



The Relationship Between Negative Emotions in Learning and Coping Among Sai Gon University Students: The Moderating Role of Self-Esteem

Le Phan Khanh Linh ¹, Ho Thi Thanh Nhan ², Phan Tien Truong ³, Truong Thanh Hoang ⁴, Pham Van Tuan ^{5*}

^{1,2,3,4} Psychology Majors, Sai Gon University, Vietnam

⁵ Faculty of Education, Saigon University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

* Corresponding Author: **Pham Van Tuan**

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Abstract

Negative emotions in learning, particularly in classroom settings, may adversely affect students' academic performance. This study aimed to examine the relationship between negative emotions in the classroom and coping strategies, as well as the moderating role of self-esteem in this relationship among university students. A cross-sectional quantitative design was employed with 425 students. Data were collected using a self-report questionnaire distributed both online via Google Forms and in person in classrooms, and then analyzed using SPSS 26.0. The results indicated that boredom was the most prominent classroom emotion among students ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 0.73$), whereas neutral coping was the most frequently used coping strategy ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 0.89$). In addition, negative emotions were positively correlated with both positive coping ($r = 0.22$, $p < 0.01$) and negative coping ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$), and negatively correlated with self-esteem ($r = -0.17$, $p < 0.01$). However, self-esteem did not significantly moderate the relationship between negative emotions and any of the three coping strategies, as the confidence intervals all included zero. Nevertheless, self-esteem showed a near-significant tendency to moderate the relationship between negative coping and negative emotions in the classroom ($\beta = -0.18$, 95% CI $[-0.40003, 0.0318]$). This suggests that self-esteem may function as a psychological buffer with the potential to reduce the use of self-defeating coping strategies, highlighting the importance of self-esteem and coping in emotional regulation.

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Introduction

Emotions are a common psychological process that arise and fluctuate depending on contextual factors. They can enhance motivation but may also hinder human cognition and behavior (Ngoc & Van, 2023) ^[35]. Recent studies suggest that, in general, university students tend to experience higher levels of positive emotions than negative ones (Nguyet & Quynh, 2024 ; Tam, 2024) ^[36, 48]. However, the university environment - particularly the classroom setting does not always provide sufficient stimulation to maintain students' active engagement. As a result, negative emotions during Class are often unavoidable, with common examples including boredom during lectures, embarrassment when speaking, and frustration in response to perceived unreasonable demands. These negative classroom emotions may deplete cognitive resources, reduce attentional focus, and consequently impair immediate learning performance (Baumeister *et al.*, 1998 ; McConnell & Eva, 2022) ^[7, 33].

Moreover, when experiencing negative emotions in class, students are more likely to engage in maladaptive or avoidant behaviors, which can diminish their learning motivation (Ngoc & Van, 2023) ^[35]. According to Lazarus (1985, 1990) ^[28, 29], Emotional distress does not stem directly from the event itself but rather from how individuals perceive and cope with it.

From this perspective, experiencing boredom or embarrassment in the classroom is not inherently problematic; instead, the way students cope with these emotions becomes the determining factor. Therefore, identifying how students cope with negative classroom experiences is of critical importance. Within the mechanism of coping strategy selection, self-esteem emerges as a key internal factor. Previous studies indicate that individuals with high self-esteem tend to exhibit better mental health and are less affected by negative evaluations from others (e.g., peers or lecturers), thereby approaching challenges with a more positive attitude (Abuzar & Purwandari, 2024; Hanh, 2025)^[1, 19]. In contrast, individuals with low self-esteem are more prone to cycles of anxiety and shame, and often adopt avoidant coping strategies to protect themselves from the perceived humiliation of failure.

Both globally and in Vietnam, numerous studies have examined emotions in learning contexts (Pekrun, 2006; Bieleke *et al.*, 2021)^[38, 8], coping strategies (Hang, 2014)^[21], and self-esteem (Quynh & Bac, 2021)^[42]. However, relatively few studies have focused specifically on the classroom context, and none have clearly examined the moderating role of self-esteem in the relationship between negative classroom emotions and students' coping strategies. Therefore, the present study aims to explore this relationship in depth within the classroom environment of students at Saigon University, thereby providing practical implications for improving students' mental well-being.

Literature Review

Research on Negative Emotions in Learning

Emotions arise from the interaction between individuals and meaningful events, closely linked to personal needs, and may result in either states of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Therefore, emotions can be both automatic and influenced by experience and cognitive processes, and may manifest as either positive or negative (APA, 2018; Barrett, 2017; Thuc, 2015)^[2, 5, 50]. The present study focuses on negative emotions among university students, which are understood as psychological responses emerging from unmet needs and expressed through behavioral, verbal, or non-verbal manifestations (APA, 2018; Hoa *et al.*, 2019)^[2, 22].

Within the highly social learning environment, university students are particularly susceptible to experiencing negative emotions such as embarrassment, anger, or boredom (Pekrun, 2006)^[38]. Notably, the university setting does not always provide sufficient stimulation to sustain active student engagement. Approximately 26–59% of university students report experiencing boredom during lectures alone, typically characterized by behaviors such as drowsiness, yawning, or inattentiveness (Sharp *et al.*, 2018)^[45]. According to Pekrun (2006)^[38], boredom is a deactivating negative emotion that reduces student engagement and performance within the classroom, thereby potentially impairing the learning process. Boredom arises when learning activities fail to meet students' expectations or are perceived as lacking value, as explained by the Control-Value Theory (CVT) (Pekrun, 2000; Pekrun *et al.*, 2002)^[37, 40]. Accordingly, negative emotions in the classroom can be understood as unpleasant emotional states that arise when learners perceive low control

over tasks or assign negative value to learning activities during classroom participation. Research on Negative Emotion Coping Coping is defined as cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage demands that are perceived as exceeding an individual's resources (Lazarus, 1985; Hang, 2014)^[28, 22]. According to the functional differentiation model proposed by Carver *et al.* (1989)^[11] and the coping process model of Lazarus (1985)^[28], coping strategies are commonly categorized into problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and maladaptive strategies (e.g., disengagement and avoidance). In the Vietnamese context, several scholars have conceptualized coping from two perspectives. First, in terms of coping approaches, strategies include cognitive coping (e.g., reframing perspectives), emotional coping (e.g., self-monitoring and emotional regulation), and behavioral coping (e.g., seeking support and taking concrete actions). Second, in terms of effectiveness, coping can be classified into positive coping strategies - such as sharing concerns, seeking support, and cognitive restructuring, which help alleviate negative emotions; negative coping strategies - such as denial, self-blame, or withdrawal, which tend to exacerbate problems; and neutral coping strategies - such as watching movies, engaging in charitable activities, or visiting pagodas, whose effectiveness varies depending on the individual and context (Hang, 2014)^[21]. The present study adopts this multidimensional framework to assess how students cope with negative emotions in learning contexts.

Within the classroom, when confronted with negative emotions, students tend to employ a variety of coping strategies. Some adopt adaptive approaches, such as attempting to reframe their perspectives in order to identify the value of the lecture. However, others may engage in maladaptive behaviors, such as disengaging from learning activities or becoming passive, which can lead to the accumulation of dissatisfaction (Ngoc & Van, 2023; Jensen *et al.*, 2016)^[35, 25]. These coping strategies are often ineffective and have been found to be strongly associated with increased levels of stress (Thu & Dat, 2009)^[49].

Research on Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is defined as an individual's overall evaluation of their own worth and competence, reflecting either a positive or negative attitude toward the self (Rosenberg, 1995)^[44]. Within the classroom context, self-esteem can be understood as a "sociometer" (Leary & Baumeister, 2000)^[30], meaning that individuals with low self-esteem tend to be highly sensitive to cues of rejection or negative evaluation from others. Consequently, when encountering difficulties in class, they are more likely to experience negative emotions such as embarrassment and anxiety, and to adopt avoidant and withdrawn coping strategies (Brown & Dutton, 1995)^[10]. In contrast, individuals with high self-esteem possess a more robust psychological "buffer," which protects them from the adverse effects of pressure. As a result, they are more confident in confronting challenges and are more likely to employ proactive and adaptive coping strategies (Abuzar & Purwandari, 2024; Zhang *et al.*, 2025)^[1, 55].

Most existing studies have examined self-esteem in direct relation to mental health outcomes such as depression and stress (Hanh, 2025; Phuong & Tai, 2024)^[19, 41]. However, no

studies in the Vietnamese context have comprehensively explored the moderating role of self-esteem in the relationship between negative classroom emotions and students' coping strategies. Addressing this research gap will provide a foundation for developing interventions aimed at improving students' mental well-being.

Research on the Relationship Between Negative Classroom Emotions, Coping, and Self-Esteem in Students

According to the transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus, 1985) ^[28], emotions are not merely outcomes of stress but also play a crucial role in shaping how individuals appraise situations and develop coping tendencies. When students experience high levels of negative emotions during class - such as boredom, embarrassment, or anxiety, their cognitive resources are threatened and depleted. To manage these unpleasant experiences, students are compelled to activate familiar coping mechanisms. Depending on their personal habits and skills, some students tend to adopt adaptive coping strategies (e.g., cognitive restructuring and actively seeking support), whereas others are more likely to rely on maladaptive or negative strategies to temporarily relieve pressure (Hang, 2014; Pekrun *et al.*, 2002) ^[21, 40].

Moreover, the relationship between negative classroom emotions and coping tendencies is bidirectional (Chan, 1995) ^[12]. Coping strategies are not only consequences of emotional experiences but also influence the maintenance or reduction of those emotions. Specifically, maladaptive coping strategies - such as avoidance, denial, or emotional suppression, are often associated with increased emotional problems, including anxiety and depression in the long term (Chan, 1995; Groth *et al.*, 2019; Liu *et al.*, 2004) ^[12, 18, 32]. In contrast, adaptive coping strategies - such as problem-solving, cognitive restructuring, and seeking social support - can facilitate more effective emotional regulation, thereby reducing both the intensity and duration of negative emotions (Chan, 1995). However, Groth *et al.* (2019) ^[18] reported an unexpected finding that adaptive coping strategies were not significantly associated with mental health outcomes, challenging the common theoretical assumption that adaptive coping reduces psychological difficulties.

Empirical evidence further indicates that individuals with high self-esteem tend to have greater confidence in their ability to control situations and are therefore more likely to adopt proactive and adaptive coping strategies, such as problem-focused coping and cognitive reappraisal (Dumont & Provost, 1999; Li *et al.*, 2023; Taylor & Stanton, 2007; Yalçinkaya-Alkar, 2020) ^[14, 31, 47, 54]. In contrast, individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to doubt their own abilities and consequently rely on maladaptive coping strategies, such as avoidance, self-blame, or rumination (Dumont & Provost, 1999; Li *et al.*, 2023; Yalçinkaya-Alkar, 2020) ^[14, 31, 54]. Within the educational context, self-esteem plays an important role in supporting students' emotional stability when facing academic pressure and challenging tasks. Although students may still experience stressful classroom situations, high self-esteem enables them to inhibit tendencies toward self-defeating or passive coping strategies, thereby maintaining better psychological stability (Pekrun *et al.*, 2002; Zhang *et al.*, 2025) ^[40, 55].

Methodology

Research Objectives and Hypotheses

The present study aims to examine the relationship between negative classroom emotions and students' coping strategies, with particular attention to the moderating role of self-esteem. Accordingly, the study addresses the following hypotheses:

H1: Negative emotions in the classroom are generally at a moderate level, with boredom being the most prevalent emotion.

H2: Positive coping strategies are more commonly employed by students when dealing with negative emotions in the classroom.

H3: Students' self-esteem is at a high level.

H4: Negative classroom emotions are positively correlated with maladaptive coping strategies and negatively correlated with adaptive coping strategies.

H5: Self-esteem moderates the relationship between negative classroom emotions and students' coping strategies.

Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative design using a questionnaire-based survey to examine the relationship between negative classroom emotions and coping strategies, as well as to test the moderating role of self-esteem. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 26.0.

Participants

According to statistical guidelines proposed by Howitt and Cramer (2017) ^[23], the sample size in research can be determined based on the number of variables, with a recommended range of 2 to 20 participants per variable. In addition, these authors suggest that a minimum sample size of 300 participants is generally adequate for most studies, within an optimal range of 300 to 1,000 participants. Based on these recommendations, and given that the present study included approximately 70 items, a sample size of around 300 to 400 students was considered appropriate. The participants consisted of undergraduate students from cohorts 22 to 25 currently enrolled at Saigon University.

A non-probability convenience sampling method was employed to recruit participants. This approach involves collecting data from individuals who are easily accessible and willing to participate in the study. Specifically, questionnaires were distributed both in person at lecture halls and online via Google Forms. A total of 500 students agreed to participate, of which 425 valid responses were retained after data screening.

Data Collection Instruments

Negative Classroom Emotions Scale

Negative classroom emotions were measured using the Vietnamese version of the Academic Emotions Questionnaire (V-AEQ) – Classroom Subscale. This instrument was adapted and validated in the Vietnamese context by Trang *et al.* (2019) ^[51], based on the original Academic Emotions Questionnaire (AEQ) developed by Pekrun (2000, 2006), Pekrun *et al.* (2011) ^[37, 38, 39]. The original V-AEQ consists of 230 items encompassing three

domains of academic emotions: class-related emotions, learning-related emotions, and test-related emotions, which are organized into three corresponding subscales (Trang & Dao, 2019)^[52]. The internal consistency of the scale has been demonstrated to be satisfactory, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.70 across different academic contexts (classroom, learning, and testing), and 12 out of 24 subscales reporting alpha values above 0.80 (Trang & Dao, 2021)^[51].

In line with the objectives of the present study, only 25 items assessing negative emotions in the classroom context were selected. Specifically, the scale included 11 items measuring boredom, 5 items measuring anxiety, and 9 items measuring embarrassment. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). According to Trang and Dao (2021)^[51], mean scores were interpreted as follows: 1.00–1.80 (very low), 1.81–2.60 (low), 2.61–3.40 (moderate), 3.41–4.20 (high), and 4.21–5.00 (very high).

Coping with Negative Emotions Scale

Coping with negative emotions was assessed using a scale developed and validated by Hang (2014)^[21]. In this framework, coping strategies are categorized into three types: positive, negative, and neutral. The overall scale demonstrated good reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.888. Within the scope of the present study, the scale was analyzed based on the effectiveness dimension. Specifically, it included 21 items measuring positive coping strategies - those that help reduce or eliminate negative emotions; 10 items measuring negative coping strategies, those that may intensify or exacerbate negative emotions; and 3 items measuring neutral coping strategies, whose effectiveness depends on individual and contextual factors. Following a pilot study, two items from the negative coping subscale were removed due to low item-total correlations.

Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very often). Items belonging to the negative coping subscale were reverse-coded prior to analysis. After scoring transformation, higher mean scores on each subscale indicate more adaptive coping. The mean scores for positive coping were interpreted as follows: 0–<1.8 (never), 1.8–<2.6 (rarely), 2.6–<3.4 (sometimes; moderate level), 3.4–<4.2 (fairly often), and 4.2–5.0 (very often). Conversely, the mean scores for negative coping were interpreted as follows: 1.0–<1.8 (very often), 1.8–<2.6 (fairly often), 2.6–<3.4 (sometimes), 3.4–<4.2 (rarely), 4.2–5.0 (almost never) (Hang, 2014)^[21].

Self-Esteem Scale

Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), developed by Morris Rosenberg. The RSES consists of 10 items reflecting individuals' overall feelings of self-worth and self-acceptance, rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree).

Five of the ten items are reverse-coded (items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9), meaning that higher scores on these items indicate lower levels of self-esteem, and vice versa. The total self-esteem score ranges from 0 to 30, with scores below 15 indicating low self-esteem (Dat *et al.*, 2019; Anh, 2021; Quynh & Bac, 2021)^[13, 3, 42].

The Vietnamese version of the RSES has been culturally adapted, validated, and widely used among Vietnamese student populations, demonstrating high reliability across multiple studies (Dat *et al.*, 2019; Anh, 2021; Quynh & Bac, 2021)^[13, 3, 42]. The present study adopted the version developed by Dat *et al.* (2019)^[13] due to its widespread use and established reliability. However, items 2 and 8 were excluded in this study due to low item-total correlations. The removal of two items changes the scoring range of the scale: the total self-esteem score now ranges from 0 to 24, instead of 0 to 30 in the original scale. Applying a proportional rule, scores below 12 (less than 50% of the total score) are classified as low self-esteem; scores from 12 (Mean=1.5) and above are considered moderate to fairly high self-esteem.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the survey were processed using SPSS version 22.0 following initial data screening. Descriptive statistics were employed to calculate means and standard deviations, as well as to assess normality, in order to examine participants' demographic characteristics and the levels of negative emotions, coping strategies, and self-esteem among students. The reliability and validity of the scales were evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Inferential statistical analyses, including correlation and regression analyses, were conducted to examine the relationships among negative classroom emotions, coping strategies, and self-esteem. In addition, moderation analysis was performed using the PROCESS macro integrated in SPSS to test the moderating role of self-esteem.

Results

Characteristics of the Study Sample

Descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 indicate that the study sample consisted of 425 participants, including 140 males (32.9%) and 285 females (67.1%).

In terms of regional background, 62 participants were from Northern Vietnam (14.6%), 120 from Central Vietnam (28.2%), and 243 from Southern Vietnam (57.2%). Regarding academic majors, the largest group belonged to the social sciences and behavioral sciences ($n = 174$, 40.9%), followed by engineering and technology ($n = 103$, 24.2%), teacher education ($n = 91$, 21.4%), and economics and management ($n = 57$, 13.4%). With respect to year of study, first-year students accounted for the highest proportion ($n = 172$, 40.5%), followed by fourth-year students ($n = 114$, 26.8%), second-year students ($n = 76$, 17.9%), and third-year students ($n = 63$, 14.8%). Overall, the sample demonstrated considerable diversity in demographic characteristics.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Study Sample

		Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	140	32.9
	Female	285	67.1
Region	Northern region	62	14.6
	Central region	120	28.2
	Southern region	243	57.2
Field of Study	Economics and Management	57	13.4
	Teacher Education	91	21.4
	Social and Behavioral Sciences	174	40.9
	Engineering and Technology	103	24.2
Academic Year	First-year student	172	40.5
	Second-year student	76	17.9
	Third-year student	63	14.8
	Fourth-year student	114	26.8

Scale Reliability

Cronbach's alpha (α) is a statistical measure used to assess the internal consistency of a scale, indicating the extent to which the items within the scale are interrelated. This coefficient reflects whether the measurements in a study are correlated with one another (Trong & Ngoc, 2018) ^[53]. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.60 or higher is considered acceptable, particularly when the construct being measured is new or relatively unfamiliar to the study population. In addition, items-total correlations of 0.30 or above indicate

that the scale is reliable and acceptable (George & Mallery, 2019) ^[17]. However, an excessively high alpha value may suggest item redundancy, meaning that some items are essentially measuring the same content in slightly different forms (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011) ^[46]. As illustrated in Table 2, the three scales - negative classroom emotions, coping strategies, and self-esteem, along with their respective sub-dimensions, demonstrated reliability ranging from acceptable (0.679) to very good (0.874).

Table 2: Reliability of the Scales

Scales	Factors	Number of items	Reliability
Negative Classroom Emotions (CNE)	Boredom (BO)	11	0.872
	Shame (SH)	9	0.874
	Anxiety (AX)	5	0.726
Coping (C)	Positive Coping (PC)	21	0.868
	Negative Coping (NC)	8	0.794
	Neutral Coping (NEC)	3	0.679
Self-Esteem (RSE)		8	0.682

Normality Test

Skewness and kurtosis statistics were examined to assess the

normality of the dataset and to ensure the suitability of subsequent statistical analyses.

Table 3: Test of Normality

Variable	Skewness	Kurtosis
CNE	-0.07	-0.277
PC	0.35	0.20
NC	0.343	0.190
NEC	0.005	-0.218
RSE	0.272	1.124

According to George and Mallery (2019) ^[17], data are considered approximately normally distributed when skewness and kurtosis values fall within the range of -2 to +2. As presented in Table 3, skewness values ranged from -0.07 to 0.35, while kurtosis values ranged from -0.277 to 1.124. All values fell within the acceptable range, indicating that the data were approximately normally distributed.

Therefore, the assumptions required for conducting correlation and regression analyses among the variables in the research model were satisfied.

Hypothesis Testing

Descriptive statistics were employed to test hypotheses H1 to H3. The results are presented in Tables 4, 5, and 6.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Negative Classroom Emotions

Hypothesis	Variables	M (SD)	Rank	Total score	Result
H1. Negative classroom emotions are generally at a moderate level, with boredom being the highest-rated emotion.	AX	2.665 ± 0.811	3	M=2.756 SD=0.694	Supported
	BO	2.852 ± 0.734	1		
	SH	2.690 ± 0.823	2		

Note: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

As shown in Table 4, negative classroom emotions were found to be at a moderate level (M = 2.756) and boredom

among students was a prominent emotion. Therefore, hypothesis H1 was supported.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Coping Strategies and Self-Esteem Among Students

Hypothesis	Variables	M	SD	Rank	Result
H2. Positive coping is more commonly used by students to cope with negative classroom emotions.	PC	2.912	0.606	2	Not Supported
	NC	2.590	0.704	3	
	NEC	3.161	0.899	1	
H3. Students' self-esteem is high.	RSE	1.732	0.470	Not Supported	

Note: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

The results presented in Table 5 indicate that neutral coping strategies had the highest mean score among the three types of coping, followed by positive coping (at a moderate level), and lastly negative coping (used infrequently). This finding contradicts the hypothesis that positive coping would be the

most commonly used strategy. Therefore, hypothesis H2 was not supported. Meanwhile, the mean of self-esteem was 1.732 (>1.5). Although this score is above the cutoff for low self-esteem, it reflects only a moderate level, rather than a high level. Therefore, hypothesis H3 was not supported.

Table 6: Correlations Between Negative Classroom Emotions and Coping Strategies Among

Hypothesis	Variables	1. CNE	2. PC	3. NC
H4. Negative classroom emotions are positively correlated with negative coping and negatively correlated with positive coping among students.	1. CNE	1		
	2. PC	.222**	1	
	3. NC	.418**	.514**	1
	4. RSE	-.172**	.138**	-.074

Note: **= p<0.01; *= p<0.05

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the variables in the study. This method allows for the assessment of both the direction and strength of the association between variables (Lan, 2011) [27]. The strength of the relationship is indicated by the correlation coefficient (r), which ranges from -1 to +1. A positive value (r > 0) indicates a positive relationship, whereas a negative value (r < 0) indicates an inverse relationship. A value of r = 0 suggests no association between variables. Statistical significance was set at p < .05, indicating that correlation

coefficients were considered significant when this threshold was met (George & Mallery, 2019) [17].

As presented in Table 6, negative classroom emotions were positively correlated with coping strategies and negatively correlated with self-esteem. Notably, positive coping strategies also showed a positive correlation with negative emotions, although the magnitude of this relationship was weaker compared to that of negative coping strategies. Therefore, hypothesis H4 was not supported.

Table 7: Results of Moderation Analysis

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	se	95%CI		Results
				LLCI	ULCI	
H5. Self-esteem moderates the relationship between negative classroom emotions and students' coping strategies.	RSE, CNE, PC	0.0416	0.1387	-0.2311	0.3142	Not supported
	RSE, CNE, NEC	0.1419	0.0921	-0.0392	0.3229	Not supported
	RSE, CNE, NC	-0.1842	0.1099	-0.40003	0.0318	Not supported

Note: Interaction effect; SE: standard error; CI: confidence interval; LLCI: lower limit of the confidence interval; ULCI: upper limit of the confidence interval.

The moderating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between negative classroom emotions and coping strategies (H5) was examined using PROCESS Macro version 4.0 in SPSS. The moderation effect is considered significant when the confidence interval (CI) does not include zero, and the p-value is less than 0.05 (Hayes & Scharkow, 2013) [20]. As

presented in Table 7, the confidence intervals for all tested effects included zero, indicating that although both positive and negative effects were observed, there were no significant differences between low and high levels of self-esteem in the relationship between negative classroom emotions and any type of coping strategy. In other words, self-esteem did not

play a moderating role in this relationship. Therefore, hypothesis H5 was not supported.

Discussion

Hypothesis H1: Negative classroom emotions are generally at a moderate level, with boredom hypothesised to be the highest-rated emotion.

The findings of this study support Hypothesis H1, revealing that negative classroom emotions are at a moderate level, with boredom emerging as the most prevalent emotion among students. This result can be comprehensively explained through the Control-Value Theory (CVT) proposed by Pekrun (2006) [38]. According to CVT, boredom—a deactivating negative emotion—arises when students perceive learning activities as lacking subjective value or when they experience a lack of control over the academic demands. In a university classroom setting, this often occurs when the lecture content fails to meet students' expectations or when the task demands are mismatched with their capabilities—either being too low -leading to under-stimulation or too high - leading to disengagement (Pekrun *et al.*, 2002) [40]. Additionally, Sharp *et al.* (2018) [45] highlighted the prevalence of boredom in educational settings, reporting that 26-59% of students experience sleepiness or inattention due to a lack of stimulation. These findings are consistent with recent results from Trang and Dao (2021) [52] as well as Galvan-Malagon and Morera-Banas (2025) [16], which indicated that boredom reached its peak within the classroom context.

Ultimately, the prominence of boredom among Sai Gon University students indicates a significant challenge to their learning process. Since boredom is a deactivating emotion that depletes cognitive resources and diminishes both motivation and behavioral engagement, it poses a barrier to effective learning (Pekrun, 2006; Pekrun *et al.*, 2011) [38, 39]. This implies that experiencing boredom is a pervasive issue rooted in the structural and pedagogical nature of the classroom environment, highlighting the need for educators to enhance task value and interactive stimulation during lectures.

Hypothesis H2: Positive coping strategies are more commonly employed by students to manage negative emotions in the classroom.

The research results indicate that students predominantly employ neutral coping strategies; consequently, Hypothesis H2 was not supported. Data reveal that students prioritize entertainment and distraction techniques (neutral coping), which aligns with the psycho-physiological characteristics of late adolescence: a high level of activity and a preference for social connection. When facing classroom pressure, their primary reflex is to seek temporary emotional relief through external leisure activities rather than immediately engaging in problem analysis or cognitive restructuring (positive coping), as the latter requires higher cognitive effort. These findings are partially supported by the work of Hang (2014) [21] on Vietnamese students, which highlighted a high frequency of behaviors such as "participating in recreational activities, visiting pagodas, or doing charity." Similarly, a study on Australian university students by Jensen *et al.* (2016) [25] found that "avoidance" was the most common emotional coping style, followed by other strategies, providing further contextual support for this result. However, some literature continues to suggest that positive coping remains more prevalent, though researchers agree that

students typically employ a combination of strategies rather than a single type (Anh *et al.*, 2025) [3]. Furthermore, the fact that negative coping (such as self-blame or resignation) received the lowest scores is a promising sign, suggesting that Sai Gon University students tend to protect themselves against extreme maladaptive behaviors.

Hypothesis H3: Students possess a high level of self-esteem. The findings from this study did not support Hypothesis H3 when self-esteem among students is moderate rather than high level. This moderate state of self-esteem can be profoundly explained through the lens of the Sociometer Theory (Leary & Baumeister, 2000) [30]. For university students, the campus is a highly evaluative social environment where they constantly navigate academic pressures and seek peer acceptance. According to this theory, self-esteem functions as an internal monitor of social inclusion and exclusion. Because students are in a transitional developmental phase, their "sociometers" are highly sensitive and continuously adjusting to the social and academic feedback they receive from peers and lecturers. Consequently, they have not yet crystallized an unshakably high level of self-worth. Nevertheless, this moderate finding is highly consistent with recent literature (Khang *et al.*, 2024; Moreno *et al.*, 2024; Phuong & Tai, 2024) [26, 34, 41], indicating that while modern students do not severely deprecate themselves, they are still in the ongoing process of building robust self-confidence in the demanding university environment.

Hypothesis H4: Negative classroom emotions are positively correlated with students' negative coping strategies and negatively correlated with their positive coping strategies.

The presence of negative emotions can increase the need for coping; in other words, negative emotions cause individuals or learners to mobilize all resources to cope (Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1985) [15, 28]. The results show that negative emotions are positively correlated with both positive and negative coping, but more strongly with negative coping; through this, Hypothesis H4 was not supported. Specifically, regarding positive coping, it can be explained that negative emotions activate the use of positive coping to deal with those emotions. Meanwhile, it can be seen that negative coping is positively correlated with and increases negative emotions. Therefore, it is at least known that the use of negative coping increases negative emotions much more than positive coping. This is supported by the studies of Ngoc and Van (2023) [35], Jensen *et al.* (2016) [25], and Thu and Dat (2009) [49], which argue that negative/maladaptive coping methods are often less effective and highly correlated with stress and increased dissatisfaction due to the accumulation of negative emotions. This can also be understood as: the more intense the negative emotions (especially shame), the more students' cognitive resources are depleted (Baumeister *et al.*, 1998) [7], causing them to gradually lose the strength to maintain positive coping and easily fall into avoidance or resignation behaviors (Chan, 1995; Iuga & David, 2024) [12, 24].

Hypothesis H5: Self-esteem moderates the relationship between negative classroom emotions and students' coping strategies.

The analysis results show that self-esteem does not play a statistically significant moderating role for all three coping strategies; therefore, Hypothesis H5 is not supported. Regarding positive coping, this can be explained as follows: self-esteem is an attitude of self-appreciation, but it does not directly provide specific skills. A student may have very high

self-esteem, but if they have not been equipped with time management skills or cognitive restructuring skills, it remains difficult for them to implement "positive coping." For neutral coping, the nature of this strategy depends heavily on the context and objective situations (such as conditions for going out or shopping), so it is understandable that self-esteem does not moderate this relationship.

Notably, regarding negative coping, although the interaction effect results did not reach statistical significance (95% CI = [-0.40003, 0.031⁸¹]), the confidence interval is very close to the significance boundary, which partially suggests a noteworthy trend. This indicates that high self-esteem in the classroom setting has the potential to act as a "protective shield," capable of reducing the extent to which self-destructive coping strategies are used (Brown, 2010; Zhang *et al.*, 2025) ^[9, 55]. This difference in coping habits can be explained through the learners' mechanism of interpreting failure. According to Brown (2010) ^[9], self-esteem not only determines the general emotional state but also particularly governs self-evaluative emotions, such as shame or humiliation, which are the dominant negative emotions in the classroom in this study. When facing difficulties or criticism in class, students with low self-esteem are often extremely sensitive. They easily form negative defense mechanisms (such as self-blame, avoidance, or resignation) as a form of surrendering to pressure. In contrast, students with high self-esteem perceive negative classroom experiences as isolated events rather than a measure of their human value; thus, they accept them more easily.

Conclusion

This study has clarified the complex relationship between negative emotions arising in the classroom context and the tendency to choose coping strategies among students at Sai Gon University, as well as the moderating role of self-esteem. The results show that negative emotions are prevalent at a moderate level, with boredom emerging as the most dominant emotion, which reflects a lack of adequate stimulation in the university classroom. Notably, negative emotions act as an alarm signal, triggering both positive and negative coping tendencies, but more strongly in negative coping; this means that as cognitive resources become more exhausted, students are more at risk of falling into negative coping behaviors (such as self-blame, avoidance, or resignation) and conversely, it is also possible that negative coping increases negative emotions.

The most important finding of the study lies in the role of self-esteem. Although it does not directly promote students to develop positive coping skills, high self-esteem shows a tendency to function as a valuable psychological buffer. It helps restrain and prevent students from slipping into the trap of self-destructive coping strategies when facing boredom or shame in the classroom. From these findings, the study suggests that, in order to support mental health and academic performance, higher education institutions need to implement "dual" interventions. On the one hand, lecturers need to build a safe classroom environment that respects differences in order to nurture and protect students' self-esteem. On the other hand, universities need to organise psychological counselling programmes to directly train students in positive coping skills (such as cognitive restructuring, time management, or seeking social support by sharing with friends, lecturers, and family), because self-esteem alone is not sufficient to create problem-solving skills.

Limitations Of The Study

Despite providing certain contributions, this study still has several limitations. The cross-sectional research design only provides a snapshot at a single point in time and cannot definitively confirm absolute causal relationships between variables. The collected data relied entirely on self-reports, making it difficult to avoid errors due to participants' memory or psychological defenses. Additionally, the study sample utilized a convenience sampling method and was limited to Sai Gon University, which may restrict its representativeness for other population groups. Future research should expand to more diverse sample sizes, combining in-depth interview methods (qualitative) and longitudinal research designs to track changes in students' coping habits over time.

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