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COPING WITH STRESS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMOTION

Giap Binh Nga[1], Nguyen Duc Son[2], Le Thi Phuong Nga[3]

[1,2] Hanoi National University of Education, 136 Xuan Thuy, Cau Giay, Hanoi, Vietnam.

[3] Hongduc University, Vietnam.

Email: [1]ngagb@hnue.edu.vn, [2]nguyensontlhnue.edu.vn@gmail.com,

[3]kimanhminh@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Personal psychological resources are very important in preventing academic stress. This article analyzes the effect of thinking on the action for coping with academic stress. Moreover, it analyzes the role of emotion as a mediator of this relationship. A validated self-report instrument was used to investigate 571 school students to assess levels of coping with academic stress. The mediation analyses were performed using the AMOS software version 22. The mediation model includes three factors: thinking, emotion, and action. The results indicate that emotion partially mediates the relationship between thinking and action. These findings reveal the benefits of using personal resources to enhance effective coping with academic stress while attending school.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years in Vietnam, a considerable amount of effort has been devoted to understanding the processes of coping with academic stress. Despite the attention this topic has received, a large portion of the variance in coping with stress has yet to be explained. The present paper is an attempt to account for some of this unexplained variance. Researchers focusing on academic stress attest to its high prevalence during students' time at school [1]. In their daily living skills, school students face worries such as adapting to a new environment, academic performance, as well as others that are social and financial [2]. These factors are often perceived by school students as highly stressful and may cause significant damage to their performance [3].

The long-term impact of these potential stressors depends in large part on the capacity of individuals to face them adaptively [4]. Personal strengths become real psychological resources that allow individuals to not only reduce pathological states [5] but also to stimulate their personal development [6]. In addition, education shifted to online mode and distance learning.

Studies exploring stress associated with the new norm of increased telecommunication are lacking [7]. In stressful situations, students are more aware of the positive and negative emotions that they feel, express their emotions more easily, and can effectively use their knowledge about the emotions they experience [8]. Emotion-focused coping negatively correlated with social support, openness, extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness, while it correlated positively with neuroticism [9]. A sense of belonging to the school and academic hardiness were significant predictors of academic stress [10].

In this paper, we address the limitation in the literature and examine the mediator role of emotion on the relationship between thinking and action in coping with the academic stress of school students. Creating a culture of emotion in school and supporting skills related to thinking and action should be key considerations for all schools seeking to reduce academic stress experienced by their school students.

METHODOLOGY

Figure 1 demonstrates the research design of this study. The expected data to test the hypothesis was composed through closed-ended self-completed offline and online surveys. Moreover, the sample population was fixed. From that point forward, the data was composed and investigated and the findings were clarified and argued.

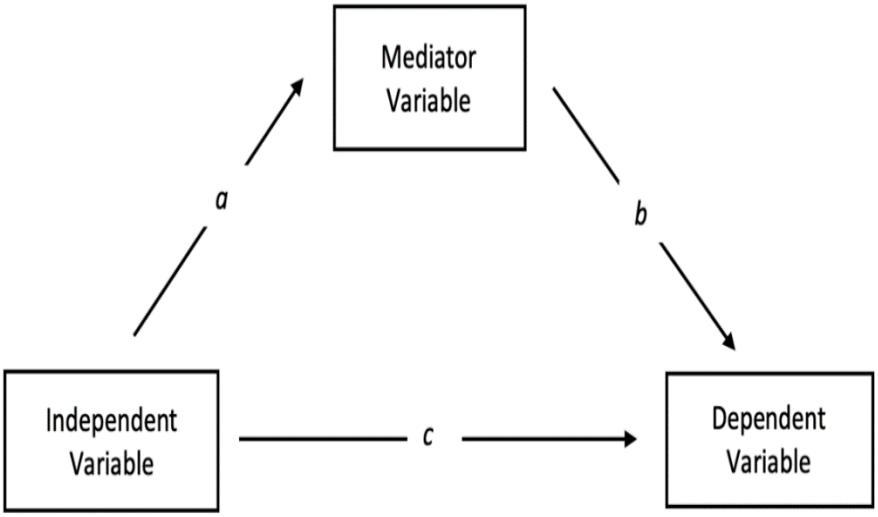

Figure 1. Research Design

Research Hypothesis Development

The following hypotheses (Hs) are proposed concerning the consequences of the main factors:
H1: The survey will show adequate factorial validity as a measure of coping with academic stress
H2: The mean levels of thinking, emotion, and action are significantly different
H3: The latent factors of coping with academic stress are correlated
H4: The effect of thinking on action is partially mediated by emotion.

Research Objectives

These research objectives are to investigate the mediating relationship between the three chosen aspects of coping with academic stress (Thinking, emotion, and action) and also provide suggestions to school students on how they can use these aspects to improve the personal resources to enhance effective coping with academic stress while attending school.

Population And Sample

The sample for this study is limited to school students who are from the north of Vietnam, which will include both genders, who are between the age group of 11-15 years old and have the ability to think and act normally. The target sample was chosen based on the needs and nature of the study that requires school students who have academic stress experiences. After connecting with the targeted sample, an online and offline survey questionnaire related to thinking, emotion, and action were answered by 571 respondents.

Questionnaire Construction

This study used three subscales of the Coping Strategies Inventory [11] to collect data for this research. There was an offline closed-ended self-completed and online survey, which was developed by using Google Forms. All responses were recorded by methods for a Likert scale that run from not at all to complete. The survey included three main parts referred to by part A, part B and part C.

Part A: *Thinking*

1. I went over the problem again and again in my mind and finally saw things in a different light
2. I reorganized the way I looked at the situation, so things didn't look so bad
3. I convinced myself that things aren't quite as bad as they seem
4. I asked myself what was important, and discovered that things weren't so bad after all
5. I looked for the silver lining, so to speak; tried to look on the bright side of things

Part B: *Emotion*

1. I let out my feelings to reduce the stress
2. I let my emotions go
3. I got in touch with my feelings and just let them go
4. I let my emotions out
5. My feelings were overwhelming and they just exploded

Part C: *Action*

1. I struggled to resolve the problem
2. I worked on solving the problems in the situation
3. I tackled the problem head-on
4. I knew what had to be done, so I doubled my efforts and tried harder to make things work
5. I stood my ground and fought for what I wanted

Data Collection

The data were collected through offline closed-ended self-completed and online surveys. An online questionnaire tool was selected because of how easy and convenient it is for the target sample to be reached. Moreover, an online questionnaire was easier for the targeted sample to use and answer efficiently.

Data Analysis Techniques

To best understand and interpret the data, a series of indexes were developed. These indexes grouped questions by type of knowledge or information. The questions were derived from topics covered in textbooks and real life. The questionnaire was administered in both city and suburban areas. The sample showed broad demographic variation. In detail, this research used a quantitative approach for collecting the primary data of the study. The data was analyzed on SPSS software and AMOS software using Structural Equation Modeling [12]. First, we used SPSS to test the hypothesis of the research. Secondly, to further confirm the results obtained from Modelling we tested our hypothesized model using Structural Equation Modelling.

RESULT

Factor Analysis

Assuming that identifying latent variables that account for the correlations among measured variables is the goal of the research. As researchers, authors decided to use the structural equation modeling analysis [12] in this research. Both exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) are used. The model tested was a relatively simple model with 3 latent factors (Thinking, Emotion, Action) and 15 measured variables. The H1 was accepted. Correlations and descriptive statistics for the factors are presented in the table below (see Table 1).

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, And Correlations

Factors	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Thinking	3.32	0.68		.35**	.47**
2. Emotion	3.03	0.63	.35**		.24**
3. Action	3.35	0.66	.47**	.24**	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
N = 571

As indicated in Table 1, the Emotion score is lower in comparison to other factors: Thinking and Action. In other words, Thinking and Action levels were significantly higher than Emotion levels. The mean level of Thinking was 3.32; for Action, 3.35; and for Emotion, 3.03. There are no regional differences in coping with the academic stress of the school students in this research.

As the correlations in Table 1 show, Action was positively correlated with each of the other factors. The correlations ranged from a low of .24 to a high of .47. The correlation between Thinking and Action was .47. This indicates that when the Thinking quality was good, school students tend to apply it to reality, thus confirming H2 and H3.

Mediating Relationships

The important point for mediating relationships is that a third variable plays an important role in governing the relationship between two other variables. Baron and Kenny (2009) argued that for us to claim a mediating relationship [13], we need to first show that there is a significant relationship in the direct pathway between the independent variable (Thinking) and the dependent variable (Action).

Direct pathway

Figure 2 and Figure 3 illustrate the mediating relationship. The regression coefficient for the direct pathway Thinking on Action is 0.47. In this case, it is also a correlation between Thinking and Action.

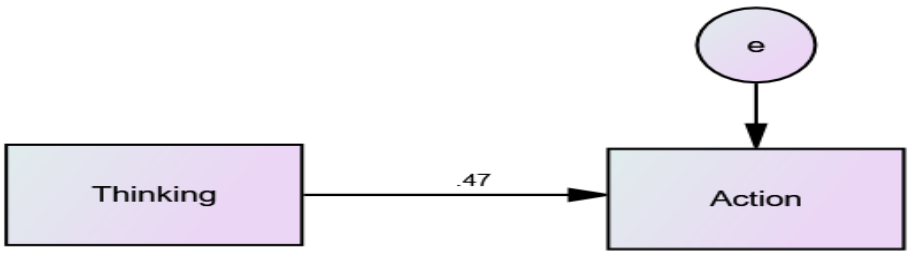

Figure 2. The Relationship Between Thinking and Action

Indirect Pathway

The next step is to show that there is a significant relationship between the independent variable and the mediator (Emotion). Then we need to show that there is a significant relationship between the mediator and the dependent variable.

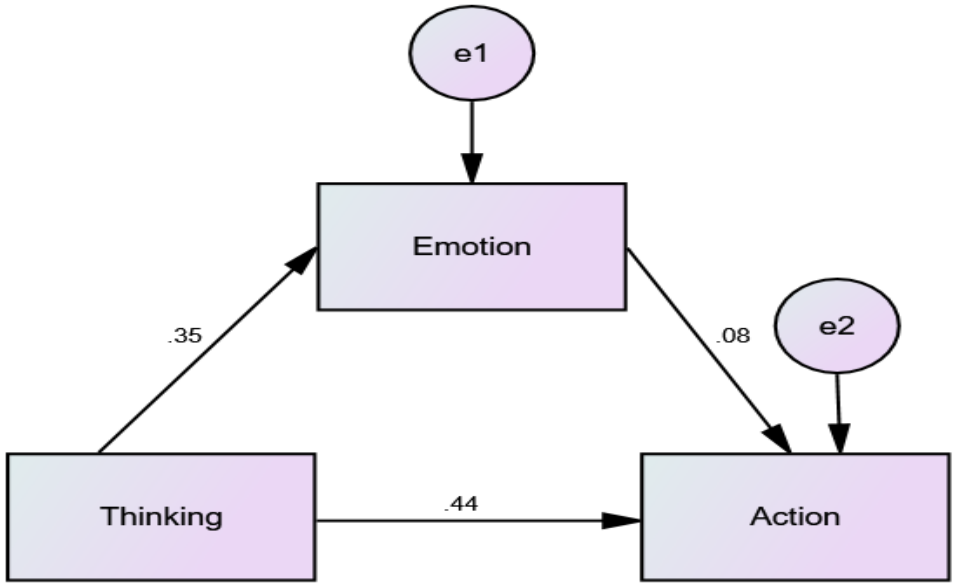

Figure 3. The Mediating Role of Emotion

The regression coefficient for the direct path Thinking on Emotion is 0.35, whereas the regression coefficient for the direct path Emotion on Action is 0.08. Then the regression coefficient for the indirect path Thinking on Action as the product of single paths: 0.35 x 0.08 = 0.03. If Thinking changes by one standard deviation, then Action changes by 0.30 standard deviations via Emotion. The total path as product of sum up direct path and indirect path: 0.44 + 0.03 = 0.47. These three conditions require that the three paths (involving Thinking, Emotion, and Action) are all individually significant. The final step consists of demonstrating that when the mediator and the independent variable are used simultaneously to predict the dependent variable, the previously significant path between the independent and dependent variables is now reduced (partially mediating relationship), if not nonsignificant. The H4 was accepted.

CONCLUSION

This research indicates that levels of coping with academic stress including thinking, emotion, and action are quite high. The emotion is low among them, but their levels of thinking and action are higher. The latent factors are correlated. There are no regional differences in coping with academic stress. The effect of thinking on action is partially mediated by emotion.

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