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**COPING STRATEGIES OF VIETNAMESE AND RUSSIAN  
STUDENTS OF AN INTERNATIONALLY ORIENTED  
UNIVERSITY**

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*Abstract*

The research on coping strategies of Vietnamese and Russian students attending an internationally oriented university calls forth the necessity of the adaptation process improvement in a new educational and multicultural environment. It was hypothesized that there are similarities and differences in coping strategies among the Vietnamese and Russian students of People Friendship University in Russia (PFUR) during their education in a multicultural environment. The purpose of this study is to find out the characteristics of coping strategies among these students, using education in universities as an example. 120 Vietnamese and Russian students aged 18 to 22 participated in this research. The students were divided into two samples by gender and again categorized into four subgroups: 30 men and 30 women from Vietnam, 30 men and 30 women from Russia (all studying at PFUR). The level of confrontational coping, distancing and search for social support prevailed among Vietnamese students. Low levels of tension and feelings management were observed among Russian men. Vietnamese students are prone to use the strategy of taking responsibility under the distinct influence of anxiety. The probability of “emotional stress development” was higher among Russian students. The factorial structures, which prove the connections between emotions and the development of stress in difficult situations among Russian and Vietnamese students, were different. High levels of coping strategies such as distracting and avoiding problems, providing responsible and positive solutions to problems were revealed among Vietnamese students. The strategy of distracting and avoiding stressful situations by communicating prevailed among Russian students.

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**Keywords:** Coping strategies, adaptation to multicultural universities, stress flexibility, stress, Vietnamese students, Russian students.



## **1. Introduction**

Coping is the sum of cognitive, emotional and behavioral strengths for following specific inner and outer requirements (Endler & Parker, 1990), which are straining and exceeding resources of one's personality (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It is extremely important to conduct researches on coping strategies for facing new or unfamiliar situations during the adolescent years (Nesmith, 2017), which is considered as one of crises of human development (Erikson, 1968). For the Vietnamese students studying in Russia, the objective for overcoming stressful situations from acculturation (caused by adapting into a new environment) is the particularity of experiencing the adolescent crisis (Berry, Kim, Minde & Mok, 1987). It has been revealed that the productive way of overcoming stress is connected to successful acculturation (Heppner, Wei, Neville & Kanagui-Munoz, 2014). On the other hand, the accepting side, in this case the Russian students, also experience stress because of submerging into a multicultural educational environment, which requires the usage of productive coping (Yi, Giseala Lin & Kishimoto, 2003).

## **2. Problem Statement**

The necessity of research on the characteristics of coping is determined by: 1) scientific reasons for understanding the connections between stress, how to overcome it and ethnocultural differences (Berry, 1997) and 2) the necessity of practical psychological support in internationally oriented universities due to the increasing number of foreign students studying under contemporary conditions of academic mobility (Sandhu, 1995). This brings up the vaguely answered question about the similarities and differences of coping strategies among Russian students as the "accepting side" and foreign students as "guests of the university" (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). Understanding this question could lead to better cooperation between the students (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989), how they understand each other and how they could decrease or prevent potential friction in multicultural relationships (Fierro & Moreno, 2007).

## **3. Research Questions**

It was hypothesized that there are unique methods of coping strategies among the Vietnamese and Russian students of RUDN University in the process of education in a multicultural environment. A question raised during the research about the similar and different aspects of handling stress between the two groups of participants considering their ethnicity and gender. The main questions of this research were the following: whether there are differences between the two groups when it comes to the usage of constructive and relatively constructive coping strategies, how the actualization of emotions is connected to stress in both groups, and what kind of resources set the students in motion in the process of experiencing stress.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to study the characteristics of coping among Vietnamese and Russian students at RUDN University while adapting in a multicultural educational environment. The interpretation of the results from this research corresponds with G. Hofstede’s “Cultural dimensions theory,” which states that a society’s culture affects an individual’s values of its members, and how those values effect their behavior and especially their coping strategies (Hofstede, 2002).

#### **5. Research Methods**

##### **5.1. Participants**

120 Vietnamese and Russian students aged 18 to 22, with the average age of 20, studying in different faculties participated in this research. The participants were split by gender and then divided into four sub-groups, which consisted of 30 men from Vietnam, 30 women from Vietnam, 30 men from Russia and 30 women from Russia.

##### **5.2. Measures**

The following measures were used: “Ways of coping questionnaire” (Lazarus), “Coping behavior in stressful situations” (Kryukova, 2004), questionnaire for determining the tendency towards the development of stress (Nemchin & Taylor) and the scale for determining stress “PSM-25”

Each participant was instructed to answer all provided questions on the questionnaires.

##### **5.3. Statistical Analysis**

Comparative and factorial analysis (with SPSS 22.0) were used to process and interpret results.

#### **6. Findings**

A comparative analysis of Vietnamese and Russian students on their coping strategies was done by using the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test. Results showed that there are distinct differences between the two selections according to the scales, which can be seen in the table below.

**Table 1.** Significant differences in coping among Vietnamese and Russian students

Name of the scale	Average rank by the scale for Vietnamese students ( $M_{\text{Vietnam}}$ )	Average rank by the scale for Russian students ( $M_{\text{Russia}}$ )	Mann-Whitney U criteria	Significance level ( $p < 0.05$ )
Positive reappraisal	13.55	12.18	1385	0.029
Coping for solving problems	40.86	43.61	1411.5	0.041
Emotional coping	40.85	35.82	1248	0.004
Avoidance	50.45	45.00	1197.5	0.002
Distraction	24.5	20.8	1144.5	0.001

According to the data from Table 1, the strategy of positive reappraisal was more dominant among the Vietnamese students compared to the Russian students. This is most likely due to their culture, which includes low levels of avoiding uncertainty, demonstrating personal initiatives and calmly accepting different perspectives from others. Problem-solving coping strategies were seen more among Russian students compared to the Vietnamese, which could be connected to the predominance of strategic thinking, which leads to making long-term perspectives and making wise decisions related to education. According to the scales on emotion-focused coping, avoidance and distracting oneself, the Vietnamese students proved to demonstrate this more compared to the Russian students. This may be because of the fact that the Vietnamese culture is more feminine, which leads them to focus on the process and not on the result of the action. Thus, the obtained results prove the typology of cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2002).

Further analysis was done using the Kruskal-Wallis H test. The analysis shows the differences between the two selections statistically based on their gender and ethnic traits by scales, which can be seen on the table below.

**Table 2.** Significant differences in coping between Vietnamese and Russian men and women

Name of the scale	Average rank by the scale for Vietnamese men (M <sub>men+ Vietnam</sub> )	Average rank by the scale for Vietnamese women (M <sub>women+ Vietnam</sub> )	Average rank by the scale for Russian men (M <sub>men+ Russia</sub> )	Average rank by the scale for Russian women (M <sub>women+Russia</sub> )	Pearson's X <sup>2</sup>	Significance level (p<0.05)
Accepting responsibility	8.53	8.1	6.83	8.16	9.664	0.022
Escape-avoidance	11.36	12.46	10.33	13.9	10.443	0.015
Emotional coping	40.46	40.93	30.03	41.73	35.343	0.003
Distraction	24.5	24.36	20.03	21.53	8.720	0.005
Socially distracting oneself	16.67	16.9	14.67	17.13	11.304	0.010
Tendency towards stress	22.07	23.17	15.67	23.87	15.549	0.001
Scale of stress	101.83	99.76	79.63	102.83	14.805	0.002

Based on the data from table 2, Vietnamese men are most likely to take responsibility. Later comes both Russian and Vietnamese women; their results were similar. Russian men are the least likely to take responsibility. This can be explained by an uneven distribution of responsibility by gender, and not by ethnical traits. Vietnamese men demonstrate almost the same locus control as Russian women compared to Russian men. On the scale of "escape-avoidance," high values were observed among Vietnamese and Russian women. This could be explained by the feminine type of both cultures, which suggests to orient on the process of things and not on the results. On the scale of emotion-focused coping, there was a larger gap in the values between Russian men and women compared to the values of the Vietnamese students. This may imply that Russian men are less likely to be submerged in emotion and they tend to separate

themselves from their own feelings. On the scale of “distracting oneself,” the values of Vietnamese men and women were the same, however Russian women had lower levels than the Vietnamese, while Russian men showed the least levels. On the scale of “coping by socially distracting oneself,” Vietnamese and Russian women showed higher levels than the men from both countries. These results reflect the type of collective society where members of it, especially women, value relationships and therefore strive to support each other. The scale of “tendency towards stress” showed that women from both countries had higher chances of experiencing stress. This means that women are much more prone to have intense reactions when facing difficult situations and interpret them as “stressful situations.” On the general scale of stress, Vietnamese men appeared to be more sensitive towards stress compared to Vietnamese women. For the Russians, results showed the opposite. Women were more sensitive and men were less sensitive towards stress. All of these results above prove G. Hofstede’s ideas true.

The next analysis was done using the Varimax rotation. The analysis divided the results into four factors inside each sub-group. The results were the following for the Vietnamese students.

The first factor of the coping strategy of making “responsible and positive solution” included the following variables: planful problem solving (0.914), coping by solving problems (0.849), accepting responsibility (0.788), positive reappraisal (0.771) and coping by socially distracting oneself (0.551). The second factor, “development of emotional stress,” had the following variables: tendency towards stress in general (0.867), psychological stress (0.840), avoidance (0.752) and emotional coping (0.735). The third factor, coping by distracting and avoidance, included the following variables: avoidance (0.898) and distracting oneself (0.865). The fourth factor, “constructive and relatively constructive strategies of overcoming stress,” was represented by the following variables: distancing (0.793), confrontive coping (0.643), self-controlling (0.627) and seeking social support (0.502).

In the selection consisting of Russian students, the following factors were provided. The first factor of the “intensification of stress while orienting on emotions” had the following variables: emotional coping (0.904), tendency towards stress in general (0.900) and psychological stress (0.809). The second factor, coping by distraction and avoidance by communicating, consisted of the following variables: avoidance (0.942), coping by distraction (0.817) and socially distracting oneself (0.812). The third factor, “constructive and relatively constructive strategies for overcoming stress,” had the following variables: distancing (0.721), confrontive coping (0.718), escape-avoidance (0.548), self-controlling (0.55) and accepting responsibility (0.549). The fourth factor, “making decisions with social support,” consisted of the following variables: coping by solving problems (0.78), planful problem solving (0.749) and seeking social support (0.51).

**Table 3.** Dominant factors of behavior among Vietnamese and Russian students

<b>Factors dominant among Vietnamese students</b>	<b>Factors dominant among Russian students</b>
Responsible and positive solutions	Making decisions with the help of social support
Intensification of stress while orienting on emotions	Intensification of stress while orienting on emotions
Distracting and avoiding problems	Distracting and avoiding by communicating
Factor of constructive and relatively constructive strategies for overcoming stress	Factor of constructive and relatively constructive strategies for overcoming stress

Results from the factorial analysis show that stress increases while orienting emotions (inner tension; stress) among both groups of participants. This implies that there was insufficient development of constructive coping in the selection for this research. This data is also backed-up by the general factor of constructive and relatively constructive strategies which are being used by Vietnamese and Russian students. Along with productive strategies of self-control, accepting responsibility and seeking for social support, the students of both sub-groups use relatively productive strategies of distancing, confrontational coping, and also the less productive strategy of escape-avoidance. The differences between the groups are the following: Russian students are more likely to use the strategy of seeking social support, orienting on their own social environment and also communicating with others while solving stressful situations. On the other hand, while distracting and avoiding problematic situations, Vietnamese students are less likely to depend on their peers, and instead concentrate on their inner positive reappraisal on the situation, as well as taking responsibility for solving problems. It is possible that higher communication needs of Russian students go in line with G. Hofstede's opinion. Therefore, caring for others, making effort to share feelings and not one's own potency is valued and encouraged in typical feminine cultures.

## 7. Conclusion

Through the research, it was found that there are certain characteristics of coping strategies among Vietnamese and Russian students, and therefore, the hypothesis was proven true. The analyzed data also corresponded with the G. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, as Vietnamese students showed high levels of tolerance towards vagueness or uncertainty, practicality and strategic thinking was seen among Russian students, and feminineness in both cultures by orienting on the process and not on the result.

The factorial analysis showed that there are similarities in both groups by the following factors: a) intensification of stress while orienting on emotions and 2) constructive and relatively constructive strategies for overcoming stress. The differences between the groups were the following: a) the usage of communication resources only among Russian students while using the coping strategy of distracting and avoiding problems, b) solving problems by getting social support among Russian students and c) making responsible and positive solutions for solving problems among Vietnamese students.

The results from this research could be used for individual and group consultation practices held by the Cabinet of psychological support of RUDN University for the purpose of improving coping strategies and levels of adaptation among Vietnamese and Russian students in Russian internationally oriented universities.

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