can Tho, Vietnam. The study was carried out from January to April 2018. The questionnaire is designed to include an introduction of the survey objectives and instructions on how to answer the questions, and the objective information, including the questions on participants' fundamental information, listing as gender, grade level, and family status. Survey content includes a question system, which collects data related to the current Vietnamese students' negative emotions. The question system comprises 13 questions (items) that concentrate on the Vietnamese students' negative emotions. Responses for students to answer are designed using a 5-point Likert scale (Croasmun and Ostrom 2011). The reliability of the questionnaire is 0.85.

### Data Analysis

Students' answers were assessed based on the five-point Likert scale (Croasmun and Ostrom 2011) and coded via SPSS for Windows 16.0 as follows: Scale 1 = 1, Scale 2 = 2, Scale 3 = 3, Scale 4 = 4 and Scale 5 = 5. Distance Value = (Maximum - Minimum) / n = (5-1)/5 = 0.8. Therefore, the meanings of the scales were understood as, from 1 to 1.8 = Never, from 1.9 to 2.6 = Seldom, from 2.7 to 3.4 = Sometimes, from 3.5 to 4.2 = Often, and from 4.3 to 5 = Always. The SPSS for Windows was used to analyse the data collected by, frequencies, percentages, mean, standard deviations, t-test and Anova with confidence interval percentage at ninety-five percent.

### Survey Participants

Of the 1,200 students, the ages ranged from 11 to 18 years enrolled in the study. In terms of gender, there were 37.4 percent males and 62.6 percent females. In terms of grade level, 60.5 percent students were in secondary schools (from grade 6 to 9, while 39.5 percent students were in high school (from grade 10 to 12).

In terms of grade, 5.7 percent students were in grade 6, 0.8 percent students were in grade 7, 27.1 percent students were in grade 8, 27.0 percent students were in grade 9, 5.8 percent were in grade 10, 20.5 percent were in grade 11 (20.5%), and 3.3 percent students were in grade 12.

In terms of family status, 85.5 percent students lived with both parents, 2.9 percent with their father (single-father family), 4.3 percent with their mother (single-mother family), while 7.3 percent lived with grandparents, uncle, aunt or relatives.

## RESULTS

Table 1 indicates that the mean score of students' negative emotions is 2,1556, corresponding to the 'Seldom' level on the scale.

In detail, the items that were chosen in descending levels in the scale by students including: two items evaluated as 'Sometimes' level including 'I hate my friends' (M=2.9992, SD=1.42215) and 'I feel miserable when everyone doesn't understand me' (M=2.7917, SD=1.37653), seven items evaluated as 'Seldom' level includ-

**Table 1: Students' negative emotions**

S. No.	Expression		Level					M	D	Rank
			1	2	3	4	5			
1	I hate my friends.	N	237	231	299	162	271	2.9992	1.42215	1
		%	19.8	19.2	24.9	13.5	22.6			
2	I feel miserable when everyone doesn't understand me.	N	301	233	232	283	151	2.7917	1.37653	2
		%	25.1	19.4	19.3	23.6	12.6			
3	I feel ashamed to be inferior to my friends.	N	300	315	246	231	108	2.6100	1.29007	3
		%	25.0	26.2	20.5	19.2	9			
4	I feel bored with studying.	N	322	373	278	137	90	2.4167	1.20800	4
		%	26.8	31.1	23.2	11.4	7.5			
5	I feel that studying doesn't solve any problems.	N	452	357	218	76	97	2.1742	1.22886	5
		%	37.7	29.8	18.2	6.3	8.1			
6	I feel not useful myself.	N	442	356	247	97	58	2.1442	1.14578	6
		%	36.8	29.7	20.6	8.1	4.8			
7	I feel myself no sense.	N	548	251	212	105	84	2.1050	1.26635	7
		%	45.7	20.9	17.7	8.8	7			
8	I am afraid to go to school.	N	587	244	203	89	77	2.0208	1.23828	8
		%	48.9	20.3	16.9	7.4	6.4			
9	I have a feeling that teachers and friends don't like me.	N	580	355	178	46	41	1.8442	1.03398	9
		%	48.3	29.6	14.8	3.8	3.4			
10	I hate myself.	N	748	162	171	46	73	1.7783	1.19110	10
		%	62.3	13.5	14.2	3.8	6.1			
11	I feel unsafe when attending school.	N	708	211	172	66	43	1.7708	1.10650	11
		%	59.0	17.6	14.3	5.5	3.6			
12	I felt that no one understood and accepted me.	N	715	253	126	64	42	1.7208	1.07340	12
		%	59.6	21.1	10.5	5.3	3.5			
13	I feel happy when my friend whom I don't like to have an accident.	N	738	217	188	45	12	1.6467	0.94211	13
		%	61.5	18.1	15.7	3.8	1			
Total								2.1556	0.71815	

M: Mean; SD: Standard Deviation

ing 'I feel ashamed to be inferior to my friends' (M=2.6100, SD=1.29007), 'I feel bored with studying' (M=2.4167, SD=1.20800), 'I feel that studying doesn't solve any problems' (M=2.1742, SD=1.22886), 'I feel not useful myself' (M=2.1442, SD=1.14578), 'I feel myself no sense' (M=2.1050, SD=1.26635), 'I am afraid to go to school' (M=2.0208, SD=1.23828), and 'I have a feeling that teachers and friends don't like me' (M=1.8442, SD=1.03398), and four items evaluated as 'Never' level including 'I hate myself' (M=1.7783, SD=1.19110), 'I feel unsafe when attending school' (M=1.7708, SD=1.10650), 'I felt that no one understood and accepted me' (M=1.7208, SD=1.07340), and 'I feel happy when my friend whom I don't like to have an accident' (M=1.6467, SD=0.94211).

In terms of percentage, it is shown that there is a ratio of students who chose the 'Often' level and 'Always' on the scale.

This means many students in secondary schools and high schools have expressed various negative emotions (Table 2). Therefore, the hypothesis  $H_{01}$  is rejected.

Regarding the gender and level of study indicator, with significance greater than 0.05, there was no significant difference related to the students' negative emotion between males (M = 2.1739, SD = 0.71284) and females (M = 2.1446, SD = 0.72155), and between secondary school (M = 2.1497, SD = 0.73394) and high school (M = 2.1646, SD = 0.69393). Therefore, the hypotheses  $H_{02}$  and  $H_{03}$  are accepted.

Regarding family status, students who live with grandparents, uncle, aunt or relatives identified a mean score (2.3793), which is highest. Otherwise, students who live with the father identified a mean score (2.0132), which is lowest with significance = 0.003, indicating that there was a significant difference in the negative

**Table 2: Students' negative emotion to gender and grade level**

		<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)
Gender	Male	449	2.1739	0.71284	0.03364	0.163	0.683	1198	0.495
	Female	751	2.1446	0.72155	0.02633				
Grade level	Secondary school	726	2.1497	0.73394	0.02724	1.909	0.350	1198	0.726
	High school	474	2.1646	0.69393	0.03187				

*n*: number of participants; *M*: Mean; *SD*: Standard deviation; *SE*: Standard Error Mean

**Table 3: Students' negative emotion to family status**

		<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)
Family status	With both parents	1026	2.1326	0.70199	0.02192	4.707	0.003
	With father	35	2.0132	0.23038	0.03894		
	With mother	52	2.3314	0.62651	0.08688		
	With grandparents, uncle, aunt, relatives	87	2.3793	0.98961	0.10610		

*n*: number of participants; *M*: Mean; *SD*: Standard deviation; *SE*: Standard Error Mean

emotion among students with different family statuses.

Therefore, the hypothesis  $H_{04}$  is rejected.

Comparing pairs as in Table 4, the significant differences in the negative emotion in terms of students who live with both parents and who live with grandparents, uncles, aunts, relatives (sig.=0.002), with father and with mother (sig.=0.042), with father and with grandparents, uncle, aunt or relatives (sig.=0.011) were found. Other pairs are determined to have no significant difference (with significance >0.05).

**DISCUSSION**

Comparing the results of this study with previous studies, the previous studies demonstrated that people with lower social class tend to endure more stressful life environments and experience more negative effects including depression and anxiety (Haushofer and Fehr 2014), suffer higher rates of depression (Adler et al. 2008; Haushofer and Fehr 2014; Singh-Manoux et al. 2003) and experience greater hostility (Marmot et al. 1991) compared to people of higher social class. Individuals with higher scores on

**Table 4: Comparison of family status**

	<i>Family status</i>	<i>Mean difference (i-j)</i>	<i>Std. error</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
With both parents	With father	.11937	.12287	.332
	With mother	-.19881	.10161	.051
	With grandparents, uncle, aunt, relatives	-.24676*	.07982	.002
With father	With both parents	-.11937	.12287	.332
	With mother	-.31817*	.15629	.042
	With grandparents, uncle, aunt, relatives	-.36612*	.14309	.011
With mother	With both parents	.19881	.10161	.051
	With father	.31817*	.15629	.042
	With grandparents, uncle, aunt, relatives	-.04795	.12530	.702
With grandparents, uncle, aunt, relatives	With both parents	.24676*	.07982	.002
	With father	.36612*	.14309	.011
	With mother	.04795	.12530	.702

\*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

the meta cognition scale revealed more negative emotions in comparison with individuals with lower scores (Tajrishia et al. 2011). Negative emotional experiences were more negatively related to life satisfaction in individualist countries than in collectivist nations (Kuppens et al. 2008). The orphaned adolescents experienced anxiety concerning their death as well as that of their significant others. From an educational perspective, their anxiety was due to the negative attitudes towards their teachers. Furthermore, social factors that contributed to their anxiety included economic survival, grieving according to cultural beliefs, and the isolation they experienced (Babedi and Pillay 2019).

Table 1 shows that many students in secondary schools and high schools have expressed various negative emotions at the level in terms of the mean score. The highest indicators, in descending level, are as below: hating my friends, feeling miserable when everyone doesn't understand me, ashamed to be inferior to my friends, bored with studying, studying doesn't solve any problems, no useful myself, no sense myself, afraid to go to school, teachers and friends don't like me, hating myself, unsafe when attending school, no one understood and accepted me, and happy when my friend whom I don't like to have an accident. However, in terms of percentage, it is obvious that there is a certain percentage of students who sometimes or often or always express negative emotions. Although these percentages are not high, it is worth receiving attention. This fits the previous finding that people experienced positive emotions 2.5 times more often than negative emotions, but also experienced positive and negative emotions simultaneously, relatively and frequently (Trampe et al. 2015), children expressed complex, multi-layered emotions within school settings that were connected to the quality of school relationships (Lisa et al. 2019), and students hold both positive and negative emotions about socio-scientific issue instruction, as well as about the various aspects of the specific learning environment (Nicolaou et al. 2015). Negative emotions not only negatively affect their life and relationships but also negatively affects their learning process. Thus, it is especially necessary to guide and educate emotions to develop negative emotions and prevent negative emotions for high

school students. Applied research should aim at finding out measures to enhance children's emotional well-being to include safety, equity and diversity, connectedness, enjoyment, teacher rule clarity, and teacher support of children's needs as determined by Aldridge et al. (2017), Kurt (2017) and Lawler et al. (2017).

Table 2 illustrates that no significant differences in students' negative emotions in terms of gender and school level were identified. This proves that students with different gender and school level express the same level of negative emotions. Regarding gender indicator, this finding matches well with the previous finding that the level of emotional maturity across gender was found to be statistically insignificant for all dimensions (Dhaka and Mukwiilongo 2019). Regarding the level of study indicator, in contrast, Brindle et al. (2019) reported that gender differences were evident as females engaged in lower levels of antisocial and risk-taking behaviours and experienced more emotional deregulation than males aged between 18 to 74 years. The constructs of interest were also influenced by an individual's educational attainment. Individuals with low education attainment had a higher propensity for engagement in antisocial and risk-taking behaviours and experienced increased emotional deregulation compared to those with high educational attainment. The reason for this difference is due to the different age of survey participants. The survey participants' ages ranged from 11 to 18 years for those enrolled in this study. Whereas, survey participants' ages ranged from 18 to 74 years for those enrolled in the study by Brindle et al. (2019).

Tables 3 and 4 demonstrate that there was a significant difference in the negative emotion among students with different family status. This confirms that living condition impacts students' negatively. With different family status, the level of expressing negative emotions of students varies. Students who live with grandparents, uncles, aunts or relatives express the most negative emotions ( $M=2.3793, SD=0.9896$ ). This result has some similarities with Dhaka and Mukwiilongo's (2019) finding that the majority of the orphan children had an average emotional maturity and by dimensions, the majority were average in emotional instability, social maladjustment, disintegration, and independence but emotional regres-

sion was found to be poor. In contrast, students who live with their father express the least negative emotions ( $M=2.0132$ ,  $SD=0.23038$ ).

These research results show that negative emotions are expressed not only by people with lower social class and higher scores on the meta cognition scale but also in students in secondary schools and high schools. Students' time is when the development of personality in general and emotions, in particular, is highly achieved. Therefore, the detection of negative emotions in students is necessary to help educators have the right education measures in the process of forming and developing positive emotions for them. However, the process of forming and developing students' emotions is influenced by many factors.

The negative emotions of students depend on their characteristics of family status. This finding helps to put forward a suggestion that those who work in training and education need to pay attention to the characteristics of students' family status in the process of establishing and developing positive emotions and adjusting their negative emotions.

### CONCLUSION

A lot of Vietnamese high school students have expressed negative emotions. There were no significant differences in students' negative emotions to gender and grade levels. However, the significant differences in students' negative emotions among family status were identified. Therefore, it is necessary to find out the causes and solutions to preventing students from negative emotions in the next studies. It is recommended that remedies to the situation of students' negative emotions should consider the distinction between their characteristics of students' family status and propose relevant educational solutions or measures.

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