

**VIETNAMESE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS’  
PERCEIVED CHANGES IN  
EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND COPING STRATEGIES**

**Do Ngoc Phuong Anh**

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## **Abstract**

An increasing number of mental health problems have been found in Vietnamese undergraduate students, including stress, anxiety, depression and suicide. One of the factors linked to increased mental health problems in Vietnamese undergraduate students is low emotional intelligence and a lack of coping skills. Emotional intelligence is involved in coping and problem-solving processes, reduces stress and has been found to improve physical and psychological wellbeing. Individuals who lack emotional intelligence experience more stress, have more mental health issues, lack adaptive coping skills and adopt unhealthy or risk-taking behaviours. Research demonstrates that many Vietnamese undergraduate students have difficulty adapting to changes, lack assertiveness and experience relationship instability. Their problems also are thought to be partly caused by the pressures they experience while trying to adhere to social and cultural norms, which are strongly influenced by a mixture of value systems, including Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and Socialism.

The purpose of the present study is to explore the experiences of Vietnamese undergraduate students and their learning about emotional intelligence and coping strategies within Vietnam's social and cultural context. This research was conducted in the Vietnamese language. A descriptive qualitative study was used to explore participants' experiences of a programme designed to develop emotional intelligence and coping strategies. The participants were 21 undergraduate students aged 17–25 years old, living and studying in Hanoi. Audio diaries, interviews and cogenerative dialogues were utilised as data collection methods. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data and present the main findings. The study showed that participants used avoidance and emotional suppression to cope with stress and interpersonal conflicts. These strategies were culturally shaped and aimed at maintaining interconnectedness and social harmony but had negative consequences on their wellbeing. Participants' self-reported changes indicated some improvement in their perceived coping ability and their emotional abilities that contribute to emotional intelligence. The programme helped participants develop their emotional literacy, awareness and understanding. These abilities enabled them to develop a broader range of problem-solving skills, emotional acceptance, and increased self-control, leading to their changes. This change was evidenced in participants reporting feeling more liberated, empowered, and autonomous. They also felt more confident in their problem-solving ability and had more control over stressful situations.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### **Vietnamese students' mental health**

Mental health problems, especially depression, affect approximately 4.4% of the world population, or at least 322 million people (Nguyen et al., 2019). South Asian countries report the highest prevalence of mental health problems globally (Naveed et al., 2020). Poor mental health among university undergraduate students has been a cause of concern globally. University students have a higher rate of depression than the general population (January et al., 2018). In Vietnam, there is a rapidly growing public awareness of mental health problems such as stress, anxiety, depression, and suicide among Vietnamese students (Nguyen et al., 2013). A study by Ly and Vo (2018) on 965 undergraduate medical and non-medical students showed that about 97% of the participants had stress, anxiety, or depression symptoms. About 85% of these sufferers experienced severe levels of these mental health problems. Research showed that about 80% of Ho Chi Minh city undergraduate students experience stress, anxiety or depression, and severe anxiety accounts for one-third of the diagnoses (An, 2019; Thai et al., 2021).

Despite the alarming levels of mental health problems, university students have limited access to sources of mental health support. Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) found that Vietnamese undergraduate students lack mental health literacy. They found that only a small number of undergraduate students can correctly identify depression, suggesting that they have little knowledge about mental health problems and how to seek mental health support. Additionally, according to Harrer et al. (2018), in developed countries, only one out of five students diagnosed with mental health problems receives minimal adequate treatment. In Vietnam, there are 0.91 psychiatrists per 100,000 people, meaning undergraduate students have limited access to adequate mental health assessment, treatment, and support (Mah, 2018). Therefore, there is a need for mental health awareness and support for Vietnamese undergraduate students that helps them improve their ability to cope with stress and mental health issues.

## **Living as young people in Vietnamese culture**

One of the reasons proposed for Vietnamese undergraduate students experiencing high rates of stress and problems is that they are under pressure from the unique sociocultural context of Vietnam. The mixture of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and Socialism has created a unique value system for Vietnamese people and shaped them to become brave, responsible, cooperative, creative, and hardworking people (Nguyen, 2016). However, this mixture of cultural features has also created some problems for Vietnamese, especially young people.

**Taoism** was widely accepted in Vietnam in ancient times for its core philosophy of maintaining harmony between people, and between people and nature, and historically most Vietnamese were farmers (Nguyen, 2016). Through Taoist teachings, Vietnamese people are introduced to the concept of balance so that human and human, as well as human and nature, can co-exist in a harmonic way (Vuong et al., 2018). In Vietnamese culture, maintaining harmony within the family is very important because failure to maintain harmony within the family might create a negative mood among all the family members and lead to the withdrawal of other family members. As a result, the member who disrupted the family harmony might feel isolated and feel that his or her sense of belonging is threatened (Bich, 1999). Additionally, the sense of self-worth of each individual is evaluated according to how well the individual serves to enhance interpersonal relations in social contexts. Hence, maintaining harmony with group members is highly valued (Bedford & Hwang, 2003). Since the philosophy emphasises harmony, Vietnamese children are taught at a very young age to avoid conflict at all costs to maintain harmony in all social relations (He et al., 2011). On the one hand, maintaining harmony in Taoist teachings has created a love of peace in Vietnamese, strengthened bonds with their family and other interpersonal relationships, and secured their sense of belonging with their social groups. On the other hand, it has also shaped resignation and inaction, which hinders Vietnamese, especially young people, from being proactive and equipping themselves with adequate skills and the mentality for adversity and difficult situations in life.

**Confucianism** stresses family solidarity and interdependence. It has set strong foundations of the hierarchy and collective characteristics that have created order and stability in Vietnamese social relations (Truong et al., 2017). Vietnamese people are expected to engage in role-appropriate behaviours. For example, one of the most important obligations in

Confucian teachings is that a person should be filial to his or her parents to successfully fulfil the role of the child in the family (Truong, 2013). According to Kwan (2000), whenever the expected responsibilities associated with a specific social role are fulfilled, the esteem of the individual who takes the role increases, and the harmony of the family also perseveres or is even enhanced (Kwan, 2000). Conversely, people who fail to fulfil their expected role do not possess expected abilities and competence, or those who fail to display appropriate appearance will experience face loss and eventually feel publicly shamed or humiliated (Nguyen, 2013; Pham, 2007). Influenced by Confucianism, Vietnamese culture uses the sense of shame to guide social behaviours and encourage people to hide their bad behaviours and conform to social and culture norms with virtue ethics (Berkson, 2021). For example, Vietnamese parents often say to children “stop doing that or people will laugh at us”, this saying implies that if a child does something wrong, the humiliation or shame will be on ‘us’ as the whole family. The failure or misconduct of an individual brings criticism or shame on not only himself or herself but also to his or her family.

Additionally, to be seen as good children who are filial to their parents, Vietnamese children need to learn that their parents’ authoritarian behaviours and strict child-rearing methods reflect their intentions of love and benevolence. Authoritarian filial piety requires self-oppression and absolute obedience of children toward their parents to satisfy parents’ expectations or demands (Bedford & Yeh, 2020). The obedience of the children is established through authority and discipline and, in the family, parents are the ultimate source of authority (Kwan, 2000). Because of these filial principles, punishments are given and widely accepted at home and in schools in Vietnam (Nguyen & Tran, 2013). Hoang et al. (2001, cited in Vu, 2016) found that many Vietnamese parents believe harsh punishment is a way to educate their children. Vietnamese parents even give permission to teachers to beat their children if they do not obey the teachers or make mistakes at school (Nguyen & Tran, 2013). Children who experience authoritarian parenting styles can internalise this style and grow up being excessively demanding and punitive toward themselves and experience negative emotions such as fear, shame and guilt. It is common in Vietnamese culture for parents to expect their children to achieve academically and bring honour to the family. From the Western point of view, it might seem like Vietnamese students study for their parents rather than voluntarily engaging in study activities for personal gain. However, for Vietnamese young

people, it is what they do to fulfil their filial responsibilities and meet the social expectation of being a good child (Pham, 2011).

Moreover, unlike the Western culture of adoring youth, age is an asset in Vietnamese culture. Older people in the family are believed to have more experience, knowledge and wisdom; therefore, they have to be respected and rarely accept opinions or critiques from those lower in the hierarchy. Following these rules, young people must not give their opinions on family matters if they are not asked, regardless of how right they may be (Truong et al., 2017). Although Confucian values help young Vietnamese become responsible, disciplined and loyal, these values also limit young Vietnamese from becoming independent, assertive and critical.

**Buddhism** was first introduced in Vietnam during the first century AD. At that time, the Vietnamese accepted Buddhism as the Karma, compassion and tolerance in Buddhism helped them deal with the pain of poverty and misery (Le, 2014). In the present day, Buddhist teachings around endurance and the expression of certain negative emotions still play an important part in Vietnamese cultural and social life in proverbs, folk stories and poetry taught at home and school (Nguyen, 2016). Under the influence of Buddhism, Vietnamese people tend to hold specific beliefs about coping and emotional regulations. First, Buddhism motivates people to endure their problems instead of facing and solving them. Buddhism teaches that every life situation is predestined and tends to think that everything happens for a reason. Buddhism also stresses that suffering (e.g., distress or unfulfilled expectations) is an inevitability of life and that one needs to accept it. Therefore, enduring suffering is an encouraging method of overcoming difficult situations (De Silva, 2014).

For Vietnamese people, endurance is a valued characteristic as it reflects the spirit of self-cultivation and the continuous effort to develop one's mental strength (Moore & Constantine, 2005). However, this valued characteristic's downside could lead to negative coping behaviours such as making people feel reluctant to share their problems, silently suffering through their problems, or sacrificing themselves and putting others' needs first (Moore & Constantine, 2005). These coping behaviours are positively associated with depressive symptoms (Wei et al., 2012). Second, Buddhism advises that some emotions are unbeneficial and cause suffering in people. When unbeneficial emotions such as anger become intense, they could drive people to take wrong actions (e.g., retaliation) (Thich, 2014). When people

believe that their emotions are overwhelming or out of control, it could frighten them and lead them to believe that those emotions need to be terminated or avoided so that they will not be a burden to others (Leahy, 2019). Vietnamese people believe these are problematic and unbeneficial emotions; they prevent people from liberating themselves from suffering to find happiness. On the one hand, Buddhist teachings act as important spiritual guides that help Vietnamese people to have a calm mind and take rational actions when facing difficult situations (Vuong et al., 2018). On the other hand, these teachings also result in the use of some unhealthy coping behaviours and negatively impact people's mental health and wellbeing.

**Socialism** was introduced to Vietnam in the mid-twentieth century. In 1945, President Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam an independent country and introduced the national motto that showed the first socialist value of Vietnam: 'Independence – Freedom – Happiness' (Nguyen, 2016). With the rapid socioeconomic transformation of Vietnam, the Communist Party of Vietnam added more aspects to the national socialist values of Vietnam to achieve the socialist goals set by President Ho Chi Minh in 1945. The added values were "prosperous people, strong nation, democracy, justice and civilisation" (Nguyen, 2016., p. 38). Since 1986, the lives of Vietnamese people, especially young people, started to change because of the Doi Moi (reform) programme initiated by the Vietnamese Communist Party.

The year 1995 marked a significant change for Vietnamese young people as Vietnam and the United States ended the embargo of more than 20 years following the war. After this event, Vietnam officially joined the global world (Nguyen, 2015). The economic liberation and globalisation in the following years allowed Western influences to make their way into the everyday lives of Vietnamese people. Hence, young Vietnamese people adopted individualist ideologies that represented Western culture (Nguyen, 2015). Therefore, Vietnamese culture is also seen as more individualistic than other collectivistic cultures, such as Chinese culture (Young, 1998). According to the national socialist goals of the Vietnamese Communist Party, 'prosperous people' is the key element for happiness. If everyone is rich in materials, no one has to suffer from poverty, diseases, unemployment or exploitation. Under the lens of socialism, happiness and wellbeing seem to be measured by the level of being 'prosperous', and young people are expected to show 'patriotism' to the nation by contributing materially

in any possible way. This expectation might explain the shift from spiritual to material values in young Vietnamese in recent years. Many employers have voiced the tendency to endorse individualism to an extreme that selfish, lazy and expedient are the common characteristics of young people in Vietnam (Ha, 2017).

However, selfishness, laziness or expedience may just be the other facets of young people's inability to assert themselves in a non-destructive way, the fear of doing things wrongly and their wish to prove themselves to their superiors as quickly as possible. First, in a society that is strongly influenced by Confucianism, young people are in low positions and have few rights in social relations; therefore, they are constantly under pressure to prove themselves by gaining more achievements in life, especially academic achievements. Young people also believe they will be happier if they receive recognition from people at higher levels of the hierarchy (Truong, 2013). However, they do not know that the more they try to seek happiness through achievements, the more miserable they may be (Frankl, 2008). Moreover, all these value systems seem to emphasise collective values and downgrade the importance of individual needs and wants.

### **Vietnamese students' emotional intelligence and coping strategies**

Another possible reason for Vietnamese undergraduate students experiencing high rates of stress and mental problems is that they may lack the emotional intelligence and coping abilities to handle stress. According to Mayer and Salovey (1997), emotional intelligence is the combined cognitive ability to regulate emotions and use one's intelligence. Generally, emotional intelligence can be referred to as a set of skills or abilities that enables people to be aware of, identify and understand emotions in themselves and others. It also enables people to accurately express themselves and sympathise with other people. It allows people to manage their emotions, adapt to immediate situations and effectively solve their problems with a positive and self-motivated attitude (Bar-On, 2006).

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping refers to action regulation under a stressful situation, which refers to all purposeful attempts of individuals to manage the mismatch between the demands created by the external environment and their perceived resources or ability to deal with these demands. Endler and Parker (1990) define coping as a "response to

an external stressful or negative event, ... these responses are usually conscious strategies and or styles on the part of the individual" (p. 844). Coping is also defined as "conscious and volitional efforts to regulate emotions, cognition, behaviour, physiology, and the environment in response to stressful event or circumstances" (Compas et al., 2001, p. 89). There are various theories of coping, and each coping theory tends to have its own definition of coping; however, coping definitions tend to be complementary rather than contrasting (Frydenberg, 2008).

In 2003, a national survey was conducted by the Ministry of Education and Training Vietnam (MOET) on about 6000 Vietnamese undergraduate students and young professionals to measure their intelligence quotient (IQ), emotional quotient (EQ) and creative quotient (CQ). This survey was a part of a national project that aimed to develop culture, people and human resources for Vietnam's national industrialisation and modernisation process in the period 2001 and 2005 (Tran, 2005). The results of the national survey revealed that the majority of students had low or moderate levels of emotional intelligence. The researchers identified a need to increase emotional intelligence in Vietnamese undergraduate students (Dang, 2020; Do et al., 2021; Nguyen, 2007; Phan, 2010). Since the 2003 report, eight more studies have been conducted in different universities across Vietnam, and their results were consistent with the survey by the MOET. Despite this growing awareness of increasing mental health problems and stress in students, Vietnamese undergraduate students have limited or no access to effective mental health support programmes that are designed to increase their emotional intelligence, improve coping and enhance health and wellbeing (Huynh et al., 2020).

### **Research on emotional intelligence and coping in Vietnam**

Research in Vietnam has found a relationship between stress, emotional intelligence and coping. It is reported that university students who experience higher rates of mental illness, stress and other issues often lack coping skills, emotional awareness and problem-solving skills, and have difficulties communicating their problems and asking for help (Regehr et al., 2013). Increased stress is associated with lower emotional intelligence and less adaptive coping (Sarabia-Cobo et al., 2017). In contrast, people who have higher scores in emotional intelligence tend to have better self-control and higher self-esteem, and a higher level of

happiness (Zijlmans et al., 2014). People with higher emotional intelligence have lower perceived stress, are more positive and better at using the information to cope with emotional distress in life (Ruiz-Aranda et al., 2014). Additionally, greater emotional intelligence has been positively linked with life satisfaction, stress reduction, greater emotional self-efficacy, higher quality of interpersonal relationships, greater wellbeing, greater academic achievement and higher job performance (Wood et al., 2009). Research has also found that, in stressful situations, individuals with higher emotional intelligence report less emotional distress and more rapid recovery than individuals who have low emotional intelligence (Enns et al., 2018). Moreover, research has confirmed that people with a higher level of emotional intelligence tend to employ more adaptive coping strategies than people with lower emotional intelligence scores (Mhalkar et al., 2014). Programmes and interventions designed to help individuals develop emotional intelligence could help improve mental health, wellbeing and coping, as well as improve achievement and productivity (Hodzic et al., 2017).

Decisions of engaging in coping, treating, or healing behaviours of individuals are partly driven by their culture (Huynh et al., 2020). Past emotional intelligence and coping research has been criticised because of its lack of multicultural perspectives and lack of attention to cultural influences on emotional intelligence and coping (Yeh et al., 2006). Therefore, the present study seeks to address this criticism by exploring how Vietnamese undergraduate students develop their emotional intelligence and learn about coping strategies within the context of Vietnamese culture. A search on publications in the topic of emotional intelligence and coping in the period from 2008 to 2021 conducted in the SCOPUS database showed that only a few studies focused on the topic of developing emotional intelligence and coping in people. More specifically, only a small number of those studies focused on the population of undergraduate students, used qualitative methods and were conducted in Asian countries. To the best of my knowledge, no previous qualitative research focused on developing emotional intelligence and learning about coping strategies, as well as aiming to explore young people's experience of emotional intelligence and coping within the social and cultural settings of Vietnam.

The central aim of the present study is to provide an understanding of developing emotional abilities that contribute to intelligence and learning coping strategies in Vietnam, which is a non-Western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic country. My hope is that this



study will lead to a better understanding of *how* Vietnamese undergraduate students develop emotional intelligence and learn about coping strategies, and that the findings will contribute to the literature and work in the area of emotional intelligence, coping and the promotion of wellbeing in undergraduate students from a cultural perspective. In doing so, the present study aims to explore the following question:

*What are Vietnamese undergraduate students' perceived changes in emotional intelligence and coping?*

### **Personal motivation for this research**

I have been working as a teacher and trainer for preschoolers, primary, secondary, high school, university and other groups for six years. From my observation and working experience, undergraduate students have the most difficulties in life compared to the other groups. They struggle with their lives at university because of a lack of assertiveness in addressing their true needs and wants, a lack of social skills to have positive relationships with people from diverse backgrounds and, most importantly, a lack of purpose for their future direction. It is quite common for Vietnamese university students to have all these problems because Vietnamese parents are mostly helicopter parents and tend to overly control and isolate their children from the world to protect them. For this reason, only a few students have a chance to learn the necessary skills to cope with real-life difficulties before entering university. I myself also experienced the same problems when I was younger, but I was very fortunate to have opportunities to learn knowledge and skills that could change my negative thinking and behaviour patterns to have a happier life. Therefore, I would like to create a programme that contains essential knowledge for students to gain an adequate understanding of their emotions and tools with easy-to-follow activities to help them manage themselves and others effectively. Through this programme, I wish to empower my country's young people to change their lives by equipping them with suitable self-help knowledge and skills. I also want to raise awareness that emotional intelligence can be a suitable choice to promote university students' mental health and wellbeing. I also hope that, by delivering this programme to Vietnamese undergraduate students in Vietnam, I would better understand how young people develop their emotional intelligence and adaptive coping strategies and how Vietnamese culture could influence this process.

## **Outline of this thesis**

In the first chapter, I have introduced an overview of the mental health and struggles of undergraduate students in Vietnam and in other countries. I then turned to the context of my research – Vietnam – and provided a review of interconnected value systems of Vietnam: Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and Socialism. This leads to a statement of the research problem that pressure from the values system of Vietnam could be one of the reasons that lead to the high stress level in undergraduate students in Vietnam. A review of research showed low emotional intelligence and a lack of adaptive coping strategies contribute to mental health issues in undergraduate students. The thesis continues in Chapter 2 by reviewing key theories and models of emotional intelligence and coping. I discuss my decision of which emotional intelligence model and coping model I chose to use in the present study.

This study aims to explore Vietnamese undergraduate students' experience in developing emotional intelligence and in learning new productive coping strategies in their living social and cultural context. To do that, I selected a theoretical framework in Chapter 3 by positioning my research within a constructionism paradigm and by adopting the sociocultural theory of cognitive development. Adopting this framework has allowed me to emphasise the interdependence and co-construction of individuals' experiences and the importance of context when investigating participants' emotional intelligence and coping experiences.

In Chapter 4, I provide details of the qualitative descriptive design that I adopted to access insights into Vietnamese undergraduate students' experience of developing emotional intelligence and learning coping strategies to deal with stressful situations in their everyday lives. Three data collection methods were employed in this study: semi-structured interviews, audio diaries and co-generative dialogues. A thematic analysis of participants' experiences was conducted, and the findings are presented in Chapters 5 and 6. In addition to detailing the decision of site selection, participant recruitment and selection, I discuss my process of data analysis and the verification strategies used to ensure the quality of this research. I also discuss the ethical considerations, particularly about the informed consent, confidentiality and privacy of participants and management of the risk of distress for both the researcher and participants.

Chapter 5 is the first of the two findings chapters. In this chapter, I describe the experience of participants in coping with their everyday difficulties before they joined the emotional intelligence programme. In this chapter, I describe and discuss the self-described problems that participants experienced in their everyday lives, including their emotion-related, ability-related and belief-related problems. I also describe healthy and unhealthy coping strategies used by participants. I provide rich descriptions of avoidance, a dominant coping strategy used by participants before they completed the programme. The description includes the goals of engaging in avoidance coping strategies: wanting to prevent negative consequences, maintaining harmony in interpersonal relationships and saving face. Moreover, in this chapter, I describe the types of avoidance coping strategies, such as suppression, as well as external and internal coping strategies.

In Chapter 6, I describe participants' perceived changes in their emotional intelligence. I describe how they used their emotional intelligence to develop new adaptive coping strategies to deal with their difficult situations after completing the programme. In this chapter, I describe participants' emotional intelligence abilities and adaptive coping strategies after completing the education programme. I then discuss how greater emotional intelligence and new adaptive coping strategies led to changes in the participants.

In Chapter 7, I critically discuss the findings of Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 and four significant themes in relation to relevant theory and literature on emotional intelligence and coping. First, I discuss how participants engaged in emotional suppression and avoidance, which were their main strategies to cope with stressful situations and interpersonal conflicts. These strategies were shaped by social and cultural factors within the context of Vietnam. Second, I discuss how the development of emotional abilities that can be regarded as components of emotional intelligence helped Vietnamese university students develop greater emotional awareness, understanding and literacy, and this enabled them to better understand their reactions to stress, problems and issues. Third, I discuss how learning about different coping strategies enabled the students to broaden their coping repertoire and led to the greater use of problem-solving strategies. Finally, I discuss the self-reported development of emotional intelligence and how learning about coping strategies helped participants experience significant personal change.

In Chapter 8, I draw some conclusions and discuss this study's limitations and contributions to knowledge on emotional intelligence and coping as well as its implications for education and mental health support for Vietnamese people. I discuss some important directions for future research and make a number of recommendations. At the end of this chapter, I finish with my reflections on my PhD journey as a researcher, a practitioner and a learner.

## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

This chapter provides an overview of theories of emotions, the definition of emotions used in the present study and an overview of emotional intelligence research in the literature between 2008 and 2021. It includes a critical review of the main emotional intelligence approaches, including ability, trait and competency approaches. Four major emotional intelligence models will be discussed in this chapter: the Ability Emotional Intelligence Model of Mayer and Salovey (1997), the Trait Emotional Intelligence Model of Petrides and colleagues (2007), the Emotional and Social Intelligence Model of Bar-On (2006) and the Model of Emotional Intelligence of Goleman (1998). An overview of coping research of Vietnamese undergraduate students in the literature between 2005 and 2021 is discussed to provide context for the current study and demonstrate the importance of the topic. The key ideas in the two most popular coping models, the Transaction Model of Coping of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and the Conservation of Resources Theory of Hobfoll (2001), are critically discussed as these models help provide an understanding of how individuals cope and use emotional intelligence. I then discuss the reasons for choosing the Ability Emotional Intelligence Model of Mayer and Salovey (1997) and the Transaction Model of Coping of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as the suitable models for the present study.

### **Theories and definitions of emotions**

Emotions are mainly studied under the following three popular theoretical approaches: categories, dimensions and cognitive appraisals. In the categories approach, emotions are grouped based on their similarity. According to Plutchik (1980) and Ekman (2004), emotions should be grouped into eight groups based on the similarities of these emotions. There are eight universal basic emotions: anger, anticipation, joy, trust, fear, surprise, sadness and disgust (Plutchik, 1980). Additionally, Kemper (1987) argues that emotions should be divided into primary and secondary emotions. Primary emotions are universal emotions to all humans (e.g., fear, anger, sadness, happiness), and they have survival values for humans. Secondary emotions are acquired through social interactions, including shame, pride, guilt and nostalgia. Kemper (1987) also suggests that some primary emotions can be transformed into secondary emotions with the involvement of socialising agents. For example, shame is a socialised form

of anger, and guilt is a socialised form of fear (Kemper, 1987). The categorical approach of emotions is criticised for not being able to explain how emotions in the same category are related to each other or how one emotion changes into another emotion in a mixed emotional experience (Watson & Spence, 2007).

The dimensional approach overcomes these criticisms by placing an emotion on a map based on its different dimensions, such as valence (pleasant/unpleasant) or arousal (activation/deactivation) (Russell, 1980; Watson & Tellegen, 1985). The valence dimension determines an emotion to be either positive or negative, and the arousal dimension determines the level of emotional intensity, which could range from low to high (Russell, 1980; Watson & Tellegen, 1985). This approach has been criticised because of its inability to distinguish different emotions that have similar levels of intensity and that are in the same valence, for example, anger and fear (Watson & Spence, 2007).

The appraisal approach offers a more sophisticated way to differentiate emotions and provides better explanations of how contexts might influence the emotional experience. The appraisal approach focuses on using interpretations of the stimulus event to anticipate which emotions should be felt in the event and how those emotions might influence one's behaviours (Frijda & Mesquita, 1998). Appraisal theorists view an emotional experience as a continuously operating evaluation process, and the central role of the appraisal component is to assess the significance (or concern of an individual) of the environment for one's wellbeing (Moors et al., 2013; Scherer, 2001). Appraisal theorists view an emotional episode as a continuously operating evaluation process involving changes in a number of organismic subsystems or components of emotions (Scherer, 2001). Such components include an appraisal component, motivational component, somatic component, motor component and feeling component (Moors et al., 2013). According to Scherer (2001), the appraisal component assesses the significance (or concern of an individual) of the environment for wellbeing. The central role of appraisal is to trigger and differentiate emotions through the interrelated and synchronised changes within the other components (Moors et al., 2013; Scherer, 2001). There are four appraisal variables included in most appraisal theories: (1) 'goal relevance or goal congruence' (whether an event produces an outcome that is relevant to one's main concerns

of the situation); (2) 'agency' (whether an event was caused by oneself, someone else or an impersonal circumstance); (3) 'certainty' (the extent to which a situation implied an outcome that was achieved with confidence); and (4) 'coping potential or control' (an event that appeared to be something a person could or could not cope with) (Frijda & Mesquita, 1998; Moors et al., 2013; Watson & Spencer, 2007). One of the major criticisms of the appraisal approach is that the cognitions in appraisal theory are not necessary for emotions (Reisenzein, 2020). Critics of the appraisal approach have argued that emotions do not necessarily require appraisals. There are certain kinds of emotions that can be directly evoked by bodily sensations without the aid of appraisals. For example, the pleasant feelings triggered by a nice smell of food can be caused directly by the sensation and do not require any factual or evaluative beliefs about the existence of the eliciting stimulus. Additionally, the emotion 'fear' can be directly evoked by sensations (e.g., hearing sudden loud noises) without requiring the cognition of danger (Reisenzein, 2020).

The categories and dimensional approach are heavily influenced by Darwin's evolutionary perspective (Hammond, 2006; Moors et al., 2013). Emotions, from this perspective, are adaptive and have survival functions. Emotions are present during infancy and develop as people mature and help people deal with universal difficult situations such as failures or losses. Each emotion has a corresponding set of expressions, bodily sensations and neurological signatures. Evolutionary researchers focus on discovering the properties, the working mechanism of emotions and the relations between emotions and people's behaviours (Hofmann & Doan, 2018). Hence, the focus of the evolutionary perspective on the role of social and cultural forces in emotions is relatively narrow and mainly examines the relationship between these factors and the antecedents of emotions (Hofmann & Doan, 2018). The appraisal approach draws on psychological theory and concerns about the casual generation and differentiation of emotions. Appraisal theorists focus on describing the emotion system and its relations to other subsystems of the mind. They also focus on explaining the generation of emotions and their impacts on people's actions, thoughts, behaviours and physiological reactions (Reisenzein, 2020). On the other hand, researchers from the sociocultural perspective assume that emotions are experienced and regulated through interaction with others (Turner & Stets, 2005). Therefore, emotions are primarily

social constructs, and social and cultural factors can fundamentally shape emotional experiences. Sociocultural theorists believe that all reality is somewhat subjective. Our emotions are products of our construction of reality using the framework provided by culture (Gergen, 1985). According to this view, emotions are more than physiological and neurological signatures; emotions are not only an internal state but also culturally shaped (Averill, 1980; Lutz, 1988). Therefore, from the sociocultural perspective, emotions are defined as follows:

An emotion is a multidimensional experience that is characterised by different levels of arousal and degrees of pleasure–displeasure; associated with subjective experience, somatic sensations, and motivational tendencies; coloured by contextual and cultural factors; and that can be regulated to some degree through the intrapersonal and interpersonal process (Hofmann, 2016, p. 2).

This sociocultural definition of emotions was chosen for the present study as it provides a conceptualisation of emotions that is considerably broader than the view of emotions from the evolutionary perspective (Hofmann & Doan, 2018). Therefore, this definition is more appropriate for the current study, which seeks to understand emotional intelligence and coping within the specific cultural context of Vietnamese youth.

## **Emotional intelligence**

### **Review of models of emotional intelligence**

#### ***The brief history of the development of Emotional Intelligence.***

For decades, intellectual intelligence, which can be measured by an intelligence quotient (IQ), has been used to predict a person's potential for life success, especially in academic achievement, employment and financial wellbeing (Goleman, 1998). However, it has been argued that a person's performance and potential for success should not be judged solely against their intellectual intelligence but also against other abilities, such as their emotional intelligence (Stein & Book, 2011). The literature on emotional intelligence in recent years has revealed that the implication of emotional intelligence has shown a positive influence on different settings of human life, for example, in the workplace (Côté et al., 2010), in health and wellbeing (Martins et al., 2010), in education (Sanchez-Ruiz et al., 2013) and social functioning (Malouff et al., 2014).



Emotional intelligence was popularised to the world by the publication of Daniel Goleman's book *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ* in 1995. However, the theoretical conceptualisation of emotional intelligence started about a century ago. The earliest concept of emotional intelligence was thought to be proposed by Charles Darwin in 1872 when he wrote about the very important role of emotional expression in survival and adaptation in his book *The expression of the emotions in man and animals* (Bar-On, 2006). However, Edward Thorndike, an American behavioural psychologist, pioneered the study of emotional intelligence (Stein & Book, 2011). In 1920, Thorndike introduced the term 'social intelligence' as the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls—to act wisely in human relations (Thorndike & Stein, 1937) or the ability to get along with other people by understanding the inner states, motive and behaviours of oneself and others.

Later, in 1943, the importance of emotional factors was highlighted by David Wechsler, one of the fathers of IQ testing. In his work, he described the 'non-intellective factors of general intelligence' (Wechsler, 1943) and insisted that the model of intelligence could not be completed without adequate descriptions of those factors. In the later part of the century, Howard Gardner proposed a concept of 'multiple intelligences' in his book *Frames of mind* (Gardner, 1983). It is suggested that emotional intelligence is somewhere close to the two intelligences: 'Interpersonal Intelligence' (refers to the ability to understand the intentions, motivations and desires of other people) and 'Intrapersonal Intelligence' (refers to the ability to understand the emotions, fears and motivations of oneself) (Dhani & Sharma, 2016).

In 1988, Reuven Bar-On, who was active in the field of emotional intelligence and strongly influenced by the work of Darwin and Gardner, developed the term 'Emotional Quotient' or EQ through the presentation of his doctoral dissertation (Stein & Book, 2011). Shortly after, in 1990, John Mayer and Peter Salovey, the researchers who shared the same interest in human cognition and affect (or how thinking and emotions interact in humans), formally coined and defined the term 'Emotional Intelligence' (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). This term only became popular after Daniel Goleman published his 1995 book, which was believed to be inspired by Mayer and Salovey (Dhani & Sharma, 2016).

More recently, in 2000, Konstantin Petrides and colleagues proposed the concept of 'Trait emotional intelligence' and introduced the distinction between trait emotional intelligence

and ability emotional intelligence (Petrides & Furnham, 2000). Strongly influenced by the work of earlier theorists and researchers over the following two decades, a number of theories and models of emotional intelligence were proposed, which resulted in the three major approaches to emotional intelligence: ability, trait and competency (Bowen, 2019).

The Ability approach to emotional intelligence is based on theories of general intelligence. It assesses emotional intelligence as the intellectual ability to use emotional information to aid the process of thinking and decision-making (Thomas et al., 2017). The most well-known model that represents the ability approach is the Ability Emotional Intelligence Model of Mayer and Salovey as it is thought to be the foundation for the development of other emotional intelligence models (Fiori & Vesely-Maillefer, 2018). The Trait approach to emotional intelligence is based on theories of personalities and considers emotional intelligence as established personality traits. The most popular model that represents the trait approach is the model of Petrides and colleagues (2007), which was based on the theory of personalities (Thomas et al., 2017).

The Competency approach to emotional intelligence is based on the idea that emotional intelligence comprises a set of competencies/potentials that enable a person to engage in intelligent behaviours and successful performance in the workplace and in life (Goleman, 2001). The two constructs that have been discussed the most in the competency approach are the model from Bar-On and the model from Goleman (Dhani & Sharma, 2016). Both models are based on the competency approach but have different aims. Bar-On's model (2006) focuses on competencies that result in successful adapting and coping with everyday demands and has shaped theories of subjective wellbeing and non-intellectual performance. In contrast, Goleman's model stresses competencies that bring out the best working performance (Goleman, 2001) and has shaped theories of performance and leadership. The key points of the four emotional intelligence models are presented in Table 1 below. In the following section, I will discuss these four emotional intelligence models in more detail.

**Table 1***Summary of the four emotional intelligence models*

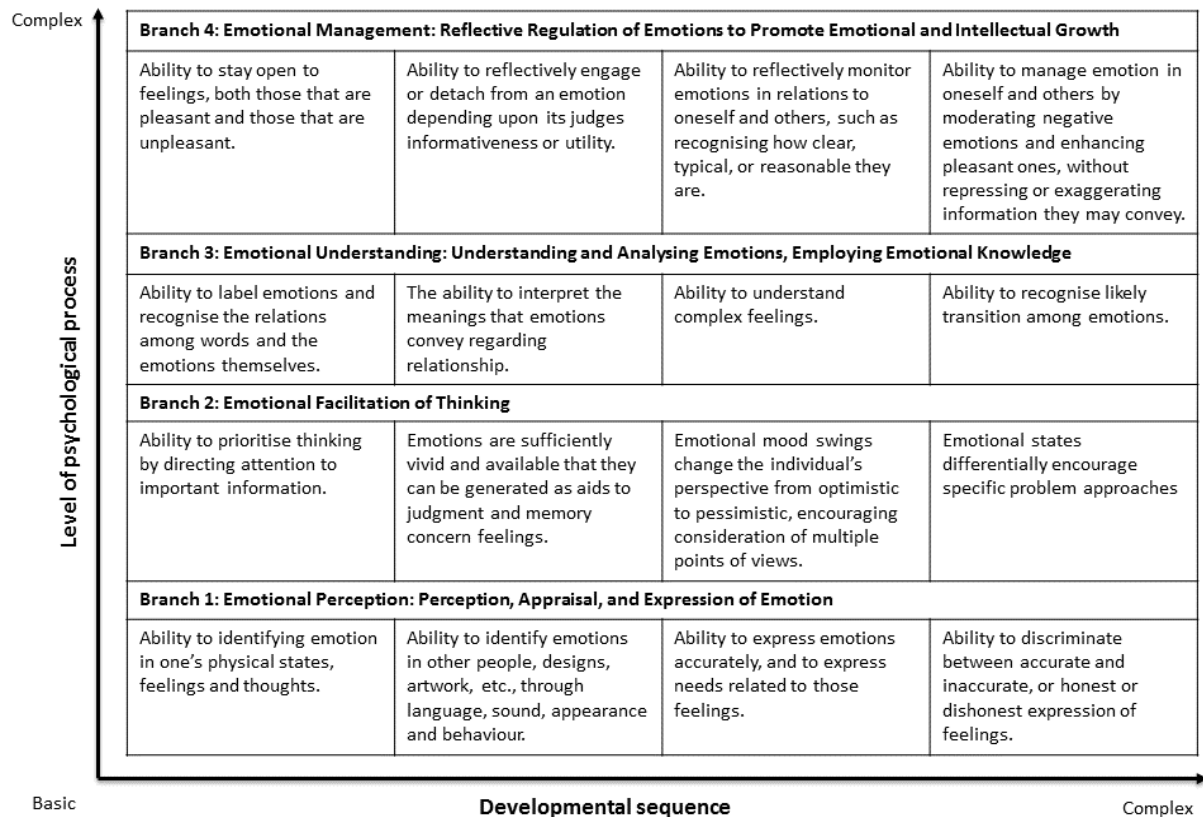
<b>Name</b>	<b>Approach</b>	<b>Theory based</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Measurement</b>	<b>Strengths/ Uniqueness</b>	<b>Major critiques</b>
Ability Emotional Intelligence Model (Mayer & Salovey, 1997)	Ability	General intelligence	Intellectual abilities to use emotional information	Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) – Maximum performance test	The first formal emotional intelligence model Strong theoretical framework Provides clear guidelines on how to increase emotional intelligence	Objective measure instrument to measure subjective matter
Trait Emotional Intelligence Model (Petrides et al., 2007)	Trait	Personalities and traits	A comprehensive study of all emotion-related self-perceptions and dispositions	Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaires (TEIQue) – Self-report	Exclusive focus on emotional-related dispositions and self-perceptions The first unified and comprehensive model that studies all emotion-related traits under the Big Five model	Overlapping too much with the existing traits in the Big Five
Emotional and Social Intelligence Model (Bar-On, 1988)	Competency	Subjective wellbeing and non-intellective performance	Successful adapting and coping with everyday demands	Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) – Self-report	Emphasising the social aspects of emotional intelligence to ensure successful coping and adaption	Too correlated with the factors in the Trait emotional intelligence model and the ability emotional intelligence model
Emotional Competency Framework (Goleman, 1998)	Competency	Theory of performance and leadership	Superior performance in working and managerial performance	Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI) – Self-report and others-report	Exclusive focus on bringing out superior performance in the workplace Looking at the evidence of the link between emotional intelligence and the brain	A weak theoretical model for having little empirical support

### **Ability approach: Ability Emotional Intelligence Model**

One approach to emotional intelligence that is important to understand when exploring emotional intelligence and the coping experiences of individuals are the ability approach. The ability approach was developed based on theories of general intelligence and focused on examining how emotions can assist rational thinking and whether being rational about emotions can be considered a type of intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). The Four-Branch Ability Emotional Intelligence Model introduced by Mayer and Salovey (1997) is thought to receive wide acknowledgement and use within the ability approach (Fiori & Vesely-Maillefer, 2018). According to Mayer and Salovey (1997), emotional intelligence should be seen as a combination of emotion and intelligence. Adopting this idea, they defined emotional intelligence as “the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions, so it assists thought, to understand emotions and emotions knowledge, to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotions and intelligence growth” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 10). This definition was considered the first and most formal definition of ability emotional intelligence (Perez et al., 2005). According to this definition, emotional intelligence should consist of four main abilities: emotional perception, emotional facilitation, emotional understanding, and emotional management (Mayer et al., 2004). These four abilities were also four branches in the Ability Emotional Intelligence Model. The details of these abilities belonging to each branch are presented in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1**

*The Ability Emotional Intelligence Model*



*Note.* Adapted from Mayer & Salovey's (1997) Ability Emotional Intelligence Model.

The emotional intelligence abilities in this model are arranged from the basic to the more advanced psychological process. Emotional perception, as the lowest branch, consists of simple abilities such as perceiving or expressing emotions. At the same time, emotional management is the highest branch and comprises more complex abilities such as reflective and conscious regulation of emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

Each branch's emotional intelligence abilities are arranged based on the order of emerging early or late in the human developmental process. For example, in branch one, the ability to identify emotions is developed at a very young age, such as infancy; therefore, it is placed on the far left of the branch. In contrast, the ability to discriminate honest or dishonest emotions in other people takes years of observing and practising to master; therefore, it is placed on the far right of the branch (Mayer et al., 2016; Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

In 2016, Mayer and his colleagues updated the Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence. In the revised model, new emotional intelligence abilities were added, especially the abilities related to problem-solving. For example, the ability to ‘appraise the situations that are likely to elicit emotions’ was added to the branch of emotional understanding (Mayer et al., 2016). Additionally, the role of cultural differences in using emotional intelligence to solve problems was also acknowledged. This is reflected in the ability ‘recognise cultural differences in the evaluation of emotions’ which was added to the model (Mayer et al., 2016). Furthermore, the revised model showed an attempt to distinguish problem-solving abilities and emotion-related abilities within emotional intelligence (Mayer et al., 2016). Some of the existing abilities were divided into two more separate abilities. For example, the ability to ‘manage emotions in oneself and others by moderating negative emotions and enhancing pleasant ones’ in the original model was divided into the ability to ‘effectively manage others’ emotions to achieve a desired outcome’ and the ability to ‘effectively manage one’s own emotions to achieve a desired outcome’ in the revised model. The changes in each branch of the revised Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence are presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2**

*Revised Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence*

<b>Branch 4: Managing emotions</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effectively manage others’ emotions to achieve a desired outcome (<i>divided from an original ability</i>).</li> <li>• Effectively manage one’s own emotions to achieve a desired outcome (<i>divided from an original ability</i>).</li> <li>• Evaluate strategies to maintain, reduce, or intensify an emotional response (<i>divided from an original ability</i>).</li> <li>• Monitor emotional reactions to determine their reasonableness.</li> <li>• Engage with emotions if they are helpful; disengage if not.</li> <li>• Stay open to pleasant and unpleasant feelings, as needed, and to the information they convey.</li> </ul>
<b>Branch 3: Understanding emotions</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise cultural differences in the evaluation of emotions (<i>added ability</i>).</li> <li>• Understand how a person might feel in the future or under certain conditions (<i>added ability</i>).</li> <li>• Recognise likely transitions among emotions such as from anger to satisfaction.</li> <li>• Understand complex and mixed emotions.</li> <li>• Differentiate between moods and emotions (<i>added ability</i>).</li> </ul>

- Appraise the situations that are likely to elicit emotions (*added ability*).
- Determine the antecedents, meanings and consequences of emotions.
- Label emotions and recognise relations among them.

#### **Branch 2: Facilitating thought using emotion**

- Select problems based on how one's ongoing emotional state might facilitate cognition.
- Leverage mood swings to generate different cognitive perspectives.
- Prioritise thinking by directing attention according to present feeling.
- Generate emotions as a means to relate to experiences of another person (*added ability*).
- Generate emotions as an aid to judgment and memory.

#### **Branch 1: Perceiving emotion**

- Identify deceptive or dishonest emotional expressions (*divided from an original ability*).
- Discriminate between accurate vs inaccurate emotional expressions (*divided from an original ability*).
- Understand how emotions are displayed depending on context and culture (*added ability*).
- Express emotions accurately when desired.
- Perceive emotional content in the environment, visual arts and music (*divided from an original ability*).
- Perceive emotions in other people through their vocal cues, facial expressions, language and behaviour (*divided from an original ability*).
- Identify emotions in one's own physical states, feelings and thoughts.

*Note.* Adapted from the Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence in Mayer et al. (2016).

Ability emotional intelligence is mainly operationalised in the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) (Papadogiannis et al., 2010). The MSCEIT consists of 141 items and eight ability subscales, which assess four branches of emotion processing based on the maximal performance method (Warwick & Nettelbeck, 2004). The scores will be assessed based on the choices between right and wrong answers in provided situations involving solving emotional problems (Kee et al., 2009).

### **Criticisms of the Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence**

There are several criticisms of the conceptualisation and operationalisation of Mayer and Salovey's model. First, the definition of emotional intelligence given by Mayer and Salovey (1997) is widely accepted by many in the field including theorists (Cherniss, 2010), however, there are some issues with the definition and it has been criticised as being just some combination of assorted habits, skills and or choices rather than an issue of intelligence

(Locke, 2005). It is argued that the ability to monitor one's emotions is just a matter of where one chooses to focus one's attention. It could be either outward at the external world or inward to the content and process of one's thought and it does not require any special degree of intelligence. Second, the MSCEIT is argued to be a rigorously developed and useful tool for investigating emotion processing (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Kee et al., 2009; Mayer et al., 2004). However, it is thought to be problematic to use MSCEIT to measure emotional intelligence as it is challenging to score EI objectively (e.g., right or wrong) especially when the experiences of emotions are mostly subjective (Bowen, 2019; Petrides, 2011).

### **Trait approach: Trait Emotional Intelligence Model**

Another key approach that has helped advance the understanding of emotional intelligence in individuals is the trait approach. According to Petrides et al. (2007), emotional intelligence is viewed as a constellation of emotion-related self-perceptions and dispositions, which is conceptualised by the sampling domain of the Trait Emotional Intelligence Model and operationalised by the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue). Trait emotional intelligence is defined as "a constellation of emotional self-perceptions located at the lower level of personality hierarchies" (Petrides, 2011, p. 660).

Trait emotional intelligence is a distinct construct from ability emotional intelligence (Petrides, 2011; Petrides & Furnham, 2001). First, many researchers differentiate between the two constructs based on the method of measurement used to operationalise them (Petrides et al., 2007; Petrides & Furnham, 2000). Trait emotional intelligence concerns people's perception of their emotional abilities measured via self-reports, while ability emotional intelligence concerns emotional-related cognitive abilities measured via a maximum performance test (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Petrides, 2010). Second, the differences between the two constructs are evident in the way the constructs are conceptualised. In the trait emotional intelligence construct, emotional intelligence is viewed as personality traits, while in the ability emotional intelligence construct, emotional intelligence is viewed as cognitive ability (Petrides, 2011). Third, the distinction between trait emotional intelligence and ability emotional intelligence also lies in how the two theories were developed. While ability emotional intelligence was theory-driven and then empirically tested, trait emotional intelligence was empirically driven and then theorised (Mikolajczak, 2009). It can be concluded that trait emotional intelligence



and ability emotional intelligence represent two different aspects of emotional intelligence. Trait emotional intelligence is linked to individual differences in personalities and ability emotional intelligence is linked to individual differences in intelligence.

Personality is one of the major domains in psychology that comprises characteristics like traits, emotions, motivations, interests and many more (John et al., 2008). Traditionally, the emotion-related aspects of personality have been scattered across the Big Five factors; therefore, it is very difficult to study them in a logical and consistent fashion. With the introduction of trait emotional intelligence, these affective aspects were found to be integrated into a unified and comprehensive model formed of four broad factors and comprised of 15 facets (Petrides et al., 2016).

The sampling domain of trait emotional intelligence was formed from the content analysis of earlier models of emotional intelligence, such as the emotional intelligence model of Salovey and Mayer, Bar-On's model, Goleman's model, the Alexithymia model and many more (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). The chosen elements in the sampling domain were the elements that appear in more than one construct mentioned earlier. This procedure is believed to be similar to the standard procedure in developing a psychometric scale, as the shared core of various items in the scale will be carried over into a total score, and the peripheral components will be excluded in the process (Petrides et al., 2016). An explanation of the sampling domain of trait emotional intelligence is shown in Table 3 below

**Table 3**

*The sampling domain of trait emotional intelligence*

<b>Global Trait Emotional Intelligence</b>	<b>High scorers perceive themselves as</b>
Adaptability	Flexible and willing to adapt to changes and new environment.
Assertiveness	Honest and straightforward. Willing to stand up for their rights.
Emotional expression	Capable of describing their feelings and emotional needs accurately and clearly.
Emotional management	Capable of managing emotions in oneself and others. Able to calm others down and make them feel better when they need it.
Emotional perception	Capable of accurately recognising emotions in oneself and others.

Emotional regulation	Capability to control one's feelings or emotional states.
Low impulsiveness	Able to think carefully before acting or making decisions.
Relationships	Capable of starting and maintaining an emotional bond with others.
Self-esteem	Having a positive view of themselves and their achievements.
Self-motivation	Driven by the need to produce high-quality work and unlikely to give up.
Social awareness	Having accomplished networks with superior social skills.
Stress management	Capable of handling pressures calmly and regulating stress.
Trait empathy	Good at adopting other people's perspectives to understand their needs and wants.
Trait happiness	Cheerful, feels good about themselves and satisfied with their lives.
Trait optimism	Often looking on the bright side and expecting good and positive things to happen in their life.

*Note.* Adapted from the Trait Emotional Intelligence Model of Petrides et al. (2007).

The Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue) is a measurement instrument based exclusively on trait emotional intelligence theory to measure global trait emotional intelligence (Petrides, 2011). Petrides and colleagues (2007) argue that TEIQue should be considered one of the most suitable and effective instruments to measure trait emotional intelligence (Petrides, 2011; Petrides et al., 2016). The most recent version of the TEIQue's full form comprises 153 items, providing scores on 15 facets and four factors of broader relevance (wellbeing, self-control, emotionality and sociality) (Petrides & Furnham, 2001).

### **Criticisms of the Trait Emotional Intelligence Model**

One criticism of trait emotional intelligence is that trait emotional intelligence might not be as distinct as it is claimed because it correlates too much with existing personality traits such as the Big Five (Mikolajczak, 2010). Gignac (2006) stated that the Big Five is such an enormous model that encompasses almost everything and suggested that trait emotional intelligence may be redundant within the Big Five model of personalities. However, Petrides (2001) has argued that trait emotional intelligence is a distinct and useful model as it integrates all the emotional-related personalities scattered across the Big Five into a unified model so they can be studied comprehensively. Additionally, findings from the work of Petrides et al. (2007) provide additional evidence that the four facets of trait emotional intelligence (social

awareness, emotional management, emotional expression and trait empathy) are unique traits that have not been captured by the Big Five.

Trait emotional intelligence has also been criticised for the use of self-reports, which are thought to be unable to reflect objective criteria reliably (Mikolajczak, 2010). However, trait emotional intelligence is related to many objective works. First, the biological foundation of trait emotional intelligence has been supported through the findings of behavioural-genetic, neuroscientific and neuroendocrinological research (Petrides et al., 2016). For example, the findings from the work of Bar-On et al. (2003) show that patients with damages in the brain areas associated with emotional processing (e.g., amygdala) had lower trait emotional intelligence scores. Second, trait emotional intelligence has been reported to be a predictor of objective life outcomes such as psychological and physical health (Petrides, 2011), academic performance (Mavroveli & Sánchez-Ruiz, 2011) and relationship satisfaction (Malouff et al., 2014).

### **Competency approach: Emotional and Social Intelligence Model**

Bar-On's Emotional and Social Intelligence Model (ESI) is a third approach to understanding emotional intelligence. It is a more comprehensive, holistic and mixed model that includes various aspects of emotional and social capabilities, competencies, skills and traits that influence how one can successfully cope and adapt to various situations in everyday life (Bar-On, 2006; Wood et al., 2009). According to the ESI model, emotional intelligence is defined as “the cross-section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills and facilitators that determine how effectively we understand and express ourselves, understand others and relate with them, and cope with daily demands” (Bar-On, 2006, p. 3).

Bar-On's ESI model refers to one's potential for adaptive and effective behaviours that contribute to successful performance, happiness, general wellbeing and a more meaningful life. It also provides an acquired repertoire of necessary capabilities, competencies and skills for one to successfully cope with adversity in everyday life (Bar-On, 2010; Wood et al., 2009). The construct includes five composite scales comprising 15 subscales, as in Table 4 below.

**Table 4**

*The domains and competencies of the Model of Emotional and Social Intelligence*

<b>Domains and competencies of the Emotional and Social Intelligence Model</b>	
<b>Intrapersonal (Self-awareness and self-expression)</b>	
<i>Self- Regard</i>	To accurately perceive, understand and accept oneself.
<i>Emotional Self-Awareness</i>	To be aware of and understand one's emotions.
<i>Assertiveness</i>	To effectively and constructively express one's feelings and oneself.
<i>Independence</i>	To be self-reliant and free of emotional dependence on others.
<i>Self-Actualisation</i>	To strive to achieve personal goals and actualise one's potential.
<b>Interpersonal (Social awareness and interpersonal relationship)</b>	
<i>Empathy</i>	To be aware of and understand how others feel.
<i>Social Responsibility</i>	To identify with one's social group and cooperate with others.
<i>Interpersonal Relationship</i>	To establish mutually satisfying relationships and relate well with others.
<b>Stress Management (Emotional management and control)</b>	
<i>Stress Tolerance</i>	To effectively and constructively manage emotions.
<i>Impulse Control</i>	To effectively and constructively control emotions.
<b>Adaptability: Change management</b>	
<i>Flexibility</i>	To objectively validate one's feelings and thinking with external reality.
<i>Reality Testing</i>	To adapt and adjust one's feelings and thinking to new situations.
<i>Problem Solving</i>	To effectively solve problems of a personal and interpersonal nature.
<b>General Mood: Self-motivation</b>	
<i>Optimism</i>	To be positive and look on the bright side of life.
<i>Happiness</i>	To feel content with oneself, others and life in general.

*Note.* Adapted from Bar-On's (2006) Model of Emotional-Social Intelligence.

This model includes several key factors: intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability and an individual's general mood. Intrapersonal factors refer to the ability to be aware of and understand oneself and one's emotions. The components in this factor enable an individual to recognise and label his or her emotions, to understand what has caused those emotions, to express himself or herself in a non-destructive manner and to present himself or herself with a certain degree of confidence, autonomy, goal-directedness and self-motivation (Bar-On, 2006). In Bar-On's model, interpersonal factors encompass the abilities related to social interactions and the ability to understand the emotions of others. The components of

this factor influence one's abilities to recognise, understand and appreciate others' emotions and feelings, establish and maintain mutually meaningful and satisfying relationships with others, and form a pro-social attitude which is thought to be fundamental in producing effective behaviours in an individual (Bar-On, 2006). Stress management factors consist of components related to an individual's abilities to manage and control his or her strong emotions to successfully deal with difficult situations (Bar-On, 2006). Adaptability factors in Bar-On's model of emotional and social intelligence refer to the ability to navigate one's emotions and feelings according to the immediate situations, as the components in this factor assist an individual's ability to use emotions to facilitate the process of thinking and reasoning (Bar-On, 2006). General mood factors consist of happiness and optimism, which represent the level of satisfaction in life and a positive outlook toward the future of an individual (Bar-On, 2006).

It can be seen that many components in Bar-On's ESI model are similar to the emotional intelligence abilities described in Salovey and Mayer's (1997) model as well as the model of Petrides et al. (2016). For example, the factor 'Stress Management' and the factor 'Adaptability' are similar to the branch 'Managing Emotions', the highest branch in Salovey and Mayer's model. Researchers have referred Bar-On's ESI model as a trait model, suggesting an overlap between the components of the ESI model and the facets of the Trait emotional intelligence model (Wood et al., 2009). However, the inclusion of the components 'Independence', 'Social Responsibility' and 'Reality Testing' is thought to create the distinctiveness of the ESI model (Wood et al., 2009).

To better understand the ESI, it is crucial to understand the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) as it is the operationalisation of the ESI model (Bar-On, 2006). EQ-i, a self-report measure for adults over 17, provides an estimated level of one's ESI by measuring one's emotional and social behaviours (Bar-On, 2006). The measure comprises 133 items chosen from the initially generated 1000 items, with seven to nine items for each component of the model. Items were worded in short sentences and using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) "very seldom or not true of me" to (5) "very often true of me or true of me" (Bar-On, 2006).

### **Criticisms of Bar-On's Model of Emotional and Social Intelligence**

The Bar-On model of ESI has been criticised for using measures of emotional intelligence that overlap with measures of other traits (Conte, 2005; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016). For example, it is reported that the EQ-i correlated 0.57 with the Big Five personality measure (Brackett & Mayer, 2003). Additionally, Wood et al. (2009) argued that the EQ-i and TEIQue share some components in their constructs, such as 'Assertiveness', 'Impulse control', 'Optimism' and 'Happiness'. However, Conte (2005) argues that the correlation between the EQ-i measure and the Big Five personality measure is moderate; therefore, they overlap but are not identical. Mikolajczak et al. (2009) support this idea and note that both the TEIQue and the EQ-i comprise measures of wellbeing. However, while the TEIQue uses 'Self-esteem', 'Trait Optimism' and 'Trait Happiness' to measure wellbeing, the EQ-i uses the cluster 'General mood' (comprising optimism and happiness) to assess wellbeing, suggesting that the two instruments have some overlap but are not identical.

A second criticism of the Bar-On model is that restricted access to the EQ-i measures has meant new researchers in the field of emotional intelligence have been discouraged from using these measures to advance understanding of emotional intelligence (Tamwatin, 2012). Cartwright and Papas (2008) suggest that the cost to purchase the instrument measurement of heavily commercialised models, such as the Bar-On model, might create difficulties for some academic researchers, especially doctoral students. In contrast, well-commercialised and widely used measures, such as the EQ-i, tend to have better validity and reliability than other less well-known instrument measurements (Cartwright & Papas, 2008).

### **Competency approach: Model of Emotional Intelligence**

In 1995, the book *Emotional intelligence* by Daniel Goleman not only popularised the concept of emotional intelligence but also offered a groundbreaking new conception of emotional intelligence as a new form of intelligence to the world (Goleman, 1995). In 1998, he published the book *Working with emotional intelligence*. In this book, he introduced a model of emotional intelligence based on emotional competencies, which were defined as "learned capabilities based on emotional intelligence that results in an outstanding performance at work" (Boyatzis et al., 1999, p. 3). The model reflects how an individual demonstrates his or her intelligent use of emotions in mastering the skills of 'Self-awareness', 'Self-management',

'Social Awareness' and 'Relationship Management' to work with others for superior work and managerial performance in the workplace (Goleman, 2001). Goleman's model is conceptualised by the 'Emotional Competency Framework' and operationalised by the 'Emotional Competency Inventory' (Goleman, 2001).

According to Goleman's model of emotional intelligence, "emotional intelligence is observed when a person demonstrates the competencies that constitute self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skills at appropriate times, in suitable ways, and in sufficient frequency to be effective in the situation" (Boyatzis et al., 1999, p. 3).

Initially inspired by the ability-based emotional intelligence model of Mayer and Salovey, Goleman (1995) suggested that emotional intelligence could be best understood through five domains of abilities. These domains include knowing one's emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognising emotions in others and handling relationships (Goleman, 1995). Goleman (1998) focused on the idea that emotional competencies are job skills that can be learned and should be learned, as they translate into superior performance in the workplace (Boyatzis et al., 1999). Goleman (1998) introduced a theoretical model of emotional intelligence, referred to as the 'Emotional Competency Framework'. This framework is designed to encompass emotional and social competencies linked to superior workplace performance. It comprised 25 emotional competencies clustered into five domains of emotional intelligence, as in Table 5 below.

**Table 5**

*The domains and components of the Emotional Competency Framework*

<b>Domains and competencies of the Emotional Competency Framework</b>	
<b>Self-Awareness</b>	
<i>Emotional Self-Awareness</i>	To recognise one's emotions and how they impact one's performance.
<i>Accurate Self-Assessment</i>	To realise one's own strengths and weaknesses.
<i>Self-Confidence</i>	To distinguish average performers and superior performers.
<b>Self-Management</b>	
<i>Emotional Self-Control</i>	To deal with aggressive people without striking back.

<i>Conscientiousness</i>	Being self-disciplined, extremely careful in details in attending to responsibilities.
<i>Adaptability</i>	To keep an open mind for new information and adapt to new situations.
<i>Achievement Orientation</i>	An optimistic desire to continuously improve one's performance.
<i>Initiative</i>	To take anticipatory action to avoid problems before they happen.
<b>Social Awareness</b>	
<i>Empathy</i>	To be aware of others' emotions, concerns and needs.
<i>Organisational Awareness</i>	To read the current emotions and political realities in groups.
<i>Service Orientation</i>	To identify the customers' unspoken needs and match them to suitable products or services.
<b>Relationship Management</b>	
<i>Leadership</i>	To inspire people to work together toward collective goals.
<i>Communication</i>	To effectively give and receive information fully and straightforwardly.
<i>Influence</i>	To sense others' emotions and reactions and move them in the best direction to achieve collective goals.
<i>Change Catalyst</i>	To recognise the need to change and to engage others in pursuit of new initiatives.
<i>Conflict Management</i>	To realise trouble when they are raising and handling a difficult situation with diplomacy.
<i>Building Bonds</i>	To establish and maintain a strong relationship based on trust and goodwill.
<i>Teamwork and Collaboration</i>	To increase the level of collective emotional intelligence of the team members and to work cooperatively with peers.
<i>Developing Others</i>	To sense other's development needs, to support and strengthen their abilities.

*Note:* Adapted from Goleman's (1998) Emotional Competency Framework

The Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI) was designed to measure all the competencies in Goleman's theoretical framework. The ECI is a 360-degree measurement instrument that uses self-report, peer report, subordinate report and supervisor report to assess one's emotional and social competencies (Goleman, 2001). The current version of ECI includes 110 items and takes an average of 35 minutes to complete. Items are short sentences and use a 6-point scale to describe the emotional and social competencies of oneself or other people. It is stressed



that the ECI was designed as a tool to assess the potential for development only, not for making hiring or compensation decisions (Gowing, 2001).

### **Criticisms of Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Model**

Goleman's model of emotional intelligence has been criticised for being non-scientific and many elements of the model have had little empirical support (Bowen, 2019; Lock, 2005). For example, Goleman mentioned the contribution of IQ and EQ to life's success in many of his publications. He even provided statistical data on the contribution of IQ (20%) and other forces (80%) in life success in his book (Goleman, 1995). However, it has been argued that the given data was not proven by any empirical research. For example, it is reported that the variance of performance explained by emotional intelligence was only 5% (Conte, 2005).

Goleman's competency-based emotional intelligence model has been said to predict job performance, but the study of Van Rooy and Viswesvaran (2004) showed the contrary. A meta-analysis was conducted on 59 independent studies with a sample of 9522 participants to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and performance. The results of the study revealed that the correlation between emotional intelligence and performance was modest, as the percentage of variance in preperformance explained by emotional intelligence was only 5% (Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004).

Another criticism of Goleman's emotional intelligence model is that it fails to reflect the term 'emotional intelligence' (Côté, 2014; Mayer et al., 2004). For example, Goleman's model includes many work-related competencies (such as Organisational Awareness, Leadership or Service Orientation), which have little or nothing to do with emotion or intelligence. Therefore, the model should not be considered an emotional intelligence model (Mayer et al., 2004). Additionally, Côté (2014) argues that self-esteem does not belong to the realm of intelligence; it should be excluded from the emotional intelligence model.

### ***Overview of emotional intelligence research***

The interest in emotional intelligence has increased greatly in recent years, and it is suggested that emotional intelligence interventions or educational programmes are promising (Hodzic et al., 2017). However, my search on both English and Vietnamese publications on the topic

of emotional intelligence from 2008 to 2021 showed that only a few studies on emotional intelligence interventions or educational programmes had been done.

The search term 'emotional intelligence' yielded 13,636 articles published between 2008 and 2021 from SCOPUS, and reduced to 1783 articles when using the search term "emotional intelligence" AND "intervention" OR "programme". Next, titles, abstracts and keywords were scanned, and the inclusion criteria for articles was that (1) the articles were peer-reviewed, (2) they were written in English languages and (3) they reported emotional intelligence interventions on samples that had normal mental health conditions. The search strategy resulted in 34 articles. Another search was conducted on E-Theses Online Service and Open Access Theses and Dissertations websites with the same search strategy. This research resulted in 10 theses on emotional intelligence interventions/educational programmes out of 107 theses on emotional intelligence. A similar search strategy was applied to the digital resource of the National Library of Vietnam and resulted in eight articles on the topic of emotional intelligence published in the period from 2003 to 2021. Only one of these articles was about an emotional intelligence intervention/educational programme.

Findings from the analysis of 44 studies in English revealed a number of themes. First, emotional intelligence studies have focused on various people and age groups across the lifespan, including studies on children, adolescents and adults. Studies have also focused on a wide range of professions, including healthcare (e.g., nurses, surgeons), business (e.g., managers) and sports (e.g., players). Only seven studies focused on university students within the young adult age group (17%), suggesting that this age group is under-represented and that the understanding of emotional intelligence in this group is limited. Second, one study focused on how emotional intelligence can be increased and one on whether an emotional intelligence intervention leads to increased beneficial characteristics. Third, most studies in these 44 studies used the Ability Emotional Intelligence Model as the guidelines for their research, not the Trait Emotional Intelligence Model or the Competency Emotional Intelligence Model. Fourth, there were no common methods used in emotional intelligence interventions or educational programmes. For example, some used meditation, some used relaxation and others used mobile apps, text messages, or video games. Fifth, there was a paucity of research on emotional intelligence in Asian countries (China and Iran). The vast

majority of studies have been conducted in the USA and European countries; therefore, little is known about how culture may affect emotional intelligence. Sixth, none of the studies on emotional intelligence interventions or educational programmes provided outlines or descriptions of the content of the programme/intervention. Last but not least, only three out of 44 studies (7%) used a qualitative methodology, while the majority were conducted with the quantitative method.

The analysis of eight publications in Vietnamese showed that all the studies employed undergraduate students and teachers as participants for their research. Among eight studies, only one aimed to improve high school teachers' emotional intelligence through an intervention programme; the rest just measured the level of emotional intelligence in students and teachers. Quantitative methods and the Ability Emotional Intelligence Model of Mayer and Salovey (1997) were employed in all eight studies to investigate the participants' emotional intelligence. The findings from all eight studies in Vietnamese showed that Vietnamese undergraduate students' emotional intelligence is at a moderate or low level.

The results from this review of the research on emotional intelligence revealed that there were only a few studies conducted on the topic of emotional intelligence intervention or educational programmes in Asian countries and using the qualitative method. Additionally, in Vietnam, there was no previous research that used qualitative methods and focused on developing emotional intelligence in the population of Vietnamese undergraduate students. Therefore, to my knowledge, the present study would be the first in Vietnam to use a qualitative approach to explore the experiences of Vietnamese undergraduate students who undertook an educational programme that focused on developing emotional intelligence and learning about coping strategies.

### ***Choice of emotional intelligence model***

Each of these four emotional models has its own uniqueness, and these features were carefully considered in selecting the most suitable intelligence model for the present study. It is revealed that each emotional intelligence conceptualisation has a different focus on emotional intelligence; however, they share some similar core components, which are the ability to recognise, understand and manage one's own and other's emotions (Bar-On, 2006;

Goleman, 1998; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Petrides & Furnham, 2001). Apart from the shared features, each of the four emotional intelligence models has its own strengths and weaknesses. The uniqueness of Bar-On's ESI model is the emphasis on the importance of the social aspects of emotional intelligence. However, this model is reported to be too correlated with the factors in Petrides et al.'s (2007) Trait Emotional Intelligence Model and Mayer and Salovey's (1997) Ability Emotional Intelligence Model (Petrides, 2011). Goleman's emotional intelligence model exclusively focuses on increasing emotional intelligence to maximise one's capacity to result in superior performance in the workplace (Goleman, 2001). However, the weakness of this model is that it does not have a strong theoretical framework compared to other emotional intelligence models (Eysenck, 2000; Locke, 2005). The uniqueness of the Trait Emotional Intelligence Model is that it provides a comprehensive model of all the emotional-related personalities under the Big Five model (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). However, some researchers have argued that trait emotional intelligence is a redundant construct within the Big Five model as it overlaps too much with the existing traits in the Big Five. This idea is perceived as a weakness of the Trait Emotional Intelligence Model (Alegre et al., 2019). The Ability Emotional Intelligence Model of Mayer and Salovey (1997) is suggested to be the first formal emotional intelligence model and has the strongest theoretical framework among the discussed models (Jordan et al., 2007). Among the four models, the Ability Emotional Intelligence Model exclusively focuses on emotional intelligence and provides a clear and detailed description of the core emotional intelligence components, as well as how it should be enhanced from the basic to the advanced level in a developmental fashion (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

The purpose of the present study is to explore the experiences of Vietnamese undergraduate students who completed an educational programme that focused on helping them learn more about emotional intelligence and coping strategies that they could apply within their Vietnamese culture. Therefore, choosing a suitable emotional intelligence model to inform the programme was important. After weighing up the strengths and weaknesses of the four models, I decided to choose the Ability Emotional Intelligence Model of Mayer and Salovey (1997) to inform the content of the proposed education programme. Using the Ability Emotional Intelligence Model helped provide participants with a clear and theoretically supported conceptualisation of emotional intelligence and informed the focus of content and

discussions of emotional intelligence. The following sections provide an overview of coping research in the literature and a review of the most popular coping theories that also informed the development of the education programme developed for participants and used in the current study.

## **Coping**

### ***Review of coping models***

Young people are in a life stage where they are still developing their ability to cope with stress and life challenges that come with transitioning to adulthood (Arnett, 2018). Coping theories can help us better understand how and why young people use their coping strategies. Two major theories in the literature on coping are the Transactional Model of Coping developed by Lazarus and Folkman in 1984 and the Conservation of Resources Model conceptualised by Stevan Hobfoll in 1989 (Frydenberg, 2017).

How people cope is determined by how stress is defined (Frydenberg, 2017). The term 'stress' is often used to represent the effects of anything in the surrounding environment of a person that seriously threatens the internal balance of that person (Selye, 1956). Stress occurs when a person realises a need for readjustment to a new situation, and perceived demands from this situation have gone far beyond his or her coping resources (Larazus & Folkman, 1984). The actual or perceived threat to a person is called the stressor, and the response to the stressor is referred to as the stress response (Schneiderman et al., 2005). Four types of stress have been identified. They are distress (i.e., negative or harmful stress), eustress (i.e., positive or good stress), hyperstress (i.e., an excessive amount of stress) and hypostress (i.e., insufficient stress) (Harms, 2010). Experiences of stress can have different levels, and each level has different impacts on a person. Lazarus (2000) distinguishes between three levels of stress: acute stress, episodic stress and chronic stress. Acute stress only lasts for a short duration, but it is very intense. Acute stress happens when unrealistic demands, pressures and expectations are placed on a person. Episodic stress has the same criteria as acute stress; however, the experience of episodic stress is more consistent and frequent and occurs in multiple episodes. Chronic stress results from accumulated stressors over a long time and is associated with family problems, poverty and long-term illness (Lazarus, 2000).

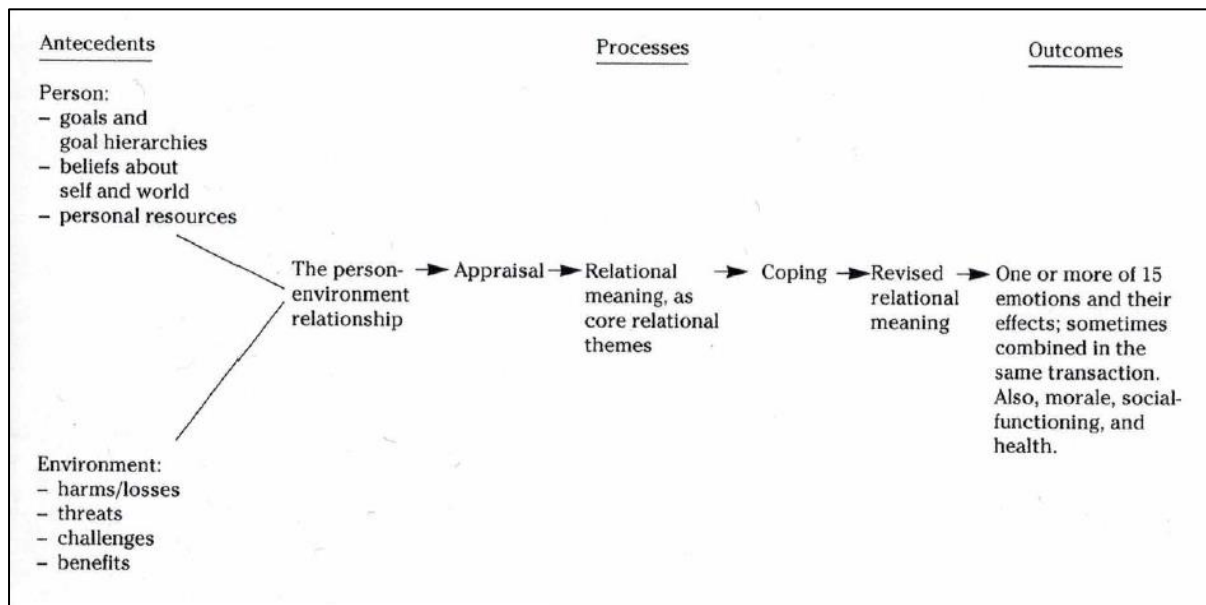
Coping is viewed differently in different coping models. In the Conservation of Resources Model, coping is often viewed as behaviours that aim to modify psychological stress by increasing needed resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Hobfoll and colleagues believe that people do not wait for adversity to strike; they invest in resources for future protection, as individuals with greater resources will be safer from threats and in a stronger position to gain (Halbesleben et al., 2014). In the Transactional Model of Coping, coping is a dynamic process that changes over time as the person responds to demands. Coping occurs after a person makes a series of appraisals about how well they can manage the demands of the situation. The key elements of this theory are the individual, the environment and the appraisal process (Frydenberg, 2017). People take different approaches to cope with stress, threats, demands and challenges and have different styles of coping (Schaefer & Moos, 1992). These styles of coping sometimes include approach (analysing the situation, reappraisal, seeking help or social support and taking action to solve the problem) and avoidance (minimising the problem, doing nothing, seeking alternative rewards or venting emotions) (Schaefer & Moos, 1992). In the following section, I will discuss the Transactional Model of Coping and the Conservation of Resources Model in more detail.

### **Transactional Model of Coping**

A key and influential coping theory that might inform a study of Vietnamese youths' experiences of emotional intelligence and coping is Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Coping (TMC). The coping process in TMC consists of antecedents, mediating processes and outcomes, as illustrated in Figure 2 below (Lazarus, 2012).

**Figure 2**

*Revised Model of Stress and Coping*



*Note.* From Lazarus (2012), Reproduced with permission from Lazarus (1991)

The antecedents in the TMC comprise personal variables (e.g., goals, beliefs, personal resources) and environmental variables (e.g., social & cultural demands). The interaction of antecedent variables plays an important part in shaping how an individual appraises a potential emotional experience as a threat, harm, or challenge (Lazarus, 2006). The outcome of the coping process is evaluated based on the effectiveness of its two main functions of “managing or altering problem causing distress” and “regulating emotional responses to the problem” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 150). The effectiveness of coping strategies should be evaluated through the selection of appropriate outcomes (e.g., short-term or long-term effectiveness, wellbeing of self and others) and the fit between coping and the demands of the situation (e.g., cultural differences in coping, individual differences in coping) (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

The mediating process variables in the TMC consist of cognitive appraisal (primary appraisal, secondary appraisal and reappraisal) and coping methods (emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping is determined by the process of people using their cognitive appraisal to evaluate stimuli within their environment to see whether they are threatening, harmful or challenging. The process of

appraising generates emotions. When stress appears, it is often accompanied by emotions including anger, sadness, disgust, anxiety, shame, guilt, envy and jealousy (Lazarus, 1993). The result of cognitive appraisal shapes the types of coping strategies chosen (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). For example, if stimuli are appraised as a threat or harm, an individual might engage in coping strategies that enable them to avoid the negative outcome. If the stimuli are appraised as a challenge, an individual might engage in coping strategies that help them to address the problem.

According to the TMC, coping processes create outcomes that are reappraised as favourable, unfavourable or unresolved. Favourable outcomes are accompanied by positive emotions, whereas unfavourable and unresolved outcomes are accompanied by distress, which requires an individual to seek more coping strategies to deal with the stressors (Biggs et al., 2017).

### **Problem-focused and emotion-focus coping**

One strength of the TMC is the theoretical distinction between problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, which has been highly influential in shaping thinking and research and is reflected in the broader coping literature (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). The conception of these two broad groups of coping strategies is thought to be an important foundation that has enabled the formation of many other coping models (Carver et al., 1989; Parker & Endler, 1992).

People use a combination of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping but may use one style more than another, depending on the situation and stressors. Problem-focused coping manages the problem by altering the elements of the stressful situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These strategies are suitable for stressors that are perceived as amendable to change and controllable (Abu Shosha & Al-Kalaldeh, 2020). Emotion-focused coping has the function of regulating emotions or distress that is elicited from stressful situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This form of coping is concerned with improving how someone feels and internal emotions rather than changing external stimuli that trigger emotional responses. People are more likely to engage in emotion-focused coping when the stressors are perceived as harmful, threatening, or uncontrollable and no actions can be taken to change environmental conditions (Abu Shosha & Al-Kalaldeh, 2020). These two types of coping and the TMC may be



useful for understanding how Vietnamese youth manage stress and deal with challenging circumstances and situations in their cultural context.

### **Criticisms of emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping**

Emotion-focused and problem-focused coping have been commonly criticised because they only provide surface explanations of coping and fail to adequately differentiate the conceptual complexity between different forms of coping (Biggs et al., 2017). Skinner et al. (2003) argue that most coping strategies used by individuals have both functions and are used to manage problems and calm emotions, so a single strategy can fit into both categories. For example, making a plan not only creates a solution for a problem but can also help reduce stressful feelings. Additionally, the distinction between emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping has been criticised for not being comprehensive and taking into account all coping behaviours (Skinner et al., 2003). For example, these two categories do not include seeking social support. Some scholars and researchers have argued for adding a third category – avoidance coping – which builds on the existing emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping taxonomy (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Parker & Endler, 1992).

### **Conservation of Resources theory**

Conservation of Resources (COR) theory is a motivational stress theory developed based on the assumption that people have the desire to protect their current resources and are motivated to acquire new resources to recover from their current loss and potential loss in the future (Hobfoll, 1988). Resources are loosely defined as things that people value (Hobfoll, 1988). Resources include object resources (e.g., tools for work), condition resources (e.g., employment), personal resources (e.g., key skills) and energy resources (e.g., knowledge, money) (Hobfoll & Lilly, 1993). Following this basis, COR theory posits that stress occurs (a) when personal resources are threatened with loss, (b) resources are lost, or (c) an individual fails to gain resources following investment in other resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

There are several principles of COR theory; however, the three main ideas are (i) primacy of loss, (ii) resources investment and (iii) gain paradox. In the following section, I will discuss these ideas in more detail because they help shed light on how Vietnamese youth may be

appraising stressors and stressful events and what shapes their use of emotional intelligence and coping. A summary of the three principles of the COR theory is shown in Table 6 below.

**Table 6**

*Principles of the Conservation of Resources theory*

<b>Principles of Conservation of resources theory</b>	
Principle 1: Primacy of loss	Resource loss is more salient than resource gain as factors that reduce resources have more stress implications for people than factors that increase resources.
Principle 2: Resources Investment	People are motivated to invest in order to protect against resource loss, recover from resource loss and to increase their actual resource level in every possible aspect.
Principle 3: Gain paradox	When resource loss circumstances are high, resource gain increases in salient in terms of value.

*Note:* Adapted from Hobfoll et al.'s (2018) Conservation of Resources Theory.

The first principle of COR posits that resource loss has a much greater psychological impact on the individual than the gain of the same resource (Hobfoll et al., 2018). According to this principle, the threat or actual acute loss of resources will lead to stress-related outcomes. For example, an individual ended a relationship with a good friend of hers, and at the same time, made a new positive friendship with someone else she met at school. The resource loss of losing a friend will have a more harmful psychological impact on her than the resource gain attained by developing a new friendship. In the short term, mental and physical stress-related outcomes can appear as negative emotions such as anger, frustration or physical exhaustion. However, if these outcomes occur over a long period, they can develop into more severe conditions such as depression, burnout or heart disease (Zamani et al., 2006).

According to COR, the second principle, people must invest in resources to restore for current loss, prevent potential loss and acquire new resources (Hobfoll, 2001). For example, being sick is a resource loss for a person in terms of health. To recover from the health resource loss of being sick, a person invests in health resources such as having more rest time, eating a more

nutritious diet and getting a good night's sleep. Also, to protect herself from possible health resource losses in the future, she invests in gaining more health resources by spending time exercising to promote healthy immune functioning. Resource investments include direct replacement of resources (e.g., getting an additional job to make up for the lost income of one job) and indirect investment in resources (e.g., increasing personal skills and confidence to prepare for difficult situations in the future) (Hobfoll, 2001). This principle also suggests that the investment in resources, when having limited resources, may cause further resource loss. Therefore, people are expected to invest in resources that easily offset the lost resources and ensure the highest chance of resource recovery before investing in resources that are harder to gain (Zamani et al., 2006).

The third principle of COR concerns a gain paradox. During traumatic situations or under conditions of high loss, individuals' attempts to cope might lead to real gains and tangible resources that may offset the resource loss. Resource gains can appear as coping mastery and growth, such as an enhancement in cognitive functioning, a heightened sense of meaning, or the development of closer relationships (Hall et al., 2006). For example, Hobfoll et al. (2006) found that people who experience greater exposure to terrorism not only reported a greater psychological loss but also reported greater post-traumatic growth.

The principles of COR lead to the corollaries of loss and gain spirals. Understanding these three main ideas/principles and corollaries can help inform our understanding of how Vietnamese youth approach stress and the active process that individuals engage in to achieve important goals. The three corollaries of COR are presented in Table 7 below.

**Table 7***Corollaries of Conservation of Resources theory*

<b>Corollary of Conservation of resources theory</b>	
Corollary 1	People with greater resources are less vulnerable to resource loss and more capable of resource gain. Conversely, people who lack resources are more vulnerable to resource loss and less capable of resource gain.
Corollary 2	Because resource loss has more harmful psychological impact on people than resource gain, and because resource loss lead to stress. Each time stress occurs, people with fewer resources to offset the resource loss and lead to further loss and more stress, and these loss spirals increase in both speed and degree.
Corollary 3	Because resource gain occurs in slower speed and less in magnitude, resource gain spiral tend to be weak and increase slowly.

*Note:* Adapted from Hobfoll et al.'s (2018) Conservation of Resources Theory.

The first corollary is that people who have more resources to start with are better protected against resource loss and have a higher chance of gaining resources, resulting in gain spirals. On the other hand, people who lack resources are more vulnerable to resource loss, and since the initial loss can lead to further loss in future, loss spirals will be formed (Hobfoll, 2001). The second corollary is that when experiencing resource loss, although resource gain is made with an attempt to balance the resource loss, the harmful psychological impact associated with resource loss outweighs the positive psychological impact created by resource gain. When people experience stress and they have fewer resources to balance the loss of resources, they will experience more stress, which leads to more resource loss (Hobfoll, 2001). The third corollary is that, in comparison to resource loss, resource gain tends to happen at a slower speed and to a lower degree; consequently, the increase of the resource gain spiral is weaker and slower than that of the resource loss spiral (Hobfoll, 2001).

The second and third corollaries are closely linked and provide a detailed explanation of loss and gain spirals. Take a case of a woman who got mugged as an example. She was a single mother who had to work two jobs and lived in a resource-poor environment. She lost her rent, and her arm was injured. This initial resource loss (financial and health resources) led to more

potential resource loss as medical appointments threatened her job security. Post-traumatic symptoms, stress from threats to job security and physical pain reduced her job performance. The more stressed she was, the more aggressive she became, and this resulted in less social support. She lost her job, and the event contributed to the increase in depression and the loss spiral continued. Conversely, if the woman had been in the same situation of resource loss but had lived in a resource-rich environment, her ongoing medical appointments would not threaten her job security as her co-workers could help her and covered some work for her. Her post-traumatic symptoms of being mugged would be treated by a psychotherapist. Her friends, neighbours, or family would have supported her and assisted in caring for her children or housework. She would have recovered from physical and mental problems and kept her job. The resource loss was recovered, and the loss spiral stopped (Holmgreen et al., 2017).

### **Criticisms of Conservation of Resources theory**

The most common criticism of the COR theory is that resources have not been clearly defined in the literature (Thompson & Cooper, 2001). This criticism has two main points. The first point is that the definition of resources in COR is too general and focuses on categorising resources rather than defining them. Halbesleben et al. (2014) have argued that resources are limitless and COR has a too general and poorly defined idea of resources, and this means it is difficult to identify which factors can be identified as resources in COR theory. To respond to this issue, Hobfoll and Lilly (1993) examined the resources' utility in community samples and found 74 key resources. In the process of examining, identifying and categorising resources, they suggested that “everything that is good is a resource” (Hobfoll, 2001, p. 360), and this was added to the definition of resources in COR.

The second point about COR's poorly defined idea of resources was that the term ‘everything that is good’ implied that if things are to be considered resources, they must lead to a positive outcome (Halbesleben et al., 2014). This definition can be problematic as it has now confused resources with the outcomes (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Findings from research have shown that good resources can lead to both positive and negative outcomes (Halbesleben et al., 2014). For example, possessing great work resources can lead to an individual's high level of work performance and engagement; however, it can also create work-life balance conflict and greater stress for that individual.

### ***Review of coping research in the literature***

Using the search terms “coping” and “Vietnamese” yielded 255 articles published between 2005 and 2021 from SCOPUS, and this was reduced to 44 articles when using the search terms “coping” AND “Vietnamese” OR “students”. Titles, abstracts and keywords of articles were scanned using the following inclusion criteria: (1) peer-reviewed, (2) in the English language and (3) focusing on ‘coping strategies’. The search strategy resulted in 10 articles. Of the 10, only three articles included studies investigating the coping abilities of Vietnamese undergraduate students in Vietnam and within the Vietnamese social and cultural context. All three studies used quantitative methods. Other studies focused on either the sample of high school students, postgraduate students, or Vietnamese undergraduate students who were studying outside of Vietnam. A similar search strategy was applied to the digital resource of the National Library of Vietnam and resulted in five articles on coping in undergraduate students published from 2005 to 2021. All five articles used quantitative methods and focused on identifying coping strategies and measuring the coping abilities of undergraduate students in coping with academic stress.

The articles that focused on coping strategies used by Vietnamese undergraduate students within the social and cultural context of Vietnam showed that they engaged in both healthy and unhealthy coping strategies to deal with academic stress. In terms of healthy coping strategies, acceptance, positive thinking, problem-solving and re-interpretation of the event were used the most when dealing with their academic stress. In terms of unhealthy coping strategies, the most common were acceptance, positive thinking, problem-solving and re-interpretation of the event. These strategies were used to cope with their academic stress. In terms of unhealthy coping strategies, the articles showed that Vietnamese undergraduate students often used avoidance and catharsis when coping with academic stress. Other coping strategies to manage academic stress were emotional regulation, wishful thinking, seeking social support, self-blame and self-isolation.

The review of this coping literature revealed that only a few coping studies focused on Vietnamese undergraduate students’ coping strategies, which took place in the social and cultural context of Vietnam. Additionally, in Vietnam, no previous research used qualitative methods and focused on exploring the experience of developing coping strategies in

Vietnamese undergraduate students. Therefore, to my knowledge, the present study would be the first study in Vietnam that used a qualitative approach and method to explore the experiences of Vietnamese undergraduate students and their emotional intelligence and use of coping strategies.

### ***Choice of coping model***

The selection of the suitable coping model for this study was based on the focus of the two coping models on how individuals deal with stress. First, the TMC model emphasises the immediate context in which coping occurs and focuses more on the process and the attempt to cope rather than the outcome. In contrast, the COR model focuses on the complex ecology that affects how individuals deal with stress and motivates individuals to protect their future and safeguard against loss rather than compensating for loss (Hobfoll, 2001). Therefore, coping in the TMC is seen as reaction coping and present-oriented as it explains how people react after or during stressful events. In COR theory, however, coping is seen as proactive and future-oriented coping as it motivates individuals to retain, protect and build resources for future protection (Frydenberg, 2017). Second, the TMC views coping as a cognitive behavioural approach focusing on an individual's internal process of appraising the situations and coping has been associated with self-regulation, which is related to health and wellbeing (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping in COR is seen as a process between an individual's interdependence and his or her ecology system, and it has been associated with self-development, which is linked with goal attainment and management (Hobfoll, 2001).

In the present study, I decided to choose TMC as a theoretical framework to inform the development of the education programme and to conceptualise coping in Vietnamese undergrad students for the following reasons. First, to help the participants effectively deal with stressful situations and interpersonal conflicts, they need to learn about and develop the ability to deal with those problems immediately. Therefore, coping with stress, difficult situations and conflicts require present-oriented coping strategies like those depicted in the TMC. According to Frydenberg (2017), the TMC is present-oriented and focuses on the cognitive appraisal of events and selecting coping strategies to deal with the event rather than focusing on responding to the potential loss of resources in the COR model. Additionally, the development of emotional intelligence is considered a process of cognitive development

(Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Therefore, the focus on the cognitive appraisal of events as depicted in the TMC would be helpful and contribute to participants learning about coping strategies and developing emotional intelligence. Therefore, the TMC model was a more suitable theoretical framework that could act as a guideline in helping participants to learn about present-focused coping strategies.

Second, the TMC could help inform the development of knowledge, skills and different coping strategies needed by participants to cope with their stresses. TMC includes problem-focused coping strategies and emotion-focused strategies (e.g., different self-regulation strategies) and coping strategies that involve social interactions (Thomas et al., 2017). The educational programme is used to help participants learn about emotional intelligence and coping needs to help individuals learn how to identify and categorise their own coping strategies, especially productive ones. The TMC provides a useful and simple framework that can be used to educate participants and provide them with knowledge of antecedents and possible outcomes or consequences associated with each of the categories and coping strategies. This information could be very helpful for participants when deciding which coping strategies to reduce stress and avoid negative consequences.

## **Research problem**

This thesis seeks to explore Vietnamese undergraduate students' experiences of emotional intelligence and coping within Vietnam's social and cultural context. One of the key reasons for focusing on this population is because Vietnamese undergraduate students experience high levels of stress. That stress is partly due to the pressures Vietnamese students experience while trying to adhere to Vietnam's social and cultural norms. Anxiety, depression, low emotional intelligence and a lack of productive coping strategies have also been contributing factors. Research also demonstrates that social and cultural contexts influence decisions and coping behaviours such as emotional regulation.

In addition, this thesis focuses on this population and context because it seeks to address a gap in the current research. Research in emotional intelligence and coping has been criticised due to a lack of multicultural and cultural perspectives. Therefore, the present study aims to advance understanding of how non-Western social and cultural contexts shape experiences



of emotional intelligence and learning about coping strategies by presenting these within a cultural perspective of Vietnam.

Moreover, findings from the review of the research and literature on emotional intelligence and coping showed that few previous studies have focused on the population of undergraduate students and have been conducted in Asian countries. The review also showed that no previous qualitative studies examined how emotional intelligence and coping are developed in Vietnamese undergraduate students in the context of Vietnam. Therefore, to my knowledge, the present study would be the first study conducted in Vietnam that used a constructionist approach and descriptive qualitative methods to explore the experiences of Vietnamese undergraduate students.

Finally, despite the alarming levels of mental health problems, Vietnamese undergraduate students lack mental health literacy and have limited access to sources of mental health support. Few studies in the review focused on existing interventions or educational programmes that aim to promote emotional intelligence and coping in university students in Vietnam. There is a need for such interventions or educational programmes that teach students how to manage and cope with stress and potentially improve mental health awareness and wellbeing. To the best of my knowledge, the education programme used in the present study is the first programme that has been developed to promote an understanding of emotional intelligence and coping and has been culturally adapted to Vietnamese undergraduate students.

### **Research question**

The overall goal of this research is to explore Vietnamese undergraduate students' experience of changes in emotional intelligence and coping strategies within the influence of Vietnamese culture. Therefore, a constructionist descriptive qualitative study was conducted to answer the following research question:

*What are Vietnamese undergraduate students' perceived changes in emotional intelligence and coping strategies within the cultural and social context of Vietnam?*

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In Chapter 2, the review of the literature demonstrated that there is a paucity of research on undergraduate students' experiences of emotional intelligence and coping in Vietnam. This chapter describes the philosophy that underpins my study, including the research ontology, epistemology and methodology. It also includes a description of the sociocultural theory, which is the theoretical framework that underpins the study, and I provide a rationale for selecting this theory. This chapter also includes a theoretical discussion of how emotions are learned and developed from the perspective of sociocultural theory.

### **Reasons for a philosophical framing**

Research philosophies or paradigms provide researchers with a lens that shapes how they view the nature of reality and develop their knowledge in a particular field (Saunders et al., 2019). Adopting a suitable philosophy for a study is very important because it guides researchers in posing and answering their questions. It also shapes and reflects their view of reality (ontology), how they know about that reality (epistemology) and what procedures they use to acquire the knowledge about that reality (methodology) (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Research methodology also assists researchers in how they interpret their findings (Crotty, 1998). Suitable research philosophy and methodology also help a researcher to be more creative in either selecting or adapting research methods that are outside of their previous experience (Easterby-Smith, 2008).

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), there are four major research paradigms: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructionism. Positivism is characterised by approaches relying on scientific evidence. Positivists look at an issue in a predetermined way through empirical observation and measurement to confirm or reject a hypothesis (Levers, 2013). The positivistic paradigm is characterised by empirical experimentalism (Guba, 1990). Post-positivists believe that it is nearly impossible to discover the absolute truth through science, especially when studying human behaviours and actions, and objective investigations can only bring us to partial segments or approximations of the truth (Clark, 1998). Post-positivistic paradigms are characterised by critical multiplism (or thought of as elaborated triangulation methods) (Guba, 1990). Researchers who take a critical theory position are concerned with

the issue of power relations within the society and interactions of social elements (such as race, class, gender, etc.) that contribute to a social system. Research approaches in the critical paradigm should provide an explanation of what is wrong with the current social reality, identify actions to change it, and provide clear norms for criticism and transformation (Bohman, 2019).

Researchers who adhere to constructionism believe that the meaning of reality is created through the interactions of the interpreter and the matter that is interpreted (Crotty, 1998). Constructionists believe that the meaning-making process of the truth is shaped by the phenomenon and societal influences, and the knowledge of the truth is constructed rather than discovered (Levers, 2013). In order to understand, locate and develop my philosophical stand, I read the work of Creswell (2014), Guba and Lincoln (1994), and Crotty (1998) to explore my ontology and choose a theoretical framework for my study. I decided to use constructionism as my research ontology. I chose sociocultural theory as my research epistemology and qualitative descriptive inquiry as my research methodology. This theory and approach helped me to locate my position and guided the development of my research question, data collection and interpreting findings.

### **My research ontology: Constructionism**

The aim of the present study was to explore the participants' experiences of emotional intelligence and coping within the Vietnamese cultural setting. The study is concerned with participants' perspectives/thinking about emotional intelligence and coping, their experiences of emotional intelligence and coping and their interpretations of their experience. Therefore, I chose constructionism as my research ontology because it shared my viewpoint that knowledge is constructed, not discovered.

Constructionists believe that knowledge about the world and phenomenon is not discovered through objective scientific methods and research but is constructed (Blurr, 1995). They also believe that there is no single objective truth out there waiting to be discovered; rather, there is only shared knowledge of reality and truth which is constructed through everyday social interactions (Blurr, 1995).

Constructionism claims that meaning is not inherent in the object; the actual meaning of things emerges only when consciousness engages with them. In other words, meanings are constructed by people as they engage with the world and objects they are interpreting (Crotty, 1998). Before human beings' consciousness could interpret the world, the world held no meaning at all. According to constructionism, we do not create meaning. We construct meaning. We must work with the world and objects in the world. The world and objects in the world may be in themselves meaningless; they are our partners in the generation of meaning and need to be taken seriously (Crotty, 1998).

Constructionism were the suitable research ontology for the present study for several reasons. Constructionism provided me with a worldview and a guide to making sense of how young Vietnamese people learn and develop new knowledge and skills in emotional intelligence and coping within the Vietnamese context. Additionally, taking a constructionist position allowed me to put participants at the central of the learning experience when designing and implementing the educational programme. It also enabled me to prepare a learning environment that encourage interaction and shared learning.

### **My research epistemology: Sociocultural Theory**

This study focused on exploring participants' experiences and perceptions of developing new knowledge and skills in emotional intelligence and coping. It was also designed to explore the role of culture in shaping Vietnamese youths' coping and use of emotional intelligence. Social constructionism and sociocultural theory were both considered when deciding the research epistemology because both theories emphasise the influence of culture in shaping the way in which we see things. I chose sociocultural theory because it focuses on the contexts and factors that shape the process of learning within a social and cultural setting (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). At the same time, social constructionism focuses on exploring knowledge development through discourse and social interaction (Crotty, 1998).

While constructivists believe that an individual is an active constructor of knowledge and place emphasis on the process of learning in an individual's mind (Shaw, 1995). The epistemological belief of sociocultural theory adds to the constructivist viewpoint by demonstrating that the learning and development of individuals are also enhanced by shared constructive activities

(Shaw, 1995). We do not construct our interpretations of reality in isolation but within an interconnection of shared understandings, practices, language, and so on (Denzil & Lincoln, 2003). The creation of knowledge cannot be separated from the social environment in which it is formed. There is an inevitable historical and sociocultural dimension to meaning making process (Daniel, 2001). The creation and sharing of personally meaningful artefacts of knowledge enable learners to extend their knowledge. Their world view can change once they experience alternative points of view (Gonzalez, 2020). By focusing particular attention on the external constructions of the process of learning, sociocultural theorists seek to explore how social and cultural interactions shape the internal mental constructions of individuals (Vygotsky, 1978). For sociocultural theorists, a common way of understanding the world, or shaping knowledge, is through understanding the historical and social origins of assumptions and the social, cultural, political and economic factors that sustain them (Gergen, 1985).

Sociocultural theory was the suitable research epistemology for the present study for several reasons. Sociocultural theory enabled me to consider individual factors that shaped participants' views and experiences and the historical, social, and cultural events in Vietnam that shaped their experience and knowledge of emotional intelligence and coping. It also helped me gain deeper insights into how they applied their learned knowledge and skills in emotional intelligence and coping to deal with their difficulties in their everyday life. The details of sociocultural theory will be described in the latter section of this chapter.

### **My research methodology: A qualitative descriptive inquiry**

Crowe et al. (2011) recommended that a qualitative inquiry is a useful approach to explore an event of interest (such as people's experiences of an educational programme) in depth. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) have also suggested that a qualitative inquiry is useful to gain a better understanding of a phenomenon, to gain access to the perspectives of people who have direct experience of that phenomenon and to give voice to people who are marginalised, disadvantaged or vulnerable. Qualitative inquiry is thought to be a suitable method to thoroughly investigate descriptive questions such as 'how do young people experience emotional intelligence' and 'what coping strategies do young people use?' (Gray, 2014; Laverty, 2003) and is helpful for investigating 'how' participants learn about their emotional intelligence and copings strategies, and 'why' learning emotional intelligence and coping

strategies is beneficial to them in their everyday lives. A qualitative approach to inquiry provides a flexible and appropriate structure and research framework for collecting and analysing data, such as exploring how people make sense of an experience (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Therefore, a qualitative descriptive inquiry was a suitable approach to explore the Vietnamese undergraduate students' experiences of learning emotional intelligence and coping strategies within the social and cultural context of Vietnam.

Qualitative descriptive inquiries are thought to offer an accurate and comprehensive summary of an experience or an event as well as the meanings attributed to those experiences or events (Gray, 2014). The current study also focused on exploring what it meant for participants to learn about emotional intelligence and coping as well as how participants thought, felt and responded to their learning. Braun and Clarke (2013) have argued that a qualitative inquiry is best used in situations where it is hard to find a single 'right' answer, such as discovering the insights which may not be directly measurable, including the thoughts, feelings, motivations and reactions of participants. However, applying a qualitative inquiry methodology is not without its issues. Findings can be difficult to validate, and scientific thoroughness can be difficult to prove (Braun & Clarke, 2013). To overcome these challenges, researchers are advised to use precise language and provide a rich presentation of evidence (e.g. tables, figures and appendix) to make the study more reliable and easy to follow (Gustafsson, 2017). Additionally, it is also advised that credibility and trustworthiness are very important in qualitative research (Morse, 2018). Strategies such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability should be adopted to enhance credibility and trustworthiness in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I will discuss these strategies in detail in the Method chapter.

### **Theoretical framework: Sociocultural theory**

To understand, locate and develop my theoretical framework, I read the work of Piaget (1957), Rogoff (1990), Vygotsky (1978) and Wertsch (1991), who have written about learning and the way social and cultural factors shape learning and cognitive development. I decided to choose sociocultural theory as a theoretical framework for the present study.

### ***Sociocultural theory***

Socioculturalism is interested in how cultural, historical and institutional factors influence human development, as well as how social and cultural practices shape and define the thoughts and actions of an individual who lives within it (Wertsch, 1991). Sociocultural theory posits that individuals create meaning of the world through their interactions with each other and with the environment they live in (Daniel, 2001). The creation of knowledge cannot be separated from the social and cultural environment in which it is formed. Therefore, social, cultural and historical factors have an important role in the process of meaning-making (Daniel, 2001). The epistemological belief of sociocultural theory emphasises the use of mediated artefacts, such as language, to invent concepts to make sense of our experience of reality (Wertsch, 1991). We do not construct our interpretations of reality in isolation but within an interconnection of shared understandings, practices, language and so on (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Sociocultural theory pays attention to the interdependence and co-construction of knowledge through social and individual processes, and sociocultural approaches have led to the acknowledgement of the situated character of human development and, thus, the importance of context (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

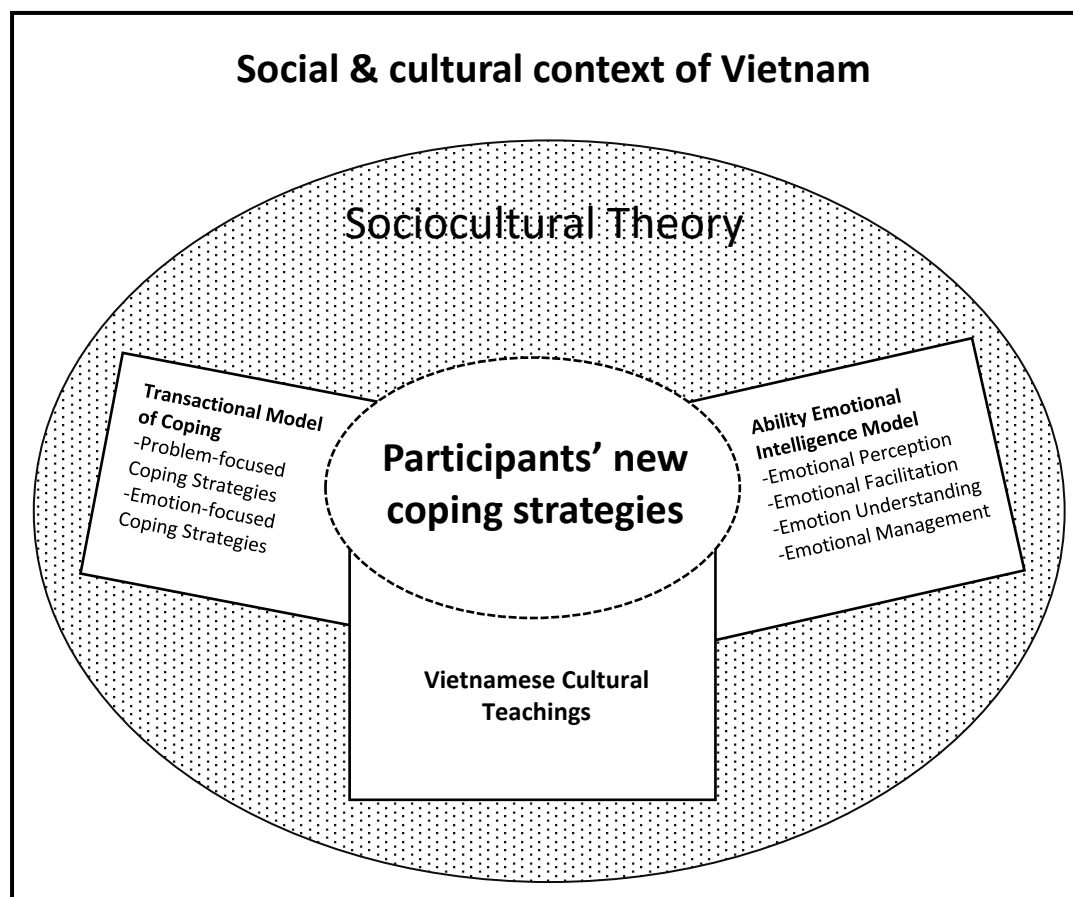
It is proposed that emotions are sociocultural products that have been shaped by the milieu, culture, religions and history of a particular society that one lives in (Hofmann et al., 2010; Hofmann & Doan, 2018). This implies an understanding of the embodiment of emotions in social practices; therefore, the study of emotions in individuals needs to consider the participation and experience of individuals involved in the social context (Sanchez, 2014). According to sociocultural theory, how Vietnamese youth and students experience and express their emotions, as well as how they develop emotional intelligence and their understanding of emotions, is shaped by their social, cultural, political and religious norms and contexts. Therefore, it would be very difficult to understand how Vietnamese students develop emotional intelligence and learn about coping strategies without understanding their unique situation, the society that they live in and its moral system.

The focus of the current study is on exploring and understanding how participants develop their emotional intelligence and how they learn about coping strategies to deal with stress and difficulties in their daily lives within the Vietnamese cultural context. I decided to use

sociocultural theory as the theoretical lens to interpret the significance of the findings of the present study as it is a perspective that would encourage me to look for the influence of the sociocultural context of Vietnam on participants' experiences. I also used Mayer and Salovey's (1997) Ability Emotional Intelligence Model and Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Coping to guide the education programme's design that helped participants develop their emotional intelligence and coping strategies. The interactions of the theoretical theory and models are presented in Figure 3 below:

**Figure 3**

*Interactions of the theories and models*



The details of how these theories/models interacted and acted as principal features that guided the programme design will be described in Chapter 4, which discusses the methods of conducting the present study. In the next section, I would like to discuss how emotions are viewed, shaped and developed from the perspective of sociocultural theory.



## **Emotions in sociocultural theory**

From the sociocultural view, no emotions can be purely internally elicited and context-free (Lupton, 1998). Some emotions (primary emotions) are biologically inherited as they are shown in infants for survival purposes (e.g., fear, anger, happiness); however, many emotions (secondary emotions) are learned through social interactions (e.g., shame, guilt) (Kemper, 1987). As a result, emotions should be viewed as sociocultural products.

For some sociocultural theorists, emotions are the result of a complex interaction between cultural and social systems, cognitive and neurological forces or influences (Turner & Stets, 2005). The emotional brain (limbic system) was there long before the cognitive brain (neocortex) developed. Evolution and the primitive brain inform our emotions and thinking (Franks, 2003). In the study of emotions, a great deal of evidence indicates that biological processes are involved in the production of human affection (Turner & Stets, 2005). For example, research on the cortex enabled researchers to explain how emotions are controlled, inhibited and organised (LeDoux, 1996; Panksepp, 2000).

If biological processes are important in understanding emotions, so are cognitive processes. The cognitive component of emotions is suggested to be a representation of the emotional meaning (Clore & Ortony, 2000). Emotions are not formed until there is an appraisal of objects or events in a situation. An encounter of a person with the environment is evaluated to see whether it is potentially harmful or beneficial for that person. If the encounter is appraised as potentially beneficial, positive emotions will be elicited within the person. If the encounter is appraised as potentially harmful, negative emotions will be elicited, and coping strategies will be used to manage the negative emotions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Cognitive processes emphasise the role of judgments in influencing people's emotions.

Social and cultural constructions (e.g., cultural ideologies, beliefs, norms) play an important role in defining what emotions are to be experienced and how these emotions are to be expressed within a particular culture. Social and cultural norms refer to the rules and expectations of behaviours in a society. For example, collectivistic cultures are likely to have more rules that restrict the expression of emotions (Argyle et al., 1986). Norms that set rules for people's emotional responses (e.g., emotional expression or suppression) are normally related to cultural values or beliefs regarding emotions. For example, suppressing one's

emotions can be seen as having great control, whereas expressing emotions can be associated with a sign of weakness in some cultures (Cheung et al., 1980). Although sociocultural theorists acknowledge the biological and cognitive aspects of emotions and feelings, they tend to focus more of their analytical attention on social rules, norms, obligations and expectations that shape the feelings that people typically experience in day-to-day life (Franks, 2003). Therefore, from the perspective of sociocultural theorists, emotions should be investigated within the social and cultural context in which those emotions are learned.

### **Sociocultural theory of emotions learning and development**

The development of emotional intelligence in sociocultural theory can be explained in three ways. First, according to sociocultural theory, human development originates from social interactions; through these interactions, people make meanings of the world and generate new cultural forms. Second, languages are seen as one of the cultural and psychological tools and play an important role in helping people make and create meaning about themselves, others and the world. Third, according to sociocultural theory, to understand an individual's learning and development, it is necessary to investigate the political, social, cultural and historical environment that an individual lives in (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991).

The aim of this study is to explore participants' experiences of developing emotional intelligence and their ability to communicate and express their thinking and feeling through language. Second, it aims to explore participants' experiences of coping and learning about coping strategies and how they apply their thinking and emotional intelligence to cope within the cultural context of Vietnam. Therefore, the sociocultural theory was a suitable theoretical lens that helped me make sense of and explain participants' experiences and enabled me to critically examine the role of Vietnamese culture in shaping those experiences and learning about emotional intelligence and coping.

According to Vygotsky (1978), the development of emotions can be best understood when examined in social and cultural contexts. Phan (2012) was influenced by Vygotsky's idea and proposed an analytical framework of human development with the following aspects: the historical and cultural attributes of a society, the individual's family within a community and

the individual himself or herself. This framework was useful for thinking about the potential influences on participants' experiences of emotional intelligence and coping.

According to Phan's (2012) framework, the development of emotions should include an examination of the aspects of a society's historical and cultural attributes because emotions cannot exist outside of sociocultural context. Culture has an important influence on emotions as emotions are culturally shaped as a way for an individual to understand himself or herself in relation to the larger sociocultural context (Hinton et al., 2009; Hofmann et al., 2010). Additionally, social norms, values and beliefs are powerful forces in shaping behaviours, especially in terms of emotional experience and expression (Matsumoto et al., 2008).

Second, Phan (2012) proposes that the development of emotional intelligence should be examined in terms of the individual's family within a community. From the sociocultural perspective of emotional intelligence learning, parents are believed to be important socialising agents that have the greatest influence on shaping children's emotional experience and development (Van den Bergh, 1990). Each family has their own specific values, beliefs and behaviours about emotions, which influence the way parents react to children's emotional experiences. Through this process, parents pass down their cultural backgrounds to their children and shape their children's emotional reactions and emotional regulation without conscious awareness (Hofmann & Doan, 2018).

Third, Phan (2012) argues that individualised perceptions and views about the development of emotional intelligence depend on the individual himself/herself. According to Phan (2012), the community, which is a larger social milieu, and the family may contribute to the formation of beliefs and attitudes towards the learning and development of an individual. However, these beliefs have to work with the internal cognitive process (i.e., thinking, reflecting ability) and non-cognitive process (i.e., self-efficacy, resilience) to achieve his or her desired outcomes. For example, expectations from cultural norms and the family make an individual believe that he or she must have excellent academic achievement. However, the person must use his or her own cognitive ability to plan and create learning strategies as well as to utilise his or her personal motivation to execute what has been planned to achieve his or her desired outcomes.

Sociocultural theory provided a useful framework to investigate participants' experience of learning about emotional intelligence under the influence of the cultural attributes of their society, their family within a community and the individuals themselves in their surroundings. Therefore, it is necessary for this study to use sociocultural theory as the theoretical lens.

### ***Rationale for sociocultural theory***

Sociocultural theory provides a useful framework to investigate how participants develop emotional intelligence and coping strategies and to explore the influences of the cultural attributes of a society, an individual's family and the individual in their surroundings. There were several other reasons for choosing sociocultural theory. First, sociocultural theory provides an analytical frame that can potentially explore an experience at both micro and macro level. It can also help explore how the social and cultural system works to shape people's experience of emotions (Franks, 2003). The analytical frame would enable me to investigate the participants' experience of learning and applying emotional intelligence and coping strategies from both perspectives of the individual self and the collective self, which is important within a collectivist culture such as Vietnam. It can also enable me to explore how social and cultural elements influence the process of participants making sense of themselves, their emotional experiences as well as their selection of coping.

Second, as highlighted in the literature review, a positivist paradigm and quantitative approach have informed most of the research that has investigated the impact of emotional intelligence and coping in people. There was a small amount of research exploring people's experience of emotional intelligence and coping from a cultural perspective. Few studies have explored people's experiences of emotional intelligence and coping by utilising a constructionism paradigm and qualitative methods (Saunders, 2019), which are best suited to exploring phenomenon within a cultural context. Only a few studies also investigated the influences of social and cultural factors on emotional intelligence and coping in people. To achieve the aim of the present study, I used a descriptive qualitative approach. I believe that sociocultural theory is a suitable framework that will help me to investigate the complexity of participants' emotional experiences within the social and cultural settings of Vietnam.

## **Chapter summary**

To summarise, this chapter provides descriptions of the ontology, epistemology and methodology of the present study. A research paradigm of constructionism was chosen because it provided a useful way for me to view the world and how this view enables people to make meanings of the world. A qualitative descriptive inquiry as the research methodology was chosen because it offered an accurate summary of participants' experiences and the meaning attributed to those experiences. Sociocultural theory, as the theoretical framework, provides a useful way to view emotions and how emotions enable people to make meaning of themselves in their social environment. It also helps focus attention on how the social and cultural system works to shape people's experiences of emotions.

In this chapter, I provided a description of sociocultural theory as the theoretical framework for the present study. From the view of sociocultural theory, emotions result from a complex interplay among cultural and social constructs, cognition, and biology. Emotions cannot be separated from the social and cultural environment in which they are shaped. The chapter also describes the learning of emotions in a historical, social and cultural context. Sociocultural theory, as the theoretical framework, enabled me to explore the complexity and diversity of the participants' process of learning their emotional intelligence and coping strategies within the social and cultural context of Vietnam. The following chapter describes the methods used to conduct the present study and describes the process of data collection and analysis.

## **Chapter 4: Method**

In this chapter, I discuss the methods used to conduct the present study, including participant selection and recruitment, data collection and analysis process, and verification strategies for the rigour and trustworthiness of the study. I also provide a descriptive overview of the emotional intelligence and coping education programme participants attended and completed during the study. Details of how the present study was planned and implemented will be discussed in the following sections.

### **Selection of context**

In the present study, the participants who lived in Vietnam volunteered to complete a programme designed to develop emotional and coping strategies. The educational programme was 10 weeks in duration and included specific teaching about emotional intelligence and learning activities aimed at developing adaptive coping strategies in participants. In this study, the programme was an instrument to help explore how participants develop emotional intelligence and learn about coping strategies.

Originally, I selected the Centre for Sustainable Development Studies (CSDS), a non-governmental organisation based in Hanoi, Vietnam, as the context for my study. It has the mission to support and empower Vietnamese youth by providing them with skills and opportunities through community-based interventions. CSDS was chosen based on my experience as a project manager for the CSDS Young@Heart project in 2015. I knew that the young people who joined the CSDS projects had demographic information that matched with participants' selecting criteria of the present study. However, the CSDS could not help me recruit enough participants for the present study; therefore, I decided to select Hanoi city as the new context for my study. This change not only enabled me to recruit sufficient participants more quickly and effectively but also helped me to maximise the variation of the sample for the present study.

### **Sample**

I focused on 17–25-year-old Vietnamese because youth aged 14–25 years old have been reported to be the group that has a growing number of mental health problems in recent

years (UNICEF, 2018). There has also been a growing demand for developing educational programmes or interventions to improve wellbeing in this age group (Doan, 2014).

The four criteria for the selection of participants were:

- Vietnamese undergraduate students aged 17–25 years old, who came from different cities/provinces in Vietnam, studying at different universities in Hanoi
- those interested in personal development and could commit to completing the 10-week education programme
- those willing to take part in and complete all data collection activities of the study, including audio diary, interview and video recording, and
- those able to articulate and discuss their experience of learning new skills and knowledge and how they applied these skills and knowledge in real life.

The first criteria ensured that all participants fit with the sampling strategy's targeted group and would have access to the programme. The second criteria ensured participants were likely to complete the full programme and had sufficient experience of emotional intelligence and coping strategy development to reflect on and discuss them. The third and fourth criteria ensured that participants would be able to share their experiences of their development of coping strategies and emotional intelligence and experience practising these strategies in everyday life.

Sample sizes for qualitative studies tend to be smaller than in quantitative studies and vary between 20 and 30 individual interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 1998). For the current study, 21 participants agreed to participate and shared their experiences of emotional intelligence and learning about coping. However, the small sample size was not a barrier to the present study for the following reasons. First, the sample size would be affected by the purpose of the study (Patton, 2002). The aim of the present study was to investigate the in-depth experiences of emotional intelligence and coping and not focus on examining the generalisability of the data. Therefore, it is important to collect rich data that could tell a meaningful story to answer the research question. The small sample size of the present study made each participant more accessible and allowed the researcher to collect a lot of rich data from them. A larger sample size in qualitative research might create more problems in the

data collection process. The problems include requiring more participants, being less accessible, collecting fewer data and data being shallow (Morse, 2000).

Second, the sample size would be affected by what can be done with available time and resources (Patton, 2002). In the present study, the researcher was also the facilitator of the educational programme; having a larger sample size could create an extra amount of work for the researcher and could lead to exhaustion and feeling overwhelmed. Twenty-one participants were an appropriate sample size that allowed the researcher to comfortably and effectively deliver the educational programme and manage the data collecting and analysing process with the available time and resources of the present study.

Sample variation was maximised by creating a matrix in which each participant would be as different as possible from others in the dimensions of age, gender, the field of study, university and geographical location of their hometown (Patton, 2015). This matrix helped promote the selection of participants who could provide a range of insights. The demographic information of participants in the present study is presented in Table 8 below.

**Table 8**

*The demographic information of participants*

No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Study Major
1	Tam	F	21	Biology Teaching
2	May	F	22	Graphic Design
3	Eira	F	22	Psychology
4	Vicky	F	20	Linguistics
5	Alaska	F	23	Banking
6	Sen	F	22	Biology Teaching
7	Te	F	24	Business
8	Aioon	F	22	Teaching
9	Marice	F	20	Business
10	2K	F	21	Banking
11	Silvia	F	22	Linguistics
12	Wind	F	23	Finance
13	Storm	F	21	Finance
14	Bear	F	22	Psychology



15	Hehe	F	22	Industrial Design
16	BDZ	M	21	Psychology
17	Pink Frog	M	21	Business
18	Kevin	M	22	Psychology
19	Juan	M	22	Chemistry
s20	Thad	M	22	Graphic Design
21	K	M	25	Engineering

## Participant recruitment

At first, my recruitment plan was to recruit participants through CSDS. CSDS provided approval to deliver the programme at a selected venue and was willing to provide access and assist with recruiting participants. After gaining Human Ethics Committee approval from Victoria University of Wellington, I provided the full details of my proposed programme to CSDS via email. CSDS agreed to send a recruiting email to all relevant groups in their database; however, the content of the email that was sent out to prospective participants needed to be edited to follow their default email format. A coordinator from CSDS created an email that was sent to the relevant, targeted audience with the attachment of my original recruiting email. Two weeks after CSDS sent out the recruiting email, I received emails from only three students interested in participating in the study.

I decided to change my recruitment strategy and posted the recruitment letter on my personal Facebook page and asked my friends to share the letter on their Facebook walls. Twenty-four hours after of posting the letter, I received emails from 50 people interested in participating in the programme. Twenty-five potential participants were selected using a maximum variation purposeful sampling strategy. I sent them an email containing an information sheet and consent form. Twenty-three of those replied with willingness to join the programme. All 23 potential participants signed consent forms and sent them to me via email before the beginning of the programme. During the programme, two participants decided to withdraw from the programme. One participant withdrew because it was too tiring for him to travel a return trip of 60 kilometres for each training session. Another participant said that he withdrew because the programme did not fit his needs; he needed psychotherapy and tools

to deal with his psychological problems rather than information about emotional intelligence and coping strategies. When the two participants withdrew from the programme, they were informed that their prior collected data would be erased. Therefore, the total number of participants in the programme was 21 undergraduate students.

A week before the programme started, all participants were invited to have their first one-on-one interview with me. This interview was a part of data collection activities and an opportunity for me to build rapport and trust in participants. At the beginning of the interview, I informed the participants about the programme, provided an overview, described the data collecting process and invited participants to ask questions. When the participants demonstrated that they understood the information and had no more questions about the programme or the study, I interviewed them about their motives for joining the programme, the problems they wanted to fix and their desired outcomes.

### **Overview of the educational programme**

The education programme was used to help participants develop greater literacy, understanding and awareness of emotional intelligence and enabled the researcher to collect data from participants for the present study. The ADDIE model stands for analysing, designing, developing, implementing and evaluating (Chan, 2010). This model was utilised in building the education programme for this study. The content of the programme was designed following the principle features set by the Ability Emotional Intelligence Model of Mayer and Salovey (1997) and the Transactional Model of Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). It also applied sociocultural theory in pedagogy and cultural teachings based on the values system of Vietnam, which is a mixture of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and Socialism. The programme was delivered in the Vietnamese language. The content of the programme could be found in Appendix A that provided an overview of the programme of developing emotional intelligence.

The programme was designed following the order of emotional intelligence abilities arranged in the Ability Emotional Intelligence Model. As a result, four different emotional intelligence abilities were learned and practised in the 10 sessions of the programme in the order from basic to higher psychological processes. The Transaction Model of Coping provided knowledge

to help participants distinguish emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies, the pros and cons of each strategy, and adaptive and non-adaptive coping. The programme and learning activities enabled participants to combine this knowledge of coping with emotional intelligence abilities to develop more adaptive coping strategies that could be used to cope with stress and social and other pressures that cause distress.

The application of sociocultural theory in pedagogy emphasises the importance of culture and context in making sense of what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding. It is stated that, in order to translate theory into practice, a learning environment influenced by sociocultural theory should include the following principles:

- Focus on student's learning, not outcome or performance.
- Students and teachers are co-constructors of knowledge.
- Utilise the ideas of guidance rather than instruction.
- Make sure that students will be the ones completing the tasks so that the students can notice the positive impact on themselves.
- Motivate learners to the active process of self-learning with appropriate guidance (Hogan & Pressley, 1997; Gonulal & Loewen, 2018; Bradley & Bradley, 2004)

The programme was designed, developed and delivered with similar principles. The programme comprised 10 sessions conducted every Sunday for 180 minutes (2:00 pm–5:00 pm) in a co-working centre in Hanoi, Vietnam. The researcher facilitated all the sessions with the assistance of two programme assistants. The programme assistants were responsible for preparation before the sessions started (e.g., setting up equipment, signing in participants, printing learning materials, etc.), assisting participants in doing activities when required and taking notes during group discussion activities. Before the programme started, participants were informed about the roles and duties of the programme assistants. Participants were also informed that any participant with more than three absences would be asked to leave the programme.

The content of the programme was designed to help participants to overcome the problems that young Vietnamese people are facing (see Chapter 2), including:

- lack of emotional and mental health literacy

- difficulties in managing intense emotions
- maintaining good relationships with others
- an inability to express feelings
- using maladaptive coping strategies.

The content of the programme focused on two main topics. Half the content consisted of the core topics of emotional intelligence of improving participants' abilities in identifying, facilitating, understanding and managing their emotions. The other half of the content was tailored to the needs of Vietnamese young people in developing their adaptive coping strategies, including topics of self-awareness, self-regard, assertiveness, time management and communication skills. An example of the programme's content is presented in Figure 4 below, and details of how the programme was designed, developed and implemented can be found in Appendix A that provided an overview of the programme of developing emotional intelligence.

**Figure 4**

*Example of the outlined content of the programme*

**The emotional intelligence and coping programme for Vietnamese undergraduate students**  
Brief descriptions of content

No.	Topics	Learning objectives	Information content	Activity
1	Introduction	Creating a safe, respect and fun environment for the programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Providing an overview of the programme</li> <li>- Explaining protocol of group sharing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Games to build rapport, trust and respects among participants</li> <li>- Games for participants to have chances to talk to all other participants and remember their name</li> <li>- Introducing the principle "safe, positive, respect and confidential" to all participants and seek their agreement on the principle</li> </ul>
2	Identifying emotions	Developing ability to identify and label emotions to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- see the situation more clearly</li> <li>- make best decisions among different options</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emotional identification and labelling are the foundation for emotional regulation</li> <li>- Emotions are temporary</li> <li>- Emotions and bodily sensation are interconnected.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Practicing emotional identification and labelling via short video clips with a provided emotional identification tool</li> <li>- Dancing games to enable participants to experience emotional regulation by changing bodily sensations</li> </ul>

## Data collection

Data were collected from both participants and the researcher of the present study. Data collected included qualitative and quantitative data from participants and qualitative data

from the researcher. Originally, the study was going to include an evaluation of the effectiveness of the education programme alongside participants' experiences, and so pre-test and post-test data measures were included to demonstrate the impact of the programme. The quantitative data collected from participants comprised 21 pre-tests and 21 post-tests for the Brief COPE inventory (Carver, 1997) and 21 pre-tests and 21 post-tests for the Wong Emotional Intelligence Scale (Wong et al., 2004).

However, the focus of the current study changed to be more about participants' experiences of emotional intelligence and coping rather than a programme evaluation; therefore, the quantitative data was not included. There were also issues with the reliability of the self-report measures chosen because participants did not complete the tests correctly. For example, the estimated time to complete the test was 30 minutes, but some participants completed the tests in 10 minutes. I discussed these issues with my supervisors, and it was decided that the quantitative data should not be included in the findings of the present study. I could not use the quantitative data collected in the Brief COPE inventory by Carver (1997) and the Wong Emotional Intelligence Scale by Wong et al. (2004) as there was incomplete data. However, I utilised the responses to these scales to guide my interview questions, which explored participants' perceptions and experiences of using emotional intelligence and coping strategies.

Qualitative data collected from participants consisted of individual semi-structured interviews, audio diaries, cogenerative dialogues and personal feedback of participants sent via their email and Facebook accounts. In total, qualitative data collected from participants were 63 interviews (approximately 29 hours), 193 audio diaries (approximately 28 hours), participants' feedback from three emails and 33 Facebook messages, and eight cogens (approximately four hours). All qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis guided by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013). An outline of the data collection methods, purposes for each method and how data were used can be found in Table 9 below.

**Table 9**

*Qualitative data collected from participants to be analysed*

<b>Qualitative data collected from participants to be analysed</b> <i>All qualitative data collected from the methods below were analysed by thematic analysis guided by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) and were used in the findings of the present study.</i>				
<b>Data collection method</b>	One-on-one Semi-structured interviews	Audio Diaries	Participant feedback (as part of audio diaries)	Cogenerative dialogues
<b>Data collected</b>	63 interviews Total: approx. 29 hours Ave. duration: 29.2 mins Longest: 61 mins Shortest: 22 mins	193 audio diaries Total: approx. 28 hours Ave. duration: 8.4 mins Longest: 47 mins Shortest: 3 mins	3 emails and 33 Facebook messages	8 cogens Total: approx. 4 hours Ave. duration: 28.7 mins Longest: 41 mins Shortest: 21 mins
<b>Purposes</b>	<u>Time 1: Before the programme started</u> Participants' narrative on: - motives for attending the programme - perceptions of issues/problems - coping strategies currently being used  <u>Time 2 (5<sup>th</sup> week of the programme) and time 3 (after the completion of the programme)</u> Participants' narrative on: - changes in perceptions and attitude - changes in coping strategies used in daily life - changes in participants' relationships with people around	Participants' narrative on: - description of emotional events in their daily lives - how participants handled their emotional events - self-rate of their day - awareness of participants' irrational beliefs - how participants dealt with their irrational beliefs - barriers and achievements when applying learned knowledge and skills in real life.	Participants' thoughts on: - the things participants like and dislike in the programme - their perception of the facilitators and facilitating styles - personal requests (e.g., to be (or not) grouped with a particular member) - sharing of positive feelings from immediate achievement from applying knowledge and skills.	Participants' narrative on: - factors that hindered and motivated participants in learning in the programme - action plans to improve learning and teaching in the programme - barriers and achievements when applying learned knowledge and skills in real life from a collective point of view - solutions to overcome the barriers in applying learned knowledge and skills in participants' daily lives.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- application of emotional intelligence in daily life</li> <li>- clarification for unclear things said in audio diaries and cogens.</li> </ul>			
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## Data collection methods

Three different data collection methods were employed in the present study: audio diaries, cogenerated dialogues and semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Audio diaries are a valuable source of data and provide deeper insights into participants' experiences of developing coping strategies using emotional intelligence (Williamson et al., 2015). Semi-structured interviews were used to help clarify data from the diaries. They enabled the researcher to collect additional insights into the participants' experience of developing emotional intelligence and practising learned coping strategies in real life (Spotwart & Nairn, 2014). The combination of the two methods, or the diary-interview method, offered rich information and insights about participants by offering more narratives to clarify the experiences recorded in their diaries (Bytheway & Johnson, 2002).

Cogenerated dialogues (cogens) was a method that enabled each participant to contribute their own social, cultural, religious and political perspective to the group dialogue. The method also allowed participants to reach an agreement on elements that motivated or hindered them from practising the learned knowledge, tools and techniques for developing emotional intelligence from their individual and collective points of view (Higgins & Eden, 2017; Tobin & Roth, 2006). The triangulation in data collection methods helped the researcher find consistencies in the findings (Yin, 2014) and enhance the present study's credibility.

### ***Audio diaries***

Audio diaries have been used in various fields of study, including medicine, psychology, geography and sociology (Worth, 2009). Audio diaries have been utilised as a data collection method to investigate the development of personal and professional identities (Verma, 2020), the experience of emotions (Cottingham & Erickson, 2020) and the role of hope in coping (Bernays et al., 2014). Audio diaries are an effective data collection method that is sensitive

to time (Verma, 2020) and effective in capturing the sequential and varied experience of emotions (Cottingham & Erickson, 2020) and the lived experience of participants (Bernays et al., 2014).

Diaries are research methods that are often used when researchers are interested in understanding psychological phenomena because diaries provide valuable insights into the phenomena within their social context (Crozier & Cassell, 2016). The audio diary method can be considered an evolved form of the written diary as it captures thoughts, feelings and perceptions (Verma, 2020). Audio diaries are a research method positioned within the constructionist paradigm and use narrative inquiry as a core component of theoretical design (Durrheim, 1997).

In the present study, audio diaries were chosen as one of the data collection methods because they provide deeper insights into participants' experiences and the cognitive processes that underpin them (Williamson et al., 2015). Audio diaries also enable researchers to obtain information on private aspects of people's lives that can be missed by other methods (Worth, 2009) and this method is considered the closest form to direct observation in which participants record their lived experiences in their own way (Derry et al., 2010). Audio diaries also have higher completion rates than written diaries (Hislop et al., 2005).

### **The procedure of conducting audio diaries**

In the present study, the audio diary method was conducted following the procedure proposed by Crozier and Cassell (2016). Participants used their phones to make diary entries, anywhere and at any time they wanted during a day, to reflect or make comments on their experience of emotional intelligence and coping. Participants were informed that they would be provided with a recorder if they could not use their phones to record. One participant requested a recorder device; an MP3 recorder was provided for him, and it was returned to the researcher after the completion of the programme.

Clear guidelines about what should be recorded were given to participants to help them focus their attention on what to reflect on when recording. Guidelines were given to participants twice when conducting audio diary activities. The first guideline was provided to participants in the first session of the programme, which focused on describing emotional events in their



daily lives and rating their day as a whole. The second guideline was provided to participants in the fifth session of the programme, with an additional part that focused on participants' awareness of their self-defeated beliefs and how they dealt with them. Participants were asked to record in their audio diary every day. They were told that each audio diary should be 10–15 minutes long. Participants were invited to pick two diaries of their most interesting reflections on their experience to submit to the researcher for analysis. Participants agreed to send their diaries on Fridays. Their recordings were sent to the researcher's university email address, which has two layers of password protection to keep the data secure. Participants also agreed that the researcher would send them a reminder of diary submission via Facebook message on Thursdays.

About 60% of submitted accounts in the audio diaries were irrelevant to the research question and not analysed or used. There were several reasons for this. First, participants shared that sometimes they submitted the entries because they did not want to disappoint the researcher. As a result, the recordings often did not have much information related to the research question but contained some reference to their experiences. Second, participants shared that they often wanted to record their diaries at the end of their day; however, most of them had to share a room with others (e.g., family members or roommates in rented accommodation). Therefore, participants said it was a challenge for them to find privacy and a space where they felt safe and comfortable to record and reflect on their day's experiences (Crozier & Cassell, 2016).

Some participants also shared that they hesitated to record or wanted to avoid making their audio diaries sometimes because they experienced nervousness or felt anxious when they did (Worth, 2009). For example, one participant shared that sometimes she felt nervous and could not honestly share her stories when recording. She imagined someone listening to her recordings and worried that the person might judge her for what she said. Many audio diary files had technical issues such as disjointed monologues, low-quality sound or recording with loud background noise. As a result, some of the files were unable to be transcribed or used (Cottingham & Erickson, 2020).

### ***Cogenerative dialogues***

Cogenerative dialogues (cogens) are reflective conversations that occur among participants who can be selected from any group participating in a given field (Tobin, 2014). Cogens focus on the discussion of shared experiences within a group setting, like the educational programme in the current study. They are used to explore the contradictions that might interfere with participants' learning and to develop a plan to improve the quality of learning and teaching (Shady, 2014). Cogens are a data collection method that offers interesting insights into participants' aspects of social life, verbal and nonverbal interactions between participants, and the emotional content elicited from their reflective conversations (Higgins & Eden, 2017; Tobin & Roth, 2006). Cogens enable each participant to contribute their own interpretations and accounts of social, cultural, religious and political influences to the group dialogue. They also encourage participants to discuss and agree on elements that motivate or hinder them from practising the learned knowledge, tools and techniques for developing emotional intelligence from their collective point of view.

Cogens have been used to investigate various aspects of how to improve learning and teaching in the programme. Cogens are useful to help people to cross cultural boundaries, positively change their perception of the learning environment and build stronger bonds with others (Hsu, 2019). Additionally, cogens are powerful in helping researchers unfold participants' collective understanding of classroom or learning community culture, learning structures and the topic of learning (Higgins & Eden, 2017). Moreover, it is suggested that cogens are useful in understanding the role of culture alignment on academic performance in participants (Shady, 2014).

In the present study, I utilised cogens as one of the data collection methods to explore what motivated and interfered with participants' learning about emotional intelligence and what influenced them when practising learned knowledge and coping skills they developed in the programme. The method was also chosen as it could help make sense of the benefits and challenges participants experienced in their daily lives but from a collective point of view.

### **The procedure of conducting cogens in this study**

In the present study, cogens were conducted and followed the protocol proposed by Shady (2014). Group cogens were utilised as a method of collecting data. Participants were given the choice of not being video recorded before the programme started. All participants gave consent for the researcher to use their videos or images recorded in sessions. Recording started when the first participants arrived and stopped when the class ended. Cogens took place in the last 30 minutes of each session. Participants were reminded of the cogens' purposes and rules in every cogens activity. The cogens questions were:

- (i) *What can be changed or added to make better programme sessions in the future? and*
- (ii) *What factors hinder or motivate participants to apply and practise new knowledge about emotional intelligence and coping skills?*

A programme assistant took notes of what had been discussed in cogens. At the end of the cogens sessions, the facilitator read aloud all the notes and confirmed that all participants agreed on action plans. The notes were posted on the Facebook page later that day.

### **Results**

Eight cogens were recorded. Six cogens were about what motivated or hindered participants in learning and practising learned knowledge and what can be changed to increase learning and teaching quality in the programme. Two cogens were about the benefits and challenges of using emotional intelligence and coping strategies in their daily lives.

In each of these six cogens, participants discussed their self-perceived happiness and unhappiness in the sessions. The main topics that participants discussed were:

- Logistics (e.g., preferable type of chairs or training room, their favourite refreshments).
- Delivery methods (e.g., the facilitator should speak more slowly, the activities instructions should be made in clearer steps, posting materials on the Facebook group and allowing more time for one-on-one sharing).
- Class rules (e.g., no cell phones should be used during class time, be on time).

To produce an action plan in cogens sessions, participants were invited to contribute possible solutions for issues and offer suggestions for improving the programme delivery and sessions. All ideas were listed, and all participants voted on each idea. Ideas that received the most votes would be executed in the following sessions. With my understanding of Vietnamese culture, I was aware that sometimes people would agree with something they did not like to maintain group harmony. In the interviews, I asked each participant if they were happy with the way the action plans were made during cogens. All participants said they were happy with how the action plans were made. They added that they were rarely asked to give opinions on solutions in other settings. They were willing to follow the plans because they were their voices, and they voted for those plans to be executed.

In the two cogens that were about how participants developed their emotional intelligence and used coping strategies, participants discussed two main topics:

- Sharing their experience of practising emotional intelligence and coping strategies in their real lives (e.g., giving feedback about having difficulties using some of the tools to resolve problems in real life; or experiencing happy and proud feelings when they were able to use the knowledge and coping skills to help loved ones).
- Asking for collective advice about a problem that an individual participant was facing (e.g., asking for the experience of what other classmates would do when feeling powerless about parents' unreasonable expectations).

### **Issues in conducting cogens**

There were several issues when conducting cogens in the present study, including videos that could not be utilised and the data from cogens not being relevant to answer the research question. Some cogens videos could not be used because not all the participants could be captured in one single video frame. This created difficulties in tracking the transactions between participants during the discussion. The reason for this problem was the small size of the training room. The room size made it difficult to set up cameras in positions that could capture the whole class in one frame. Four different strategies of setting cameras were tried; however, those strategies did not help achieve the desired result of filming the class in one frame. I discussed the issue with my supervisors and decided to use the audio recordings of cogens instead of the video of cogens. My decision was made based on the present study's

focus on exploring participants' experiences of developing and using emotional intelligence and coping strategies rather than the physiological process underlying their emotional expression. Some of the data collected from cogens were excluded because they were irrelevant to answering the research question. For example, in one session, a participant told a story about her mother's unreasonable expectations toward her and asked how other participants would react if they were in her situation. The discussion was mainly about authoritarian parenting styles in Vietnamese culture and how children had to suffer from that parenting style, rather than talking about the coping strategies they used to deal with the situation. In another session, participants shared their collective experience of using the learned knowledge and skills to help people around them. They spent most of the session talking about how the experiences created happiness and confidence in them. The second purpose of cogens was to explore factors that hinder or motivate the participants to apply knowledge of emotional intelligence and practise new coping skills. As a result, the purpose of the cogens was not successfully achieved in some sessions.

### ***Interviews***

Qualitative interviews are a research method that allows researchers to have a conversation with people who have knowledge of or experience with the problem of interest. Through such conversations, the researchers explore others' experiences, motives and opinions in detail and learn to see the world from different perspectives rather than their own (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interviews enable researchers to reconstruct events they have never experienced by allowing researchers to gain access to people's subjective understanding to know what meaning they have made from their behaviours in a particular situation. Additionally, interviews help researchers examine the complexity of the real world by putting together descriptions from separate people and creating portraits of complicated processes (Seidman, 2006). Moreover, interviewing is a suitable tool for investigating people's personal and sensitive issues or choices. This method is especially important when the phenomenon being studied is nearly invisible such as the emotional world of young people or how they develop their coping strategies to deal with difficulties in their daily lives (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Brinkmann (2013) suggests that there are three different structures of conducting interviews: structured interviews, unstructured interviews and semi-structured interviews. *Structured*

*interviews* are used when a researcher wants to investigate how participants answer specific questions so that answers can be compared and quantified across participants rather than exploring the conversational production of social life. *Unstructured interviews* focus on facilitating interviewees to tell a story in a way that can highlight the most important experience, influence, circumstance or lesson of a lifetime. *Semi-structured interviews* focus on obtaining descriptions of an interviewee's world in order to make meaning of the described phenomena (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The purpose of the present study was to explore the experience of participants in developing emotional intelligence and their learning and use of coping strategies. Therefore, I decided to use semi-structured interviews as one of the data collection methods for the present study.

Semi-structured interviews are an essential source of data that provide important insights into the issue of interest (Yin, 2014). Semi-structured interviews provided direct access to participants' experience of their lived world and encouraged participants to describe as precisely as possible what they feel, think and act in specific situations and how they respond to different emotional events (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). This method helped me clarify data from the cogens and diaries and collected additional insights about the participants' experiences of developing emotional intelligence and practising learned coping strategies (Spotwart & Nairn, 2014). This type of interview also helped create considerable reciprocity between the participants and me, which allowed me to thoroughly investigate the participants' responses for clarification and more meaning-making (Galletta, 2013).

### **Conducting semi-structured interviews**

Each participant was interviewed three times: one week before the beginning of the programme, five weeks after joining the programme and two weeks after the completion of the programme. The purposes of the first interview were to provide information about the programme and explore participants' motives for joining the programme, their current coping strategies and immediate problems. The second and third interviews aimed to investigate participants' experiences of developing and using emotional intelligence and coping throughout and after the programme. The interviews also helped me explore and clarify ambiguous and contradictory data provided in audio diaries, previous interviews and group discussions in the programme.

An agreement was made among participants and the researcher via email that a Facebook page would be used as an official communication channel for arranging interviews. It was used for making announcements about changes, asking questions and discussing posted learning materials relating to the programme. All interviews were organised and managed on this page. The process of arranging an interview was as follows. A poll was created with four options of time, date and location for participants to choose. A reminder was sent to each participant one day before and two hours before the interviews. Before interviewing a participant, indicative questions were presented to participants to see if they were comfortable with the questions. Details of these questions could be found in Appendix H, which contained the indicative questions for semi-structured interview. Participants were informed that two recording devices would be used to minimise technical risks.

After completing each interview, audio files were immediately copied to my password-locked laptop and uploaded into the OneDrive that linked to my university account. Interesting ideas and memos were noted so I could quickly create a picture of participants' experiences across interviews. These memos played an important role in helping me to record my ideas and reflections, which helped me explore, contemplate and challenge my interpretations of the data and initial themes. The memos also contained my decision-making and included an audit trail through many phases of the present study (Birks et al., 2015).

To maximise the completion rate of interviews, I combined different strategies to make interviews an exciting explorative opportunity instead of fulfilling their responsibility for data collection activities. First, different cozy and impressively decorated cafés were used as locations for interviews. Participants shared that when they knew they had a chance to explore different cafés each time, they were excited and looked forward to having interviews. Second, I used casual language, and the interviews were informal and conversational. When invitations were sent to participants, I used “having a café date with me” instead of “having an interview with me” in the invitation. Also, participants were offered to have any choice of drink, food or dessert, which was free of charge, and added more pleasure to participants' experiences of interviewing activities.

To increase cooperation and willingness to share in interviews, I adopted the humanitarian interviewing approach of Holmberg and Madson (2014). I utilised the rapport-building

techniques suggested in this approach, including: (i) acting calmly and friendly and allowing participants to take time to think and respond, (ii) showing personal interest and creating personal conversations, (iii) showing active listening and keeping an open mind to participants' stories, (iv) expressing a positive attitude and (v) acting with helpfulness and empathy toward participants (Madsen & Santtila, 2018). Participants shared that the calm and friendly actions of mine made them feel that I was a friendly, approachable, and trustworthy person. By showing interest in participants' personal stories, I also made the participants feel they were recognised and their views and perspectives valid and accepted. My active listening behaviours made them feel heard and motivated them to share more of their personal stories. Mutual trust, friendliness and caring were built between the participants and me. No participants reported experiencing anxiety or nervousness before, during or after being interviewed.

### **Data transcribing**

A transcript is a product of an interaction between an audio file and a transcriber, who listens to the file and decides what to keep and how to represent the data provided from the audio file (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Transcription is important in qualitative research using audio data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Two methods of data transcription were considered, including naturalised transcription (or verbatim transcription) and denaturalised transcription (or clean transcription) (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). The naturalised transcription method describes the conversation and examines it for patterns. This method is suitable for researchers interested in exploring the sophistication of spoken languages (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). The denaturalised transcription method focuses on reproducing a full and faithful transcription. Researchers who utilise this method are interested in identifying the meaning of what was said (Nascimento & Steinbruch, 2019).

The purpose of the present study was to make sense of participants' experiences of changes in their emotional intelligence and coping strategies to deal with difficulties in their daily lives. The research objectives focused more on generating and interpreting meaning from the data rather than exploring the mechanism hidden under the language. Additionally, the focus was on understanding how participants developed their coping strategies was captured in the content of interviews, audio diaries and cogens rather than in the mechanics of conversations



(Oliver et al., 2005). Therefore, the denaturalised transcription method was used as the transcription method for the present study.

It is suggested that researchers should transcribe the data themselves because they are the people who have expertise in the field, have had first-hand experience in the data collecting process and have had the advantage of knowing the context and participants' reactions (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). Therefore, I decided to transcribe all the collected data myself. First, I listened to all the recordings at fast-forward speed to capture the whole picture of the data set, and I took notes of ideas that came to mind while listening. Second, I started transcribing data using voice typing in Google documents. I listened to the recording and repeated what participants said, then the content was transcribed into written text in an online Google document. Each hour of recording required two hours of transcribing and editing.

When coding the data, I put a bracket at the end of an extract, for example, 'Marice, I1, 45-48'. The information in this bracket included participants' pseudonyms, data collection methods and the lines of the extracts in the transcript. For example, 'Marice, I1, 45-48' meant the data extract collected from the first interview of participant Marice and this quote started in line 45 and ended in line 48 in the transcript. Using these identifiers enabled me to find the original extract and check the surrounding context for meaning for quotes. I used interviews, audio diaries and cogens to collect data from the participants; therefore, interviews were put as 'I', audio diaries were put as 'A' and cogens were put as 'C'.

To ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions, I applied the following methods. First, after all the recordings were transcribed, I listened to the files again and compared the audio with the transcriptions. Second, after finishing the transcription for each participant's interview, I made a short description that summarised all the main points related to the research question of the present study. I offered participants the option of receiving the full transcript or the short description to check for accuracy (member checking). I also asked them if they wanted to change or add anything to the transcriptions or descriptions. All participants requested a short description of their transcription, and two participants requested the full transcription. Two participants wanted to add more information in their description about how they positively changed after being in the programme. One participant wanted to change some

information in her transcription as mistakes were made due to the low quality of the recording sound. I added and changed the information and presented the participants' descriptions and transcriptions to review. All were happy with the changes.

### **Data translation**

Translating data from one language to another can be challenging. Translating data from one language into another is not only about language but also ensuring the translation reflects the culture in which the data were collected (Chen & Boore, 2009). The grammatical structure varies across languages and might create difficulties in preserving meaning in metaphors and capturing sociolinguistic nuances of individual languages (McKenna, 2022). In some languages, there are no direct translations; therefore, it may lead to poor equivalence in translations, which might result in incorrect translated meanings and incorrect findings (Smith et al., 2008). Therefore, translation needs to be performed well to ensure the truth of the reported findings (Chen & Boore, 2009).

McKenna (2022) points out that qualitative researchers who undertake research in one language and report their findings in another need to ensure the rigour of their work. Decisions made about translation can greatly impact the accuracy of data translated and reported (Smith et al., 2008). I decided to translate the data collected from the participants because I had good knowledge of the participant's backgrounds and contexts. I also have advanced language skills in both Vietnamese and English. I was confident that my translation could capture the accurate meaning of the data collected.

To promote the rigour of the process, I used peer review as a method for translation accuracy checking. According to Smith et al. (2008) and McKenna (2022), people selected for peer review need to have sufficient qualitative research expertise and have similar culture, language and discipline to avoid misinterpretation and ensure accurate meaning. I chose three Vietnamese students who were doing their PhDs in linguistics, education and politics. They also had substantial knowledge of Vietnamese culture and Western culture. Random translated sections were picked and sent to them for translation accuracy checking. Feedback from peer checking showed that the accuracy rate of translation was approximately 90%. There were recommendations for changes in English word selection to make the sentences more coherent and easier to understand. Changes were made with careful consideration

based on the condition that the recommended change made more sense to the three PhD students and me. After that, the transcripts were ready for analysis.

## **Data analysis**

Different methods of analysis were considered, including discourse analysis, content analysis and thematic analysis. Discourse analysis focuses more on the linguistic aspects of the data (Smith, 2015). Content analysis focuses on quantifying the issues mentioned in the data set (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Thematic analysis focuses on searching for the meanings across the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The purpose of the present study was to explore and describe participants' experiences of changes in emotional intelligence and coping strategies within the Vietnamese culture setting, and also what this meant for them in their daily lives and particular sociocultural context. Therefore, thematic analysis was selected as a data analysis method for the present study.

Thematic analysis (TA) was also chosen because it is a flexible method that is not bounded by any theoretical framework and is suitable to use with a variety of data sources, including interviews, diaries, focus groups and more (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Thematic analysis is also suitable for conducting exploratory research on topics and areas where little is known, such as the Vietnamese youths' experiences of developing and using emotional intelligence and coping strategies (Mohamed et al., 2016). Third, TA enables researchers to move beyond describing the data and helps them interpret and explain what is said by the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method enabled me to analyse the data and find out what it means for Vietnamese undergraduate students to develop emotional intelligence, learn more about coping and explain what shapes their experiences. Fourth, TA allows researchers to analyse the data from both a deductive (research question driven) way and an inductive (data driven) way (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I wanted to be able to answer the research question. However, I was also open to finding out what developing knowledge of emotional intelligence and coping meant from the participant's point of view and understanding what was important to them.

Data analysis and interpretation were guided by the theoretical framework of sociocultural theory, specifically the following key theme: the development of an individual must be

analysed and understood within the social environment in which the individual lives. Additionally, I used the Ability Emotional Intelligence Model of Mayer and Salovey (1997) to think about key aspects of emotional intelligence and how emotional intelligence develops from psychological and developmental processes. I also used the Transactional Model of Coping of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) when considering participants' accounts of experiences learning about and using coping, specifically their use of problem-focused, emotion-focused and avoidance coping strategies. This model was helpful when categorising and interpreting participants' descriptions of coping. Data analysis and interpretation were also guided by Vietnamese cultural teachings, norms and beliefs based on Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and Socialism.

### **Six steps of thematic analysis**

There are several useful guides on how to conduct thematic analysis, including the guides of Boyatzis (1998), Braun and Clarke (2006) and Joffe and Yardley (2004). I decided to use the method described by Braun and Clarke (2006) because it was a simplified but rigorous method with clearly articulated steps. There are many forms of thematic analysis and there is a lack of substantial literature on how to conduct the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Nowell et al. (2017), a rigorous thematic analysis can produce trustworthy and insightful findings. Braun and Clarke have written extensively on this issue and have provided a clear and rigorous description of how to conduct thematic analysis and the use of various methods. The data analysis process of the present study was guided by the earlier version of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). It consists of six steps of analysis and is outlined below. Since the completion of the current study, Braun and Clarke have developed their method further and renamed it reflexive thematic analysis to distinguish it from other types of thematic analysis and to highlight the important role the researcher and their subjectivity plays (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

**Step 1. Getting familiar with the data** involved the process of reading and re-reading participants' accounts and interviews so that I could become intimately familiar with the entire data corpus (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To establish trustworthiness in this step, it is vital that researchers immerse themselves in the data to familiarise themselves with the depth and breadth of the content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I read the transcripts and listened to the audio

files at the same time. This strategy helped me to become familiar with the data more quickly and in a more engaging way, as the recordings clearly showed participants' emotions when data was recorded and gave clues to intent and tone. I read through the entire data set three times to become familiar with all aspects of the data. Starks and Trinidad (2007) recommend that researchers should engage with the analysis as a faithful witness to the accounts in the data and be honest about their own perspectives, pre-existing thoughts and beliefs.

To promote the rigour in my data analysis process, I recorded initial impressions and made notes of my reflective thoughts, which were helpful for later coding. At the end of this step, a summary of highlighted ideas and patterns were made as an example in Figure 5 below.

**Figure 5**

*Examples of early impressions of data coding*

<p>DESIRE</p> <p>Bring back a happy little boy once I was (Thad - A8)</p> <p>Wanting people to start looking at me as an imperfect person but I am comfortable with and confident about my imperfection (HeHe - A7)</p> <p>"Being slim - when being slim, everything will get easier/ better for me" (Silvia - A3)</p> <p>PROBLEMS THAT THEY FACE</p> <p>Procrastination because of the fear of failure (Vicky - A1)</p> <p>Hardly asked for help because think "I will be a burden for others" (Vicky - A1, Sen - A1)</p> <p>Wanted to leave school clubs but couldn't because fear of what people will think/ judge (Vicky - A2)</p>
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**Step 2. Generating initial codes** involved a process of rigorously organising data in a meaningful and systematic way. The purpose of coding is to reduce the whole data corpus into small chunks of meaning (Braun & Clark, 2006). It is necessary for researchers to use a consistent method to generate codes before they start coding the data (Nowel et al., 2017). I decided to conduct two coding cycles involving both deductive and inductive coding. In doing this, I could produce a set of codes that richly and thoroughly captures the analytically relevant aspects of the data. The first coding cycle was inductive semantic coding. All data were imported to NVivo. Data were coded line by line to generate as many open codes as possible for the data. At the end of this cycle, 2097 codes were generated from the data corpus. The codes were checked by my supervisors, who were very experienced with coding and had expertise in coping and wellbeing. They suggested that the codes were too long and needed shortening (e.g., the code 'Don't trust anyone enough to share any of her problems' could be

shortened to 'trust issues discourage sharing'). Additionally, many codes were interesting but not relevant to the research questions. The second coding cycle was semantic deductive coding. In this cycle, coding was done manually in Microsoft Word, and I only coded the data segments relevant to the research question, as shown in Figure 6 below.

**Figure 6**

*Examples of manual data coding using Microsoft Word*

	Sub-themes	Codes	Quotes	References
54		Desired characteristics	I want to be more confident because I am very unconfident <u>at the moment</u> .	Vicky, I1, 10-12
		Unconfident in social interaction	I feel so nervous when coming into a new environment, or meeting someone I don't know much.	
55		Being ill-treated	I met many rude people. They were rude to me, the mocked me.	Vicky, I1, 53-60
		Avoidance	I was hurt but I ignored them.	
		Belief of temporary ill-treating actions	I didn't respond to them because people have done this to me before, after a while, they would start acting normal to me, so I just pretended nothing really happened.	

Cutcliffe and McKenna (1999) recommend that peer debriefing and reflexive journalling throughout the coding process can help researchers examine how their thoughts and ideas evolve as they engage more deeply with the data.

I decided to employ these two approaches to increase the rigour in the step of generating initial codes. When the coding was finished, I discussed the codes with my supervisor again. As we worked through them, we modified some existing codes and generated some new codes. Changes to codes and modifications were recorded in an audit trail, which provided brief statements and explanations for the changes made, why categories collapsed or expanded, and themes were developed. At the end of the second coding cycle, 1194 codes were generated from the selected segments of the dataset.

**Step 3. Searching for themes** involved the activity of capturing something significant or interesting about the data that tells a story that was relevant to the research question. At this step, codes were re-organised and re-analysed so that the unrelated data could fit logically in a category to develop coherent meanings in the dataset (Saldaña, 2013). Codes were carefully examined to find out which codes had a shared concept or meaning and clearly fitted together

into a theme. One code could be put in more than one group because it might provide different meanings from a different perspective. For example, the code 'calmly face the situation' could be put in both the 'Becoming more confident' theme and the 'Growth mindset' theme, as shown in Table 10 below.

**Table 10**

*Examples of searching for themes*

Categories of themes		
<p><b>Theme:</b> Becoming more confident</p> <p><b>Codes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be a person who is thoughtful</li> <li>• See things more clearly and have new perspective</li> <li>• Taking other's point of views more objectively</li> <li>• Become a careful thinking and non judging person</li> <li>• Can integrate emotionality and rationality</li> <li>• <u>Calmly face the situation</u></li> <li>• Use emotions appropriately</li> <li>• Be someone that others can count on</li> <li>• Believing in myself</li> <li>• More mature &amp; more successful</li> <li>• Appear to be calm and positive</li> <li>• Be positive when facing difficulty</li> <li>• Bring positive energy to others</li> <li>• I'm happier &amp; more positive</li> <li>• <u>Be ready to deal with negativity</u></li> <li>• Become a responsible and gentle person</li> <li>• Be more gentle</li> <li>• Having strong will</li> </ul>	<p><b>Theme:</b> Growth mindset</p> <p><b>Codes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Calmly face the situation</u></li> <li>• Accepting emotions to regulate it</li> <li>• <u>Be ready to deal with negativity</u></li> <li>• Are not controlled by negative emotions</li> <li>• Accepting emotions and find a way to regulate it</li> <li>• Keep my emotions calm and stable</li> <li>• Want to achieve emotional stillness</li> <li>• Becoming who I want to be</li> <li>• Labelling emotions makes negative feelings go quickly</li> <li>• Learning that accepting emotions doesn't mean drowning in them</li> <li>• Know my feelings and accept them</li> <li>• Can always change my reaction for better outcome</li> <li>• Finding alternative option</li> <li>• Choices of what to do with my emotions</li> <li>• Accepting my imperfection make my life easier</li> <li>• Feel more relaxed when accepting myself</li> <li>• Accepting me as who I am</li> </ul>	<p><b>Theme:</b> Roots of current struggles</p> <p><b>Codes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expression leads to worse situation in the past</li> <li>• Repress emotions to protect myself</li> <li>• People feel strange when I express too much</li> <li>• Ignore emotions because having no better strategy</li> <li>• Emotions were not recognised lead to repression</li> <li>• Still having a habit of repressing emotions</li> <li>• Talking can't express my feeling accurately</li> <li>• Repression environment in the family</li> <li>• My family avoid apology or showing affection</li> <li>• not showing emotions is following old tradition</li> <li>• Get upset with my family the same way my dad does</li> <li>• mom taught me to be cautious with what others told me to protect myself</li> <li>• Realise my response are like my dad</li> <li>• Short-temper and sensitive like my mom</li> <li>• My mom is a negative person</li> </ul>

To ensure transparency and increase the rigour of data analysis, researchers can keep detailed notes about how themes are formed and the development of hierarchies of themes (Nowell et al., 2017). I kept a detailed record of the development of themes from initial codes and the hierarchies of themes and subthemes. I also kept a record of the codes that seemed irrelevant to the research questions and put them into a separate category. Braun and Clarke (2006) advise that it is important to keep an open mind and to not discard anything when the themes and subthemes are still being combined, refined or discarded. At the end of this step, codes and extracts were reviewed and finally organised into 43 broader categories/themes that described patterns in the data relevant to the research question, which were then grouped into some initial themes.

**Step 4. Reviewing themes** involved reviewing, modifying and developing the themes that were identified in step 3. The purpose of this step was to make sure, first, the data were not misrepresented through poor coding and, second, the story that the data were telling was coherent, compelling and relevant to the research question of the study (Saldaña, 2013). At this step, I read all the extracts associated with each code in each theme and considered if the data really fitted in the category and theme. Then I collapsed the board themes into overarching themes that could potentially answer the research question. For example, the first time of reviewing themes, 43 broad themes found in the previous step were collapsed into four overarching themes, with 10 themes and 37 subthemes, as shown in Table 11 below.

**Table 11**

*Examples of reviewing and modifying themes*

Reviewing themes – Draft 1			
<b>Overarching theme:</b> What shaped my coping strategies  <b>Theme 1:</b> Cultural influences <b>Subthemes:</b> Expressing feelings is not usual in Vietnam Family environment Responsibilities of children in the family	<b>Overarching theme:</b> Gain control in life  <b>Theme 1:</b> Utilising solution-focused coping strategies <b>Subthemes:</b> Facing problems instead of avoiding them Delay impulsive actions  Asking for support from others	<b>Overarching theme:</b> Emotional intelligence  <b>Theme 1:</b> Developing emotional intelligence Emotional identification  Emotional Acceptance Emotional Management  <b>Theme 2:</b> Awareness <b>Subthemes:</b>	<b>Overarching theme:</b> Increased self-love  <b>Theme 1:</b> Understanding myself <b>Subthemes:</b> Having more awareness of positive sides in myself Exploring positive impact on myself when applying learned skills Gaining awareness of the roots of their



<b>Theme 2:</b> Living a double life <b>Subthemes:</b> Repress or deny feelings to keep harmony Maintain relationships at a pricey cost  <b>Theme 3:</b> Self-defeating <b>Subthemes:</b> Self-critical/ self-blame Self-comparing Thinking of myself as a burden of others	Utilising self-talk for self-understanding Accepting others with compassion  <b>Theme 2:</b> Applying learned skills to gain more control in life <b>Subthemes:</b> Seeking alternative solutions Utilising time management techniques Prioritising myself Being assertive Actively Improving relationship with their family	Awareness of different identities and characteristics Awareness of developed useful abilities Awareness of unhealthy patterns Awareness of other problem-solving methods  <b>Theme 3:</b> Acceptance <b>Subthemes:</b> Acceptance toward oneself Accepting others	unhealthy thinking or acting patterns Accepting myself Accepting my flaws Allowing myself to fail  <b>Theme 2:</b> Accepting negative characteristics of myself <b>Subthemes:</b> Staying open to new experience Changing self-perception  Choosing positivity Appreciating present moment of happiness
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The next step was to examine the themes to see whether they were coherently linked with other themes and could tell a meaningful story of the data that answered the research question. Checking the validity of individual themes plays an important role in deciding whether the themes and subthemes accurately reflect the meanings evident in the data set as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To increase rigour at this stage, I read the code associated with each subtheme, theme and overarching theme again with the following questions in mind:

- Does this subtheme/theme/overarching theme make sense?
- Does this subtheme/theme/overarching theme help me answer the research question?
- Am I trying to fit too much into a theme/overarching theme?
- Are the themes really separate or do they overlap?
- Are there other themes within these themes?

I reviewed and modified the themes three times. At the end of this stage, the themes were collapsed into two overarching themes consisted of 10 themes and 37 subthemes.

**Step 5. Defining and naming themes** and the final refinement of the themes was the second last step in the thematic analysis. This step aims to identify what aspect of data each theme captures and give meaning to what each theme is about (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Defining and naming themes was an ongoing process as themes were frequently re-arranged so that they

could tell the most coherent and meaningful story about the data. The process of defining and naming the themes involved the following steps. First, a brief description of one or two sentences was made for each subtheme. Second, descriptions of subthemes were integrated to produce a descriptive narrative that told the reader about the themes' features. Table 12 below is an example of the process of defining themes.

**Table 12**

*Examples of defining themes*

<b>Defining overarching theme 2: Participants' perceived changes in emotional intelligence</b>		
<b>Theme:</b> Developing coping strategies	<b>Subtheme:</b> Facing problems instead of avoiding them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Felt more motivated to face their problems</li> <li>- Not afraid to acknowledge the existence of problems</li> <li>- Could develop a plan to face it</li> </ul>
	<b>Subtheme:</b> Delay impulsive actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Resist their urge to act immediately</li> <li>- Consider aspects of the situation</li> <li>- plan more effective actions</li> </ul>
	<b>Subtheme:</b> Asking for support from others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Developed the ability to ask for support from other</li> <li>- Changed perception: asking for help is good, not a sign of weakness</li> </ul>
	<b>Subtheme:</b> Utilising self-talk for better self-understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Help them to keep negative thoughts in check</li> <li>- Help them to stay rational and motivated</li> </ul>
	<b>Subtheme:</b> Accepting others with compassion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learned to deal with situations and people with more compassion</li> <li>- Being compassionate helped participants to accept the situation more easily and be more at peace.</li> <li>- Learned to maintain some more healthy boundaries by not taking on board all criticism and negative judgments</li> </ul>

Third, names for each level of theme were carefully chosen to succinctly capture the essence of the theme. Theme names need to be short, accurate and immediately give the reader a sense of the theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To increase the rigour in naming themes, I consulted my supervisors, who know a great deal about qualitative data analysis methods, to determine whether the themes were sufficiently clear. Table 13 below shows an example of how an overarching theme changed through the process of reviewing themes and naming themes.

**Table 13**

*Examples of naming themes*

Draft 1	Draft 2	Draft 3
<p><b>Overarching theme 1:</b> What shaped my coping strategies</p> <p><b>Theme 1:</b> Cultural influences <b>Subthemes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expressing feelings is not usual in Vietnam</li> <li>• Family environment</li> <li>• Responsibilities of children in the family</li> </ul> <p><b>Theme 2:</b> Living a double life <b>Subthemes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repress or deny feelings to keep harmony</li> <li>• Maintain relationships at a pricey cost</li> </ul> <p><b>Theme 3:</b> Self-defeating <b>Subthemes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-critical/ self-blame</li> <li>• Self-comparing</li> <li>• Thinking of myself as a burden of others</li> </ul>	<p><b>Overarching theme 1:</b> Coping strategies before the programme</p> <p><b>Theme 1:</b> Suppression <b>Subthemes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience of suppression</li> <li>• Factors contribute to the development of suppression</li> </ul> <p><b>Theme 2:</b> Avoidance <b>Subthemes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid confrontation</li> <li>• Avoiding tension of being right or wrong</li> <li>• Avoid suffering</li> </ul> <p><b>Theme 3:</b> Self-Defeating <b>Subthemes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative self-talk</li> <li>• Having feelings of undeserving</li> <li>• Comparing myself with others</li> </ul> <p><b>Theme 4:</b> Unhealthy coping strategies <b>Subthemes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shouting and hitting others</li> <li>• Breaking and hitting objects</li> <li>• Self-harm</li> </ul>	<p><b>Overarching theme 1:</b> Participants' experiences of avoidance and suppression</p> <p><b>Theme 1:</b> Preventing negative consequences <b>Subthemes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoiding Criticism and Punishment</li> <li>• Avoiding Judgment and Social Exclusion</li> </ul> <p><b>Theme 2:</b> Maintaining harmony in interpersonal relationships <b>Subthemes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoiding to Protect Others</li> <li>• Avoiding Talking About Issues</li> </ul> <p><b>Theme 3:</b> Avoidance to save face <b>Subthemes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoiding Saying Sorry</li> <li>• Avoiding Criticism</li> </ul> <p><b>Theme 4:</b> Suppressing emotions <b>Subthemes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staying Calm</li> <li>• Suppressing Anger</li> <li>• Suppressing Sadness and Accepting Suffering Because it will pass</li> </ul> <p><b>Theme 5:</b> Externalising strategies <b>Subthemes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I slashed. I kicked. I screamed.</li> <li>• Self-Harm and Risk-Taking Behaviour</li> <li>• Verbal Aggression and Threats</li> <li>• Complaining and Badmouthing Others</li> </ul> <p><b>Theme 6:</b> Internal avoidance strategies <b>Subthemes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Criticism and Self-Blame</li> <li>• Worrying and Rumination</li> <li>• Resignation and Imagining Revenge</li> </ul>

**Step 6. Presenting themes** was about telling a complete story of the data in a way that convinces readers of the merit and validity of data analysis. According to Starks and Trinidad (2007), the analytic credibility of the research will depend on the coherence of the argument. To build valid arguments for my analysis, I decided to blend literature with my findings to make the story of the data stand with merit. By doing this, I not only described what each theme meant, but I also built a convincing explanation for the themes from a cultural perspective. Presenting themes involved re-arranging, editing and presenting the existing analytic writing to make it a completed story. First, each subtheme was presented with a balance between data extracts and analytic commentary. Second, themes were presented in three levels of subthemes, themes and overarching themes. Last, themes were re-arranged, developed, edited and presented as a completed story. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that The final analysis should create an overall story about what the different themes reveal about the topic. To increase the rigor of this step, I asked the same PhD students who helped me in the data translation process to check the presented themes to see whether the themes made sense to them and whether the data represented young people's experience within Vietnamese culture. Changes were made with careful consideration so that the story about the data could make more sense to the readers.

### **Verification strategies**

It is important for researchers to strive for credibility and trustworthiness in qualitative research, as they are criteria for determining a study's quality, worthiness and utility (Morse, 2018). Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four criteria to enhance trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The researcher used a number of strategies to ensure quality (Tracy, 2010) and these included memos, an audit trail and a reflexive diary to enhance trustworthiness. The researcher's data included written records of ideas, reflections and evaluations of those ideas, as well as records of changes and decision-making that shaped the findings and led to the conclusion of the present study. These tools were used to help build the rigour and trustworthiness of the present study and are discussed in more detail below.

### ***Credibility***

Credibility ensures the study's findings are true, credible and believable (Cope, 2014). To enhance the credibility for the present study, different strategies were employed, including method triangulation and member checking (Yin, 2014). A method triangulation of interviews, audio diaries and cogens helped ensure that data was collected from different sources. Additionally, tactics aimed at building rapport and trusting relationships with participants were employed to ensure the honesty of participants and resulted in the richness of data (Yin, 2014). For member checking, I offered participants an opportunity to read the transcripts of their collected data and asked them if they were happy with the transcripts or if they wanted to add or change anything (Shenton, 2004). Changes were made in transcripts or descriptions of four participants as requested. The interpretation of data was checked by the mentioned Vietnamese PhD students who have a strong background in the cultural, social and political context in Vietnam to ensure the interpretation of the data was not culturally biased. I also discussed with my supervisor each step of data analysis to ensure that coding was accurate and that the process of searching for themes and organising and defining themes was conducted rigorously. These strategies were to ensure bias and presuppositions did not unduly influence the data analysis and interpretation.

### ***Transferability***

Transferability is established by providing evidence proving that the study could apply to another setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To enhance the transferability of the present study, I provided a detailed description of the research process and participants so that other researchers would have sufficient information to decide whether the present study's findings are transferable to their setting (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I provided a detailed description of contextual factors that impacted the research, including detailed descriptions of the process of (i) selecting and recruiting participants, (ii) designing and implementing the education programme and (iii) collecting and analysing data. Additionally, I provided a rich description of participants and their self-described problems, motives and changes, as well as factors that contributed to their experience of the programme.

### ***Dependability***

Dependability concerns the aspect of consistency. This criterion ensures that the process of conducting a study is fully documented and described so that future researchers will be able to understand how an enquiry has been undertaken and be able to repeat the work (Daniel, 2018). To enhance the dependability of the present study, detailed drafts of the study protocol were made in the beginning stage of the study, which described how the study was planned and executed on a strategic level. Notes were made on how data was collected, including what was done successfully, what was not implemented, and unexpected issues and results. An audit trail was established so that I could keep track of the thought processes that led to the conclusion of the present study. Data coding accuracy and themes were checked by participants, peers and supervisors. These details would provide future researchers who want to repeat the work with a prototype model of clear steps to follow.

### ***Confirmability***

Confirmability refers to the researcher's ability to conduct the research objectively (Cope, 2014). This criterion ensured that the study's findings were not concluded based on my own viewpoint but were grounded in the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To develop the confirmability of the present study, the data and evidence of the participant's accounts of their experience of emotional intelligence and coping were presented in Chapter 5 and 6 in the form of verbatim quotes. These quotes provide direct evidence for the themes and the researcher's interpretation.

Different audit trails were also established to fully document the different processes, and the ways conclusions and interpretations were arrived at. The first audit trail was made for the whole study, recording which changes were made and the reasons for change-making in each step. The second audit trail was made for designing, implementing and exploring the participant's experiences of the education programme to record the factors that shaped the participant's experiences and learning. The third audit trail was designed to fully record the whole process of data collection, analysis and presentation. Additionally, I was using different strategies to keep an objective mind when reporting the study. For example, I discussed my concerns with different people (e.g., my supervisors and other PhD students) to have diverse

perspectives on dealing with those concerns. This strategy helped me to make informed decisions about my study and avoid biases.

I understand that it is important for any researcher to be aware of the ethical considerations surrounding qualitative research (Yin, 2014). Prior to beginning the research and starting recruitment, research ethics approval was gained from the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee. The participant information sheet, consent form, interview guide, instruction of completion audio diaries, cogens confidential guidelines form and other documents were approved prior to data collection (see Appendix). This study was guided by ethical guidelines (Wiles, 2012), and the study was carefully planned, monitored and supervised. Three main ethical principles for conducting qualitative research guided my study: i) informed consent, (ii) confidentiality and privacy, and (ii) management of potential harm and distress (Wiles, 2012).

## **Ethical considerations**

### ***Informed consent***

The aim of informed consent is to ensure that participants are fully informed about all activities they will be involved with if they participate in the study. It is very important that researchers provide sufficient information about the study so that potential participants will have an idea of what it will be like if they take part in the study and so they can give informed consent to taking part (Wiles, 2012).

In the present study, the study's aim, requirements of data collection activities, potential benefits and discomforts, and how the findings would be used were provided to participants three times: through an information sheet, in the first interview before the programme started and at the beginning of the introduction session of the programme. Once participants showed their willingness to participate and had an opportunity to ask questions about the programme, they were given a consent form to sign. Participants were told that they had the right to withdraw at any time and their data would be erased. They were reminded of their right to withdraw in each session of the programme and in three interviews that participants took part in. Participants joined the programme voluntarily. No monetary incentives were offered. Participants were presented with opportunities to not take part in any activities that

might bring them discomfort. No other participants withdrew from any activities of the programme. Participants were also presented with choices of participating in activities by themselves, their peers, the programme assistant, or the facilitator.

In the present study, the programme assistants were also given information about the programme and the role descriptions, duties, responsibilities and potential risks. When they showed interest in helping provide the programme, they were asked to sign a consent form and a confidentiality form that required them to keep all information about the participants confidential.

### ***Confidentiality and privacy***

It is important that participants are informed about how their confidentiality and privacy will be managed in the study. Participants need to know what will happen to the data they provide in the study, how those data will be reported and whether participants will be identified from those data. Participants need to be made aware of what aspect of the study is public and private and the potential risks involved (Wiles, 2012).

In the present study, participants were invited to personally contact the researcher for further information about the study. Their identities could not be kept anonymous as they were going to complete an education programme together, and this would require them to discuss and work together. Anonymity was not possible for 10 participants because they knew each other before (e.g., they were close friends, sisters, classmates) and decided to join the programme together. Those participants were made aware of the issues and the potential risks involved (e.g., their friends or family might know too much personal information about them), but they were still willing to join the programme together.

Confidentiality was maintained, and their identities (outside of the programme and in the thesis) were protected by using pseudonyms and in other publications and presentations. Participants were assured that any information gathered during interviews, cogens, audio diaries and group discussions would be kept confidential. Participants were informed that their video vignettes or images might be used in the thesis and other publications, presentations or teaching activities. In case participants did not want to be recorded, they were offered a seat in a blind spot of the cameras or had their faces blurred if they accidentally



appeared in the video or image. When participants provided informed consent and agreed that their videos and images could be used for these purposes, consent forms were provided for them to sign. All participants gave consent to the use of their videos and images recorded in the programme.

A protocol of group sharing activities was also developed to create a safe environment for sharing and ensure the confidentiality of the content of what participants shared in the sessions. Before the programme started, each participant was informed that there would be programme assistants to assist them when in the programme. They were informed that programme assistants had signed a confidentiality agreement form to keep all the information they shared in the programme confidential.

### ***Management of potential risk and distress***

In the present study, there were some potential risks for participants in relation to their mental wellbeing. I was aware that by talking about their experiences of dealing with stressful situations, using emotional intelligence and coping, participants might recall unpleasant experiences, thoughts and feelings when participating in some activities in the programme. This experience could have been potentially upsetting or distressing for them. I was also aware that by sharing with others, participants' may have their experiences validated and understood, and those experiences could be beneficial for others, or they could be judged and stigmatised. The group and programme rules helped provide a guideline that prevented this from happening and helped participants feel safe while participating in the programme.

To minimise the risks for participants, I employed the following strategies. First, I developed a disclosure protocol and discussed it with participants during the interviews and at the beginning of the programme. The disclosure protocol was to reassure participants that if they did disclose they were at risk of harm, had been harmed or harmed others, their disclosure would be taken seriously and a process put in place to ensure their safety and wellbeing as well as others. Second, I reminded participants in each session that they have the right to withdraw from any activity or the programme anytime without any questions asked. Third, I invited them to come and talk to me if they experienced any emotional distress or any problems from being in the programme. I also provided them with information about 24/7

anonymous call support and the contact of a professional counsellor, which they could use free of charge. Third, the two assistants, who joined the programme to assist participants when needed, were experienced in assisting young people in mental and emotional wellbeing. One assistant was a certified educational therapist with more than two years of experience working with students in secondary schools, high schools and universities. Another assistant was a certified life coach with over five years of experience working with young adults.

The following situation is an example of how emotional distress happened in the programme and how it was handled. In an activity of identifying emotions of an event that happened in the past, a participant started to cry. I came to her and asked if she was all right, and she identified the reason for her emotional distress. I then offered her different options: (i) stopping the activity, (ii) stopping the session and going home, (iii) keeping on working through the activities on her own, or with my support or the support of a programme assistant and (iv) talking to a programme assistant or me further about her experience. She decided to keep on working on the activity with the support of a programme assistant, and she wanted to talk to me after the session ended. After the session, we talked about what had happened. She said that she felt better and relieved after our talk. Before she left, I reminded her about all the available options for further support. The next day, I contacted her and asked how she was and to see whether she needed further support. She reported that she was feeling fine and the distress was gone, and she required no further support.

### **Management of risks to the researcher**

Managing risks for the researcher is also an important part of ethical considerations; however, it is often neglected (Wiles, 2012). In the present study, the main risk I experienced was from emotional and physical exhaustion and from preparing and implementing the programme and collecting and transcribing data.

Preparing and implementing the programme was very time intensive and exhausting. To minimise the negative impact of this process, I decided to use the programme assistants. I gave them clear and detailed instructions on how they could help me set up the training room, print out materials, sign in participants, take notes of group discussions and send out slides and materials to participants after each programme session.

In the process of collecting data, I underestimated the time and energy required for conducting interviews. I set up too many interviews to conduct during the day and only had a short gap between interviews. As a result, I had no time to rest, and it really affected my physical wellbeing on those days. After that, I changed my strategy and decided to conduct a maximum of four interviews on any day with at least an hour gap between interviews.

In the process of transcribing data, I was also affected by a participants' descriptions of her experiences and the anger she described. I became very angry because it triggered a negative experience from my past. I wanted to exclude the participant's data from the dataset because I was too distressed to deal with her account. I decided to stop working on her data, contacted my supervisors, informed them about the issue and asked for their advice. I was advised to leave her data for a while, and the next time I worked on her data if I still had the same issues, I could exclude her data. The next time I worked on her data, I did not have any problem; therefore, her data was included. My strategies to minimise similar reactions to hearing participants describe their struggles and coping included doing small exercises when feeling stressed and seeking help from my supervisors or professional help when my stress levels were too high.

## **Chapter summary**

Designing a qualitative study to explore participants' experiences of an education programme was the best way to explore how a group of Vietnamese undergraduate students develop emotional intelligence and learn more about adaptive coping. Originally, a non-governmental organisation based in Hanoi, Vietnam, was chosen as the community context to recruit participants. However, due to unforeseen issues, it was decided that Hanoi city would be a new site, and participants would be recruited through social media channels. A maximum variation purposeful sampling strategy was used, and 23 undergraduate students, aged from 17 to 25 years old, who lived and studied in different universities in Hanoi, Vietnam, volunteered and chose to participate in the study. Two later withdrew, and 21 participants completed the education programme and took part in all aspects of the study and data collection. The data collection activities included one-on-one semi-structured interviews, audio diaries and cogenerative dialogues. Interviews were conducted with each participant before, during and after the programme. Participants were asked to record audio diaries every

day and submit at least one diary per week. Cogenerative dialogues were conducted in every session of the education programme. Following data collection, a thematic analysis was conducted, and the findings are presented in the following two chapters. The rigour and trustworthiness of the present study were supported by using different strategies to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The data collection activities only started after ethical approval was gained from the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee. This study was guided by ethical guidelines, including aspects of informed consent, confidentiality and privacy, and management of risks for participants and the researcher. The next two chapters describe the key findings.

## **Chapter 5: Findings: Participant's experiences of coping**

In this chapter, I describe the participants' experiences of coping with stress within the context of their lives in Vietnamese culture. This chapter consists of two sections. In the first section, I provide a description of participants' perceptions of the stressors and problems, their motivation to develop emotional intelligence and their coping strategies prior to the programme. In the second section, I describe participants' perceptions and accounts of coping in more detail, especially their use of emotional suppression and avoidance strategies they used to deal with frustration and anger around family and other stresses. This section also includes a description of how Vietnamese culture shaped participants' use of these coping strategies.

### **A. Descriptions of participants' perceptions of stressors/problems, themselves, motives for joining the programme and coping strategies**

#### ***Current stressors and problems***

A key theme evidenced in participants' descriptions of reasons for wanting to develop emotional intelligence and learn more about coping was their everyday stress and problems, many of which related to their selves rather than external and social environments. Participants described experiencing a range of daily hassles, issues and problems, and they wanted to learn how to manage these better. However, the main problems and concerns fell into four main categories: (i) negative personal traits or characteristics, (ii) a lack of particular personal skills and abilities, (iii) fears and negative beliefs and (iv) emotion-related problems.

#### **Negative personal traits or characteristics**

Participants described a number of personal traits and negative characteristics that affected their self-esteem and self-worth including being short-tempered, lacking confidence, being emotional, procrastinating, overthinking and ruminating. Most participants thought they had problems with being short-tempered, lacking confidence and being emotional. About half of the participants shared that their procrastination, overthinking and rumination were problems that made them think negatively of themselves. Table 14 below provides more details of participants' personal traits and negative characteristics, the percentage of

participants having these traits and characteristics, and examples to demonstrate each trait or characteristic.

**Table 14**

*Participants' self-perceived negative personal traits and characteristics*

<b>Traits and characteristics</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Example</b>
Being short tempered	N=19, 90% (of the participants)	"I am very short-tempered, I think my whole family has this same characteristic" (Juan, I1, 72-73)
Lacking confidence	N=19, 90%	"I always think that other people are better than I am and they are in a higher league than I am" (Aioon, I1, 126-127)
Being emotional	N=17, 80%	"If I am sad or angry, the emotion will stay with me for a long time" (Eira, I1, 45)
Procrastination	N=13, 61%	"I know that I should do things, but I was just lying in my bed for hours" (Vicky, I2, 6-7)
Overthinking and rumination	N=13, 61%	"I can't stop thinking, I will think until my thoughts tired me out" (Sen, I1, 16-17).

### **Deficiencies and inadequacies in ability or skills**

Participants described a number of deficiencies and inadequacies relating to their perceived abilities or skills. All participants perceived that they had inadequate communication skills. They shared that they did not know how to express their thoughts and feelings effectively. Many of them could not assert themselves effectively to maintain healthy boundaries with others and maintain their mental health and wellbeing. These created problems and issues for them, particularly in their interpersonal relationships. Participants also listed other skills-related deficiencies and inadequacies, including having a lack of self-control, a lack of self-esteem and not being able to protect themselves from the negativity caused by others. Table 15 below provides more details of participants' deficiencies and inadequacies relating to abilities or skills.

**Table 15***Participants' self-perceived deficiencies and inadequacies relating to abilities or skills*

<b>Deficiencies and inadequacies</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Example</b>
An inability to tell others how they felt and a lack of empathy or compassion	N=21, 100%	"When people irritated me, I will not say anything, but if I can't stand them anymore, I will shout at them, even swear at them" (2K, I1, 86-87)
Ineffective self-expression and communication skills	N=21, 100%	"I'm scared to talk to people, I'm scared that people will misunderstand me" (Silvia, I1, 13-14)
An inability to maintain boundaries, be assertive and say no and be a people pleaser	N= 20, 95%	"It's very hard for me to say 'no', I guess I learn it from my mom" (Marice, I3, 59-60)
A lack of self-control in difficult situations	N=19, 90%	"I know that screaming and scaring people off is not helping, but it is the only way I know to deal with my anger" (Juan, I1, 81-82)
Lack of self-esteem and a need to gain others' approval	N=18, 85%	"I will always try to do more. If I can't have approval from my dad, I will get the approval from outside" (Kevin, I1, 476-577)
A lack of ability to distance or protect themselves from negativity	N=17, 80%	"I am easily affected by the negativity in my mom's stories" (Tam, I3, 13-14)

**Fears and negative beliefs**

Participants described struggling to manage emotions and negative beliefs. They wanted to learn more about these and how to manage and control them. Self-perceived fears listed by most participants included fear of being a misfit and being negatively judged, abandoned, disliked, or misunderstood. More than half of the participants believed that they were not good enough or not worth loving. They also believed that their work and school efforts were not appropriately appreciated. Half of the participants said that they had a negative self-perception or negative self-image. They also feared that people would think of them as a person with negative traits and characteristics. For example, people might perceive them as cold or someone who expresses too much and creates an emotional burden for others.

Participants described these negative emotions and beliefs as contributing to stress and overreacting in challenging social situations. Table 16 below provides more details of participants' negative beliefs and fears.

**Table 16**

*Participants' self-perceived problematic beliefs and fears*

<b>Problematic beliefs and fears</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Example</b>
Beliefs and fears of being a misfit and being judged, abandoned, being disliked and misunderstood	N=20, 95%	"It's not easy for me to show my feelings to other people because I am afraid that they will not like me anymore, I always have this fear" (Sen, I1, 35-36)
Beliefs about their competency and fears of not being good enough	N=15, 71%	"I am very stressed when thinking of the exam, but I can't rest because if I stop for one minute, other people will become much better than I am and I will be left even further behind" (Silvia, A7, 29-1)
Beliefs about their worth and concerns about their efforts not being appreciated	N=15, 71%	"My biggest fear is fear of failure and fear of being judged. My most important achievements were not acknowledged. People often said I got these achievements because my grandfather is a powerful man" (Eira, I1, 158-160)
Beliefs about their self-image and fears about being negatively perceived by others (e.g., being perceived as childish, weird, too sensitive, too emotional, or cold and distant)	N=13, 61%	"My parents and my friends think that I am a childish person and often tell me to grow up. Whenever I look in a mirror, I feel like I am a child trapped in a grown woman's body. I am ashamed of myself" (Vicky, I1, 307-309)

### **Emotion-related problems**

Issues with emotions, emotional expression and control also prompted participants to want to learn more about and develop emotional intelligence and coping strategies. Participants described that they found it challenging to manage strong negative emotions and often



reacted in ways they later regretted. Most participants shared that they would easily get angry with someone or something. Suppressing, avoiding, denying and ignoring their emotions was another Issue with emotions that most participants experienced. They also lacked the ability to regulate their emotions and the emotions of others. Table 17 below provides more details of participants' struggles with self-control and their emotional problems.

**Table 17**

*Participants' self-perceived issues with emotions*

Issues with emotions	Number of participants	Example
Getting easily angered	N=19, 90%	"I get angry easily with people around me, especially my close friends and family member[s]. I cannot control my emotions well around them" (Sen, I1, 48-50)
Suppressing, avoiding, denying and ignoring their emotions	N=17, 80%	"When I envy someone, I tend to avoid the thought. I often tell myself that I should not feel this, I should not do this" (Aioon, I1, 26-27)
Not knowing how to regulate negative emotions in themselves and cope with emotions in others	N=18, 85%	"I am easily drowned in my sadness. I make it go away by not paying attention to it, but the root of the sadness is still inside of me. I cannot feel better because I don't know how to solve it" (Marice, I1, 88-89)
Expressing too much emotion or too little	N=13, 61%	"They told me that I express too much, that I am too emotional. I really hate it" (Fink Frog, I1, 14-15)

***Motives for joining the programme***

Analysis of participants' explanations for wanting to learn more about and develop emotional intelligence and coping showed that all the participants had internal and external motives.

Intrinsic motives reflected participants' desires for self-development. Most participants wanted to develop their emotional intelligence and their ability to express and control their emotions more effectively. They also described wanting to learn how to respond calmly in difficult situations. They wanted to develop personal traits and characteristics associated with successful role models defined by the Vietnamese culture, for example, being thoughtful,

decisive and responsible. More than half of the participants expected to better understand themselves after learning about emotional intelligence and coping. Table 18 below provides more details about the participants' internal motives.

**Table 18**

*Participants' internal motives for developing emotional intelligence and coping strategies*

<b>Internal motives</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Example</b>
Learn how to effectively express and control their emotions	N=20, 95%	"I want to have the ability to express my feeling accurately with others, so they will understand how I feel, without bringing negative feelings to myself or others" (Bear, I1, 20-21)
Respond to challenging situations more calmly	N=19, 90%	"Always appears as calm, responds appropriately with whatever people say. I want to bring the feeling of calm, gentle and comfortable to others" (Wind, I1, 58-59)
Acquire desired personal traits and characteristics, including confidence, thoughtfulness, calmness, being non-judgmental, empathetic, decisive, responsible, more gentle, caring, accepting, considerate and humorous.	N=19, 90%	"I want to become a more thoughtful person, who will be empathetic, who will understand people and will not judge them for what they do" (Thad, I1, 266-267)
Understand themselves better	N=14, 66%	"I want to understand my own emotions so that I can understand myself" (May, I1, 300)

Extrinsic motives for learning more about emotional intelligence and coping were related to participants' desires to develop more advanced social and interpersonal skills. They said these skills would help them enhance social relationships and connections with family and friends and become more popular, well-liked people regarded positively by others. All participants

shared that they wanted to learn more about emotional intelligence to communicate effectively and have good relationships with people around them. About half of the participants said they wanted to develop emotional intelligence because they wanted to provide emotional comfort to others and become someone that others could count on when they needed emotional support. Table 19 below provides more details about the participants' external motives.

**Table 19**

*Participants' external motives for developing emotional intelligence and coping strategies*

External motives	Number of participants	Example
Effectively communicate with others	N=21, 100%	"I wish that I could freely express my feelings. I won't be afraid of being judged anymore. This is what I want. And I can express love to my beloved people at the moment that I want to express it. I also want that whenever I feel upset or displeased, I can express my feelings without feeling guilty" (Hehe, I1, 427-429)
Have good relationships with people around them	N=21, 100%	"I want to find a way to have more talks with my mom. I know she cares for me, and I want to have a better relationship with her" (2k, I1, 26-27)
Provide emotional comfort for others, especially close friends and family	N=13, 61%	"I want that when being close to me, people will feel my energy and my calmness, and it will make them feel positive and comfortable" (Tam, I1, 55-56)
Become a person others can trust and come to for help when they are in need of support	N=12, 57%	"I want to navigate my thought[s] in a more positive direction. I want myself to be more confident. I want to make others feel that they can trust me to share their sadness" (May, I1, 112-113)

### ***Participants' coping strategies***

Participants reported using many different coping strategies to deal with stressors and difficulties they had in their lives. From their perspective, some of these strategies were

healthy and adaptive, while others were less healthy or adaptive, and they described how they wanted to replace these with healthier strategies.

There were nine coping strategies participants perceived as healthy or adaptive coping strategies. All participants shared that using distractions was a helpful strategy for dealing with their problems or difficult situations. Most participants believed that talking to their family and friends was a good way to lift their mood and have more energy to deal with their problems. Other coping strategies they described as healthy coping strategies included indulging themselves, playing sports, solving problems, focusing on achievements, finding motivation from idols, using humour and focusing on the positive side of the stories. Table 20 below provides more details of participants' perceived healthy coping strategies before they learned about emotional intelligence and coping

**Table 20**

*Participants perceived healthy coping strategies*

Healthy coping strategies	Number of participants	Example
Distracting themselves from the problem	N=21, 100%	Watching movies, listening to music, browsing social media, sleeping
Talking to family and friends	N=17, 80%	Talking to family and friends to seek understanding and validation
Indulging themselves	N=8, 38%	Doing something immediately to lift their mood, bring relief, or increase their happiness or positive feelings, such as eating nice food, sleeping more or taking a day off
Playing sports	N=6, 28%	Playing sports to regulate negative emotions and increase energy
Solving problems	N=5, 23%	Focusing on finding a solution to the issue
Achieving more at work or at school	N=5, 23%	Shifting attention from problems and focusing more on work and feeling good about their achievements
Finding motivation in K-pop idols	N=3, 14%	Watching performances and following news of their idols to gain motivation and positive energy
Using humour	N=3, 14%	Expressing thoughts and opinions in a humorous way to relieve tension

Focusing on the positive side	N=3, 14%	Reframing or looking for lessons learned or the positive side
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Participants described a large number of unhealthy coping strategies that they wanted to change or replace with new ones. This was their main reason for enrolling in an education programme that focused on emotional intelligence and coping. The three most common unhealthy coping strategies they wanted to change included: 'doing nothing to solve their problem', 'suppressing their emotions' and 'avoiding people or situations'. Half of the participants shared that they would be aggressive towards themselves or others in response to stressful situations. These aggressive behaviours included shouting or yelling at others, blaming or criticising oneself or others and destroying objects. One fourth of the participants said they used strategies like thinking of the worst outcome, overworking or over-worrying and rumination, crying and engaging in risk-taking activities to cope with their stress. A few participants shared that they coped with stress by wishing their problems would go away, badmouthing others or binge eating. Table 21 below provides more details of participants' perceived unhealthy coping strategies before they learned about emotional intelligence and coping.

**Table 21**

*Participants' perceived unhealthy coping strategies*

Unhealthy coping strategies	Number of participants	Example
Doing nothing about their problem despite being aware of it	N=17, 80%	Lying in bed for hours, staring at the wall
Suppressing emotions	N=17, 80%	Not reacting or showing annoyance, pretending nothing is wrong, acting normal, suffering silently, numbing feelings
Avoiding people or stressful situations	N=16, 76%	withdrawing from conversations and social interactions, walking away from conflicts
Shouting/yelling	N=12, 57%	shouting or yelling at people around when being angry or annoyed
Blaming/criticising	N=12, 57%	having blaming, criticising or punishing thoughts about oneself or others or situations

Destroying objects or the peace	N=11, 52%	breaking, throwing objects or making a loud noise to make others know one's annoyance
Visualising the worst outcomes	N=6, 28%	thinking about the worst outcome, contemplating violent revenge
Overworking	N=6, 28%	taking on too many tasks and overscheduling activities to distract them from thinking about worries or concerns
Over-worrying/rumination	N=5, 23%	thinking about problems and issues all the time
Crying	N=5, 23%	crying alone in private until emotions have dissipated
Risk-taking	N=4, 19%	engaging in exciting, dangerous or potentially harmful behaviours to focus on physical sensations and pain and take their mind off emotional problems
Wishful thinking	N=3, 14%	hoping or wishing their problem will go away
Badmouthing others	N=3, 14%	Complaining, gossiping, or spreading rumours with others about the person who made them angry or secretly hoping unfortunate events will happen to them
Binging	N=2, 9%	excessive eating, drinking, smoking or video gaming as a way to cope with their problems

All the participants used a mix of healthy and unhealthy coping strategies. However, they described using more unhealthy coping strategies when they felt overwhelmed or under much stress when they were distressed or facing difficulties. Table 22 below shows which participants used which strategies.

**Table 22**

*Overview of coping strategies of participants before the educational programme*

Self-described healthy coping strategies																	
Participant	Tam (F)	May (F)	Eira (F)	Vicky (F)	Alaska (F)	Sen (F)	Te (F)	Aioon (F)	Marice (F)	2K (F)	Silvia (F)	Wind (F)	Storm (F)	Bear (F)	Hehe (F)	BDZ (M)	Pink Frog (M)
Coping strategies																	
Talking to friends/family		•		•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•
Distracting	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Treating	•				•	•			•	•				•		•	•
Finding motivation from idols	•		•									•		•	•		
Solving problems												•	•			•	•
Achieving					•	•				•	•					•	•
Playing sports																•	•
Being positive		•							•							•	•
Self-described unhealthy coping strategies																	
	Tam (F)	May (F)	Eira (F)	Vicky (F)	Alaska (F)	Sen (F)	Te (F)	Aioon (F)	Marice (F)	2K (F)	Silvia (F)	Wind (F)	Storm (F)	Bear (F)	Hehe (F)	BDZ (M)	Pink Frog (M)
Doing nothing	•		•	•	•		•	•			•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Avoiding	•	•	•	•	•	•		•			•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Suppressing	•	•	•	•	•	•			•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•
Destroying	•					•	•	•			•	•		•		•	•
Crying	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•					•	•		•
Shouting/Yelling		•	•	•			•	•		•	•			•		•	•
Blaming/Criticising	•		•	•	•	•				•	•	•			•		•
Worrying	•				•	•					•				•		•
Overworking									•		•					•	•
Visualising	•			•		•							•		•		•
Wishful thinking								•							•		•

Bad mouthing				•					•		•		•					•			
Risk taking				•						•						•	•				
Binging					•						•			•							

The next section of this chapter describes two key themes and participants' experiences of using avoidance and suppression strategies to deal with stressful situations. These strategies were the two most commonly reported strategies (after doing nothing). The following section provides more insight into how and why participants used avoidance and suppression, and offers some evidence and insights into how the Vietnamese culture may shape the use of these.

## **B. Overarching theme 1: Participants' experiences of avoidance and suppression**

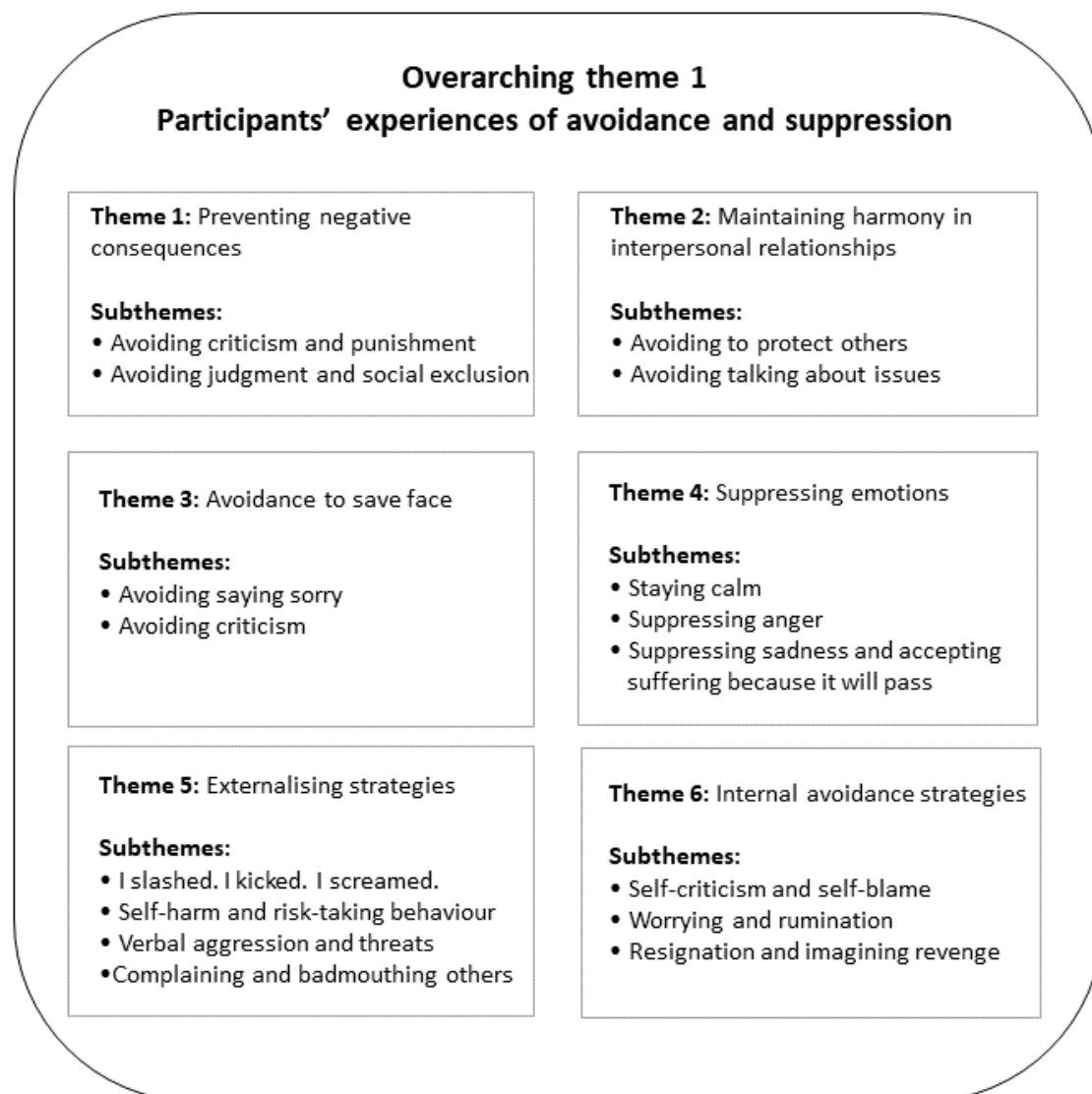
Participants used different coping strategies in their daily life situations and talked about how they developed these strategies over time. They described using avoidance and suppression strategies because they wanted to avoid unwanted consequences (e.g., being punished, judged or criticised by people around them). They then began using avoidance coping strategies to maintain harmony in their interpersonal relationships to 'save face' for themselves and others (to protect their self-respect and the respect of others).

Participants used emotional suppression because they did not feel they could express themselves openly, honestly and directly. Instead, they expressed their emotions indirectly and sometimes in unhealthy or harmful ways to both themselves and others. They suppressed how they felt but then when things became too much, they would release their emotions using physical actions (e.g., breaking objects, becoming aggressive, engaging in risk-taking behaviours, etc.) and use mental strategies (e.g., self-critical, negative visualisation, etc.) to vent, dose or diffuse emotions. The following section outlines and provides evidence of participants' use of avoidance and suppression strategies and the contexts in which they used them. Figure 7 below presents a thematic map related to participants' experience of using avoidance and suppression within the context of Vietnamese culture.



**Figure 7**

*Themes of participants' experiences of avoidance and suppression*



The following sections present the themes with relevant descriptions of participants' experience. Following the descriptions of each theme is an explanation of the possible role of Vietnamese culture in shaping the experiences of participants.

### ***Theme 1: Preventing negative consequences***

There were several key themes in the participants' experiences of avoidance as a coping strategy. Participants mainly used avoidance prior to the education programme to prevent negative consequences to themselves and more specifically to: (i) avoid criticism and punishment and (ii) avoid judgment and social exclusion.

### **Avoiding criticism and punishment**

One of the reasons participants avoided showing their genuine emotions or telling people what they thought was to avoid displeasing others (e.g., parents or people who have more power and are of higher rank) and avoid being punished.

When I was about ten years old, I often felt vulnerable, and I cried a lot. My sister always shouted at me "Why are you crying so much like that? Such a needy girl." I was thinking "Even when I am crying like this, nobody seems to care". After that, I told myself that I would not cry anymore, and I started suppressing everything. (Te, I1, 467-470)

From a very young age, I learned that expressing my feeling is a bad thing, and it only leads to a worse situation. Nobody would care if I was sad or I was hurt; they would punish me for it [expressing my emotions]. (Thad, I2, 58-60)

Te and Thad had learned growing up in Vietnamese culture and families that when they try to express negative feelings and communicate emotional needs, they may be rejected or punished; therefore, it is best to keep how they feel private and secret.

Vietnamese children learn from an early age to suppress emotions, especially around elders, parents and grandparents. In cultures that value order, power and hierarchy, those who are juniors in the family hierarchy are expected to submit to those who are senior in the hierarchy, such as parents and grandparents (Kwan, 2000). Vietnamese parents tend to adopt an authoritarian style of parenting, command obedience and use discipline and punishment such as spanking, hitting, scolding or shouting (Vu, 2016). Participants described using avoidance and suppression as a way of avoiding punishment, reprisals and negative consequences.

### **Avoiding judgment and social exclusion**

Participants reported suppressing thoughts and feelings to meet social and cultural expectations and avoid negative judgment or potential social exclusion from their social relationships.

My father is doing nothing to help the family. I want to tell my father to man up, and get a job. That's what I want to do but I can't. I am afraid that people will judge me if I do so. I will feel devastated about myself. (Silvia, I1, 537-540)

I tend to not speak my mind. I think people will be irritated with what I say, so I try my best to please them. I am always trying my best to become the type of person that people want to talk to. (Alaska, I3, 228-230)

Participants struggled to be able to express themselves around others and to show their authentic selves. They felt restricted and that they were unable to do what they wanted to do, and this caused them some distress. Prior to completing the programme, participants described choosing to neglect their wants and needs and focusing on pleasing other people and suppressing their thoughts and emotions to avoid social judgment and criticism.

Silvia chose not to tell her father what he should do because this would have been considered a disrespectful act that violated teachings of filial piety, and she was nervous and fearful when thinking of how others might react if she criticised her father. Alaska worried about how others might react to her views and opinions and feared that what she talked about might make people dislike her. She wanted to be the type of person other people would be pleased to talk to. She invested an incredible amount of mental effort to suppress her thoughts and feelings and present her 'ideal self' to others, a self that others would like and appreciate.

Confucianism-influenced cultures use a sense of shame to teach people about which behaviours are encouraged or discouraged (Berkson, 2021). As a result, people in these cultures, including Vietnamese, tend to judge, criticise, shame or socially exclude individuals or entire families if they witness behaviour that is perceived as not conforming to social norms. Therefore, when facing a difficult situation, people have to consider the negative consequences for themselves and others they care for. This may mean suppressing thoughts and emotions and maintaining a social image that is dissonant or incongruent with how they really think and feel.

## ***Theme 2: Maintaining harmony in interpersonal relationships***

Another key theme and reason participants used avoidant coping was that they wanted to maintain harmony in social relationships, prevent others from worrying about them and de-escalate the potential for conflict with others in their families. The thematic analysis of participants' descriptions of coping showed that participants used avoidance to (i) protect others and (ii) so they did not have to talk about particular problems.

### **Avoiding to protect others**

Many participants in this study described how they suppressed their emotions, and this was a strategy they used to protect their parents from negative emotions, such as worrying or sadness.

My family, I don't want them to worry about me, so I don't tell them much, just tell them necessary things. I don't think it is a good thing for myself because I have to keep all sadness within me, and I don't know how to explain that to them.  
(Marice, I1, 291-294)

Before, my dad sometimes say things that make me sad. I used to think that it was not a big deal. I think I need to talk to my dad about my feelings. That's what I thought, but I still can't talk to him. I am also afraid that if I tell him, it will make him sad. (Hehe, I3, 37-40)

Marice and Hehe wanted to share how they felt about their lives and school work. However, they decided to withhold that information and avoided talking about their situation so their parents would continue to believe that they were still doing well in life or at school. They were afraid that if they shared their feelings, they might be shamed or not be accepted or validated, in which case they might end up feeling worse. They also avoided sharing their concerns because if their parents were overprotective or authoritarian, they worried that their parents might overreact to the situation. As a result, an emotional burden would be put on themselves and family members and disrupt the harmonious state of the family.

One of the features of filial piety teachings is “to let parents live without worry and anguish” (Kwan, 2000, p. 25). As a result, many young Vietnamese choose to hide their negative emotions and problems to protect their parents and to fulfil their duty of being a filial child.

Additionally, all participants live in Hanoi. Unlike houses in Western countries that often allow family members to have their own private space, many Hanoian families live in one-room houses (Thuy & Dinh, 2019). This one-room house is their kitchen, living room and bedroom for the whole family. When living together in such a small area, maintaining harmony in the family is considered an essential duty for every family member. Therefore, it is understandable that they decided to keep worries and concerns to themselves to protect others and avoid bringing disharmony to their families.

### **Avoiding talking about issues**

Participants also shared that, in many situations, they and their families chose to use indirect communication and avoidance to deal with the situations and keep harmony in the family.

My father was complaining about how messy the kitchen was and implying that I created the mess. I was wrongly accused. We were in the middle of a heated conversation. Then the microwave made the finishing sound. I brought the food out. No one talked about what happened anymore, and we started having dinner as usual. (Bear, I1, 51-54)

When my younger sister annoyed me, I stopped talking to her and did something else. I left it [the problem] there for a while, an hour or two, and it was gone. Things were back to normal for us. (Wind, I1, 174-176)

In Bear's situation, both she and her father used avoidance to end a stressful interaction. In collectivist cultures like Vietnamese culture, maintaining harmony is prioritised over identifying who is right in the situation (Yeh et al., 2006). Bear may have wanted to stop arguing with her father because she recognised that arguing would not help her solve her problem. Additionally, there is a saying in Vietnamese culture, 'trời đánh tránh bữa ăn' (which means 'Even the lord never pours his wrath upon thee at meal times') to prevent people from making a fuss at meal times and ruining everyone's enjoyment of the food. Bear and her father may have voluntarily withdrawn from their argument and left their problem unsolved so they could start their dinner peacefully and maintain harmony for the whole family.

Wind could have chosen to confront her younger sister about the problem, but she instead chose to keep silent and give her some space. She waited for her uncomfortable feelings

associated with the problems to go away so that she could communicate with her sister in a calm state. She pretended that what happened was not a major thing that her sister needed to be concerned over. Wind chose to prioritise the harmony in her relationship with her younger sister over directly solving her problem with her sister. From a young age, most Vietnamese children are very familiar with the teaching of 'kính trên nhường dưới' (which means 'Respect the older, yield to the younger') (Vo, 2020). Wind may not have wanted to confront her sister because she was supposed to show tolerance to the younger sibling in the family. In Wind's case, avoidance may have ensured she could earn her sister and family's respect and love and maintain a harmonious relationship.

### ***Theme 3: Avoidance to save face***

Another key theme in participants' experience and use of avoidance was saving face. Participants avoided directly acknowledging wrongdoing and avoided situations where they had been hurt or when they had not been acknowledged to protect themselves and their reputations. Saving face often occurred in two contexts: (i) when participants did wrong but refused and avoided saying sorry, and (ii) when they chose to avoid situations where they felt their status and reputation might be at risk because of criticism or negative and harsh judgment.

#### **Avoiding saying sorry**

Saving face is one of the important characteristics of Vietnamese culture. To Vietnamese, 'face' is individual positive qualities and competence. Saving face is suggested to be one's want or the desire to be approved of for the positive characteristics associated with one's social role (Pham, 2007). The higher rank and the more power an individual has, the greater amount of face he or she is entitled to maintain. Losing face is one of the worst nightmares for Vietnamese people (Khuc, 2005). Findings from participants' descriptions of issues they were dealing with and their coping strategies showed that, to save face, participants often avoided making verbal and direct apologies to others for their wrongdoings.

When someone is really angry with me, I will apologise, but it will not be a direct verbal apology. I will do something to compensate for what I have done. (Eira, I1, 359-361)

My mom and dad, my family actually, if anyone makes a mistake or something like that, we use laughs and jokes to make peace with others instead of saying "I'm sorry", we don't have that culture in our family. (BDZ, I1, 288-292)

The quotes show that both Eira and BDZ knew they made mistakes and regretted their actions but avoided making a direct verbal apology to save face. To many Vietnamese people, saying sorry for their wrongdoings means verbally acknowledging their incompetence or inability to fulfil their expected role. If they admit their wrongdoing, they open themselves and their family up to social criticism, judgment or even humiliation (Do et al., 2020). Participants described how their preferred way to make up with others was by taking a different approach (e.g., treating others with food, giving them gifts or presents or helping others do something).

Participants also learned about avoidance and saving face from within their families and culture. In Vietnamese families, children are expected to obey their parents and follow their teachings as they are wiser and more experienced. Therefore, parents rarely apologise to their children because, if they do, it means they have failed to meet expectations and they will lose the respect of their children (Minh, 2021). Instead, parents will offer children pocket money or make peace with them in other ways. Participants described how they grew up learning from their parent's examples that they should avoid apologising directly to avoid losing face with their children.

### **Avoiding criticism**

A second way that participants tried to save face was by avoiding certain situations where they might be judged or criticised, or made to feel uncomfortable.

Actually, I know how to do things [household chores] now, but I will still not do them because I will get scolded anyway. If I do a chore, I get scolded because there will always be someone else doing it better than I can. If I don't, I get scolded with name calling, I was called many names, but they all mean that I am useless. (Vicky, A3.1, 12-16)

I remember that when I was a child, I was compared with one boy. He is the same age as me. People said that I am not good at holding a baby as he can, but the

thing is, he has an infant baby sister; I don't. Because of that, I never hold any babies anymore. (Alaska, 12, 278-280)

Participants described how they avoided situations that might lead to feelings of discouragement or demotivation. They also described avoiding situations where they felt they might be treated unfairly. In doing so, they lost an opportunity to develop important social skills, confidence and abilities because of their fears of failure, being criticised, being compared and losing face. They acknowledged that avoidance and saving face were maladaptive and unhealthy and were costing them. They wanted to attend the emotional intelligence and coping programme to find other ways to cope.

Vietnamese culture has many rules and responsibilities associated with gender roles. As a result, there are strong social expectations. For example, a woman must show that she is skilled at doing housework, presenting an elegant appearance, performing gentle and graceful speech, and demonstrating love and care to her family (Thu, 2015). If a woman fails to perform any task skillfully, she is very likely to be labelled as useless or faulty by others. She will lose face, and so will her family, because in Vietnamese culture, when people lose face, shame is not only brought on themselves but also on their family. Saving face is very important for Vietnamese people (Nguyen, 2017). Participants avoided performing tasks or engaging in situations that might cause them to lose face or bring shame to their families.

#### ***Theme 4: Suppressing emotions***

The second major theme in the participants' experiences of coping is related to their use of suppression. Participants shared how they often tried to stay rational, keep calm and suppress emotions such as anger when encountering stressors and challenging situations before completing the education programme. The theme of suppression involved (i) staying calm, (ii) suppressing anger and (iii) suppressing sadness and suffering.

##### **Staying calm**

Participants described how they suppressed their feelings and tried to stay calm and rational when they encountered stressful situations. Withholding one's opinion or emotions to maintain social harmony is an important feature of Vietnamese culture. This ability is seen as the core of the cultural idea of becoming mature (Yeh et al., 2006). To meet such cultural



expectations, participants in the present study, especially male ones, put much effort in suppressing their negative emotions.

When bad things happened, I numbed myself to feel nothing. And I tried to solve the problem as soon as I could. I must solve it in a completely rational way.  
(Thad, I2, 25-30)

I often say to myself “No, I must be calm. I shouldn’t be like this. This is nothing. Normalise it [problem], then it will become just a normal matter.” (BDZ, I2, 76-77)

Thad tried to block and pay less attention to his emotions so that he could think and solve his problem using logical and rational thinking. BDZ used positive self-talk to try and persuade himself that the situation was not that bad and to keep his emotions under control. Participants also shared that they used similar strategies in other situations (e.g., breaking up with a girlfriend during exam time). They used these strategies despite knowing that suppressing emotions is unhealthy (e.g., they felt they could not enjoy anything fully and could not empathise with others’ emotions). However, these strategies enabled them to maintain a positive social image of a rational or calm person. Maintaining control of one’s emotions and actions is core idea of self-cultivation in Vietnamese values systems. Additionally, to become a well-respected person, one must have certain characteristics (e.g., being harmonious, rational, careful and honest) and abilities (e.g., controlling anger and keeping an objective mind) (Nguyen, 2014).

### **Suppressing anger**

Participants described how they struggled with anger and tried to suppress it prior to the programme and wanted to learn better ways to manage it. They often suppressed their anger because they were expected to remain calm and rational in all stressful situations. Buddhism sees anger as a poison of the mind that can affect a person both mentally and physically. Anger blinds people from reasoning, and it makes them want to hurt others (Thich, 2014). Participants tried to suppress or eliminate anger immediately when it occurred rather than acknowledging and expressing anger or frustration with others.

I have to suppress myself because anger is not something very nice. It is not a good feeling, like people always said "too angry, lose wisdom". (Storm, I1, 286-288)

When being angry, I was like, "No, I must not be angry. This is nothing, no problem at all", and I would find something to do to make myself happy immediately. It worked but took a long time, and I could not enjoy my happiness fully because I was still affected by the anger. (Wind, I3, 178-182)

Storm and Wind avoided expressing anger because they feared losing control and doing things they might regret later. For them, staying in control and suppressing their anger was more important than expressing their feelings to others.

Vietnamese culture prioritises keeping harmonious relationships with others over the desire to strive for personal gain or embarrassing others (Yeh et al., 2006). As a result, expressing intense emotions like anger is strongly discouraged in Vietnamese culture. Expressing anger is also thought to create an emotional burden on people in their surrounding environment. When a person is taken over by strong emotions such as anger, they might unintentionally say cruel words or do something that hurts others. The person being hurt might find relief by seeking punishment for the person who hurt them. The result is an escalation of anger on both sides and breaks the harmony of their relationship. The disruption in their harmonious relationship not only upsets the involved people but also negatively affects the emotional states of people close to them, such as their families. Understanding the possible negative consequences of expressing anger contributed to participants thinking that it is wise for them to avoid experiencing and expressing anger.

### **Suppressing sadness and accepting suffering because it will pass**

Suppression also was extended to suffering and sadness. Participants described how they often suppressed their feelings, suffered in silence, and kept their problems to themselves. They did this because they thought expressing their emotions would not change the situation's outcome and because they wanted to keep a harmonious relationship with the people around them.

I will suffer from it [emotions] silently instead of showing it. It was a great weakness of mine. I think it will be more harmful, and take longer time, effort, and pressure to get through the problem. But everything happens for a reason, and there is nothing I can do about it. I just suffer through it, and it will pass.  
(Marice, I1, 220-223)

When I am annoyed with someone, I will just suffer from it inside and not show anything outside. I am afraid that if I do or say anything, I might make it worse.  
(May, I1, 100-102)

Marice and May kept their suffering and disturbing thoughts and emotions to themselves even though they knew bottling it up took its toll and might cause them more problems later. Suffering in silence and suppressing emotions were more common in participants who thought that their problems were predestined and who felt powerless. Participants also suffered in silence and suppressed their emotions as the situation was believed to be unchangeable, and the outcome was fixed. Because of this perception, Marice and others believed that suffering through their emotional distress was the best way to get through the problem. In May's case, she suppressed her thoughts and emotions and suffered alone because she feared taking action could worsen the outcome. She was worried that she might create a burden for herself and others.

Many Vietnamese believe that distress and suffering are a natural and inevitable part of life that is predestined to happen, and there is nothing they can do to change it (Nguyen, 2018). Therefore, many Vietnamese can only accept sadness, loss and disappointment and suffer through it. This belief is rooted in the Buddhist belief that unwanted or problematic events in the present are the karmic result of evil deeds or sins that one has done in the past or in previous lives. If a person wants to clear a sin they have committed in the past, they must endure the distress resulting from the event until it passes (Nguyen, 2018). Additionally, Vietnamese culture encourages people to avoid interpersonal conflicts and values connectedness and harmony between people (Ngo, 2014). As a result, Vietnamese people tend to sacrifice themselves, and what they want/need to maintain harmony in relationships. Therefore, keeping problems to themselves is a safe choice for them to protect others from distress and maintain connectedness and harmony with others.

### ***Theme 5: Externalising strategies***

A third key theme in participants' experiences of coping prior to the programme was the externalisation of emotions and venting through action. When participants experienced strong negative emotions, they used coping strategies that enabled them to externalise what they were feeling and vent their intense emotions instead of facing and dealing with their emotions directly. Participants identified many ways they dealt with negative emotions, including being outwardly aggressive, engaging in risk-taking and self-harming behaviours, verbal expression and badmouthing/criticising others.

At times they directed their strong emotions towards objects and destroyed them to cool themselves down. Sometimes they engaged in self-harm and risk-taking behaviours to seek to externalise the inner pain they felt, to feel something different and to temporarily forget the emotional pain they were suffering. Additionally, participants shared that they often lost control and verbalised how they felt and shouted or yelled at people around them to tell others that they were suffering from frustration. Moreover, to externalise and vent their anger, participants complained about others or the situation, badmouthed or spoke badly about people who annoyed them. These externalising coping strategies are discussed in the following sections.

#### **I slashed. I kicked. I screamed.**

Participants described expressing and showing problematic emotions, such as anger, in unhealthy ways prior to the programme, such as projecting their hostility on other objects.

I like BTS [a Kpop boyband] but my uncle doesn't like the fact that I like them. I framed a big poster of theirs and hung it in my bedroom. My uncle told me, "take it down, don't be ridiculous". I was very angry when my uncle said that to me. I slashed the poster and thought, "I'd rather throw it away". (Tam, I1, 101-105)

I was taking a shower. My two-year-old nephew suddenly opened the bathroom door. I screamed. Outside, everyone just laughed. I screamed again. My father shouted at me "are you crazy?" like it was my fault. I kicked the door nonstop,

and my legs started to scratch, and then I cried. I couldn't have a proper talk with the one that made me angry. (Vicky, I2, 22-24)

The participants often took out their anger on inanimate objects after being rejected, ridiculed, shamed and having their privacy violated or feelings dismissed. Others felt angry when they could not express their feelings or assert themselves toward people who elicited such problematic emotions. They displaced their intense negative emotions onto objects and destroyed them as a way to release their distress.

Parents or older people in cultures that influenced by Confucianism often interpret young people who express frustration or anger as engaging in acts that challenge expectations of obedience, deference or defiance of their power (Kwan, 2000). To avoid being wrongly interpreted, the participants tried to find cathartic ways to release their anger and frustration on someone at the same level or more venerable than they are. Therefore, breaking or destroying objects is an easier socially and culturally appropriate way for them to express their anger that does not upset the social balance.

### **Self-harm and risk-taking behaviour**

When participants experienced unhealthy negative emotions, and they did not know how to express them or cope with them in healthy ways, they sometimes engaged in dangerous and self-harming activities. They used this coping method to externalise how they felt inside, to distract them from how they felt inside, and to feel physical pain, something other than emotional pain hurt or problematic emotions.

I used to have the thought that I could never die. I did dangerous chemical experiments and made explosives. The thrill of doing something dangerous is very addictive. It was a way for me to deal with my anger. It helped. (Juan, I1, 143-145)

When I was disappointed and angry, I was very negative. I used the way the emo kids often do. I used the cigarette to burn my arms. The physical pain makes me forget about my emotional pain. (Silvia, I2, 46-47)

Participants sometimes struggled with intense and overwhelming negative emotions. They struggled to regulate their emotions and had little distress tolerance, so they engaged in

unhealthy coping strategies to cope with them. For example, Juan sought excitement from possibly risky or fatal behaviour to forget about his anger. Silvia inflicted numerous small burns on herself to keep her focus on her physical pain instead of her painful emotional experiences.

Vietnamese people value the harmony within interpersonal relationships (Nguyen, 2016); therefore, expressing negative emotions is not encouraged because it might create unpleasant feelings in other people. Since individuals cannot show their problematic emotions to others, they internalise those emotions. Additionally, because of the rules of social rank and power, young people have little control over many things in their lives. They know it is not right to lose their temper and do bad things to others when angry, but it is acceptable to be angry with and do terrible things to themselves. They have complete control of what they do. These unhealthy ways of coping were accompanied by relief and a sense of empowerment because they had done something with their emotions.

### **Verbal aggression and threats**

Participants also externalised their emotions and shouted and yelled at people when they were frustrated and angry and when they needed to tell others about their dissatisfaction.

I will tell them "You are annoying me, stop". If they keep doing it, I will yell at them "I don't like it, stop doing it, or I will hit you". (Thad, I1, 85-86)

I became aggressive and yelled at the person who made me mad. Every time it happened like that, I felt like I became an angry bear, I had no fear.

I yelled at people and made them scared. (Silvia, I3, 163-164)

Thad yelled at others and warned them that he would use violence if necessary to stop others from annoying him. Silvia showed others that she was about to lose control and could become a wild, dangerous animal to make them back away and avoid making her angrier.

Vietnamese culture encourages strict and disciplined educational methods with the spirit of 'spare the rod, spoil the child'. Punishment methods, such as spanking, shouting, scolding and minimising are justifiable acts that parents can use to correct, protect, or motivate their children to gain more achievements in life (Vu, 2016). Growing up with such educational methods, many Vietnamese youths learn that shouting and yelling to communicate their

dissatisfaction are legitimate and culturally sanctioned ways to express their strong negative feelings to others. They also learn that making others scared might be an effective method to stop people from doing something, especially something that makes them feel distressed. Juan, another participant in the study, shared that he knew that yelling, shouting or scaring others was not good at all, but it was the only strategy he knew because everyone in his family did it.

### **Complaining and badmouthing others**

Another theme in participants' descriptions of coping and use of externalising strategies was projecting anger on other objects and people. Participants complained about how they felt, badmouthed other people and spoke negatively about people who annoyed them.

If I am too annoyed at someone, I will bad mouth behind their back. Well, it is more like complaining than badmouthing. I do not want anything bad to happen to them. I just want to get things off my chest. (Aioon, I1, 465-467)

I will badmouth when I am very annoyed with someone. I will be like "Jeeze, I met ABC today. It was an eyesore you know", then others will start joining me, and we will all badmouth about the person. It feels satisfying. (Marice, I1, 209-210)

Participants engaged in badmouthing and complaining, which are a form of passive-aggressive behaviour. Instead of confronting their feelings and expressing them or communicating about them to people directly, they released pent-up emotions and thoughts in a way they thought did not create any direct harm to the targeted person. Engaging in this strategy meant others understood how they felt, but it made people who engaged in badmouthing feel satisfied only for a short time.

Direct expression of thoughts and feelings is not encouraged in Vietnamese culture as those actions might escalate the conflict or hurt people's feelings and consequently disrupt the harmony in the relationships (Ngo, 2014). Therefore, badmouthing and its milder forms, such as complaining or gossiping, was employed by participants as a way to publicly express their

mean thoughts and negative feelings toward others instead of confronting them and risking their interpersonal harmony.

### ***Theme 6: Internal avoidance strategies***

The fourth theme in participants' use of coping strategies was that they often internalised unwanted and negative emotions. These ineffective and unhealthy strategies added to their problems and distress. When they were overwhelmed or struggled to know what to do, they engaged in (i) self-blame and negative self-talk, (ii) worried and started engaging in negative thinking, or (iii) used resignation or imagined getting revenge on or confronting others.

Some participants directed their strong negative emotions toward themselves and blamed or criticised themselves for the unwanted outcomes as a way to deal with those emotions. Participants described knowing that overthinking, or rumination, was not a healthy coping strategy. However, they still engaged in it because overthinking or ruminating about something that happened in the past stopped them from worrying about their present problems. Participants also engaged in resigned thinking to cope with uncontrollable situations, or they imagined getting revenge in their minds when experiencing a situation in which they felt powerless. These internalising strategies are described in more detail in the following section.

#### **Self-criticism and self-blame**

When some participants experienced unwanted or stressful situations in life, they criticised or blamed themselves or thought that it was their fault that things did not go as expected. Participants described how they knew that it was not healthy for them to engage in such strategies, but when they did it, they said they immediately felt better.

I started a habit of self-hating a long time ago. If something unexpected happens, I will be very angry at myself, I will talk to myself like I really hate myself, and it was all my fault. I used that way to make myself feel better. (Kevin, I1, 202-215)



When I am angry, I am not angry with others, I am angry with myself. I often turn back to myself and think that I must have done something wrong so that they would treat me that way. (Tam, I1, 61-64)

Instead of facing the situation, solving their problems or confronting the people who did something wrong to them, Kevin and Tam shifted the blame inside and criticised themselves. In engaging in self-blame, the participants gained some sense of control and were able to think, 'this is my fault, I can change myself, and the problems will be fixed'. When the blame lay with others, they described how they could not confront others because they could lose control and the ability to manage the situation and feared reprisals, criticism and judgment. Vietnamese youth who grow up with authoritarian parents who use scolding, shouting and minimising methods as a source of correction and discipline (Vu, 2016) also tend to internalise the hurtful words that adults use when punishing them. The repetition of this form of punishment creates a pattern of young people learning that they are at fault, are the cause of problems and should punish themselves the way they were in childhood when things did not go well.

### **Worrying and rumination**

Worrying was another internalising coping strategy that participants engaged in when they faced uncertain and challenging situations. Participants described how they wanted to stop worrying because it created self-doubt and prevented them from performing effectively in their studies, work and life. When they ruminated and went over the details of what happened and all the possible results and consequences, they became stuck in their heads and could not act.

I think of the things that have not even happened yet. Those things keep lingering in my head and make me worry so much about "how far will I go with my career? Am I that boring? Will I forever be this shy, this awkward, this shaky?" (Sen, A1, 46-48)

I can't stop thinking. It keeps running in my head, those worrying thoughts. I can't do anything else. I can't do any complicated task because it takes all the capacity for everything else. (Hehe, I1, 190-191)

Sen and Hehe had been overthinking things and worrying about so many things. Their thoughts were often about the imaginary future accompanied by fear and self-doubt. Sometimes they would worry about what had happened in the past, and sometimes they worried about the future. Worry served to distract them from thinking of the problems they had at present.

In Vietnamese culture, there are many forms of etiquette for a person to perform (i.e., in eating, walking, talking), many social standards to follow (i.e., be filial to parents, be helpful and caring to neighbours) and people are expected to have a fixed successful role model to live up to (i.e., women are expected that they must obey when being at home and obey their husband when married) (Nguyen, 2014). The pressure of meeting too many standards and expectations contribute to the worry that many Vietnamese experience (Nguyen, 2019). Vietnamese youth judge themselves by these standards. If they cannot live up to these standards, they fear they will be judged as a loser and as someone who will bring shame to their family. Therefore, over-worrying starts to develop and is a way participants used to cope with pressure from social and cultural customs.

### **Resignation and imagining revenge**

Participants also described using internalisation as a coping strategy, including negative thinking and resignation (e.g., feeling there is nothing that can be done to fix the problem or feeling hopeless). They also described using their imagination and fantasising about getting revenge or confronting others after experiencing difficult situations where they felt disempowered.

When I am stressed, I cannot think straight. Then I found a way that helps to think of all the possible worst scenarios, and say to myself "what will be, will be". (Pink Frog, I1, 77-79)

When I am very angry, in my head, there will be violent and crazy thoughts like hitting someone. (Sen, I1, 178-185)

Pink Frog imagined and contemplated the worst things that could happen to him as a way to deal with his difficult situations. He would then think about what could be lost and the impact of those outcomes on him. This helped him feel grateful and value the things he still had, even

if the worst scenario happened. He also felt resigned and believed that if something bad happened, it was fate. Sen, on the other hand, used her imagination to deal with her difficult situation in a completely different way. She rehearsed a revenge fantasy in her mind. She visualised committing violent acts that could help her address the wrongful acts others had committed against her. In this way, she imagined living out a fantasy that did not involve taking physical actions and hurting anyone or herself. This type of visualisation provided an outlet for her rage and aggression.

Participants engaged in resignation and visualisation, possibly because of a sense of powerlessness that was cultivated from some cultural beliefs and norms. First, many Vietnamese believe that whatever happens in their life is predestined. The outcome will not change regardless of what they try to do to change it (Nguyen, 2018). Therefore, they have no choice but to prepare themselves for the worst. Additionally, following the rules of a hierarchical order in social relationships in Vietnamese culture, people of lower rank must respect their elders and authority figures, follow the rules and not give their opinions unless asked (Truong et al., 2017). When being treated wrongfully, participants felt they should not confront people of higher rank or who have more power in the social hierarchy. Therefore, visualisation and fantasising about getting retribution or confronting people was a helpful way for participants to reduce their tension without actually hurting anyone.

## **Chapter summary**

This chapter provided a description of participants' experiences of coping that were shaped by Vietnamese culture and their social and cultural context, norms, beliefs and practices. In this chapter, I described the types of problems participants experienced, including emotion-related, ability-related and belief-related problems. I also described the coping strategies participants used and provided evidence to support two major themes in their coping: avoidance and suppression of emotions. Participants used avoidance to prevent negative consequences, maintain harmony in interpersonal relationships and save face. Participants also used externalising (e.g., being outwardly aggressive, engaging in risk-taking and self-harming behaviours, verbal expression and badmouthing/criticising others) and internalising strategies (e.g., self-blame and negative self-talk, worrying/rumination, resignation or imagining getting revenge or fantasising about confronting others). All these strategies need

to be understood within the cultural context in which these Vietnamese youth have been socialised. The next chapter explores and describes the changes in participants' emotional intelligence and coping strategies as a result of the development of emotional intelligence and learning about coping strategies.

## **Chapter 6: Findings - Participants' perceived changes in emotional intelligence and coping**

In this chapter, I present the findings from the analysis of participants' descriptions of their perceived changes in emotional intelligence and coping strategies that resulted from them completing the education programme. This chapter has two sections. In the first section, I provide an overview of self-perceived developed emotional intelligence and healthy coping strategies of participants. In the second section I provide more detailed descriptions of participants' experience of perceived changes in emotional intelligence and coping. Perceived changes are presented in four themes: (i) self-reported improvement in emotional intelligence (e.g., increase in ability to identify, express, accept, understand and manage emotions), (ii) self-reported improvement in coping strategies (e.g., a shift to using more problem-focused coping strategies), (iii) personal change (e.g., greater self-acceptance, understanding and wellbeing) and (iv) applying developed skills in real-life situations.

### **A. Descriptions of perceived improvement in emotional intelligence and coping**

Participants described developing greater emotional abilities that contributed to their emotional intelligence after the programme. They reported having improved abilities, including emotional acceptance, emotional identification, emotional expression, emotional management and having more empathy. The majority of participants shared that they were more able to emotional identify, accept and express emotions. About half of the participants believed that they developed their emotional management ability and empathy. Table 23 below provides more details of participants' perceived development of emotional intelligence abilities.

**Table 23***Participants' perceived developed emotional intelligence abilities*

<b>Improved emotional intelligence abilities</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Examples of improved abilities</b>
Emotional acceptance	N=16, 76%	Accepting negative emotions in self and others. Being honest about their emotions. Being less judgmental of other's emotions. Being more empathetic towards others.
Emotional identification	N=15, 71%	Better able to name emotions in self and others. Better able to understand complex feelings. Being able to review their emotions.
Emotional expression	N=15, 71%	Feeling more comfortable sharing thoughts and feelings verbally and at an appropriate level of intensity. Being more willing to share emotions with others.
Emotional management	N=12, 57 %	Better able to engage in self-soothing and self-comforting. Better able to disengage from negative emotions. Being able to regulate negative emotions more quickly. Being able to prolong positive emotions.
Having more empathy	N=12, 57%	Being able to accept differences in others. Better able to identify with what others may feel. Being more gentle, and patient with others in stressful situations.

Participants also described their perceived changes in coping strategies (problem-focused rather than emotion-focused) and that they believed were helpful for dealing with stressful situations. All participants shared how they now could gain control in some aspects when experiencing difficult or stressful situations. The majority of the participants thought that the strategy of choosing to be positive and happy was a helpful strategy for dealing with stress. Half of the participants developed the ability to face their problems head-on instead of avoiding them and said they could take immediate actions to solve their problems. They also described being more compassionate and loving toward themselves, which helped them cope

with stressful situations more calmly. Table 24 below provides more details of participants' newly developed healthy coping strategies.

**Table 24**

*Participants' newly developed problem-focus coping strategies*

<b>New problem-focus coping strategies</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Example</b>
Gaining control of some aspects of their situation	N=21, 100%	Stopping taking on a victim role, finding positive aspects of the situation, being more assertive, saying no to others, being aware of and seeking alternative solutions, and prioritising
Being positive and focusing on happiness	N=16, 76%	Spending more time with loved ones, creating small amounts of happiness during the day, bringing happiness and positivity to others, having more 'me time'
Taking immediate action to solve the problem/issue rather than engaging in self-blame and criticism.	N=14, 66%	Attempting to identify the cause and solutions to the problem, seeking information and help, working hard on strengthening or improving relationships with others
Facing problems head-on rather than avoiding people and situations	N=13, 61%	Confronting people who upset them, having confidence in their problem-solving ability, feeling ready to face adversities and challenges
Engaging in self-compassion and self-loving	N=11, 52%	Relaxing, taking care of physical and emotional needs, being less critical and blaming self, accepting one's own and others' mistakes and imperfections, seeing failure and setbacks as opportunities to grow, and choosing to live with a positive mindset

A summary of participants' developed emotional intelligence abilities and new productive coping strategies is shown in Table 25 below. This table will provide an overview of which participants developed which emotional intelligence abilities and which problem-focus coping strategies.

**Table 25**

*Summary of self-reported developed emotional abilities & new productive coping strategies*

Increased emotional intelligence abilities																	
Participant	Tam (F)	May (F)	Eira (F)	Vicky (F)	Alaska (F)	Sen (F)	Te (F)	Aloon (F)	Marice (F)	2K (F)	Silvia (F)	Wind (F)	Storm (F)	Bear (F)	Hehe (F)	BDZ (M)	Pink Frog
Coping strategies																	
Accepting emotions in oneself or others	•	•	•		•	•	•	•		•		•	•		•	•	•
Identifying emotions in oneself or others	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•			•
Expressing emotions/thoughts comfortably	•	•	•	•			•	•	•		•	•		•	•	•	•
Managing emotions of oneself or others	•	•	•		•	•			•	•	•	•		•	•		•
Empathy	•	•	•		•		•		•	•			•		•	•	•
Understanding emotions in oneself or others		•	•	•		•				•		•		•	•	•	•
Increasing self-awareness	•	•		•			•		•	•			•		•	•	•
New developed coping strategies																	
Participant	Tam (F)	May (F)	Eira (F)	Vicky (F)	Alaska (F)	Sen (F)	Te (F)	Aloon (F)	Marice (F)	2K (F)	Silvia (F)	Wind (F)	Storm (F)	Bear (F)	Hehe (F)	BDZ (M)	Pink Frog
Coping strategies																	
Gaining control in possible aspects of the situation	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Creating happiness for oneself	•	•	•	•	•		•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•		•
Taking immediate problem-solving actions	•		•	•		•				•	•	•	•	•		•	•
Facing the problems		•		•	•		•	•		•	•	•	•			•	•
Self-loving	•		•		•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•				•



Self-tolerating/Self-accepting	•		•	•		•	•	•	•									•		
Seeking objective views of the situations		•	•	•	•					•		•					•			•
Delaying responding to collect more information about the situation	•					•											•		•	
Seeking help/support							•										•		•	

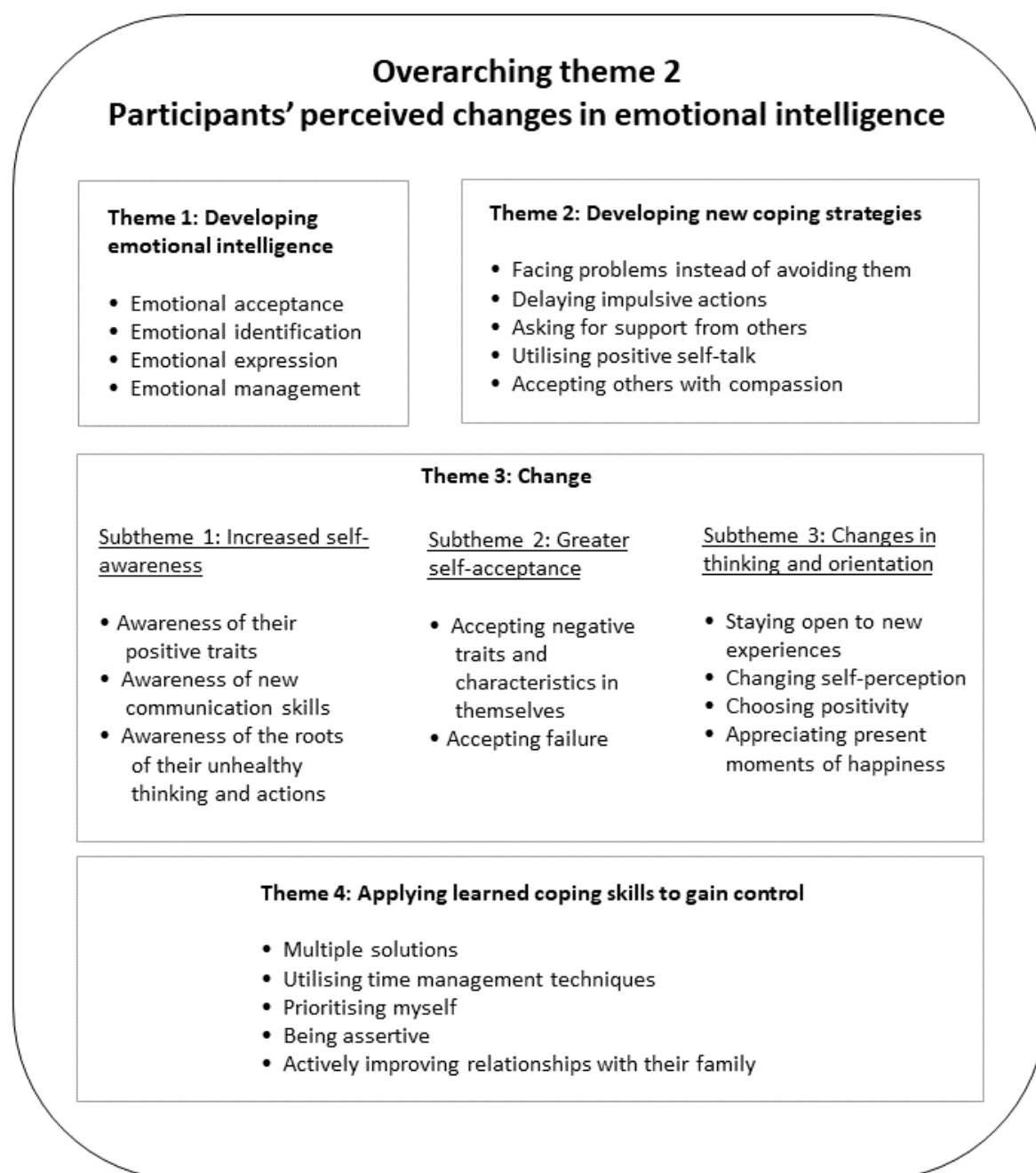
## B. Overarching theme 2: Participants' perceived changes in emotional intelligence

In this section, I describe the participants' perceived changes in emotional intelligence. The first theme 'developing emotional intelligence' consisted of five subthemes: emotional identification, emotional expression, emotional understanding, emotional acceptance and emotional management. Participants also described a number of personal changes that occurred as a result of their learning experiences. The third theme, 'change' has three subthemes: (i) better self-understanding, (ii) better self-acceptance and (iii) changes in thinking and orientation.

Finally, the analysis of participants' accounts of learning about emotional intelligence and coping showed that participants had applied their new knowledge and coping skills to their everyday lives. The fourth theme 'applying skills to gain control' consisted of five subthemes: (i) multiple solutions, (ii) utilising time management techniques, (iii) prioritising myself, (iv) being assertive and (v) actively improving relationships with their family. Figure 8 below presents the thematic map related to participants' experience of learning and applying the knowledge and skills of emotional intelligence and coping.

**Figure 8**

*Themes of participants' experiences changes in emotional intelligence and coping strategies*



***Theme 1: Developing emotional intelligence***

Many participants described having a short temper and finding it hard to control their emotions. They either avoided or suppressed their negative emotions, suffered through them by keeping quiet about them or lost emotional control and lashed out or reacted negatively

towards objects and people. After the programme, participants reported having developed new emotional intelligence abilities, including emotional identification, emotional expression, emotional understanding, emotional acceptance and emotional management.

Participants said they were now better at being able to identify and label their own and others' emotions and do so accurately. Being able to identify their emotions and those of others was an essential foundation for improving their problem-solving skills. Participants also said that they had developed their ability to express emotions more and without discomfort/anxiety instead of suppressing them. They also noted that an increased understanding of emotions enabled them to better understand the origins and interpret the meanings of emotions in themselves and others.

Participants described how they had learned to accept their emotions, allow themselves to experience both positive and negative emotions, and tolerate a range of emotions in others. As a result, participants recounted that they could experience a range of emotions but also had more control over them and better ways to manage emotions. Participants were able to keep their unwanted emotions manageable and achieve their goals even when they had negative feelings. The following section will discuss participants' experiences of their increased emotional intelligence in more detail.

### **Emotional identification**

Emotional identification is one of the fundamental elements of emotional intelligence and is an awareness of one's emotions and the ability to put those emotions into words (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). A key part of developing emotional intelligence was participants learning about different types of emotions and how to recognise them in themselves and others. When they could identify and talk about how they felt, they developed more control and were able to make informed choices about how to respond to those emotions. Participants described how they could use simple and clear language to make their feelings understood and communicate their emotional experiences to others. They could also help others make sense of their own emotions.

Participants were also better at identifying their emotions, which helped them detect emotional problems more quickly. Now they were able to make informed rather than reactive decisions about how to respond to what and how they felt.

After each emotional event, I started to ask myself how I was feeling. It was helpful because I was able to know exactly how I felt, and I could solve my problems. Before, I couldn't solve my problems because I couldn't identify them. Now, after labelling them all, solving problems seem easier. (Marice, 12, 76-83)

I am not confused about my emotions anymore. At least I know how to filter them like I know that I am in the state of an emotion when I am experiencing it. Then I can ask myself what I want to do to get out of it. (Bear, 12, 340-344)

Vietnam has a history of thousands of years of being in different wars and colonised by different countries. The Vietnamese people went through so many hardships to survive (Ngo, 2014). Therefore, in the perception of many Vietnamese, real problems are poverty, famine or war; emotional issues are not considered problems. Only weak or incompetent people, who cannot endure life's hardships, talk about their emotions. Vietnamese people generally do not want to invest time and effort in exploring their emotions because digging deep into their own emotions might be associated with dramatising a situation unnecessarily (Ngo, 2014). As a result, Vietnamese people tend to avoid thinking about or talking about their emotions as they do not want to be labelled as weak or incompetent and be seen as an emotional burden to people around them.

However, the participants realised that spending time thinking about and focusing on and identifying what one is feeling is helpful. When they could focus and identify how they felt, they were less confused and more able to respond to their emotions and those of others.

Whenever something happens, I ask myself about my emotions in detail. I just focus on how I feel at that moment. I try to look for all the emotions that I am having and talk to myself about them. (Aioon, 12, 49-55 )

I know the emotions of the people I am talking to, and I can label their emotions to help them. For example, they are angry. I can tell them that they

are experiencing anger. It might help them to manage their anger. (May, I2, 3-6)

### **Emotional expression**

Before learning about emotional intelligence, participants shared that they used to think that emotional expression mainly was about venting negative feelings and that this might make others reject them. They, therefore, chose to suppress their emotions, particularly negative emotions, a lot of the time. Then they learned that expressing emotions simply meant giving themselves an opportunity to let their emotions, even negative emotions like anger, happen and be acknowledged. Acknowledging, feeling and expressing emotions helped participants experience and communicate their emotional states (i.e., anger or hunger). This experience helped them feel freer and more comfortable sharing their feelings with others.

The noticeable change in me was that I changed my way with my emotions. Now, if I dislike something, I will try to express it instead of suppressing it like “no, you have to stay calm” like I did before. (BDZ, I2, 90-93)

I let my emotions flow in their way. If I want to show it, I will show it without thinking of what I need to do to keep my personal image. If I am angry, I will show my anger. If I am hungry, then I will show that I am hungry. I felt like I am allowed to be myself. (Juan, I2, 413-422)

In Vietnamese culture, it is commonly believed that it is unacceptable for children to show anger toward their parents and, if they do, they will be labelled as ungrateful children (Nguyen, 2014). However, some participants, who described themselves as people-pleasers prior to learning about emotional intelligence, decided to express their anger toward their parents after completing the programme. They knew their parents would not tolerate their expression of anger, but they still expressed their emotions because they wanted to let their parents know what they felt and thought. They also described wanting to develop a new foundation for their relationship based on honest and open communication.

My dad often bursts into my room. Before, I just cried. Now, I can show my anger instead suffering from it all alone. When someone bursts into my room like that, I think that they think of me as a child, and it makes me really angry. I know that I can start showing my anger to my parents, and I know it will be better if I can tell them my thoughts directly and appropriately. (Vicky, I2, 112- 119)

I will tell my parents that "You told me that I didn't care about how you feel. You know that I love modelling. I used to do photo shoots every month. Now I just join two photo shoots per year. I did sacrifice what I love because I know you don't like it. I was very sad when declining the offers. I want to ask you to consider how I feel as well". (Kevin, I3, 115-125)

### **Emotional understanding**

Developing emotional intelligence helped participants to learn and understand their own emotions, where they come from, what they mean and how they affect them. In developing greater emotional understanding, participants developed better self-understanding, self-awareness and wisdom. "Knowing others is intelligence. Knowing yourself is true wisdom" is a famous teaching of Lao Tzu that has been embodied by many Vietnamese (Ngo, 2014). Emotional understanding helped participants to understand themselves as well as others and helped them to interpret the meaning of different emotions. Their learning about emotional intelligence also helped develop their understanding of the relationship between emotions, thinking and acting.

Before, I knew my emotions, but I couldn't name them. I couldn't differentiate them. I didn't know each emotion would support me this way, it gave me some directions, and I could understand why I have this emotion. When recording, I could separate my emotions and know why I felt like this. It helped me to understand myself more. (Wind, I2, 142-152)

For Wind, being able to identify an emotion also meant that she could identify that she had that emotion and the target of that emotion. She now understood the insights each emotion was trying to tell her. By verbalising the whole process of identifying and making sense of her

emotions, Wind was able to gain better insight into her own feelings and thinking, resulting in better self-understanding.

I can find reasons behind the emotions I was feeling. I found that many problems of mine started from my arrogance. I suppressed my emotions so hard. I became arrogant. When I talked to people, I talked to them like I was their superior. I didn't know I did that, but I know now. It makes me feel more comfortable, and I can figure out what I really want. (Juan, I2, 192-204)

Since Juan knew more about his emotions and understood why he had those emotions, he was better able to understand actions more clearly. He thought that he could control his emotions very well, and he was arrogant about that. However, emotional understanding helped him to realise that he was not that effective at managing his emotions. He was just good at suppressing them. By discovering this, he knew what he wanted to do with his emotions and emotional problems and was motivated to find new emotional strategies.

Participants were also better able to understand their own and others' emotions and needs, and this helped them strengthen their relationships with others.

I focus on finding out what I want and what I need first. It will help me to interact well with others. If I can understand myself, I can see similar things in others. If I know I need this, then I will be able to see the same need in others. That is the way to improve relationships. I feel that my relationships with others have been getting better recently. (Hehe, I3, 7-12)

Knowing more about her emotions not only helped Hehe to identify the desired outcome of her situations but also helped guide her on how to interact with others to achieve the outcome she wanted. Hehe realised that better self-understanding could help her identify her and others' needs and wants. Hehe believed that knowing others' needs and wants and attending to those needs and wants was a good way for her to improve her relationships with others.

I think more of others' emotions, but not how I used to think. Now, I think about their emotions in a deeper way, like "why they are feeling like that?" It helps me to empathise with them and accept their emotions more easily. I don't have to put my guard up toward others' feelings anymore. (Kevin, 12, 27-31)

Emotional understanding enabled Kevin to look at his emotions through a different lens. It made him curious about his emotions and enabled him to explore them with an open attitude. He became more accepting of his own emotions. As a result, he felt more relaxed when dealing with his own emotions and the emotions of the people around him.

Participants learned during the programme that the function of emotions is to tell an individual that something good or bad is happening so that the individual can respond accordingly and meet their own or others' needs. They learned that emotions are often a response to feedback and input from the environment. By understanding the function of each emotion (e.g., fear is to help protect us, jealousy is often a response to a threat to a valued relationship), participants were able to understand the hidden messages that accompany their feelings in a situation. As a result, participants had a deeper understanding of themselves and the situation they were facing. They were able to choose more considered objective and intentional responses. Additionally, emotional understanding helped participants explore their wants and needs (e.g., recognising sadness and grief meant they could meet their needs for comfort). They used their new emotional understanding to help them recognise feelings in others, which helped them make sense of those feelings and show empathy to others.

### **Emotional acceptance**

Participants said they had learned about the importance of emotional acceptance when developing their emotional intelligence. They learned that accepting emotions is about acknowledging emotions without judging those emotions as good or bad. They also described how they learned that emotional acceptance was about allowing themselves to fully experience all emotions, even the unwanted ones.

Vietnamese culture does not encourage the presence or display of negative emotions, while positive emotions and attitudes are overly promoted (Truong et al., 2017). For many people,



there is much pressure to be happy and positive in public, and people are taught that negative emotions should be suppressed or gotten rid of quickly whenever they appear. When people want to eliminate a negative emotion, they have to put in the cognitive effort to force themselves not to experience the emotion. However, this process makes them focus more on the emotion they want to eliminate. As a result, they unintentionally intensify their negative emotions. They become short-tempered because of the escalation of negative emotions and can feel powerless as they fail to keep their negative emotions in control as desired (Leahy, 2015).

Participants learned after being in the programme that accepting emotions did not mean suppressing or allowing emotions to overwhelm them but simply acknowledging them and accepting them as feelings.

One day I realised that "oh, I am feeling sad", I was very happy. That was the first time I truly understood acceptance, and I accepted my sadness. I was sad. I accepted it, and I was so happy about it that I wanted to go out, to celebrate. (Storm, I2, 37-41)

Before joining the programme, I dealt with my fear by telling myself that "I must not fear". But the more I tell myself that "I must not fear, I will be all right, I can do it", the shakier I feel. Then when I told myself that "I have the right to be scared, it is normal that I feel scared, I am feeling scared, it is OK. Let's calm down first". And I realised that it was not too scary as I thought. I felt calmer and less shaky, and I did the presentation quite well.

I knew how to handle my fear. It is really good for me. (Wind, I2, 16-26)

By acknowledging and accepting their emotions, participants were able to let the unwanted emotions occur, and they had learned to overcome their fear of losing self-control to intense emotions, such as anger.

I am emotional. I quite like it. Before, I really hated it, but then, I realised that it was not a negative characteristic, I could live peacefully with it, and I even can enjoy it. I feel that I can trust my feelings because I know that these are my feelings, and I have choices for them. Then, I will find a way

to control my feelings; therefore, I'm not afraid anymore. (Pink Frog, I1, 15-20)

Learning about emotions and emotional acceptance also enabled participants to become more compassionate with themselves as they learned to tolerate both positive and negative emotions. When all their emotions were accepted for what they were, participants could handle their emotions more effectively and solve their problems more confidently.

I accepted that I was scared, but that fear did not control me. It means that I can feel fear, but I will still be able to complete my task. (Te, A3, 81-87)

### **Emotional management**

In developing emotional intelligence, participants learned how to better manage and contain their own emotions, limit the effects of emotions, maintain boundaries in stressful situations and continue to work towards goals. Many participants used to believe they were very good at managing their emotions, which was demonstrated in how they could suppress negative emotions or rational responses to stressful situations. Later, they divulged that they had learned that emotional management does not mean suppressing or minimising unwanted emotions, such as anger, and making them disappear. They learned that emotional management involves facing their negative emotions, and they developed skills that enabled them to manage and regulate their emotions more effectively.

I got angry less than before. I know when I should show my anger. It was an achievement for me. I know how to regulate my anger. I think more of the reason why I got angry in the first place and decide whether I should continue being angry. Although I know anger comes unexpectedly, I have the belief that I can control it. (BDZ, I2, 16-21)

Emotional management skills helped participants understand the cause of their emotions, what strategies work best for different emotions, and how to moderate those emotions and keep them within a manageable range. Participants described how they had developed

increased emotional management, which enabled them to be more efficient when coping with or resolving unwanted emotions and helped them feel more confident about their coping and problem-solving abilities.

I realised that if I knew why I was angry, the anger quickly disappeared instead of lingering in my head for a long time anymore. If it was several months ago, it might take months for my anger to disappear. This time, only one evening, I could leave it there and move on. (Pink Frog, 12, 28-30)

Participants also reported that they were better able to manage and contain their emotions and maintain boundaries in stressful situations without being negatively affected. May and other participants shared that they could listen to sad stories from friends and help them gain insight into their problems and available solutions without being affected by their distress.

I have a depressed friend. I used to talk to her and tried to help her, but she had too much negativity, which affected me badly. Recently, she wanted to talk to me. I was able to help her to dig deep into her problems and helped her to find out what options she was having in her situation. I was very happy about the fact that I could help her and not be affected by her negative feelings at all. (May, 13, 22-28)

Moreover, by developing their emotional management skills, participants could control themselves better, limit the impact of others' emotions and achieve their goals (e.g., delivering a successful tutor session or completing a project they dislike) even when experiencing negative feelings.

My student is in his 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and he has learning difficulties. I teach him something, and then he will totally forget it in the next minute. Deep down inside, I know that he is really trying to study, but sometimes he just can't. Last week that I tried to explain it to him again and again, but he still couldn't get it. I got frustrated, I shouted at him, and he was scared. I still feel guilty about it. In the previous tutoring class, he was

the same, but I just asked him in a normal voice, "Have I taught you this?" He was surprised and asked me, "you don't scold me anymore?" I explained the lesson to him again, and he was happy about it, and the class went really well for both of us. I realised that I was more patient with him. I was able to keep my irritation at bay. I was able to motivate him instead of shouting at him. I shouted at him before, I felt guilty about it, but I won't do it anymore. The changes make me feel easier and avoid the guilty feeling. (Tam, I2, 114-124)

Participants shared that, during stressful situations, they were able to keep their negative emotions at a manageable level, react to others more rationally and patiently, and achieve their personal or professional goals without bringing negative emotions to anyone involved. Participants described feeling good about themselves and proud of their newly developed emotional intelligence abilities.

### ***Theme 2: Developing new coping strategies***

The second major theme in the participants' perceived changes in emotional intelligence and learning about coping is 'developing new coping strategies'. This theme consists of five subthemes: (i) facing problems instead of avoiding them, (ii) delaying impulsive actions, (iii) asking for support from others, (iv) using self-talk for better self-understanding and (v) accepting others with compassion. Improvement in emotional intelligence helped participants become more confident and efficient when dealing with problematic emotions. It also provided an excellent foundation for participants to learn about coping strategies and develop new coping strategies that help them manage emotions and issues. Participants reported that they had learned a lot about different types of coping and were able to identify their own styles and strategies. As a result of this learning and self-awareness, they were able to start using different solution-focused coping strategies to deal with difficulties in their lives. They described developing the following new coping strategies: (i) facing the problem instead of avoiding it, (ii) delaying impulsive actions, (iii) asking for support from others, (iv) utilising self-talk for self-understanding and (v) accepting others with compassion.

## **Facing problems instead of avoiding them**

Participants shared that developing emotional intelligence abilities and learning about coping made them feel more motivated and ready to face their problems instead of avoiding them as they used to do. Participants shared that they tended to avoid conflict and avoided directly confronting other people about issues in their lives. Vietnamese youth rarely use problem-focused coping strategies such as being assertive or talking with others to find a solution to a problem. They tend to use more emotion-focused coping strategies such as suppression, avoidance and venting.

Avoiding a problem or a person might bring temporary relief for an individual; however, these strategies tend to be maladaptive in the long term because they never actually solve the problem or bring about any change in the situation (Leahy, 2015). As a result, the use of emotion-focused strategies tends to have a negative impact on a person in the long term; for example, they feel worried or stressed about the unsolved problem for a longer time. When a problem is avoided for too long, people can also start feeling powerless and think they are unable to solve the problem, which affects their self-efficacy (Leahy, 2015).

Participants shared that they were more willing and ready to face problems head-on after learning about different coping strategies and how these could be used to resolve social conflicts and issues and manage difficult emotions. They reported feeling more empowered and confident in their ability to use problem-solving strategies and processes to cope or manage.

I stop blaming. I keep in mind that the problems are there, and I will deal with them gradually. I don't avoid them anymore. That's the difference (Silvia, I2, 3-8) ... Before, I knew that the problem was there, but I was too coward[ly] to face it. Now I think that I'm ready to face my problems, even difficult and confused ones. I can handle them. (Silvia, I2, 11-14)

I learned how to love myself and how to know my feelings. I feel stronger. I can face my feelings. Now I am strong enough to look at the pain that I have been hiding inside of me. (Eira, I2, 208-210)

Participants also said they felt more motivated to face their negative emotions, were not afraid to acknowledge the existence of their problems and felt they could develop a plan to resolve them.

### **Delaying impulsive actions**

After learning about emotions and coping strategies, participants reported that they were less impulsive, more able to resist the urge to react immediately, and were better able to delay responses, consider aspects of their situation and make a plan for actions that could help them.

Recently, I have thought more of emotions. For example, when something annoying happens, I spend more time thinking about it. Before, I would do whatever I liked doing, whatever came into my mind. Now I will spend some time thinking of "why?" and "what to do next?" (Pink Frog, I2, 10-14)

Before, when I was angry, I would leave or show my anger right away. Now, although I was very angry, I was still sitting there and thinking of what to do to solve the problem. I knew what others were feeling and what were they talking about, and I was thinking of looking for solutions immediately instead of running away or exploding as I did before. (Sen, I2, 263-271)

Participants were able to resist their urge to act immediately (i.e., leaving the situation, getting angry or doing immediately what comes to their mind), consider aspects of the situation and plan more effective actions that could help them avoid making the problem worse or address the situation. Learning to have better impulse control and how to think through the logical and natural consequences of various responses helped participants take a considered and intentional approach to stressful situations. Being rational and having the ability to delay impulsive actions is a highly valued ability in Vietnamese culture. People who possess this ability would be seen as calm, thoughtful and mature. These are desirable characteristics in many Vietnamese people's perception (Nguyen, 2014).

## **Asking for support from others**

Developing emotional intelligence and learning about coping strategies helped participants develop the ability to ask for support and help from others. It was an important and difficult change for them to make because asking for help can be understood as being a sign of weakness or incompetence. Participants reported learning that asking for help from others can enable them to achieve what they want and better use their time, skills and energy. Securing help from others can be a sign of proactiveness and enable them to manage a situation or complete a task. They no longer saw help-seeking as a sign of weakness but as a way of being more efficient and productive.

I realised that I have many people around me. If I am stuck at doing a task, I will have more than one way to get it done. I don't have to do it all by myself, and it can be very stressful. I can ask for help from others. It is one of the ways to get the tasks done, and it does not mean that I depend on them. (Thad, I2, 141-144)

I don't have to do everything by myself. I can ask others to help me. I have never had this idea before because I am the kind of person who will do it all. Now I know that others can help me to do the work perfectly as long as I can tell them in detail how I want it to be done. (Te, I3, 66-74)

Being a strong person that others can depend on is a desirable quality for Vietnamese (Nguyen, 2014). As a result, many Vietnamese believe that, in order to be seen as a strong person, they must be self-sufficient and do everything on their own. Asking for help from others is seen as a sign of dependence and weakness (Ngo, 2014). Knowledge about productive coping strategies helped participants reframe help-seeking behaviours. Seeking help was seen as a way to regain control, move closer to desired outcomes and show they were proactive, rather than a sign of weakness or incompetence. This mindset liberated participants from feeling overwhelmed and stressed when they could not finish a task by themselves. It helped them realise that working with and relying on others can lead to success.

## Utilising positive self-talk

Participants shared that they were more attuned, introspective and aware of their thoughts and feelings, including internal conflicts. They were better able to consider different ways of thinking, feelings and perspectives and could see the merit of looking at a situation from various perspectives to gain insights. They also described how they were more able to use positive self-talk to cope with negative thinking patterns.

Vietnamese youth experience much pressure when trying to meet others' expectations (i.e., pressure from being an obedient child at home, being an academically successful student at school, or being a well-liked person in society). When the expectations are too unrealistic, they often feel frustrated and stressed and experience self-doubt. Participants described experiencing internalised negative self-talk and self-criticism, having self-defeating thoughts and engaging in self-blame (e.g., 'I am not good enough', 'It was my fault, I should have done more'). As a result, they experience a higher level of stress.

Participants described how they learned to develop their use of positive self-talk. As a result of learning about emotional intelligence, they became more aware of their negative thoughts and were able to examine whether those thoughts were true. Participants learned that using positive self-talk could help them to keep negative thoughts in check and to help them to stay rational and motivated, and to dispute their negative and irrational thoughts (e.g., 'those thoughts were not true, I am not like that, I can do this.').

I can use the self-talk technique to solve my problems in a different way than the way I did before. I let my different selves talk to each other. When I was doing that, I could think more deeply and go deeper into the root of the problem. (Storm, I3, 70-72)

Doing audio diaries is a way a talk to myself. It helps me to be more honest with myself and be clearer in my thought. When I think, the thoughts are mixed up. When I talk, I start organising my thoughts, and they become clearer one by one. (Silvia, I2, 211-214)



Participants learned to become more aware of their own thinking and look at the basis for those thoughts. During the programme, they were encouraged to conduct emotional conversations that allowed each aspect of themselves to have a turn to speak. By doing this, participants learned they could acknowledge both their negative and positive thinking. They also reported learning to see the situation from various perspectives and gaining insights into their thoughts, feelings and internal conflicts. Talking to themselves was a way to detangle their thoughts and choose which thoughts to base actions on. Participants described that they realised that they had different emotions when talking aloud about the problem they were experiencing. They also realised that each of those emotions was linked to a different person, object or event. They were able to examine their problem at its atomic and higher level. As a result, participants could make sense of their problems, understand their own reactions and make more rational and informed decisions.

### **Accepting others with compassion**

Developing emotional intelligence and learning about coping meant participants learned to accept situations for what they were (and acknowledged that sometimes they could not control others or the situation). They also learned to accept the reactions and responses of others with more compassionate consideration. Vietnamese people are well known for their judgmental and criticising ways (Do et al., 2020). Participants said that when others judged or criticised them, they used to retaliate, suffered in silence or blamed themselves for being at fault. After the programme, they learned to accept others' reactions without judgment. They described how they had started being calmer when facing others' judgment, were more accepting of valid or constructive criticism, and became more tolerant of others' opinions.

I joined an improvised theatre class. In that class, it was like a default setting that everyone must follow orders, and they criticise each other so much. For example, the facilitator would say to me, "I'm not happy that you do this; you must do that". I was irritated. If it was before, I would have thoughts such as "I'm doing it all wrong", and I would feel very sad and disappointed in myself. (Te, 12, 34-38)

But this time was different, I just smiled at her, and I accepted that her point of view was completely different from mine. Maybe something

happened in her past, and it made her uncomfortable with the differences. (Te, I2, 47-56)

I can't control the fact that people might hate me. They might think bad[ly] of me. Even if they do that to me, I will not hurt them, and I will not badmouth or gossip about them because everyone has their own pain. They do that because they have their own unsolved problems. Thinking in this way makes me accept people and what they do more easily. (Sen, I2, 59-68)

Participants described how they learned to accept that people might not always be nice to them and might treat them badly sometimes, but this did not mean they had to blame or criticise themselves or take those perspectives personally. They were also able to accept that others may act in hurtful ways because they are upset or distressed. They said they now tried to understand the underlying reasons that made people treat them badly or unfairly. The ability to be understanding and compassionate in a difficult situation helped participants to accept challenging situations and be more at peace. They had also said they had learned to maintain some more healthy boundaries by not taking on board all criticism and negative judgments.

### ***Theme 3: Change***

The third major theme in the analysis of participants' experiences of learning about emotional intelligence and coping relates to changes in participants. Participants described how they had developed and changed as a result of their learning. This process of change is described in three subthemes: (i) increased self-awareness, (ii) greater self-acceptance and (iii) changes in their thinking and orientation. At the beginning of the process, participants developed a more comprehensive understanding of themselves. The increase in self-awareness led to a higher level of self-acceptance in participants. The development of self-awareness and self-acceptance in participants resulted in changes in their thinking and orientation.

### **Subtheme 1: Increased self-awareness**

Developing emotional intelligence and learning about coping led to increased self-awareness, and participants reported developing more comprehensive self-understanding. They were more aware of their strengths, values and positive characteristics. They also described that, as a result of their learning experience, they became more aware of how they communicate and express themselves, their thoughts and feelings. Moreover, they had greater awareness of the roots of their unhealthy thinking and actions. The increased self-awareness of participants is captured in three smaller themes: (i) awareness of their positive traits, (ii) awareness of new communication skills and (iii) awareness of the roots of their unhealthy thinking and actions. In the following sections, I describe each of these subthemes and provide supporting evidence for them.

#### **Awareness of their positive traits**

In Vietnamese culture, parents often compare their children with others, including their siblings, in order to push them to achieve in study and life. Growing up with such parenting methods, many Vietnamese youths become self-conscious, anxious about social comparison and self-critical. They learn to focus mainly on their weaknesses, shortcomings, flaws and what they cannot do, rather than on their strengths, skills and values (Nguyen, 2021).

Participants were encouraged to explore different aspects of themselves while developing emotional intelligence and learning about coping strategies. After the programme, they described how they better understood their positive sides, characteristics and values. Participants described how they had developed more comprehensive self-understanding and shifted from focusing solely on their weaknesses and limitations to becoming more aware of their strengths, values and other positive characteristics.

They [other participants] said that I am a nice and friendly person. It made me realise that although I seem to be a childish person and I might not be able to do a lot of things, and I have my own values.  
(Vicky, I2, 43-45)

After talking to friends in this programme and listening to their stories, I realised that I am not too bad. I am not a person who easily gets angry. I am not a grumpy person. I am a person who has many good sides. (Sen, 12, 343-345)

Participants also described how they had broadened their understanding of who they were through social interactions with others in the programme. Feedback from others and self-reflection helped them realise there was more to them than they previously thought. Many had held negative self-perceptions and saw themselves as not good enough or not being worthy or loveable, which contributed to their self-devaluing. When they started hearing from others and seeing themselves as good and having positive traits and characteristics, they started to understand themselves differently. They began to develop positive self-regard and self-respect.

For example, from a young age, Thad was compared with his brother and was always told that he was not good enough and that he would never have any decent accomplishments in his life. As a result, Thad said he had low self-esteem and lacked positive self-regard. During the programme, other classmates told him that they thought he was cute and had a good sense of humour. Thad began seeing himself differently and feeling more confident in who he was. He started respecting his own traits, characteristics and emotions by allowing all his emotions to occur, and he started taking better care of himself by allowing himself to take some time off work and study to rest. Thad shared that when he understood himself to be valued, popular and worthy, he felt more confident about himself.

### **Awareness of new communication skills**

Participants talked about how they thought they had developed a new understanding of communication (e.g., how to communicate and express themselves, their thoughts and feelings) and how they better understood their own communication skills and abilities. They reported having developed new skills they could use to improve social interactions with others. The positive experience created by newly developed communication skills made participants feel more confident about their abilities and helped them increase their self-esteem.

Vietnamese youth are often cautious about communicating with others and tend to be self-protective because of the social comparison and criticism they often experience. Many choose to suppress their emotions, not speak up or avoid social situations that might put them at risk of being criticised (Cox, 2018). As a result, some Vietnamese youth have limited opportunities to develop essential communication skills such as listening to others attentively, keeping a conversation going smoothly or showing appreciation to others sincerely. Going through the education programme meant participants had an opportunity to develop and practise important communication skills. These skills enabled them to be more confident and competent in socially connecting and developing positive social relationships.

I am proud of my ability to listen. After learning that technique from the programme, I can listen to what my friends want to tell me. I can listen, I can ask them questions to encourage them to share more, and I can give them some advice. My friends told me that they wanted to talk more with me. I feel that I can be helpful, and I have values. I am very happy. (Hehe, I3, 111-118)

I can talk to people. For example, if I didn't know them well, I could still talk to them. It was a very interesting thing for me. And I was able to have a longer conversation, and others responded to me quite positively. It made me feel like I could actually talk to people, and my communication skills were not bad. (Toong, I2, 80-87)

I am getting better at praising others, and I do it sincerely. For example, if someone I don't like, I will praise him or her in my mind only, but with people I like, I will happily tell them my praises directly. Some were happy when receiving my praises. Some wondered why I praised them too much. But I think I praised them with my heart. (Aioon, I3, 93-99)

Participants' new understanding of themselves as competent communicators and their new communication skills positively impacted their self-esteem and self-confidence. Most participants described how they thought they were not very good at talking to other people, especially people they did not know very well. However, within the safe boundaries of the

programme environment, they were encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings. A safe and respectful environment allowed them to practise their communication skills without fear of being judged or criticised. This opportunity and feedback from others enabled them to realise that their communication skills were much better than they thought, leading to an increase in self-confidence.

Participants shared how they now understood how important listening to others is as a skill. They said learning to active listen was beneficial for both themselves and the people around them. Participants were able to earn people's trust by using their attentive listening skills and encouraging others to talk about their concerns. The positive outcomes from applying the new skills gave participants a sense of accomplishment and helped them to feel proud of themselves. Participants' understanding of themselves changed because they recognised they could express themselves more freely, accurately and confidently.

### **Awareness of the roots of their unhealthy thinking and actions**

A third theme relating to increased self-awareness was that participants learned more about why they had particular patterns of feelings, thinking and behaviour. When participants understood the 'why' behind their thoughts, feelings and actions, it gave them a sense of relief that their problems were explainable and could be fixed. They now knew that they could change how they react and respond to emotions, stress and challenging situations.

In Vietnam, mental health issues are not thought of as health and wellbeing issues related to stress and a range of individual, social and cultural factors; they are associated with insanity and seen as a result of deficits within an individual. Therefore, a lot of personal and social stigma is attached to mental health issues. Vietnamese people tend to deny that they might be experiencing mental issues, such as anxiety (Do et al., 2020). As a result of a lack of education and public awareness, many Vietnamese youths suffer from mental health issues, including anxiety and depression, without knowing why they have those feelings or why they think or act in a certain way (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018).

In the process of learning about emotional intelligence, participants described how they had developed a greater understanding of the factors that contributed to them being unhappy or upset. They now understood that the reasons for their negative thinking and feeling did not

always lie within them but were sometimes a response to what was happening in their social and cultural environment. They realised there were logical and often complex reasons behind some of their unwanted or problematic thinking and acting patterns.

The programme helped me to explore a completely new perspective about myself. Before, I was so confused, I learned that people only have problems if they were mistreated in their childhood or lacked parental love. But I didn't experience any of those. I don't know why I am this miserable. Then from this programme, I realised so many things, such as my misery was caused by being too spoiled by my parents. That's it. My misery has its cause, and it was not because of me; it was not my fault. It all makes sense. (Vicky, I2, 98-106)

My dad did not approve of me, so I went and sought approval from the outside world. (Kevin, I1, 525-526).

My schedule is really tight now, and I only stop working when I am too exhausted to continue. I want myself to be able to do much more than that, and if I can do that, I will feel proud. If my life gets better, If I can be the corn seed that popped earlier than other seeds in the pot, I will be happier than I am now. I want to prove myself to my parents. (Kevin, I2, 145-151)

Participants also reported experiencing changes in their perspective, and now they were able to better understand why they had particular patterns of feeling, thinking or acting (i.e. procrastinating or needing constant approval from others). When participants understood themselves and the 'why' behind their thoughts and actions, they said it gave them a sense of relief that their problems were explainable and could be fixed or worked on. Having greater self-understanding and being aware of the roots of unhealthy thinking or acting patterns was empowering for the participants. It gave participants a starting point for the process of self-improvement and self-development.

## **Subtheme 2: Greater self-acceptance**

The second theme within the major theme of change is self-acceptance. Acceptance is one of the foundation steps for healing and growth. The first step is awareness, and the second step is acceptance. If people cannot see their problems or do not know themselves clearly, they cannot embrace their weaknesses and take action to change them (Branden, 1994). In the present study, participants described how an increase in self-awareness leads to a higher level of self-acceptance. For participants, learning how to have more self-acceptance meant they needed to be more willing to tolerate the existence of their negative traits and characteristics instead of denying them. Self-acceptance also meant participants had to learn to accept their failures and see them as normal events in life. The experience of changes in participants' self-acceptance is captured in two subthemes: (i) accepting negative personal traits and characteristics and (ii) accepting failure. In the following section, I describe each subtheme in more detail and present the evidence for them.

### **Accepting negative traits and characteristics in themselves**

Participants talked about how they were able to accept that they had some negative characteristics. Instead of denying or rationalising these traits, they learned to accept them as a part of themselves and perceived them as something they wanted to improve. They adopted a growth mindset, and learned to allow both their positive and negative characteristics to coexist and accept them with compassion.

In Vietnamese culture, an ideal and respectable person is someone humble, rational, thoughtful and knowledgeable, who does more and talks less and has high self-discipline (Nguyen, 2014). Many Vietnamese youths put pressure on themselves to achieve these traits, and they deny or hide other traits that are less desirable or ideal. Practising acceptance helped participants to change the way they think about themselves. Because of that, they started accepting all their traits and characteristics and were less ashamed of having them.

Before, when thinking of myself, I knew that I had some negative characteristics but never thought I would have such feelings as 'arrogance' or 'contempt'. They are feelings that I could not accept before because I always think of myself as a warrior, and a warrior



should not have those kinds of feelings. Recently, by using the emotions card sets, I realised that I do have those feelings. It was quite ironic to realise that I'm just an ordinary peasant, not a hero like I thought I was. I never imagined that I could accept thoughts like that, and after a while of careful consideration, I realised, "these are mine. I'll take them back to me. I won't deny them anymore". My negative characteristics are like my children, and whether they are good or bad children, they are still mine; I will have to take them back, love them, and then we can get along well with others, and the family will be at peace. (Juan, 12, 336-345)

For Juan, emotions such as arrogance or contempt were judged as negative emotions that only appeared in people with low social rank, such as peasants. Since he saw himself as a person of high social rank, a warrior, he refused to acknowledge the existence of those emotions within himself. He did not want to acknowledge these characteristics, so he hid them from himself and others. Learning about emotional intelligence meant Juan could accept that it is normal to have both positive and negative emotions. He was also able to explore some of his negative characteristics and look at them with a non-judgmental attitude. By accepting the negative characteristics within himself, Juan had an opportunity to reconnect with many of his hidden characteristics and be more compassionate to himself.

Other participants realised they did not have to be right all the time; they could make mistakes and change their thinking, and be more accepting of their weaknesses. This change in thinking helped them also to be more compassionate towards others who shared similar or had different abilities or issues.

I thought I was wrong because before, I always tried to think and solve everything in the way of  $1+1=2$ , but I realised that even though it seemed so logical as  $1+1=2$ , it was all made up in my head. Yes, it is logical and correct, but in the calculation only, in life, it is much more complicated, so I was wrong. Knowing that "I was wrong" was actually a good thing, "being

wrong" happens during this time of my life is not too bad. It is still "wrong" but not bad because it is a necessary mistake for me. (Thad, I2, 45-51)

Now I accept that I am not rational as I thought. I am weaker than I know. Accepting this can help me to really care for others and be a better self of mine, to become someone I want to become, not someone I need to become. (Thad, I2, 112-116)

Thad believed that everything should be solved with a rational and logical method; therefore, he often numbed his feelings to force himself to be rational to solve problems effectively. However, Thad realised that life was full of emotional problems, and those problems could not be effectively solved with only rationality. He realised that his way of coping and his attitude of 'always being rational' was not as effective as he believed it to be. He learned to accept this and allowed himself to be irrational and emotional. By accepting the emotional side of himself, his weakness, Thad not only saw a new path for self-development but developed more self-compassion. He also had more understanding and cared for other people who were emotional and irrational at times.

Participants transformed when they became more willing to accept and tolerate the existence of their negative traits or characteristics and see those traits or characteristics as a part of themselves rather than denying or disowning them. Participants recognised that sometimes they did not effectively handle their problems; they made mistakes, reacted badly or responded in less than desirable ways. Instead of coping with these by denying or rationalising these traits or behaviours, participants looked into themselves and saw these as being human, fallible, imperfect and okay. This process helped participants re-evaluate themselves (i.e., not being rational or noble as expected) and allowed both their positive and negative characteristics to coexist and be accepted with compassion.

### **Accepting failure**

Developing self-acceptance also meant participants had to learn the ability to accept that failure was a part of life and that this did not mean they were bad or unworthy people. Being 'right' is very important to Vietnamese people because it is the way people maintain the level of respect that others give them (Truong, 2013). As a result, making mistakes, being wrong or

failing is a great fear for many Vietnamese. After completing the programme and learning about emotional intelligence, participants reported that they had started to change their perceptions about failure and started giving themselves permission to fail or accept that they could not be right or the best all the time.

I accept that I expect too much from myself. I accept that there are failures and unsatisfied events in my life. I accept that I still have many weaknesses. This means there are so many things that I can learn. (Eira, I3, 157-160)

I accept the fact that sometimes I will fail, and it will hurt. That's right. I am ready. I am ready that anything can happen, either good or bad, and I can accept them. The idea made me feel more relaxed. (Te, I2, 294-298)

Their views of failure changed, and instead of viewing failure as something to fear, they started seeing failure as an inevitable element of life, which provided them with opportunities to learn and grow. When participants developed this new perspective, they felt more relaxed and more open to taking risks and trying out new experiences, even ones that could be good or bad. Their new perception of failure as acceptable motivated participants to be more ready to face difficulties in life and helped them feel more confident that they could handle setbacks.

### **Subtheme 3: Changes in thinking and orientation**

The third and final theme that contributes to the major theme of change is related to changes in thinking and perspectives. Participants described that as a result of their learning about emotional intelligence, they were now more open to trying new experiences and enjoying life more. They also reported experiencing changes in their self-perception, choosing to have a more positive attitude about life and having more gratitude. All these changes in thinking and orientation to life meant participants could enjoy their lives more and gain greater control over their happiness.

Participants' changes in their thinking and life orientation are captured in the following four smaller themes: (i) staying open to new experiences, (ii) changes in self-perception, (iii) choosing positivity and (iv) appreciating the present moment of happiness. In the following

section, I describe each of these subthemes in more detail and provide supporting evidence for them.

### **Staying open to new experiences**

Participants reported that, as a result of learning about emotional intelligence, they had changed their mindset and were more open to new experiences. They actively sought out a variety of new experiences and were more comfortable and excited about taking up new challenges.

A thousand years of colonialism and being at war have meant Vietnamese people have suffered from much poverty and famine, and they have often feared for their safety (Ngo, 2014). As a result, Vietnamese people have developed a very risk-averse lifestyle, and they are used to playing things safe and avoiding any unfamiliar or uncertain activities so that they can live peaceful and stable lives (Nguyen, 2018). Learning about emotional intelligence enabled participants to develop the confidence to take on new opportunities and experiences in life, including finding new ways to express their identities and uniqueness.

I started relaxing and dared to live the way I wanted. I really love that idea. It is very exciting, and I am not forcing myself anymore. I started applying for a job. I also applied for a volunteer position in South Africa, I was very nervous, but I applied anyway. Yesterday was my first time ever making an application, all in English. I felt so proud. (BDZ, I2, 375-377)

I did many things that I didn't dare to do before. I cut my hair. I got a new piercing. There was a competition at my school. I was scared when thinking about whether I should apply for a competition; I was like, "Can I do it?", "What if I fail?" I eventually decided to do it because if I fail, at least I tried and failed, and it's fine. If I didn't apply, I didn't have a chance to fail. Thinking in that way made me realise that even if I fail, I will still feel happy. (Tam, I3, 484-490)

Participants shared that they were more willing to try out new things, take risks and actively seek out a variety of new experiences (i.e., taking a part-time job for the first time or going to

an outdoor concert with a massive crowd for the first time). They described how they were now more comfortable and excited about exploring and pushing themselves to step out of their comfort zone. Participants reported that they could do this because they could now better examine and understand the pros and cons of a situation and were more accepting of failure. Being more open to new experiences enabled participants to have positive feelings about themselves (i.e., being happy and proud of themselves when they tried something new or achieved something new).

### **Changing self-perception**

A second change in thinking that participants reported as a result of their learning was in relation to self-perception. The practice of judging and criticising others in Vietnamese culture has contributed to many Vietnamese youths developing negative self-perceptions (i.e., thinking of themselves as incompetent and unworthy) (Nguyen, 2013). As a result, they often devalue themselves and treat themselves badly (i.e., deny themselves or hate themselves). Participants reported experiencing changes in self-perception. After learning about emotional intelligence and coping, they were better able to identify and challenge their pessimistic thinking. They were better able to understand the origins of self-degrading thoughts. They realised these thoughts were not always correct and were sometimes irrational. Participants said that they had changed the way they thought about themselves, were less self-critical and now felt better about themselves.

This is the first time in a long time that I feel confident. I feel that I can love myself instead of hating [myself]. And the anxious feelings that come from the thought that "I hate myself", those feelings don't come often anymore. I started realising that the statements in my head, like "You're rubbish", are not true. I feel like a person that suddenly feels fine after a long time of being ill. I felt liberated. (Vicky, A2, 42-51)

Something that happened made me realise that I have mistreated myself. I should love myself because If I don't do it, who will? This thought reminds me that I should never degrade myself. I must respect

myself. I will become stronger and more confident if I know how to love myself. (Marice, I3, 219-222)

Participants also reported changes in their self-evaluations and developing more self-compassion and positive self-regard. They had learned how to challenge their self-degrading thoughts and realised that those negative thoughts about themselves were incorrect and did not help their mental health or wellbeing. Participants described how they now realised they should treat themselves respectfully and in a more loving way instead of expecting others to do that for them. When participants started thinking more positively about themselves, they felt liberated and empowered and had more confidence in themselves.

### **Choosing positivity**

Another key change participants experienced in their thinking and orientation was that they realised they had more agency than they thought. They reported that they had learned that they could choose to live their lives the way they wanted, either happily or sadly. It was a decision they could make for themselves. Many Vietnamese people believe that their destiny is fixed and that their happiness depends on external forces. This belief helps people stay calm and accept a difficult situation more easily, as outcomes are seen as being out of their control (Nguyen, 2018). On the other hand, these beliefs mean some people feel that they have no control over a situation, and this can lead to hopelessness, resignation, helplessness and powerlessness.

Participants shared that they had learned that they had more control over outcomes in their lives, thinking, feeling and actions. They learned that they have more agency than they thought and can choose to live with a positive attitude.

It created positivity in a way that, recently, my life is getting much more positive. I mean, I now know that I have choices. I know that I can have a choice in every situation. I have told everyone around me that I have started living with a new mindset because I can live a life in which all the choices are mine. Feeling sad or happy is also my choice of what I want to feel, not because of others. (Silvia, I2, 10-18)

I know I can choose to be joyful. For example, meeting my students make me happy, so I actively create more opportunities for myself to meet the students more, talk to them and have fun with them. (Aioon, 13, 167-171)

Participants described that their thinking about life and happiness had changed, and they now believed they had choices in every situation in their lives. They could choose to live their lives the way they wanted, either in a happy or sad way. Participants said they were also actively choosing to have a more positive attitude towards themselves, life and opportunities. For example, Tam shared that, before, she was never serious about her study at university, but after completing the programme, she realised that she was still very young and she wanted to utilise as many opportunities to learn as possible; she changed her attitude toward her study. Since then, Tam said she had never skipped a class and took notes carefully in class. Tam also changed her learning goals. Before, she chose to study to get good grades, and now, she chose to learn as much as she could while she was still in university so she could feel good about her studies and herself.

Participants also talked about how they had learned to be more proactive and create positive experiences for themselves (e.g., actively expressing love more often to their family members to bring happiness to the family). They also described how they now chose to see criticism from other people from a compassionate lens and to better understand and accept them. Participants realised they had the power to choose a positive or negative orientation to problems and life. The new approach and perspective gave participants a sense of freedom and helped them gain more control over their lives.

### **Appreciating present moments of happiness**

Learning about emotional intelligence and coping also enabled participants to change how they approached living. They reported that they had learned to live in the present moment, be mindful and keep their attention on the present rather than letting their minds be pulled into the past or future and into worries.

Many Vietnamese youths experience the pressure of having to be successful in their study or work to bring honour to their family (Truong, 2013). Anxiety about the future can contribute

to negative thinking and a focus on failure or missed opportunities. A focus on the future and the past, especially when they have struggled or failed, and future threats can also make young people doubt whether they will be good or skillful enough to achieve in the future (Branden, 1994). As a result, many Vietnamese youths ruminate and worry excessively about not living up to others' expectations; they miss the chance to enjoy life and be present in the moment.

After being in the programme, participants said they were now more open to enjoying and being happy in everyday moments during their day, which made them happier.

I learned to enjoy small moments of my life more. I often think of the past and feel regret for things that I couldn't do. I can't really enjoy the present. Now I feel happier. I learn to appreciate small happy moments in my day. It is a very comforting feeling. (Kevin, I3, 248-354)

If I had many joys during my day, I would use the emotion card to call out all the positive emotions I had. I could relive all the happy moments of my day, and I really liked it. I start caring more about my emotions, and I think I should enjoy every happy moment I have. (Juan, I2, 241-244)

Participants reported developing mindfulness and gratitude. They changed their thinking, focus and orientation and learned to keep their attention on the present rather than letting their mind be pulled into the past or the future. They reported being better able to control their happiness by reminding themselves of and re-experiencing the joyful moments they had during their day. By doing so, they could be more at peace and feel happier in their lives, instead of having regrets about the past or worrying about the future.

#### ***Theme 4: Applying learned coping skills to gain control***

The final major theme in participants' experience of developing emotional intelligence and learning about coping strategies not only resulted in changing methods but helped participants gain more control in their daily life situations. This theme captures how participants utilised and applied their new knowledge and skills to gain more control in



different aspects of life. The theme of applied learning is captured in five smaller themes: (i) multiple solutions, (ii) utilising time management techniques, (iii) prioritising myself, (iv) being assertive and (v) actively improving relationships with their family.

By using multiple solutions, participants were better able to consider multiple viewpoints and generate more alternatives in solving their problems. They were also better able to manage their time more effectively, get more important tasks done and have a sense of achievement. Participants could identify their needs and wants and found it easier to put themselves first in many situations. They were more confident in expressing themselves and setting boundaries around what was not accepted. Participants were better able to pay attention to others' emotions and concerns, and actively created joy and happiness for their families. In the following section, I describe each subtheme in more detail and provide supporting evidence.

### **Multiple solutions**

Participants reported how they felt more in control of their lives because they had learned that there were different coping strategies they could use and that there is usually more than one way to solve a problem. They reflected on how they learned that while they may not be able to control a situation or how others reacted, they could control how they felt about and responded to it. Having increased knowledge of coping strategies meant more options and greater personal control.

In Vietnamese culture, people are socialised to believe that teachers and other authority figures are always right and should not be challenged. Students and those of lesser status must follow adults and authority figures' teaching and prescriptions without question (Truong, 2013). As a result, Vietnamese youth often struggle with initiative and critical thinking; they are used to following rules and guidance and only considering a single viewpoint (Tran, 2013). During the programme, participants were encouraged to look at situations from multiple perspectives, to appraise and weigh up options, and this encouraged participants to develop their critical thinking skills.

The question "Is there any other way to solve this?" is my favourite. I use this question a lot during my day to ensure I will do things more

slowly. I think it is better this way. Because when emotions take control, I will just go with the flow; it is not good. Instead of being like that, I ask myself this question or "What if I do this? Will it be better?" to find another way to solve my problems. (Juan. 13, 89-95)

When and why my dad got upset with me, I couldn't control that, but I knew what I could do was find another way to talk to him without upsetting him. Whether or not can I find a suitable way of talking to him, I don't know yet. At least, I don't feel powerless any more. (Kevin, 12, 128-129)

Participants described how they had learned to be more flexible and critical in their thinking, to consider various views and to move away from responding to situations using the same fixed or past pattern of response. They were able to think into the future, make predictions and examine what might be gained or lost if they took a certain action. Participants reported being more aware of natural and logical consequences and tried to solve their problems rationally. Participants shared how developing critical thinking and being able to generate alternatives helped them feel less powerless.

### **Utilising time management techniques**

Another theme in relation to participants' applied knowledge of emotional intelligence and coping is related to effective time management and prioritisation. Learning about emotional intelligence and coping helped participants also learn how to categorise and prioritise their daily tasks to reduce stress. They described and then used this knowledge and these skills to create better balance in their lives and achieve their desired goals.

In Vietnamese culture, people tend to value older people's wisdom and experience more than young people's energy and enthusiasm (Truong et al., 2017). Therefore, young people and their ideas/views/needs are often not given much value or attention. In the family, the oldest person in the upper generation is at the top of the hierarchy. In society, people of higher social status (e.g., government officials, leaders and managers in organisations) are at the top of the social hierarchy. The people at the top of the hierarchy are well-respected and are entitled to

tell people in lower ranks what to do. They are rarely questioned and have authority over people of lower rank. In order to get to a higher rank and be approved and respected by others, many Vietnamese youths try to become overachievers and do more work, sacrificing their leisure time to climb the ladder (Truong et al., 2017). As a result, they are often exhausted and feel stressed, hopeless and discouraged when faced with an overwhelming workload.

After being in the programme, participants reported having a more balanced approach to completing tasks and learning how to prioritise and manage their time more effectively.

My timetable now has three columns of "want to do", "should do", and "must do". Looking at those columns, I know what I have to do, and I always want to reduce the activities in the "want to do" column because those activities might make me feel comfortable. However, they might hinder me so much in doing other important things. (Thad, I3, 124-128)

That was the first time in my life that I opened my phone and noted all the tasks I needed to do the next day. So when I arrived at my office the next day, I didn't have to think of what to do anymore; I could start the tasks immediately. It was much easier for me when I only needed to follow everything on the list. Then I started making it become my habit. (Bear, I3, 89-97)

Participants described that they had learned to put some of their own needs first and now structured their daily time to minimise the time spent on activities they did not value. They had begun to prioritise time spent on what was most important to them. By learning to categorise needs and prioritise their daily tasks, participants started using skills to create balance in their lives and achieve their desired goals. They developed habits of planning for their work to save time, reduce stress and feel confident and ready before starting their work the next day. Planning, organising, prioritising and managing time enabled them to reduce stress, get important work done and feel good about themselves. Participants indicated that

they had started to believe that, apart from being an overachiever, there were other ways that they could achieve and yet maintain their wellbeing.

### **Prioritising myself**

As a result of the programme, participants described how they had begun to apply the knowledge they had gained and put their needs and wants first, rather than doing unwanted activities to please others and being unhappy about it. They learned to consider how to meet their own needs and become more self-reliant. Some participants had previously described being people-pleasers, not being able to say no to others and agreeing to do many things that they did not want to do. They often felt irritated or upset about it afterwards.

Vietnamese culture tends to promote collectivist rather than individualistic values. Many Vietnamese youths grow up learning to always put the group's needs first (e.g., family, parents and the community's needs). Many Vietnamese youths think their needs and wants are not as important as others' (Truong, 2013). When people have to fulfil others' needs and wants while suppressing their own needs and wants, people can easily develop feelings of resentment, unfairness and anger, and have self-degrading thoughts (e.g., "My needs and wants do not deserve to be met" or "I am not supposed to put my needs first, I am unworthy and should feel guilt and shame for doing so"). Additionally, when people are used to putting others' needs and wants first, they often do not know how to be assertive, stand up for their rights and express their needs (Young et al., 2003).

With developed emotional intelligence, participants described how they had started to be able to identify and prioritise their wants and needs. They also felt more confident and assertive in expressing their needs to others, and they began to re-evaluate their relationships with others. They took more notice of how they felt when they did things with people in their lives and started thinking about what they wanted to do and whom they did and did not want to spend time with. They learned to weigh up the costs and benefits of situations and make decisions that benefitted them in the situation. Participants started being able to prioritise their own needs and wants in some situations and consider those of others.

My friends asked me to go to a nightclub with them. I was tired, and I didn't want to go. I thought if I didn't go, they would be very unhappy with me. They would hate me, and then our relationships would be

affected. But, let it be, I didn't want to force myself to come there, to be unhappy and uncomfortable. I'd rather go back home and sleep. (Sen, A4, 54-67)

A friend asked to go with her to the supermarket. I went there with her twice; I didn't like it. We didn't have anything in common. I didn't want to hang out with her that much. I denied her invitation. If I went, I probably felt tired and irritated, so I didn't go. Before, I found it hard to say no because I would feel guilty. Now, I can say no to her, she was upset, but I just ignored it. (Vicky, A5, 47-55)

Participants described finding it easier to put themselves first (i.e., saying no and letting others be upset with them). They felt more comfortable deciding not to participate in activities that would please others but make them unhappy (i.e., often agree to do a job for a co-worker when asked even if they had too much work themselves). Participants started to gain more self-respect and to value and prioritise their needs and wants. This applied learning helped them feel better and happy because they were not doing things out of obligation or because of social pressure.

### **Being assertive**

Learning about emotional intelligence and how to identify and express emotions helped participants become more assertive and confidently express themselves beyond the programme. In Vietnamese culture, standing up for one's own views and rights is sometimes seen as being selfish, or that the person is seen as a troublemaker (Truong, 2013). Therefore, some Vietnamese youth are not good at being assertive or knowing how to stand up for themselves in certain situations. When people do not know how to assert themselves in a situation that seems unfair or disadvantages them, they may become angry, react aggressively to get what they want, or secretly annoy others until they get what they want. Both of these ways often lead to more anger and stress and worsen the relationship quality between the people involved.

Participants shared that they had learned to be more assertive in some interpersonal situations. They were able to protect themselves from being unfairly treated or taken

advantage of and reduce potential misunderstandings by communicating more clearly. Participants described how they had become more assertive in interpersonal situations and how this helped them feel better.

Before, I would avoid them when someone made me uncomfortable or attacked me in a conversation. But now, I will tell them that "I will not continue this conversation with you because I don't want to talk to you when I am not in my right mind, and I don't want you to think of me as a person that I am not". (Te, 13, 34-40)

Before, when people shared their stories with me, I would listen to them, but I didn't know what to say; I just remained silent, and it didn't help. Now, I told them, "I will listen to your story, but if I don't say anything, it means I don't know what to say, but I am still willing to listen to you". I told them that, and they said they felt better; they felt heard. (Tam, 13, 50-55)

Participants explained how they were now more able to assert themselves and put some important boundaries around what was and was not acceptable. They used their learned skills to help reduce potential misunderstandings and increase hostility and resentment. For example, Bear's father told her that she was a messy person while she was the one in her family who was tidying the whole house every day. She was able to tell her father calmly that what he was saying was not true and reminded him that he knew she was the one who kept the house clean and tidy. Participants could use their knowledge of emotional intelligence and express their discomfort and share their perspectives with others openly without being hostile or aggressive and without feeling bad about it themselves. Being assertive enabled them to stand up for themselves when they needed to.

### **Actively improving relationships with their family**

Finally, participants explained how they had begun to apply their knowledge of emotional intelligence and were using it to improve relationships and interactions within their families. They were more able to communicate and express their emotions with family members but were also able to let go of past hurt and repair some relationships. They also now had a greater

understanding of why family members said and reacted the way they did and had more acceptance and compassion towards them.

Growing up in a culture that does not encourage the outward expression of emotions or problems means many Vietnamese people learn to suppress their emotions and use avoidant coping strategies to conform to cultural norms (Truong et al., 2017). Family members in Vietnam tend to avoid discussing their problems or negative emotions openly because they want to maintain their social image shaped by cultural and social expectations (Do et al., 2020). For example, parents often suppress their negative emotions and avoid sharing concerns with their children because they want to be seen as strong people who are in control. Likewise, children avoid sharing their problems with their parents because they want them to think they are still doing well at school or work. When people are used to suppressing negative emotions and avoid talking to others about their problems, they run the risk of becoming isolated. They may find it difficult to feel positive emotions and struggle to express their love and care for loved ones. The participants talked about how the suppression of thoughts and feelings sometimes created misunderstandings and distance in their family and interpersonal relationships.

Learning about emotional intelligence encouraged participants to pay attention to other people's concerns and emotions. Participants explained how they had learned how to respond appropriately to others' emotions to ease their concerns. Developing emotional intelligence helped participants develop a new appreciation of the importance of mutual understanding, helped them develop increased dialogue and openness and showed them how they could work to find win-win solutions that benefitted them and others. Participants described how they had started to actively improve their relationships with their family by communicating with them more often, sharing their feelings and doing so with honesty and respect.

I call my parents more often, and they also call me more often. I know they worry about me. I started telling them the information they wanted to know to ease their worry. For example, I would tell them my grades at school. I know my mom really wants to know my grades, but she never asks because she thinks I will get mad. The change I made here was that I talked directly about what she wanted to know and told

her that I would show her my grades on my next visit. The change I made also created a change in my mom; now, she can tell me what she really thinks. I never paid attention to what my mom said before, and I didn't care. Now I care. That's why my parents call me more often these days. (Juan, 13, 63-81)

Juan shared that, before the programme, he did not have regular phone calls with his parents because their conversations often ended badly, with both sides feeling angry. He easily got angry when talking on the phone with his parents because they asked him too many questions and made him feel like a child. His parents got angry because Juan got angry with them, and they did not get the answers they wanted. Juan described that when he became better at managing his emotions, he became more considerate and sensitive to his mother's needs and wants. Because of this change, he was able to attend to her needs and make her feel relaxed, and she was able to really speak her mind. The result was that the relationship between Juan and his mother became closer and better than it was before.

Communication and learning to express their emotions also helped participants to gain more control and repair and restore relationships that had become strained. Being more skilled at communication and sharing emotions meant they could share more quality time with their family.

Recently, the relationship between my mom and me has been getting better. I managed to understand my mom a bit more. I feel less awkward when expressing my love and my caring for mom, and I think we are making significant improvements (Silvia, 12, 79-81).

I did so many good things yesterday, and it made me very happy. It has been a long time since I last cooked for my dad. Yesterday, I was in the mood to cook, and I asked my dad, "would you like me to cook dinner for you?" then I made dinner, and my dad was very happy about it. Additionally, I came to talk to my grandma, and we had a good laugh with each other; we hadn't done things like that for a long time. I came to



talk to my little brother as well. We talked about all sorts of silly things and laughed about it. (Silvia, 13, 85-92)

Silvia shared that she loved her mother but also felt scared of her mother. She knew that her mother cared for her, but her mother often shouted at her when she was unhappy about anything in their house. As a result, she kept a distance from her mother. Silvia really loved her mother, but she often found it very hard to show her mother her love. Silvia also loved her father, grandmother and brother, but she felt that they did not understand her, and she found it hard to connect with them. After eight weeks of practising identifying and managing her emotions, Silvia not only knew more about how she felt about each family member, but was also able to show her family that she loved them and cared for them through actions. She put effort into improving her relationship with her mother. She brought happiness to her father by offering to cook for him. She deliberately started a conversation with her grandmother and little brother to bring some joy into their day. Silvia's changes brought happiness and joy to all her family members and resulted in a closer relationship among her family members.

As a result of developing emotional intelligence, participants developed a greater awareness of others' emotions. They noticed how their words and responses affected others (i.e., being aware of their parents' concerns). Participants learned to actively share details of their lives with others to reduce their concerns (i.e., sharing information related to their study with their family, so they do not have to worry about their progress). Being able to express affection towards their family members also created more joy and happiness for them and their family members and improved their relationships.

## **Chapter summary**

In this chapter, I described the experience of participants in learning, practising and applying emotional intelligence and coping strategies in their daily lives within the social and cultural context of Vietnam. This chapter presented an analysis of the data and some key themes that help conceptualise the meaning and impact of participants developing emotional intelligence and adaptive coping strategies. In this chapter, I first described a number of important emotional intelligence abilities and adaptive coping strategies that participants learned and

developed after they joined the educational programme. I then presented a narrative and description of how their learning experiences helped participants to develop and apply these new abilities and strategies to change themselves and their relationships with others. The next chapter provides a critical discussion of the four major themes that were presented in the findings.

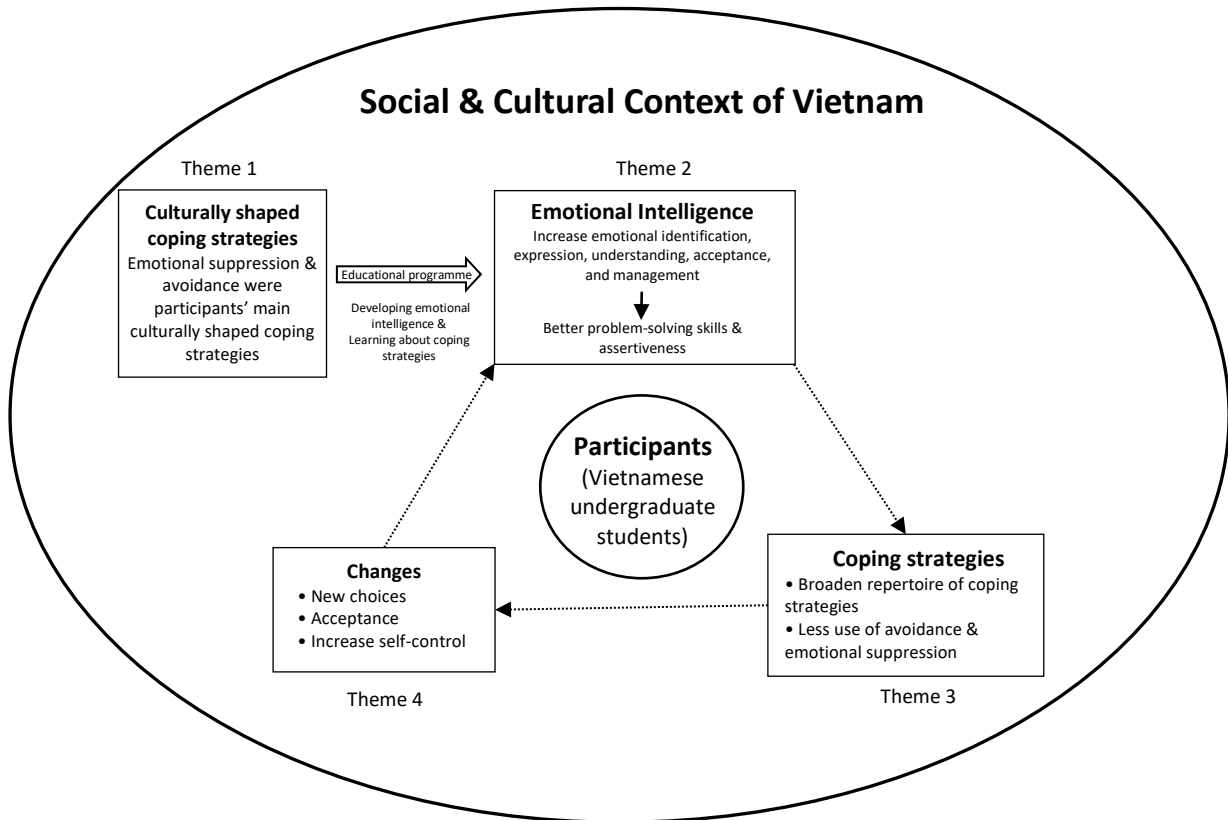
## Chapter 7: Discussion

To understand Vietnamese undergraduate students' perceived changes in emotional intelligence and coping strategies, it is important to understand the cultural factors that have shaped their emotional experiences and the sociocultural factors and socialisation that have influenced their coping. It is also important to understand the participants' experiences as children in their family context and as young people who live within a particular cultural, political and philosophical context. The findings in the last two chapters show some of the factors that have shaped the participants' emotional intelligence and coping from birth but also demonstrate the changes the participants experienced in their emotional intelligence and coping strategies.

This chapter critically discusses the findings in general and the participants' changes under four themes woven from them. The first theme is that emotional suppression and avoidance were culturally shaped coping strategies. The second theme is that changes in emotional intelligence supported the participants in developing and using problem-solving skills. The third theme is that the participants' newly learned adaptive coping strategies offered them more options and greater autonomy and control in their lives. The fourth theme is that the learning of emotional intelligence and coping strategies led to the participants' personal changes. The participants' experiences of developing emotional intelligence and learning about coping as well as their experiences of change, are shown in Figure 9 below. In the following section, I will discuss these findings and the themes in more detail.

**Figure 9**

*Participants' experiences of change in emotional intelligence and coping strategies*



### **Theme 1: Cultural influences on coping strategies**

Emotional suppression and avoidance were the main coping strategies that the participants used when they experienced stress and interpersonal conflicts. The development of these two strategies was shaped by different norms and beliefs in Vietnamese culture. As a result, the participants engaged in emotional suppression and avoidance mainly for social reasons to preserve harmonious relationships and to save face. Although emotional suppression and avoidance helped them achieve their social goals, they also resulted in negative consequences. The use of these coping strategies within their family and social contexts led to passive or aggressive behaviours, feelings of being powerless and feelings of being incompetent in coping. In the following section, I will discuss emotional suppression and avoidance as culturally shaped coping strategies.

## **Emotional suppression**

When facing emotional or difficult or stressful situations, such as interpersonal conflicts, the participants used emotional suppression as their main coping strategy. This finding is congruent with the findings of Soto et al. (2011) and Butler et al. (2007), who found that individuals in Eastern cultures, such as Chinese culture, are encouraged to control and suppress their emotions rather than express those emotions. Huynh et al. (2020) argue that there is a gap in the current research, and few studies have explored cultural influences on emotional regulation processes. According to Huynh et al. (2020), to understand people's emotional experiences, it is important to have an understanding of the cultural differences in their emotional processes. These cultural differences in the processes influence how they perceive and regulate their emotions.

The findings of the current study highlight the role of culture in the process of emotional suppression by undergraduate students in Vietnam. First, the participants used emotional suppression as a coping strategy because, in Vietnamese culture, some strong negative emotions are thought to be problematic and might cause suffering to themselves and other people (Thich, 2013). In Vietnamese culture, anger should not be felt and should not exist in one's mind at all. This belief shaped the participants' ideas about emotions and coping. They tended to avoid circumstances that might elicit anger and tried to suppress anger when experiencing the emotion to avoid hurting people around them. The finding that culture and responsibilities to family shape emotional expression and suppression are supported by Heppner et al. (2006), who found that, in collectivist cultures, children or young people in the family tend to keep their problems to themselves to prevent their parents from worrying.

Second, the participants engaged in emotional suppression when they experienced interpersonal conflicts because the idea of preserving a harmonious relationship is important in Vietnamese culture. People with interdependent self-concepts tend to focus on what others think, feel and want. As a result, they suppress their negative emotions so that others are not hurt, and the harmony between them is preserved (Cheung et al., 2010). Other studies have likewise found that people of collectivist cultures are more likely to try to suppress emotions to conform to social expectations and make other people happy (Mastracci & Adams, 2019). Previous research has yielded similar findings and shown that emotional

repression and self-constraint are valued in some cultures because these methods foster social harmony and interpersonal connections (Tsai, 1999). Wierzbicka (1994) notes that emotional repression might function as a means to achieve socially beneficial goals in interdependent self-system and collectivist cultures. Butler et al. (2007) also found that, in Asian cultures, which mostly emphasise interdependent self-construal, emotional repression is considered a helpful strategy for maintaining social relations and avoiding harm to others. The participants in the current study and previous studies have shown that people use emotional repression to control and minimise their expression to adjust to the needs of others and fit in with their social group (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Third, the participants engaged in emotional suppression because of a fear of negative consequences instilled in them by their parents' authoritarian style, which is typical of Vietnamese parents. The development of the participants' emotional suppression influenced by the authoritarian parenting style can be understood from the perspective of Schema Therapy (Young et al., 2003). In general, authoritarian parents are often demanding and punitive towards their children. Children surrender control to their parents because they are concerned about the threat of either being punished or having their parents' love withheld if they do otherwise (Young et al., 2003). When experiencing an authoritarian parenting style, children often learn to suppress their needs and feelings. They do that not because they feel they should suppress them but because they have to suppress them. They are afraid that if they express themselves, people around them, especially those of higher power and authority, will get angry with them, punish, criticise, or reject them (Truong, 2013; Young et al., 2003). Previous studies, such as Vu (2016), have found that Vietnamese young adults keep their thoughts/feelings to themselves and avoid sharing their problems with their parents because they are afraid of being reprimanded/scolded. They often stopped sharing thoughts and feelings with their parents from age 15. The current study also found that Vietnamese undergraduate students' use of emotional suppression was influenced by social and cultural norms.

### **Consequences of engaging in emotional suppression**

The frequent use of emotional suppression had negative psychological consequences (e.g., being highly emotional and upset) and adverse behavioural consequences (e.g., venting, using

passive or aggressive behaviours) for the participants. Emotional Schema Therapy (Leahy, 2015) may help explain this finding and why suppression is an unhealthy strategy. According to Emotional Schema Therapy, when people are restrained by social and cultural factors and have to conform to many cultural norms, they can feel as if they are not allowed to express their anger (Leahy, 2015). If people repeatedly suppress their anger, their anger will gradually accumulate. When it gets to the point that is beyond a person's ability to contain, they may display a sudden swing from absolute obedience to rage and engage in impulsive and out-of-control behaviours (Leahy, 2015).

The participants also engaged in passive-aggressive behaviour rather than expressing their emotions and feelings. This behavioural pattern of behaviour may be explained by Scheff's (2006) concept of the silence/violence pattern that people use in response to threats. According to Scheff (2006), emotional repression enables people to avoid painful feelings, but it also limits people's emotional regulation strategies into two categories: silence and violence. Anger, grief, fear and shame are vulnerable emotions and showing vulnerable feelings is seen as a weakness, especially for many men who ascribe to traditional masculine norms and hegemonic masculinity. In order to protect themselves and others, people learn to hide the emotions that make them vulnerable and maintain their silence, which is a form of emotionless talk or withdrawal. According to Scheff (2006), when the silence option is unavailable, people may cover their vulnerable emotions by displaying aggression and storming out due to their anger. This fear of vulnerability, judgment and criticism was not only key to shaping the participants' use of emotional suppression but also led to their anger and aggressive behaviour or outbursts.

The participants' use of emotional suppression and its negative consequences are in keeping with other studies that have shown that emotional suppression can have a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing. Studies of habitual use of emotional suppression have shown that greater use of emotional suppression is associated with poorer psychological functioning (i.e., greater negative mood, decreased life satisfaction) (Butler et al., 2007; Perez & Soto, 2011). Benita et al. (2019) found that individuals who use emotional suppression are less capable of regulating their emotions and have poorer quality relationships. Research has also shown that emotional suppression might also result in lower emotional wellbeing and self-

esteem because inhibiting one's true emotions might make people alienated from their authentic emotional experiences (Le & Impett, 2016). Chen et al. (2015) have also found that emotional suppression contributes to individuals' lack of growth potential. The current study found that the participants often experienced negative consequences as a result of being influenced by their sociocultural context and learning to suppress their emotions or engaging in passive and aggressive behaviours.

### **Avoidance**

In stressful situations involving other people, the participants tended to use avoidance as their main coping strategy. The participants' use of avoidance was influenced by the Vietnamese cultural norms of saving face and power distance. The participants engaged in avoidance to protect their social dignity, maintain respect for themselves and protect others from losing face in the situation. They avoided dealing with situations or people because they, as Vietnamese youth, had lower social status and were lower in power rank. They lacked coping strategies; thus, they tended to rely on suppression and avoidance to avoid suffering from negative consequences. Moreover, another reason for their reliance is that these strategies were the ones they were socialised to use.

The findings showed that the participants often used avoidance, and this strategy is rooted in the norm of saving face in Vietnamese culture. Saving face is important for Vietnamese people. Losing face not only brings shame to oneself but also to the person's whole family (Nguyen, 2013; Pham, 2007). The participants used avoidance to save face for themselves and their families. Previous studies of avoidance and saving face have similarly shown that people avoid confronting and solving problems to save face for themselves and other family members. Do et al. (2020) found that both older generations (e.g., grandparents, parents) and younger generations (e.g., children, grandchildren) avoid discussing their problems with others in order to save face. People of older generations do not want to talk about their problems so that they can appear strong and maintain the respect they have in the family. People of younger generations avoid talking about their problems because they want their parents or grandparents to think that they are still doing well in all aspects of their lives.



Another social and cultural factor that contributes to the development of avoidance among participants is power distance. The participants' avoidance strategies have gradually developed since childhood and are reinforced by Vietnamese culture's social dynamics and power structures. The mixed value systems of Vietnamese culture place a strong emphasis on power, order, absolute respect and obedience (Truong, 2013). According to Huang (2020), parents are entitled to all the power in the families; they often dictate the outcome of the conflicts between them and their children. This authoritarian act makes their children think they have no choice but to comply. Gradually, the children believe that speaking up to their parents does not make any difference in a situation. As a result, they learn to avoid rather than engage in conflicts with their parents because they feel as if they will always lose.

This finding that Vietnamese youths' lack of power may contribute to their use of avoidance is also supported by the findings of Timming and Johnstone (2015). They found that people in less powerful positions tend to be submissive and avoid expressing their opinions or feelings when interacting with more powerful people because of values that reflect obedience and respect for authority. Matsumoto (2007) also found that cultures with high power distance, like Vietnamese culture, encourage self-restraint and self-regulation and discourage assertiveness in social interactions. Keltner et al. (2003) also found that people with lower social power and status often need to suppress their emotions to avoid situations where others with more power might threaten or punish them.

Past research on coping strategies mostly focused on coping goals in people with independent self-construal. Their goals include meeting an individual's needs, reducing psychological distress or increasing personal control (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Hobfoll, 2001). The current study found that the participants had multiple and sometimes competing coping goals within a situation. Sometimes the participants used avoidance and suppression to improve the quality of their interpersonal relationships, maintain other people's wellbeing and reduce their distress.

Most coping research conducted in cultures that endorse individualistic values views avoidance as an ineffective coping strategy that would lead to negative psychological issues and come at a cost (Chun et al., 2006). However, from a collectivistic perspective, avoidance is not necessarily an ineffective coping strategy. Although using avoidance as a coping strategy

may not help participants in the present study to reduce their psychological distress or solve their problems, this strategy may help them achieve their desired social coping outcome. Chen et al. (2015) found that young people in collectivistic cultures often face the dilemma of expressing their independent selves or conforming to their parents' advice to avoid punishments or show loyalty. Therefore, it can be difficult for young people to choose between strategies helping them to achieve personal goals and social goals. Strategies such as avoidance are often portrayed as negative and maladaptive from a Western psychological perspective that values independence, but from a non-Western sociocultural perspective, avoidance may be seen as adaptive.

The current study showed that the participants engaged more in avoidance and emotional suppression (or emotion-focused coping strategies) when experiencing stress and interpersonal conflicts. This finding contrasts with the findings by Huynh et al. (2020). In their study, they aimed to explore positive coping strategies through an observation of 411 undergraduate medical students in Vietnam. Huynh et al. (2020) found that undergraduate medical students were more likely to engage in problem-focused coping strategies, including emotional expression and problem-solving, when facing stressful situations. They found that emotion-focused coping strategies and passive coping strategies such as self-criticism were used more by undergraduate medical students with mental disorders. It is unclear if the participants in the current study had higher rates of mental health issues and whether this shaped their coping strategy choices.

### **Consequences of engaging in avoidance**

The participants who used avoidance reported feeling powerless and having limited options in dealing with interpersonal conflicts. Schema Therapy (Young et al., 2003) may also help shed light on why they felt this way and used avoidance. According to this therapy, people are more likely to use avoidance behaviours when they think they are incompetent to perform something, are worried about doing it right or perfectly, or worry about their inability to assert themselves (Farrell & Shaw, 2018). The participants' use of avoidance coping strategies could also be explained as an effort to detach themselves from the feeling of being vulnerable by using detached modes in Schema Therapy (Arntz & Jacob, 2013). There are a number of

detached modes, including detached protector mode, detached self-soother mode, avoidant protector mode and angry protector mode (Arntz & Jacob, 2013).

In detached protector mode, people detach themselves from their needs and feelings to remove painful emotions. Coping behaviours of this mode include spacing out oneself, numbing oneself and avoiding investing emotionally in people, disconnecting from others and excessive self-reliance. In some extreme cases, people in detached protector mode might engage in self-injury or thrill-seeking activities to stop or override their unpleasant feelings (Arntz & Jacob, 2013). In detached self-soother mode, people detach from their painful emotions or experiences by engaging in activities that can distract or comfort them from their unwanted feelings or experiences. Coping behaviours in this mode include engaging in binge activities to calm themselves (e.g., binge eating or watching), fantasising, overworking, or using substances. In avoidant protector mode, people avoid almost anything that might trigger intense emotions. In angry protector mode, people display anger at the people they perceive as threatening to set a safe distance for themselves (Arntz & Jacob, 2013). The participants in the current study tended to use the detached protector and self-soother modes, which may have been shaped by their cultural and familial contexts.

In this section, I have discussed the participants' use of emotional suppression and avoidance coping and the influences of social and cultural context on these strategies. I also discussed the psychological and behavioural consequences the participants experienced when they engaged in emotional suppression and avoidance. In the next section, I will discuss the participants' emotional intelligence, their learning about coping strategies and the personal changes they experienced.

## **Theme 2: Changes in emotional intelligence**

Participants' self-reported improvement in their different emotional abilities contributed to their perceived changes in their emotional intelligence. These perceived changes in participants' emotional intelligence were the result of learning about different emotional abilities and coping strategies in the educational programme. They described having greater emotional identification, expression, understanding, acceptance and management. These emotional abilities enabled them to better understand their reactions to stress, problems and

issues. The understanding of their emotions, as well as the problems associated with those emotions, helped participants develop better problem-solving skills, which they used to manage their emotions and deal with stress and difficult situations. In the following section, I will discuss the participants' improved problem-solving skills and increased assertiveness, which were two of the key changes they experienced after learning more about emotional intelligence.

### **Better problem-solving**

The changes that participants experienced in their emotional intelligence abilities acted as a foundation that supported their improvement and application of problem-solving skills. Previous studies have also reported a relationship between emotional intelligence and increased problem-solving ability. Caruso and Salovey (2004) suggested that emotional intelligence abilities could assist people in their problem-solving process. According to Caruso and Salovey (2004), emotional intelligence enables people to identify how they and others feel and to feel what others do. These skills allow people to stay open to conflicting and complex emotions as well as feedback and input, especially the non-supportive ones. Emotional intelligence also enables people to see the world through others' eyes, which could lead to interesting realisations. Emotional intelligence abilities have been shown to help people conduct an emotional analysis and take actions based on this analysis to address or resolve real problems. Moreover, Mayer et al. (2008) report that emotional intelligence training could provide immediate benefits, such as enhancing emotional intelligence abilities, followed by gains in using emotional intelligence in problem-solving. Frydenberg (2019) also notes that emotional intelligence helps set the mindset and belief in one's capacity to solve problems, grow and change.

### **How emotional intelligence led to changes in better problem-solving**

There are a number of factors in emotional intelligence that contributed to participants' perceived development in their problem-solving, including the working mechanisms of emotional identification, expression, acceptance and understanding.

First, emotional identification helped the participants know how they felt about themselves, how they felt about other people in the situation and how to respond to the environment or

situation that they were in (Hughes & Terrel, 2012). The ability not only enabled them to accurately identify the emotions they were experiencing but also helped them gain knowledge about the cause of those emotions and how they came about (Dostal, 2014). The ability to be aware of their emotions was essential. It helped the participants use their insights and emotional information to encompass their emotional management strategies to strive for internal goals and the goals of maintaining harmonious social relationships (Lane & Smith, 2021). As a result, emotional identification was a useful ability that the participants may have used for scanning situations, identifying problems and describing those problems as accurately and realistically as possible.

Second, emotional expression allowed the participants to put their emotions and emotion-related thoughts into words, which enabled them to explore the stressful situation with coherence and meaning (da Motta et al., 2020). The ability also allowed them to direct their attention to their important goals and clearly see their barriers. Emotional expression as an ability itself did not ensure goal achievement, but it may have contributed to setting motivation and behavioural efforts in participants to generate pathways for achieving desired goals (Stanton & Low, 2012).

Third, emotional acceptance helped the participants develop a willingness to approach and deal with their problems directly. Being willing to deal with problems is very important because it involves having a positive attitude toward approaching stressful situations and the desire to solve them with the help of appropriate resources (Dostal, 2014). Emotional acceptance may have operated with the mechanism of limiting habitual emotional reactions, and it helped the participants disengage from irrational thoughts, judgments or defense mechanisms. As a result, it created more cognitive resources and mental space for the participants to develop insights and allow positive reappraisals of stressful situations (Dixon et al., 2020).

Fourth, with emotional understanding abilities, the participants could analyse the information gained from their interactions with stressful situations and combine it with the information in their existing knowledge to create a coherent mental representation of the stressful situation as a whole (Dostal, 2014). This process may have involved the participants in exploring their situations to gain new and valuable information and the goals they wanted to achieve as the

outcome of the situations. Emotional understanding enabled them to engage in critical evaluation, and it required them to think about how each piece of information affected the situation and the desired outcome. The process resulted in new knowledge to help the participants select the best behaviours or responses to remove or address the cause of the problems or conflicts (Dostal, 2014).

According to Herman and Scherer (2008), people with more emotional intelligence can generate higher quality solutions and have higher problem-solving power. Their findings showed that emotional intelligence influenced the whole problem-solving process; however, it may not have an equal impact on each step of the problem-solving process. They suggested that more research should be done to explore the influence of each emotional intelligence ability on different steps in the problem-solving process. The current study highlighted the roles of each emotional intelligence ability and how they led to changes in problem-solving.

### **Improvement in assertiveness**

With the changes in emotional intelligence abilities, the participants were able to be more aware of their own and others' feelings and gain a better understanding of their situations. As a result, they were motivated to find a way to assert themselves clearly and appropriately in stressful situations and solve problems more effectively without upsetting or hurting the feelings of the people involved. This finding is consistent with what Goleman (1998) has theorised about individuals with high emotional intelligence having greater assertiveness. Goleman (1998) explains that, with increased emotional intelligence, people do not think of their feelings as irrelevant or messy; instead, they realise that their emotions are a source of information. This valuable information enables them to be more aware of their inner resources, abilities, strengths and weaknesses, and limitations (Goleman, 1998). As a result of developing emotional intelligence during the programme, the participants could identify their problems or limits and where they need to improve. The continuous emotional intelligence led to an increase in their self-confidence. With confidence, the participants developed a stronger sense of self-worth, had more confidence in their capabilities and were able to assert themselves about what was right (Goleman, 1998).

A lack of assertiveness is thought to contribute to an increase in stress and mental health issues among many young Vietnamese people. Le (2017) found that Vietnamese adult students lacked confidence and assertiveness in both academic study and life. Additionally, Cox (2018) found that Vietnamese undergraduate students could not talk about stress or mental health issues, and kept the problems inside and tried to handle those problems by themselves. They only sought help when the symptoms became severe. The ability to be assertive could play an important role in helping Vietnamese undergraduate students to be able to honestly express their thoughts and feelings and seek help. An enhancement in emotional intelligence helped the participants become more assertive than before, which may have helped them better communicate their needs and solve their problems.

### **Education and learning about emotional intelligence**

The current study explored the participants' experiences of learning and changes during and after completing a 10-week education programme on emotional intelligence and coping. Previous research has also shown that emotional intelligence can be learned as an ability through educational programmes, even brief ones, regardless of the context (Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2012; Gorgas et al., 2015; Meng & Qi, 2018). Brackett et al. (2012) have also found that emotional intelligence abilities increased in participants who completed an education programme.

The current study showed that the participants not only experienced a number of changes in their emotional intelligence abilities, knowledge and skills but also reported being able to apply these in their everyday lives, which led to greater happiness and less distress. Likewise, Castillo et al. (2013) found that an emotional intelligence abilities-based training programme reduced the level of physical/verbal aggression, personal distress and anger of its participants.

Findings from the current study show that Mayer and Salovey's (1997) ability emotional intelligence model can be culturally adapted and lead to changes in participants' emotional intelligence and coping within Vietnamese culture. This finding is important because it demonstrates that emotional intelligence can be learned, and young Vietnamese people can develop their emotional intelligence, skills and mentality to cope with stress and life challenges. The findings of the current study also address a gap in the literature regarding Vietnamese young people's emotional intelligence and coping skills. Programmes such as the

one in the current study may provide important emotion-related skills and knowledge, and provide a solution to the issues raised by Doan (2014), who notes that Vietnamese undergraduate students had low scores in emotional awareness, self-expression, handling pressure and problem-solving. The current study and its findings also showed how educational programmes and learning opportunities could help increase Vietnamese undergraduate students' emotional intelligence (Dang, 2020; Do et al., 2021; Nguyen, 2007; Phan, 2010).

In this section, I have discussed how and why the participants experienced changes in their problem-solving and assertiveness and linked this to relevant research and literature. In the next section, I will discuss the changes the participants experience in relation to their greater use of productive coping strategies.

### **Theme 3: Learning new coping strategies**

The findings showed that the participants' self-reported perceived changes indicated some improvement in their emotional intelligence abilities and coping strategies. The participants had gained better awareness of how they felt, a greater understanding of their emotions and more ability to express their emotions. Moreover, they were able to apply this knowledge when it came to coping with emotional problems and issues. They showed that they were able to make new choices and shifted away from avoiding and suppressing their emotions to using more problem-focused coping strategies. In the following section, I will discuss the influence of emotional intelligence on the participants' repertoire of coping strategies.

#### **A larger repertoire of coping strategies**

The findings of the current study showed that the participants experienced changes in their emotional intelligence and broadened their repertoire of coping strategies by including more problem-solving strategies. Emotional intelligence enabled the participants to engage in active listening; exchange information, feelings, thoughts and ideas with others; and be more open-minded to constructive criticism. They used their emotional intelligence skills to analyse other people and their own problems as well as to view the whole situation from multiple perspectives. They also learned new problem-solving methods (other than the emotion-focused strategies they already had), so they were more able to choose the right strategy for



the right situation and felt as if they had more choices and options. Having more problem-solving methods meant they had more choices in coping and how to cope effectively. A great deal of research shows a connection between emotional intelligence and problem-solving and that people with increased emotional intelligence are better able to use coping strategies to solve problems.

This finding is consistent with the finding of Ndawo (2021) that the development of emotional intelligence resulted in increased reflection, which enabled nursing students to face their emotional challenges and solve their problems more effectively. Ballantyne (2020) and Cleary et al. (2018) have also found that emotional intelligence (the ability to identify, understand, manage and apply emotional information to decision-making) is used to guide thinking and reasoning and results in more productive coping in people. They also found that emotional intelligence is used by people to confidently communicate about complex problems or disagreements in a respectful manner and without being overly emotional.

Other researchers have emphasised and argued that emotional intelligence is of vital importance to problem-solving and can improve the capacity to think through issues. For example, Black (2019) argues that tackling a problem with purely cognitive ability is impractical and impossible because emotions and rationality are inevitably connected. She argues that the application of emotional intelligence in everyday decision-making could enhance people's rationality and result in more critical and rational decision-making as well as more effective stress coping. Similarly, Hellwig et al. (2020) found that higher emotional understanding resulted in higher reasoning ability and better ability to comprehend and interpret what is going on in situations, which are considered essential abilities that encompass effective and productive coping.

The current study also found that the participants learned new productive coping strategies and developed a repertoire of healthier coping strategies. According to Heffer and Willoughby (2017), having a limited number of coping strategies means people are less likely to achieve a favourable coping outcome. Therefore, having a greater number and more diverse range of coping strategies increases people's options and plays an important role in helping them cope more effectively in stressful situations. Additionally, the current study showed that the participants were able to apply the knowledge of coping to achieve positive outcomes.

Previous studies have shown that positive coping outcomes require the employment of relatively productive coping strategies (Kato, 2013). For example, in the current study, the participants could not feel relieved and at peace when they used maladaptive coping strategies such as self-blame or self-criticism. After the programme, they reported feeling relieved and calmer because they employed more productive coping strategies such as emotional acceptance, emotional expression, or positive reappraisal.

In this section, I have discussed how developing emotional intelligence and learning about coping improved the participants' use of coping strategies. I have also discussed how learning about different coping strategies enabled the participants to broaden their coping repertoire, which led to new choices, greater use of problem-solving strategies and a shift away from the avoidance and suppression of emotions. In the next section, I will discuss the changes the participants experienced as a result of their changes in emotional intelligence and coping strategies.

#### **Theme 4: Change**

The perceived improvement in emotional intelligence and coping strategies led to noticeable changes in the participants as Vietnamese undergraduate students. The participants reported being calmer and more optimistic when facing stress and difficult situations. They also described feeling more confident in applying their knowledge of emotional intelligence because they had more choices and options. They also described having developed more acceptance regarding their emotions and those of others, and were better able to maintain self-control. The participants described having experienced changes in their ability to make choices and accept themselves and others, and the unwanted or unexpected variables under challenging situations.

Other factors also contributed to the participants' changes in emotional intelligence and coping. These included the safe learning environment and the content that was designed to focus on the learners, not the teacher or the outcomes. These factors created a new learning experience for the participants, which was opposite to the traditional learning and teaching methods they had experienced in the Vietnamese education system. In the following section,

I will discuss the changes the participants experienced and the factors that contributed to their changes in more detail.

### **Personal change**

The process of developing emotional intelligence and learning about coping strategies led to some personal changes in participants. In terms of feelings, the participants experienced changes as they increased their sense of confidence and autonomy. They felt more liberated and empowered. They also reported that they had overcome their fear of being taken over by strong negative emotions. In terms of intrapersonal changes, the participants in the current study reported they had experienced an increase in self-control and in managing their emotions and behaviours around others. They also reported having developed their assertiveness and felt more confident in expressing their needs and ideas. In terms of interpersonal changes, the participants described an increase in their tolerance of others and a higher level of flexibility in managing interpersonal relationships. They also reported an increase in their abilities to recognise others' emotions and needs, which allowed them to form new types of relationships with others and repair existing relationships. They also described having experienced an increase in their willingness to take risks and adapt, and an increase in their confidence to handle new challenges and difficulties.

These changes in the participants are in line with previous studies that have shown that emotional intelligence education or training can result in self-transformation and changes (Dolev, 2012). According to Dolev (2012), emotional intelligence training resulted in the teachers' self-transformation by creating a shift in their emotional intelligence abilities, self-awareness, perception and behaviours. Dolev (2012) found that the development of emotional intelligence of the participants in her study was linked to their increased personal and professional effectiveness. It also resulted in an increase in their sense of fulfilment, a higher level of energy, a more positive attitude and a better ability to maintain positive attitudes when they faced stressful situations.

The present study has shown that Vietnamese undergraduate students can experience and achieve changes in emotional intelligence and coping despite being restrained by many norms and rules set by the social and cultural context of Vietnam. With the development of

emotional intelligence and learning about coping strategies, the participants became more autonomous, experienced increased self-control, developed acceptance, and maintained their mental health and wellbeing. Huynh (2017) has commented that a majority of Vietnamese undergraduate students (i) are not confident in their 'soft skills' such as communication and critical thinking, (ii) have goals related to future jobs but do not have the self-confidence to follow those employment goals and (iii) lack self-reliance skills to pursue a career. The current study shows that, with appropriate education, Vietnamese undergraduate students can develop their emotional intelligence and skills to help them deal with stress and increase their mental health and wellbeing.

In the following section, I will discuss the factors that have played an important role in the process of the participant's learning about emotional intelligence and productive coping strategies.

### **The main factors that contributed to participants' changes**

The participants described that learning to make their own choices and accepting their emotions were the two most important changes they experienced. When the participants became aware that they had choices, they had more control and could select what was best for them. With more options and control, they became more confident and autonomous. Learning to accept a range of emotions helped them become more tolerant towards those emotions and themselves. They were more open and willing to experience a range of things that might lead to either positive or negative emotions. Acceptance helped the participants get out of the 'fight or flight' mode when it came to strong negative emotions and helped them achieve a calm state more quickly. Gaining acceptance helped them manage their emotions more effectively. In the following section, I will discuss in more detail what having more abilities to make choices and gaining acceptance have meant to the participants.

### **Choices and autonomy**

The ability to see options and make different choices helped increase the participants' autonomy. They were encouraged to make different choices for themselves in the educational programme. Becoming more confident in making choices supported them to become more responsible for those choices and assisted them in feeling more confident in facing stress and

solving their problems. Katz and Assor (2007) found that when people choose to engage in an activity, they go through a process of considering environmental factors (e.g., others' opinions) and their personal factors (e.g., self-efficacy). The participants in the present study also weighed different social and personal factors, which helped them decide what specific course of action was the best for them. The successful outcome of the choosing process encouraged them to feel more efficacious and in control of their situation, which is a fundamental element of autonomy. The participants learned that they had different choices in how they handled difficult and stressful situations. Through their learning about emotional intelligence and coping, the participants could better understand the meaning of their different alternatives and how each choice could affect themselves, others and their intended goals (Markus & Schwartz, 2010). Schneider et al. (2018) found that people feel more autonomous when they have an opportunity to choose among different options. They also found that the feelings of autonomy were more likely to get stronger when the task was perceived as closely connected to a person's values, beliefs, or goals (Schneider et al., 2018). Other studies have also shown that understanding one's choices and making choices helps people feel autonomous, and this is important for maintaining an independent sense of self (Reinardy, 1999; Walker, 2020).

The participants learned that they had the ability to make different choices, which also meant they had a greater sense of freedom, increasing their feelings of self-control. Due to the cultural priority of being obedient, young people in collectivistic cultures tend to make choices that comply with their parents' preferences, and this results in feelings of low self-control in many situations (Chao & Tseng, 2002). The participants in the current study experienced a new sense of freedom because they had more control over their situations. This freedom and the ability to act on their choices meant they felt empowered (Leotti et al., 2010). Leotti et al. (2010) found that when people had the ability to make choices in their tasks, however inconsequential, the tasks became more enjoyable for them to do. Moreover, Frankl (2008) notes that having more freedom to choose how to respond to any situation leads to a greater sense of psychological freedom. The findings of the current study showed that learning that they themselves had choices helped the participants experience changes and contributed to their sense of freedom, self-control and empowerment.

## **The practice of emotional acceptance**

Learning emotional acceptance encouraged the participants to develop more confidence in their emotional management abilities and increased their behavioural willingness to seek out new experiences. First, learning emotional acceptance enabled them to develop stronger beliefs that they could manage their emotions effectively. This self-belief helped them overcome the fear of being taken over by intense emotions and shift away from avoidance coping strategies. Volkaert et al. (2020) explains that when people learn to accept their emotions, they can experience a reduced urge to engage in their automatic fight or flight response and use of unhealthy coping strategies (e.g., avoidance or aggression) to manage their emotions.

Learning emotional acceptance also assisted the participants in changing their views of themselves and becoming more self-accepting. They learned to accept both their flaws and negative traits as well as their positive traits and abilities. Studies have shown that learning to have more self-acceptance can help people reduce behaviours of unrealistically comparing or contrasting themselves to others. This ability also enables people to let go of the 'must, should, ought' set by unhealthy perfectionism often rooted in familial and social expectations (Ellis, 2006). Previous research on acceptance has also found that the beliefs about the controllability of emotions can support successful emotional management processes and lead to better psychological health (Ford & Gross, 2018). Alberts et al. (2012) also found that when people engage in acceptance, they have less need for active control of their emotions; therefore, they are less likely to avoid or repress their negative emotions.

Second, the findings show that learning more emotional acceptance helped support the participants' behavioural willingness and active engagement in new experiences. The participants were more open to experiencing new things, approaching their parents, and sharing their thoughts and emotions because they felt confident that they could manage their emotions and positive and negative reactions from others. Their greater capacity to understand others and cope meant they were willing to try out new things, take some risks and have the courage to do so. Loewenstein's (1994) information gap theory might help explain this change. According to this theory, when people approach a situation or a problem

with acceptance and curiosity, they open themselves fully to the experience and can be motivated to fill a gap in their knowledge.

The participants in the current study learned to approach situations with curiosity and openness and learned that they might approach stressful situations as learning opportunities rather than something to fear and avoid. According to Nguyen (2018), Vietnamese people tend to have a risk-averse lifestyle. They are used to playing things safe and prefer to avoid unfamiliar or uncertain activities so that they can avoid negative consequences. Learning about emotional acceptance helped the participants experience a change in their perspectives and adopt an active attitude and a mindset of being willing to face and solve their problems instead of avoiding or suppressing them.

### **Other factors that contributed to participants' experiences of personal change**

Other factors that helped the participants experience changes in their emotional intelligence and coping included how the education programme was designed and delivered. The educational programme was designed to focus on the learners' needs and active learning, which was opposite to their experiences of learning in the Vietnamese education system, which tends to focus on the teacher and passive learning. These programme factors, which enhanced the participants' motivation to engage in and be more responsible for their learning, included (i) the provision of a psychologically safe environment, (ii) real-life content and scenarios and (iii) opportunities for the participants to internalise and practise knowledge and skills. In the following section, I will discuss these factors in more detail.

### **Psychologically safe learning environment**

One of the key factors that supported the participants' changes in emotional intelligence and coping was the provision of a psychologically safe learning environment. A safe environment encouraged them to be more open to sharing their issues and emotional problems and to confidently express and talk about possible solutions. Psychological safety in the learning environment allowed them to be less concerned about what others think or how others would respond to their actions. They experienced less fear, shame and embarrassment, and were more motivated to engage in active learning behaviours, including seeking feedback, asking for help, sharing information and acknowledging mistakes (Edmondson, 1999).

Psychological safety in the educational programme was created based on (i) principles of respect and acceptance and (ii) positive interactions among the participants and between the participants and the facilitator. These elements are similar to Domalewska et al.'s (2021) findings of promoted psychological safety in their study. In their study on 360 undergraduate students in Poland and Vietnam, Domalewska et al. (2021) found that Vietnamese students rated 'being knowledgeable', 'being respectful and supportive' and 'being friendly and caring' as the top three qualities of teachers that created positive feelings in students. They found that psychological safety in the learning environment was promoted when the students were motivated to be open-minded, consider others' views, honestly share their opinions, ideas, and values, and be supportive and respectful towards others. These conditions were also provided in the current study and the educational programme, which facilitated the participants' learning about emotional intelligence and coping.

The practice of respect and acceptance within the educational programme helped the participants feel heard. They also felt that they and their emotions were accepted by other students and the facilitator. Respect and acceptance were also shown in all steps of the data collection process and educational programme activities. Newman et al. (2017) found that learning environments that provide psychological safety motivate people to communicate more openly, express their concerns and seek feedback. Kantar et al. (2020) also found that a safe environment, which is characterised by trust and respect, helps people feel motivated to take charge of their learning and engage in joint activities with others (e.g., discussion about newly learned concepts and skills). A psychologically safe learning environment helped the participants in the current study feel comfortable experimenting with new things, taking risks or making mistakes, and learning from their own experiences, all of which helped them experience changes in their emotional intelligence and coping.

Positive interactions among the students and between the students and the teachers were also a key aspect of the learning environment that helped the participants feel safe and motivated them to make changes. Rapport-building techniques (Madsen & Santtila, 2018) and active listening used in one-on-one interviews and group discussions helped the researcher/facilitator create mutual trust and friendliness, and communicate care to the participants. Other researchers have found that these factors help motivate learning in



students. For example, Dolev (2012) found that teachers who made an effort to genuinely listen and conducted close and open discussions with their students formed meaningful relationships with them, which contributed to students' change and their learning.

A number of factors, including a psychologically safe learning environment, helped the participants learn about emotional intelligence and coping and contributed to the change in learners. The programme offered the participants an opportunity to experience a learning environment that is different from the traditional learning environment in the Vietnamese education system.

### **Real-life scenarios and programme content**

The programme content was also designed to encourage the participants to think about emotional intelligence and coping in relation to real-life problems and to encourage them to apply their learned knowledge and skills to solve problems. A flexible and open design meant the programme's content and activities were continuously adjusted based on the information collected in every session about relevant issues and the participants' needs.

Research has shown that educational content and examples similar to life situations can motivate learners to engage more and help them transfer new knowledge and skills into their real lives (Holton et al., 2000). Lieberman and Hoffmann (2008) found that when the perceived training content matched or exceeded the participants' levels of relevance, they reacted to the training more positively and had higher levels of satisfaction. Conversely, they also found that if the perceived training content is less relevant to learners' real lives, they are less satisfied and negatively react to training. Bhatti and Kaur (2010) also found that the similarity of training content to actual situations impacts the participants' reactions to a programme and their confidence to perform the skills they learned from the programme in real life. Other studies have also shown that when learners think that the content of their training programmes is similar to real-life situations, they experience an increase in their confidence in their ability to perform a given task or solve a problem (Garavaglia, 1993).

### **Opportunities to practise skills and apply knowledge**

One of the unexpected findings was that the data collection methods for the current study also helped the participants to internalise their learned knowledge and skills and, in turn,

helped promote changes in participants. As discussed in Chapter 4, interviews, audio diaries and cogens encouraged the participants to reflect on their own experiences and express themselves in different ways. The repeated practice of these activities helped increase their self-awareness, self-reflection and self-expression, all of which are critical abilities in emotional intelligence.

These changes might be explained by using Transformative Learning Theory. According to Mezirow (2009), transformative learning is the idea that learners who receive new information may evaluate their past ideas and understanding. As a result, they experience a shift in their worldviews. Critical reflection and rational discourse are the essential components of transformative learning theory. In the current study, the learning activities and the facilitator encouraged the participants to critically reflect on their experiences and helped them develop an awareness of their assumptions and others'. This critical reflection may have helped the participants redefine problems from new perspectives and communicate effectively to validate their understanding and meaning-making.

Previous research has shown that the process of critical reflection enhances self-awareness and promotes a deeper level of self-understanding (Kurnia, 2021). Rational discourse refers to a form of a rational and logical discussion with others that enables people to discover the biases or incongruences in their assumptions or beliefs about themselves or others. It helps people address those biases or incongruences consciously (Kurnia, 2021). The educational programme and the use of interviews, cogens and audio diaries may have helped the participants develop skills in critical reflection and rational discourse, which contributed to changes in their beliefs, values and assumptions. Research has shown that changes in perspectives can enhance people's ability to organise and make sense of information and problems and help them develop a greater understanding of themselves and the world (Dirkx, 1998). The findings of the current study show that research methods, including interviews, audio diaries and cogens, can help young Vietnamese people improve their self-reflection and self-expression, which are critical to achieving changes.

## Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have discussed four key themes in the findings. The first theme was that the participants' use of emotional suppression and avoidance strategies was culturally shaped. These coping strategies were influenced by socialisation and learning from the participants' childhood and by the social and cultural context of Vietnam. Engaging in emotional suppression and avoidance helped them to achieve their desired social goals (e.g., preserve a harmonious relationship, save face). However, these coping strategies had many negative psychological and behavioural consequences on the participants (e.g., they were highly emotional and engaged in passive or aggressive behaviour). Developing emotional intelligence and learning about coping strategies helped them experience changes, including a greater emotional understanding, better emotional expression and the employment of problem-focused coping.

The second theme was that changes in emotional intelligence supported the participants in developing and using problem-solving skills. Each learned emotional intelligence ability (i.e., emotional identification, expression, understanding, acceptance and management) enabled the participants to improve their problem-solving ability. They were better able to identify the causes of their problems, analyse information to select suitable coping behaviours, direct their attention toward important goals and be willing to deal with their problems. The changes in problem-solving skills meant the participants were able to solve their problems more effectively to deal with their stress or interpersonal conflicts.

The third theme was that the participants' perceived improvement in coping strategies offered them more options and greater autonomy and control in their lives. The fourth theme was that developing emotional intelligence and learning about coping creates personal changes in the participants. They became more liberated, empowered, confident and autonomous. Developed acceptance and increased self-control were shaped by the participants' opportunities to practise making choices. Other factors within the educational programme also played a role in participants' experience of changes. The psychological safety of the learning environment, the real-life content, scenarios and situations, and the opportunities to practise key skills helped the participants internalise and apply the knowledge and skills to their lives.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

### Summary of the thesis

The central aim of the present study was to explore Vietnamese undergraduate students' experiences of change in emotional intelligence and coping within the social and cultural context of Vietnam. The aim of this study was achieved by answering the following research question:

*What are Vietnamese undergraduate students' perceived changes in emotional intelligence and coping?*

A qualitative descriptive inquiry was used to explore the learning experiences of 21 Vietnamese undergraduate students who completed a 10-week educational programme exclusively designed to help participants develop emotional intelligence and adaptive coping strategies. A constructionism paradigm was chosen because it was important to examine how participants made sense of, thought about and perceived their experiences of learning about emotional intelligence and coping. Sociocultural theory was chosen as an appropriate theoretical framework for this research so that the present study would acknowledge the social, cultural, religious and political settings of Vietnam that influence stress, coping and the development of emotional intelligence. This theory also helped balance the focus on individuals by drawing attention to how experience is socially and culturally shaped.

A qualitative descriptive inquiry was chosen because it provided a flexible and appropriate structure to collect and analyse data about the learning experiences of participants and how they made sense of their experiences, and any changes that occurred. Thematic analysis was used as a method to analyse the data of this present study.

The findings showed that avoidance and emotional suppression were the main strategies that participants used to deal with stressful situations or interpersonal conflicts. These coping strategies were culturally shaped. Participants engaged in emotional suppression to avoid hurting others' feelings, to maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships and because of their fear of being punished or of retaliation. They used avoidance and emotional suppression to save face for themselves and others, preserve harmonious relationships, respond to the

power distance, and avoid expressing thoughts and feelings that might show them as being vulnerable. Emotional suppression and avoidance were not the only strategies participants used; they also were outwardly aggressive and internalised unwanted negative emotions.

Learning about emotional intelligence meant participants' improved their emotional intelligence abilities (emotional identification, expression, understanding, acceptance and management). It also helped participants overcome their fear of being overwhelmed by strong emotions and helped them feel more confident in handling their emotional problems. Changes in emotional intelligence also shaped participants' use of coping strategies. Participants learned about adaptive and maladaptive coping, but understanding emotional intelligence meant they had a better understanding of what strategies to use in different situations and how to use them. Participants expanded their repertoire of coping strategies and changed from using emotion-focused coping to problem-focused coping strategies to deal with stressful situations.

Learning about coping strategies and emotional intelligence led to noticeable changes in participants. Before joining the educational programme, participants experienced a great deal of stress, and they had little freedom and few options when dealing with difficult life situations. As a result, they felt restricted, powerless and helpless, and experienced much self-directed anger as well as internalised fear, shame and guilt. After the education programme, participants felt more positive, joyful and liberated. They could stay calm and were more rational in emotionally charged situations. They became more confident in their ability to handle their emotional problems and problem-solving skills. These findings demonstrated that learning to improve emotional intelligence and coping strategies could help young Vietnamese people manage stress and life challenges. Participants also experienced other changes that included greater self-acceptance and acceptance of others' emotions, self-confidence in problem-solving, self-efficacy, self-control autonomy and feelings of empowerment.

### **Conclusions about emotional intelligence**

Emotional intelligence is important for participants of the present study because developing emotional intelligence was beneficial for them in both intrapersonal and interpersonal

aspects. For the intrapersonal changes, participants have better self-awareness, understanding and acceptance. These abilities helped them to engage less in self-doubt, self-criticism or self-blame. By developing abilities and skills to utilise, analyse and combine their emotional information to make more informed choices, participants could confidently manage their emotions and were more willing to deal with their emotional problems. For the interpersonal changes, developing emotional intelligence helped them gain better understanding of others and better communication/expression skills. These were essential abilities and skills for participants to improve relationships with people around them. The experiences of change in emotional intelligence helped participants to feel liberated, confident and empowered.

The present study contributes to the literature on emotional intelligence by addressing several gaps in knowledge identified by previous researchers (Huynh et al., 2020; Shao et al., 2015). First, it focuses on developing emotional intelligence in the social and cultural context of Vietnam and highlights the important role of religious, cultural and political norms, values and beliefs in shaping people's experiences of emotions. Second, rather than providing quantitative data on emotional intelligence, it provides rich qualitative descriptions of Vietnamese undergraduate students' experiences of learning and change and how they used emotional intelligence knowledge and coping skills in their everyday lives. One strength of the present study is to look at emotional intelligence and coping from a perspective of Vietnamese culture and to look at these through the eyes of young Vietnamese people. Vietnamese undergraduate students were given the opportunity to describe their thinking and experiences of change in their own words, from their view, through the use of in-depth interviews, audio diaries and cogens. This helped shed new light on how and why Vietnamese youth use specific emotional management and coping strategies.

The study also adds to the understanding of emotional intelligence and emotional intelligence theory. In Mayer and Salovey's (1997) Ability Emotional Intelligence Model, emotional acceptance is described as the ability to stay open to feelings, which is the first component of the branch of emotional management. In this study, I introduced emotional acceptance as one of the main emotional intelligence abilities, along with other emotional intelligence abilities, including emotional perception, facilitation, understanding and management. The

findings of the present study showed that emotional acceptance was an important part of changes experienced in emotional intelligence in Vietnamese youth.

Previous research has shown that acceptance is an effective strategy that helps people fully experience the intensity of emotions while successfully reducing the negative psychological and physiological responses associated with those emotions (Boehme et al., 2019, Feliu-Soler et al., 2018). One of the implications of the current study is that Vietnamese youth may benefit from access to models and therapies that encourage emotional acceptance. Therapies such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy or Logo Therapy, which promote acceptance and emotional regulation models (Wojnarowska et al., 2020) might help Vietnamese youth further develop their acceptance skills and emotional intelligence abilities.

### **Conclusions about coping**

Learning about coping is important for participants because it creates noticeable changes in their coping experiences. Participants' experiences of change in coping were shown in their broadened repertoire of coping strategies and their attitudes when coping with stressful situations. Learning about coping helped participants develop a larger repertoire of coping strategies, allowing them more coping choices and higher chances of solving their problems and achieving their desired outcomes. The development of new problem-focused coping strategies helped participants gain more confidence in their ability to deal with difficulties in their everyday lives. Participants also changed their attitudes toward coping and the coping process. They were motivated to become more willing to face and solve their problems as soon as they appeared, instead of avoiding them. The experiences of change in coping helped participants increase their sense of control, independence and autonomy.

The present study contributes to the literature on coping by addressing several gaps in knowledge identified through the review of coping research in the literature discussed in Chapter 2. First, it focuses on Vietnamese undergraduate students. Second, it provides a list of participants' self-described problems as well as a list of both self-described healthy and unhealthy coping strategies that participants used to cope with these problems.

The study also contributes to the understanding of coping theory by addressing a gap in knowledge identified by Yeh et al. (2006) and considering cultural contexts that shape people's coping processes guided by the Transactional Model of Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The study focuses on how the complexity of the values system of Vietnam shapes the coping experiences of participants as young Vietnamese. It also describes participants' experiences of selecting coping strategies, setting coping goals and their perception of coping effectiveness. In terms of selecting coping strategies, filial piety and the pressure of fulfilling filial piety duties and responsibilities had a great influence on the participant's coping experiences. The selection of coping strategies in participants was driven by imposed fear, shame and guilt associated with those duties and responsibilities. Additionally, we need to understand participants' coping goals to understand their choice of coping strategies. Participants had goals that strive for personal independence and autonomy as well as collective/social goals of maintaining harmony and saving face for themselves and others. In terms of coping effectiveness, avoidance and emotional suppression are not necessarily ineffective coping strategies for participants. Coping is an interactive and contextual process; it is hard to have a 'correct' coping strategy. The effectiveness of coping strategies in participants depends on many factors, including cultural values and beliefs, parenting styles and parents' coping styles, and the number of coping strategies they currently have.

### **Conclusions about emotional intelligence and coping education**

The present study contributes to the literature on emotional intelligence and coping education by showing that Vietnamese youth can learn new emotional intelligence abilities and adaptive coping strategies. They also can move from using emotion-focused coping strategies to using problem-focused coping strategies with appropriate knowledge of different coping styles. Participants' experiences of change in emotional intelligence and coping shows that emotional intelligence and coping can be learned and developed through a short educational programme. Additionally, emotional intelligence and coping can be developed quickly in young Vietnamese people if it is trained/facilitated in a non-authoritarian method and with an attitude of respect and acceptance.

To promote emotional intelligence in young Vietnamese people, it is necessary to teach them about emotional literacy and choices. Emotional literacy will provide young Vietnamese with



the necessary emotional vocabulary that helps them to identify and express their emotions. This ability will act as a foundation for them to develop other emotional intelligence abilities. Choices will help young Vietnamese gain a sense of control and freedom. This state of mind will motivate young Vietnamese to become more willing to engage in and deal with their emotional experiences rather than suppressing or avoiding them.

The factors that led to the greater use of problem-focused coping strategies in participants were their awareness of choice and the increase in the number of coping methods. Therefore, to promote learning of adaptive coping strategies in Vietnamese youth, they need to be provided with the necessary information and a range of various coping strategies, and taught how to problem-solve.

When providing an educational programme on intelligence and coping in a culture where expression is not encouraged and can be a stigma, a safe learning environment is an important factor that facilitators/trainers/teachers need to consider. For learners to feel psychologically safe in a learning environment, an educational programme should include the principles of respect and acceptance and an opportunity for positive interactions among learners and the programme's facilitators/trainers/teachers. These practices will motivate learners to be more willing, open and honest in exchanging information or sharing their experiences with their peers and facilitators/trainers/teachers. Additionally, active learning is another key factor that promotes the development of emotional intelligence and learning about coping in young people. To help learners to become more active in their learning, the educational content should have a flexible and open design that allows continuous adjustment to be relevant to the problems and needs of the learners. Also, learners should be offered opportunities to practise and apply what they have learned in both educational programme settings and in their real lives.

### **Research limitations**

There are a number of limitations to this study. Due to the nature of qualitative research and the sample, the findings of the present study cannot be generalised to a broader or different population. This research was a small study of Vietnamese undergraduate students ( $N=21$ ), and the results are not generalisable beyond the context and sample. Qualitative studies are

not usually concerned with generalisation in the quantitative sense. It was more important in this study to focus on rich data, trustworthiness and rigour rather than generalisability and reliability.

However, as mentioned earlier, I wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of Vietnamese undergraduate students' experiences of developing emotional intelligence and coping in their lived world within Vietnam's social and cultural setting. To achieve that, I used a maximum variation purposeful sampling strategy to carefully select 21 participants for this study. This sampling strategy involved creating a matrix in which each participant would be as different as possible from others in the dimensions of age, gender, field of study, university and geographical location of home town (Patton, 2015).

Language-related issues were another limitation of the current study. As mentioned in chapter four, the Method chapter, this study was conducted in Vietnamese and reported in English. The Vietnamese grammatical structure differs substantially from the English language, which means participants' narratives might not be captured accurately. Additionally, some terms used in Vietnamese, especially metaphors, did not have a comparable meaning when translated into English and might cause a misinterpretation of participants' intended meaning. Incorrect translated data would lead to incorrect meanings and findings (McKenna, 2022). To overcome the potential risks in translating data, I used peer review as a method to increase translation accuracy. I believe that using this method helped me to promote rigour in the translating process and ensure the trustworthiness of my findings.

Furthermore, I was not able to utilise the strength of audio diaries in the process of collecting data. As mentioned in Chapter 4, more than half the data from the audio diaries was not sufficiently relevant to the research question. The possible explanation for this problem was that participants were: (i) too busy to record, (ii) did not have a safe and private space to record, (iii) participants submitted entries to please the researcher instead of reflecting on the experiences of their day and (iv) participants fearing being judged by the researcher who listened to the recording.

I acknowledged this limitation after the fourth week of the programme and considered whether I should make some changes to ensure that participants would follow the recording

guidelines and produce recordings with data relevant to the research question. After careful consideration, I decided not to take any action because, if I did, it might raise an ethical issue about the demand for participation (Williamson et al., 2015).

There were, however, some unexpected benefits gained from recording audio diaries. First, participants shared that by answering the prompts in audio diary guides, they were able to think more clearly and arrange their thoughts more logically and rationally. Second, participants said that because they were identifying and reflecting on their emotions every day, they started being able to express their emotions more comfortably in the programme. Third, some participants thought that recording audio diaries helped them build a habit of self-reflection at the end of their day, even after the completion of the programme. Fourth, some participants shared that recording audio diaries brought them joy and increased positivity in their lives, as the activity allowed them to re-live positive and happy moments of their days.

### **Recommendations for future research**

The aim of the present study was to explore the learning experiences of Vietnamese undergraduate students who completed a programme that focused on emotional intelligence and coping. To my knowledge, the present study was the first qualitative research that investigated the experience of emotional intelligence and coping in undergraduate students in Vietnam. Further qualitative research is needed that focuses on capturing young Vietnamese people's experience of developing emotional intelligence using a broader sample. The present study could offer a broader understanding of how young Vietnamese people develop their emotional intelligence within the Vietnamese social and cultural context.

Future studies could also explore how the Ability Emotional Intelligence Model could be explicitly taught to Vietnamese people, along with which emotional intelligence abilities are most important. Based on the current study's findings, future researchers should also consider conducting similar studies with undergraduate students in both western and eastern cultures to investigate their experiences of learning about emotional intelligence and coping and how they differ across cultures.

Additionally, this research focused solely on young people aged 17–25 as they present the group with a higher rate of depression than the general population (January et al., 2018) but have limited access to sources of mental health support. Follow-up studies could be extended to include people in other age categories. An analysis of Vietnamese people's experiences of emotional intelligence by age category might result in valuable findings about how they develop their emotional intelligence over their lifespans.

Moreover, findings showed that the education programme helped participants experience changes in their emotional intelligence and increased their use of productive coping strategies. Future studies should consider applying quantitative measurement to statistically assess the relationship between the level of emotional intelligence and adaptive coping strategy use. Future studies should also explore coping strategies used in participants from collectivistic cultures and utilise the Collectivist Coping Styles (CCS) (Heppner et al., 2006). The CCS was developed to assess coping strategies that deal with stressful events, from an Asian perspective. The CCS includes the key Asian cultural values and philosophies from the work of Kim et al. (1999); coping strategies using primary control and secondary control from the work of Weisz et al. (1984); and Zeidner and Saklofske's (1996) adaptational coping model that focuses on problem-solving. The CCS consists of 30 items that focus on five factors: (i) acceptance, reframing and striving; (ii) family support; (iii) religion–spirituality; (iv) avoidance and detachment; and (v) private emotional outlets. 'Acceptance, reframing and striving' provide a measure of the combined effort to accept the existing reality, rethink the meaning of the situation and their perceived ability to solve the problems. 'Family support' measures the effort of seeking support from family members and guidance from respected and trusted elders. 'Religion–spirituality' assesses coping strategies involving the use of religion or spiritual activities. 'Avoidance and detachment' measures the effort to avoid thinking about the problems and detaching oneself from the problems. 'Private emotional outlets' measures the efforts people make to seek advice from others (e.g., from a professional they trust) and to seek activities to reduce tension for a short time.

The CCS is a suitable measurement for future studies of coping within collectivist cultural samples because it is a short measure. The measure consists of only 28 items that measure 14 different scales of coping responses in people. It is much shorter than other scales

measuring coping responses, such as Ways of Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which consists of 66 items. As a result, the CSS can help participants avoid the issue of response burden. Additionally, CCS is the only coping measure designed to assess coping strategies for people from collectivistic cultural backgrounds (Heppner et al., 2006). Therefore, it may be a more suitable measurement than other measurements developed in Western culture and that focus on people with individualistic self-concepts and values.

While the current study did not assess emotional intelligence in participants, future studies might consider using the profile of emotional competence scale (Brasseur et al., 2013) based on the three-level model of emotional intelligence (Mikolajczak, 2009). First, the scale unifies many characteristics of existing emotional intelligence models in one model. Second, it consists of a combination of emotional-related knowledge, abilities and traits. The measure enables researchers to measure: (i) the knowledge one has about emotions and how to deal with emotional problems (e.g., each emotion has both beneficial and dysfunctional aspects); (ii) one's ability to implement a specific emotional strategy in a stressful situation (e.g., asking for support); and (iii) one's ability to behave in a certain way in a stressful situation (e.g., remaining calm). Third, the scale is also useful and suitable for studies investigating psychological wellbeing, physical health, social relationships, and professional success.

Future studies may also explore the content, design and implementation of education programmes that help people learn more about emotional intelligence and coping strategies. The current study addressed a gap in the research identified by Groves et al. (2008) by providing (i) a description of the programme content, (ii) the methods used to teach emotional intelligence and (iii) details about the duration of each session, the whole programme and aspects of pedagogy. These descriptions will benefit future researchers who want to replicate the study and perhaps evaluate the programme's effectiveness or examine the factors that contribute to the development of emotional intelligence in Vietnamese young people.

Cultural and contextual factors need to be considered when developing educational programmes that promote learning about emotional intelligence and coping. Future studies also need to explore the duration of the effects. Participants shared that they stopped using the emotional intelligence abilities and coping skills that they learned in the programme after

six months of being in the programme. The reasons for them to spend less time or stop practising their learned skills included (i) having something more important to do, (ii) lack of a supportive and motivating environment to keep practising and (iii) working on emotional problems being exhausting, both physically and mentally. Future studies need to explore how to sustain the changes that participants make after completing education programmes and the formation and maintenance of habits. Future studies could focus on answering questions such as: what motivates young people to keep using the abilities and skills they learned? What key factors motivate/demotivate them to maintain the changes?

### **Personal reflections**

The experience of completing this PhD has changed me as a researcher, an emotional intelligence practitioner and a learner. As a researcher, I learned how to think differently. I learned to keep my mind open to everything and not to blindly believe in anything without clarifying its credibility. For a person from a culture that encourages children to obey and do as they are told, it was a very long and hard journey to acquire this ability. I had to unlearn what I had been taught and relearn how to think. This experience enabled me to have countless opportunities to learn every day to take in information, make sense of it, question it and embody it.

In the process of creating an education programme for this study, I had a chance to learn a great deal about emotional intelligence and coping. This opportunity enabled me to learn much about myself, my emotional problems and my fears, which I have been hiding so deep in my mind that sometimes I did not even remember they existed. Each theory that I read, each technique, I tried on myself. This process could be very painful sometimes, but I learned to effectively use those ideas to change my own perspective, interpret my own problems differently and find new solutions to problems. I have overcome some of the biggest fears that have been torturing me for years, and I was able to let go of so much of the anger I had in me for so long.

I only found out that I really love learning when I decided to come back to school and do my second Master's degree and then this PhD. It was truly a life-changing decision for me. I really loved this PhD because I could learn more about a topic I am interested in. I could read and

write about the topic that I am passionate about. I could work at my own pace. And, more importantly, I am blessed to have my supervisors, and I feel very lucky to be guided and supported by them in my learning journey as a researcher. This PhD has not only taught me how to become a researcher, a thinker and a learner but also taught me how to manage my life in a better way. I used to think I could never be a patient and organised person, but I did become one. This experience makes me believe that something that always seems impossible could suddenly become possible one day, with enough patience and effort. In my PhD journey, although there were times when I was almost knocked down by stress, exhaustion and depression, the rest of the time, I was filled with excitement, enjoyment and happiness. I will be forever grateful for this time.

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## **Appendices**

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## **Appendix A: The programme for developing emotional intelligence**

### **1. Aim of the programme**

The programme aimed to develop emotional intelligence and improve specific abilities that help the students effectively deal with stressful situations. The targeted abilities included:

- (i) ability to comfortably express thoughts and feelings,
- (ii) ability to know how to disengage from negative emotions,
- (iii) ability to be assertive about what they want and not create any discomfort in others,
- (iv) ability to say 'no' without feeling guilty,
- (v) ability to accept and love themselves for who they are,
- (vi) ability to live their life the way they want and still get along well with others.

### **2. Designing process**

The ADDIE model was utilised for analysing, designing, developing, implementing, and evaluating the programme.

#### **Analyse**

The analysing phase involved identifying the current problem of Vietnamese undergraduate students, analysing the cause of their problems, and determining the performance gaps. The outcome of this phase was to decide the specific learning objectives for the programme. In this phase, their problems were identified through activities of desk research. The results helped the researcher confirm the target audience, identify the gaps in their performance and compose a project management plan. Estimating cost and possible constraints were also conducted in this phase.

#### **Design**

The purpose of the designing phase was to plan and select materials/methods to ensure that the knowledge and skills would be effectively delivered and the learning objectives would be achieved. In this phase, specific learning objectives of the programme were created. An inventory of 61 activities and 12 topics of necessary knowledge of emotional intelligence and coping was developed. The structure and sequences for the programme were determined.

## **Develop**

The development phase focused on creating a prototype. A programme of ten 3hrs-sessions focused on helping the students to develop their coping strategies was created. The main topics of the programme were:

- (i) emotional identification, acceptance, understanding and regulation,
- (ii) Identification and dispute of irrational beliefs,
- (iii) assertiveness,
- (iv) self-regards and self-esteem, and
- (v) time management and goal setting.

An agenda of the whole programme was made, including information on the required knowledge, a list of activities with estimated duration, and a checklist for preparation activities for each session. Each session was planned following a consistent process. Detailed instructions for each activity were developed for the facilitator and programme assistants.

## **Implement**

The implementation phase focused on delivering the training sessions to participants who joined the study. In this study, the researcher was also the facilitator for the programme. Her roles in this phase were to:

- (i) ensure that the programme was implemented smoothly,
- (ii) facilitate the activities so that participants could understand the knowledge and skills that help them to develop their EI and coping strategies, and
- (iii) observe and record changes in participants' learning performance, behaviours and attitude before, during and after the programme.

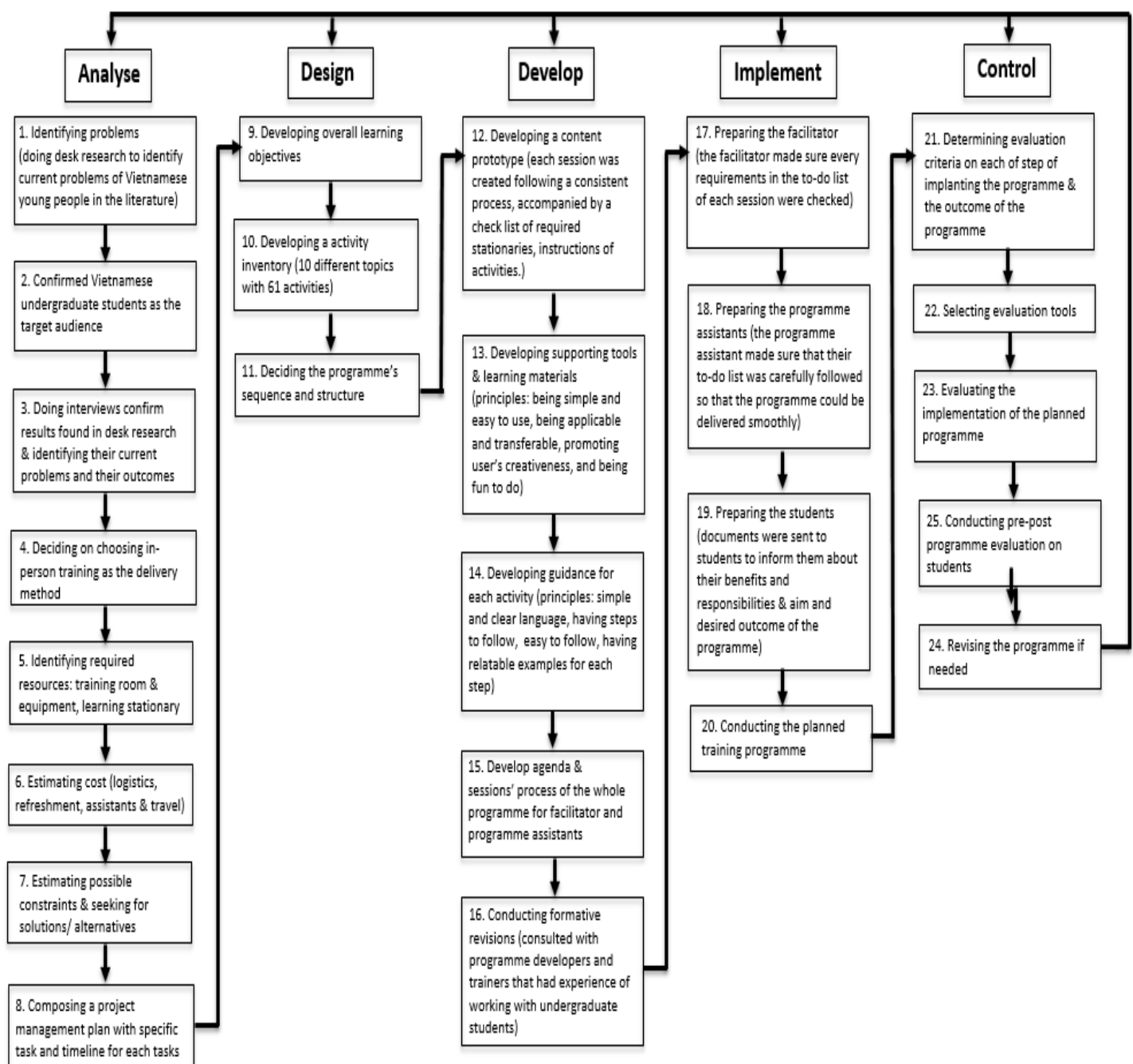
## **Evaluate**

The purpose of the evaluation phase was to explore the factors that motivate or hinder participants' learning and to measure the effectiveness of the activities, materials, and delivery methods. Cogens were employed in every session of the educational programme to explore the factors that might impact participants' learning and agreed action plans were immediately taken place to ensure better teaching and learning. Measurement methods were conducted both quantitatively (Brief COPE and WEIS) and qualitative (one-on-one interviews)

were employed to measure the effectiveness of the programme in helping participants to develop their emotional intelligence and coping strategies. The programme was also continuously evaluated following the instruction of Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Evaluation. The summary of the whole process of designing the educational programme that is guided by the ADDIE model is shown in figure 8 below.

**Figure 8**

*The ADDIE model guides the process of designing the educational programme.*





### **3. Session and content**

Based on suggestions from the comparable programmes, the three-hour session was constructed to allow enough time for participants: to learn new knowledge and tools, exercise the learned tools, exchange information, share the experience with their peers, and participate in other activities to create positive interactions and increase self-esteem.

Sessions were designed this way and have been shown to make participants feel psychologically safe and motivate them to actively engage in learning activities. Each session of the programme had the following structure:

1. The session started with team-building games to increase participants' energy levels and offer participants the opportunity to interact with as many classmates as possible and form a relationship with them.
2. The facilitator introduced new knowledge of the session's topic.
3. Participants were invited to participate in different activities to have a deeper understanding of the learned knowledge. The activities included individual work, group discussion, and collective problem-solving. Individual work included activities that helped participants to explore themselves. Group discussions included activities that motivated participants to practice expressing their thoughts and feelings and attentive listening with a respectful and non-judging attitude. Collective problem-solving included activities where participants shared their unsolved problems and asked for advice/ solutions from their peers and the facilitator.
4. Each activity was followed by a quick sharing activity. Participants had choices of how to exchange information or share their experiences. They could either reflect on the experience on their own or share it with others. Participants also had choices of doing their sharing activity with either their peers, the programme supporter, or the facilitator.
5. At the end of the session, participants were invited to do small activities that helped them feel good about themselves and, in turn, increased their self-esteem. These activities made sure that participants left each session with happiness and a positive mood, which was one of the important factors that motivated them to stay in the programme.

The content of the ten sessions was summarised in Table 11 below:

**Table 11**

*Brief description of the content*

No	Topics	Learning objectives	Information content	Activity
1	Introduction	Creating a safe, respectful and fun environment for the programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Providing an overview of the programme</li> <li>- Explaining protocol of group sharing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Games to build rapport, trust and respect among participants</li> <li>- Games for participants to have chances to talk to all other participants and remember their name</li> <li>- Introducing the principle "safe, positive, respectful and confidential" to all participants and seek their agreement on the principle</li> </ul>
2	Identifying emotions	Developing the ability to identify and label emotions to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- see the situation more clearly</li> <li>- make the best decisions among different options</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emotional identification and labelling are the foundation for emotional regulation</li> <li>- Emotions are temporary</li> <li>- Emotions and bodily sensations are interconnected.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Practicing emotional identification and labelling via short video clips with a provided emotional identification tool</li> <li>- Dancing games to enable participants to experience emotional regulation by changing bodily sensations</li> </ul>
3	Understanding emotions	Developing the ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Understanding the message associated with each emotion</li> <li>- Accepting emotions in oneself and others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Each emotion has its message that aids our survival; understanding these messages enables finding the cause of the emotional problem</li> <li>- Accepting emotions mean experiencing them fully without</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identifying the messages from basic emotions elicited from a real-life situation, using a provided list of emotions' messages</li> <li>- Working individually on revisiting the experience of being</li> </ul>

			putting judgment of 'good' or 'bad' on them	emotional accepted and unaccepted - Practicing emotional recognition and acceptance toward oneself and others following a provided 5-steps technique
4	Identifying irrational belief	Increasing self-awareness by identifying beliefs that create limiting beliefs, self-defeating thoughts and unhealthy coping behaviours in participants	- Limiting beliefs, self-defeating thoughts and unhealthy coping behaviours were developed as a way to cope with our chronic unmet emotional needs	- Provide questions that help participants to identify their strongest irrational beliefs about themselves - Identify triggers that elicit their false beliefs - Practicing disputing irrational beliefs following a provided 6-step technique
5	Assertiveness	Developing the ability to express one's wants and needs and achieve goals without creating negative feelings in oneself or others	- Providing information about 4 types of communication: passive, passive-aggressive, aggressive, and assertive - The pros and cons of 'must' and 'should' in operating everyday life	- Helping participants to identify their dominant type of communication in everyday life - Practicing addressing their wants and needs assertively with real-life situations following a provided 5-steps technique
6	Emotional management 1	Developing the ability to: - regulate emotions in a difficult situation - gain control of oneself in a difficult situation	- Every reactional behaviour is the interconnection of thoughts, feelings, actions, and bodily sensation - "Stop victimising yourself and take control of your life. You always have choices in every situation."	- Practicing emotional regulation by expressing feelings, thoughts, and desired actions in a visual way - Practicing listing all the possible solutions for the emotional problem and choosing the option that works best for them

7	Self-esteem	Developing confidence in one's thinking ability and feeling of deservedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self-esteem and self-regard will be improved and maintained if the following needs are met: safety, love, autonomy, freedom to choose, play and have fun</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identifying factors that met each need of participants</li> <li>- identifying the current level of satisfaction for each need</li> <li>- Planning action plan to meet each need of participants in the short-term and long-term</li> </ul>
8	Time management and goal setting	Developing ability to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Set realistic and specific goals</li> <li>- Manage time and priority to achieve set goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Goals should be focused on developing the desired identity (becoming who) instead of acquiring achievements (having what)</li> <li>- Time management is to prioritise important and urgent tasks to do first</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants identify the most important values to them</li> <li>- Using the chosen value to identify which relationships are worth their time</li> <li>- Practicing time management by using provided keywords to identify important and urgent tasks to do in everyday life</li> </ul>
9	Emotional management 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identifying different identities in oneself</li> <li>- Accepting and respecting each identity in oneself</li> <li>- Learning to dispute irrational beliefs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Different identities in oneself are created by combining a vulnerable, angry, impulsive side and a healthy and happy side.</li> <li>- Irrational beliefs can be disputed through a process of using facts and evidence to prove that the beliefs are wrong</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- List all possible identities they have and describe the characteristics of each identity.</li> <li>- Practicing to have a conversation with all their identities and allowing each identity to give their opinions about the situation so that each voice inside of them will be heard.</li> <li>- Follow the steps of a self-talk technique to identify their emotions and irrational beliefs</li> </ul>

				toward the situations. Then, they identify different options for solutions and anticipate how the outcome might be with each option to find the best solution for themselves.
10	Conclusion: Design Sprint	Revising all learned knowledge and skills by proposing a solution to a current problem of Vietnamese undergraduate students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introducing Design Sprints</li> <li>- All knowledge and skills provided in previous sessions were uploaded on a private Facebook group for revising and preparing for this session</li> </ul>	<p>Participants work in a group of 4 to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify and agree on a problem that they want to solve</li> <li>- Blending the learned knowledge and skills from the programme with their existing knowledge and experiences to come up with a solution for the problem</li> <li>- Preparing to present their solution in any form of presentation they want</li> <li>- Delivering their 10 minutes presentation to the whole group</li> </ul>

#### 4. Facilitator

The educational programme offered participants an opportunity of learning with a non-authoritarian teaching style within the collectivistic culture. Therefore, the programme facilitator should be someone who could eliminate the power distance between teachers and students and put the participants at the centre of the learning process. The facilitator should provide respect, inspiration, hope and motivation in learning for participants. The facilitator should be able to help participants understand the new knowledge to practice and apply the knowledge and skills in their life. However, they should not direct or demand the participants on what to do or how to study in a determined way. The facilitator and the participants should

have equal power in a learning environment and exchange knowledge and learn from each other. The relationship between the facilitator and the participants should be built based on mutual trust, respect, and support.

The programme was designed and delivered by the author, who has years of experience researching and practising emotional intelligence, Schema Therapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. She has also worked with children, adolescents, and young adults in Vietnam to help them to improve their mental health and wellbeing. As a facilitator for the educational programme, she adopted the principles of being "attentive, approachable and warm".

## **5. Feedback from participants**

### **Feedback about the learning environment**

"Each time I came to the class, I was so excited to find out what we were going to eat that day. The cakes were delicious, and there were things I had never had a chance to taste before, like chilli chocolate. The materials were prepared carefully. All the card sets were beautifully printed and carefully packed. The learning materials were provided in both hard copy and electronic copy. I recently arranged my hard drive and realised that I had all the materials from the programme, and they were logically arranged from the beginning session till the last one." (Bear)

"After a whole tiring week, Sunday class was a space that had many familiar faces. It was peaceful there. It was like a shelter for all of us. We enjoyed the nice cakes and fruits and drinks. All the negative emotions were left outside of the door." (BDZ)

"We had our freedom in the class. We were allowed to stand, sit or lie down wherever we wanted, in whatever way we wanted, to help us learn better. We were free to give our opinions. All those things encouraged us and enabled us to fully participate in the activities, especially those that required us to work with our emotions deeply. Having a relaxed mind and positive attitude really helped us prepare for the heavy activities." (VA)

### **Feedback about content and delivery method**

"In this programme, the facilitator gave so many vivid examples. The example I remember the most was finding your hidden primary emotions. She gave an example from a couple that she knew. The boyfriend thought he was angry with his girlfriend when he knew she was hanging out with someone. When he looked deeper into the situation, he realised that he was actually angry at himself and acted angrily toward his girlfriend. The example made the process of identifying primary emotions became easier to understand. I only need to remember that example to recall the knowledge that I learned and the whole process of how to apply that knowledge in real life." (Wind)

"The examples were quite interesting and helped me to understand the knowledge easier. However, real-life situations are not identical, and the relatability of the examples given in the programme was not useful enough to help me solve my problems. There are so many aspects of the real-life situation that I have never encountered before. I don't know which piece of knowledge should I apply and how to apply them to some particular information. Maybe because my foundation of knowledge of that matter was not strong enough, I didn't know how to apply them. I hope that the time the facilitator runs this programme again, she will find a better way to help participants to understand the knowledge more deeply." (Alaska)

"I attended many training programmes about motivation or self-development. Sometimes I felt very sleepy when learning in those programmes. I had never felt sleepy at all in this programme. The activities were interesting. The theory parts were not too heavy, but they often turned into a game. For example, we were grouped in pairs to learn to identify emotions. I remember I was given the letter "P", and we chose "Peace" as our emotion. We draw a picture of it. It was an impressive activity; other groups also had many beautiful and creative drawings. They were so confident when presenting their drawing, so emotions in the class. I was like, "Wow, they are so good"." (Wind)

#### Feedback about impacts on participants

"Although my house is about 10 km away from here, I showed up in class every week. I was motivated to come because I felt being understood, all my stories were listened to and accepted." (Maurice)

"I felt happier and happier every time. I was excited to learn about many new things. I thought of my knowledge before this programme as a small walking path. After taking this programme, I understand myself much more, and it feels like now I am on a highway road."  
(May)

"When joining this programme, I felt I could fit in with the community that this programme created. I joined two clubs before, but it didn't work for me. I was lucky to have this community to prove that my belief is wrong, the belief that I can never fit in with any community." (Vicky)

#### Feedback about the facilitator

"The facilitator had a high level of energy and sense of humour. Each of us had our own problems. When we shared our stories, she showed that she always accepted those stories. She had a subtle way of responding to us that enabled us to re-look at those stories with a positive attitude and fun. It was not a one-time attempt but a long-term experience with much practice. The skills became her nature." (BDZ)

"I was surprised by the reaction of the facilitator. I did one activity in a completely wrong way. She didn't say something like, "you did it all wrong; you must do it this way". She didn't say anything. She simply told me again how to do that activity, although she clearly saw the way I did it was completely different from what she instructed the class to do. I was impressed with her reaction. I think I need to learn from that. It will be helpful as I often help my nephew with this schoolwork." (Te)

"The facilitator made me think that she was a relaxed and approachable person. She had the ability that encourages me to be able to talk about things that normally I would never tell anyone. When talking to her, I felt that I could speak out everything, even my ugliest thoughts, the things I never dare to tell anyone." (Alaska)



## **Appendix B**

### **INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS**

Thank you for your interest in this research. Please read this information before deciding whether or not to participate. I would be grateful if you decide to participate but otherwise, thank you for considering my request.

#### **Who am I?**

My name is Phuong Anh Do and I am a doctoral student at the Faculty of Education at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. This research project is work towards my doctoral thesis.

#### **What is the aim of this research?**

My doctoral project explores the experience of Vietnamese undergraduate students (VUS) who are taking a programme to learn more about Emotional Intelligence and coping. The programme aims to help students develop helpful and positive coping strategies to deal with stress in their life within the social and cultural context of Vietnam and to promote mental health and wellbeing of Vietnamese students. This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee [#27738].

#### **How can you help/participate?**

##### **Who?**

I am looking for about 15 Vietnamese undergraduate students, aged from 17 – 25 years old to take part in 12 week programme which focuses on building emotional intelligence and positive coping.

The programme will run over 12 weeks from 01/10/2019 until 31/03/2020 and each weekly session is 3 hrs. The programme will take place at a training room at a commercial co-working space in the CBD of Hanoi.

## **What will you be doing?**

Each session over the 12 weeks will focus on different topics, and you will have the opportunity to take part in self-reflection, group discussion, team building games and training activities that will help you to learn and practice new knowledge and skills.

In order to see if the programme works I am going to measure your emotional intelligence and coping at three times: before the programme, a week after the 12 week programme has finished, and three months after the programme. In order to assess changes in your emotional intelligence and coping I am going to ask you to complete two tests: the Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (which takes about 30-45 minutes) and the Brief COPE Inventory (which takes about 15 minutes to complete).

Over the 12 week programme I am also going to ask you to complete the following activities so I can learn more about your experience of emotional development and coping:

1. Submit 1-2 weekly audio diaries, 10-15 minutes long about the emotional events that you experience every day. These will help me understand your experience of using new knowledge and skills to deal with stress in your every day life.
2. Four face-to-face (1hr) Interviews: where we will talk about your experience of using emotional intelligence and coping skills and what influences your motivation and use of the strategies. Interviews will take place before the programme starts, after 6 weeks of being in the programme, one week after completing the programme and three months after completing the programme.
3. Twelve Group Discussions (Cogenerative Dialogues) (30-60 mins): at the end of each weekly session we will discuss as a group what is working well or not so well in the programme so we can improve the quality of the teaching and learning experience. These group discussions will be videotaped and audiotaped for analysis. If you do not want to be videotaped we can make sure you are out of view, but we being audiotaped is necessary for data analysis.

4. Videorecording of every training session. In order to understand how students learn and experience the programme I need to record the interactions that happen between the teacher and students. There will be one camera at the front of the class and another camera at the side or back. If you do not want to be videorecorded, you can sit/stand in a blind spot where you cannot be seen or I will blur your face.

If you agree to participate in the programme, you need to agree to take part in all the data collection activities, including audio diaries, interviews, group discussions and recordings of the sessions. If you choose not to complete/ stop any data collection activities, you will be expected to withdraw from programme and I will not use any of the data you have provided.

### **What will happen to the information provided?**

All the information and data you provide will be used to inform the findings of the study. However, your identity will be kept confidential. You can choose a pseudonym, or 'code' name. You will not be named in the final study or in any publications that come out of the research. I will only describe general characteristics of participants (e.g., age, gender, years of study) in the research. The transcripts, summaries and any recordings will be kept securely and destroyed 5 years after the research ends.

Only my research supervisors will have access to the data, any assistants (who help set up the programme) and transcriber/s for the interviews will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement to ensure they protect your identity. The only time confidentiality may be broken is if you disclose to me that you or someone you know is being harmed, at risk of being harmed or harming others. If you disclose this, I will stop the interview/ session and discuss my concerns with you. I may have to break confidentiality and talk to my supervisors about the best way to get you or that person support.

The images and footage of video recordings may be used when presenting the findings of this study and in publications in academic and professional journals, for teaching/ training purposes as well as for dissemination at conferences. If you do not want to be visually recognised, I will ensure you are either not recorded visually or that any images you do accidentally appears in we will blur our face so you are unrecognisable.

### **What will the project produce?**

The information from my research will be used in my doctoral thesis, which will be made available at the university library and repositories. I will also use the information for publication in academic and professional journals, as well as for dissemination at conferences.

### **If you accept this invitation, what are your rights?**

If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- ask any question of the study at any time;
- withdraw from the study and programme at any point of the study (verbally, by email, by text or phone) without having to give a reason and all of your data will be destroyed (including your data collected in group discussions);
- choose not to answer any questions;
- agree on an alias or 'code' name for us to use rather than your real name;
- choose to be videotaped/ visually recognised or not;
- be sent a copy of your pre and post evaluation;
- be sent a copy of the summary of your interview transcripts;
- be sent a summary of the initial findings.

### **If you have any questions or problems, who can you contact?**

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

#### **Researcher:**

Name: Phuong Anh Do

University email address:  
phuonganh.do@vuw.ac.nz

#### **Supervisor:**

Name: Dr Joanna Higgins

Role: Primary Supervisor

School: School of Education, Victoria  
University of Wellington

Phone: +64-44639576

Joanna.higgins@vuw.ac.nz

### **Human Ethics Committee information**

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Victoria University Human Ethics Committee Convener:

**Dr. Judith Loveridge** Email: judith.loveridge@vuw.ac.nz or telephone +64-4-463 6028.

## Appendix C

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE: STUDENTS

This consent form will be held for 5 years

Researcher: **Phuong Anh Do, Victoria University of Wellington.**

- I have read the Information sheet and the research has been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.
- I agree to take part in all data collection activities in this research.

I understand that:

- I may choose to withdraw from this research at any time, without giving any reason, and any information I provide, including data provided in group settings; will be destroyed and not be included in the project.
- If I choose not to complete any of the data collection activities, I will need to withdraw from the programme and any data I have provided will be destroyed and not included in the project.
- Any information provided will be kept confidential to the researcher, her supervisor, the programme assistant and the transcriber (who will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement).
- Any information provided will be stored securely and destroyed 5 years after the research is completed.
- The results will be used for the researcher's doctoral thesis and may be used in academic reports and/or presented at conferences and for teaching purposes.
- I can select an alias or 'code' name, and my name will not be used in reports or any dissemination.
- Photos / video vignettes that include me might be used in presentation of the findings of this study in academic reports and/or presented at conferences and for teaching purposes. I have the right to ask to be located in the blind spots of the cameras or to have my face blurred in photos / video vignettes if I do not want to be photographed/videotaped/ visually recognised.
- I will receive a summary of the initial findings via email after the data collection is completed.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile number: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Email to Participants

**Subject:** Invitation to participate in a programme that builds Emotional Intelligence and Coping.

Hello (^),

My name is Phuong Anh Do and I am a PhD student at the Faculty of Education at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. My PhD focuses on how Vietnamese undergraduate students build their emotion intelligence and coping.

I have designed a 12 weeks programme that aims to help students to:

- Express their feelings instead of repressing them;
- Know how to disengage from negative emotions;
- Be assertive about what they want and not create any discomfort in others;
- Say “no” without feeling guilty;
- Accept and love themselves for who you are;
- Live their life the way they want and still get along well with others.

If you are interested in building abilities, please consider joining my programme. It is free of charge. I am looking for about 15 - 25 Vietnamese undergraduate students, aged from 17 – 25 years old to take part in my programme. In each session, you will have the opportunity to take part in self-reflection, group discussion, team building games and training activities that will help you to learn and practice new knowledge and skills. I am researching the experience of students building their emotional intelligence and coping skills. My research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee [#27738].

Over the 12 week programme I am also going to invite you to tell me about the experience through the following activities: **audio diaries, face-to-face interviews, and group discussion activities**. You will be encouraged to record your dairies in your own way at whenever and wherever you want to do it. In our group discussions, all of your ideas or opinions, no matter how strange they might be, will be listened and acknowledged with

respect. Not only that, our face-to-face interviews will be taken place in different cozy coffee shops in the secret corners of Hanoi (^.^).

If you are interested taking part in my research, please read carefully the Information Sheet and the Consent Form that I have enclosed in this email. If you decide to participate, please send me an email with the subject **[Register] – your full name** to the email address [phuonganh.do@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:phuonganh.do@vuw.ac.nz) before dd/mm/yyyy.

Thank you very much for considering my request \(^o^)/. Please do not hesitate to contact me, my supervisor or the university's Ethics Committee for any clarification.

Yours sincerely,

Phuong Anh Do (or you can call me Fanhheo if you want to)

Doctoral Candidate,

Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

[Phuonganh.do@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:Phuonganh.do@vuw.ac.nz)

Primary Supervisor: Dr Joanna Higgins

Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington

Phone: +64-44639576

[joanna.higgins@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:joanna.higgins@vuw.ac.nz)

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Victoria University Human Ethics Committee Convener:

Dr. Judith Loveridge Email: [judith.loveridge@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:judith.loveridge@vuw.ac.nz) or telephone +64-4-463 6028.

## **Appendix E**

### **INFORMATION SHEET FOR DIRECTORS**

Thank you for your interest in this research. Please read this information before deciding whether or not to participate. I would be grateful if you decide to participate but otherwise, thank you for considering my request.

#### **Who am I?**

My name is Phuong Anh Do and I am a doctoral student at the Faculty of Education at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. This research project is work towards my doctoral thesis.

#### **What is the aim of this research?**

My doctoral project explores the experience of Vietnamese undergraduate students in learning Emotional Intelligence and coping to develop a repertoire of adaptive coping strategies to deal with stress in their life within the social and cultural context of Vietnam. I believe this might contribute to the development of adaptive coping strategies as well as contribute to the promotion of mental health and wellbeing of Vietnamese students. This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee [#27738].

#### **How can you help?**

I am writing to request permission to undertake data-gathering at your organisation as part of my doctoral research. My doctoral project explores the experience of Vietnamese undergraduate students.

I need your assistance to recruit participants for my research. You can help by emailing information about my study to students on your database. However, I do not want you to directly recruit or ask participants to take part.

If you agree with my request, the research will involve:

#### **Who?**

A minimum of 15 Vietnamese undergraduate students, aged from 17 – 25 years old, who come from different cities/provinces in Vietnam, are studying at different universities in Hanoi and had been or are currently involved in project of the Centre for Sustainable Development Studies.

#### **How long?**

The duration of the data collection of the research project will be from 01/10/2019 to 31/03/2021.



**Where?**

A training room at a commercial co-working space in the CBD of Hanoi.

**What and how?**

In my study, I will design a 12-weeks intervention programme focus on increasing emotional intelligence and coping in Vietnamese undergraduate students. This intervention programme will be used to explore the Vietnamese undergraduate students' experience in learning and using emotional intelligence and coping in their daily life. All participants will complete 12 weekly 3-hr sessions of the programme. I will use audio diaries, semi-structured interviews and cogenerative dialogues to collect data from participants. Participants will be invited to record their entries of experience every day, and every week. Participants will be invited to submit the most two interesting/ meaningful entries of theirs for analysis. Participants will be invited to have a total of four 1-hr face-to-face semi-structured interviews with me before the programme, after six weeks of being in the programme, a week after completing the programme and three months after completing the programme. Participants will also be invited to take part in cogenerative dialogues in every session of the 12 sessions of the intervention. All the data will be transcribed and a summary of findings will be sent to participants to review. Participants will be informed that all training sessions will be videotaped and their identity will be protected at all stages of this study.

**What will happen to the information that students provide?**

Participants will be invited to choose their pseudonym, or 'code' name so their identity in this research will be kept confidential. Participants will not be named or be facially recognised in any reports, presentations, or public documentation. However, other identifying characteristics (e.g., gender, year of study, etc) might be used for reporting. Your organisation will not be named in any reports, presentations, or public documentation without your written consent. Participants can withdraw from the research before the start of the data collection activities. If they do withdraw, the information they have provided will be destroyed.

Only my supervisors and I will read the notes or transcript of the interview. The interview transcripts, summaries and any recordings will be kept securely and destroyed 5 years after the research ends.

**What will the project produce?**

The information from this research will be used in my doctoral thesis, which will be made available at the university library and repositories. I will also use the information for publication in academic and professional journals, dissemination at conferences as well as for teaching purposes. You will receive a summary of my initial findings after I have completed my data collection.

**If you accept to participate, what are your rights?**

You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you do accept to participate, you have the right to:

- Ask any question of the study at any time;
- Be able to read the summary of the initial findings by indicating in the consent form.

**If you have any questions or problems, who can you contact?**

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

Researcher

Name: Phuong Anh Do

Email: [phuonganh.do@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:phuonganh.do@vuw.ac.nz)

Supervisor:

Name: Dr Joanna Higgins

Role: Primary Supervisor

School: School of Education, Victoria  
University of Wellington

Phone: +64-44639576

[Joanna.higgins@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:Joanna.higgins@vuw.ac.nz)

**Human Ethics Committee information**

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Victoria University Human Ethics Committee Convener:

Dr. Judith Loveridge

Email: [judith.loveridge@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:judith.loveridge@vuw.ac.nz) or telephone +64-4-463 6028.

## Appendix F

### CONSENT TO RECRUIT STUDENTS: DIRECTORS

This consent form will be held for five years.

Researcher: **Phuong Anh Do, Victoria University of Wellington.**

- I have read the Information sheet and the research has been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.
- I agree for the Centre for Sustainable Development Studies to assist in recruiting students for this research project.

I understand that:

- I may withdraw the permission to recruit students from the Centre for Sustainable Development Studies from this study at any point before October 1st 2019.
- Any information the participants and the Centre for Sustainable Development Studies has provided will be destroyed on April 1st 2027.
- Any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher, her supervisors and the transcriber.
- I understand that the findings may be used for academic publications and/or presented to conferences and for teaching purposes.
- I understand that the observation notes, heuristics and recordings will be kept confidential to the researcher and the transcriber.
- I understand that the organisation will/will not be named in any of publications.
- My name will not be used in reports and utmost care will be taken not to disclose any information that would identify me or my organisation.
- I will receive a copy of the final report

Signature of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact details: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix G: Email to director**

To: Director of the Centre for Sustainable Development Studies (CSDS)

I am writing to request permission to undertake data-gathering at your organisation as part of my doctoral research. My doctoral project explores the experience of Vietnamese undergraduate students. I need your assistance to recruit participants for my research. You can help by emailing information about my study to students on your database. However, I do not want you to directly recruit or ask participants to take part.

My doctoral project explores the experience of Vietnamese undergraduate students (VUS) in learning Emotional Intelligence and coping to develop a repertoire of adaptive coping strategies to deal with stress in their life within the social and cultural context of Vietnam. I believe this might contribute to the development of adaptive coping strategies as well as contribute to the promotion of mental health and wellbeing of Vietnamese students. This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee [#27738]. More information of my study will be found in the information sheet I have enclosed in this email.

I would be grateful if you could let me know by replying to this email whether you are willing for your institution to participate in this study. Should you be willing, potential participants will be informed that approval to conduct the study has been obtained from you. Please do not hesitate to contact me, my supervisor or the university's Ethics Committee for any clarification.

Yours sincerely,

Phuong Anh Do

Doctoral Candidate,

Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

Phuonganh.do@vuw.ac.nz

Primary Supervisor: Dr Joanna Higgins

Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington

Phone: +64-44639576

[joanna.higgins@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:joanna.higgins@vuw.ac.nz)

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Victoria University Human Ethics Committee Convener:

Dr. Judith Loveridge Email: [judith.loveridge@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:judith.loveridge@vuw.ac.nz) or telephone +64-4-463 6028.

## Appendix H

### Indicative questions for semi structured interview

1. What does emotional intelligence mean to you?
2. In your opinion, what is a person with high emotional intelligence like? (e.g., what do they think, feel, act?)
3. Do you think you have high emotional intelligence? And why?
4. How often do experience negative feelings (e.g., sadness, anger, fear, shame, etc.) in the last two weeks? What were those feelings?
5. What does helpful/ unhelpful coping mean to you?
6. What do you do to cope with these negative/ stressful experiences?
  - Do you think your coping strategies helpful in those situations? And why?
7. Would you like to make some changes to the way you manage your emotions?
  - What would you like to do less of?
  - What would you like to do more of?
8. Would you like to make some changes to the way you cope?
  - What would you like to do less of?
  - What would you like to do more of?
9. When was the last time you have a stressful situation?
  - What did you do to cope with it?
  - What was the results of your coping? And how do you feel about those results?

## **Appendix I**

### **Guidelines for Completion of Audio Diary for Participants**

Thank you very much for agreeing to complete audio diaries about your experience of learning and using emotional intelligence and coping in an intervention programme.

After each session, I would like you to record your thoughts, feelings, and responses about any events you experience at least once a day. If you wish to record more than two entries, this would be welcomed but is not essential. It is important that you try to record your experience as it happens or soon after, rather than relying on remembering what happened and how you felt, later on in the day/week. Record whatever is important and relevant to you at the time, however trivial it might sound. You can talk in as much or as little detail as you would like. Some of the prompts below may be of more relevance to you than others; therefore, you might spend more time on some prompts than on others. You might talk for 1 – 15 minutes. You can record your entries with your mobile phone. If your phone does not have recording function, please inform me, I will loan you a portable recording device.

Each Friday you are required to submit the two most interesting/ meaningful entries for data analysis. Please submit your entries to me on through email: [phuonganh.do@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:phuonganh.do@vuw.ac.nz). When sending your entries to me, please use the email subject as: (Your Alias) – audio dairies – week (...). You will be sent a text message on Thursday to remind you that you entries should be sending in on Friday.

### **Prompt Sheet**

Each time you make your audio diary entry, please comment on the prompts below. Please work through them in order.

#### **For each entry please record:**

1. Your 'code' name
2. What is the date and what time of day is it?
3. What have you just been doing?
4. Where are you when making this recording?
5. Are you alone/what is going on around you?

**Here are some ideas of the kinds of things that you might want to talk about but don't feel restricted by this list. Please comment on whichever prompts you think are most relevant:**

1. What are the feelings have you experienced and how did you react to them when you experienced the event?
2. Can you describe the event that led to those feelings and responses?
3. When the event happened, what were your thoughts (about the event, about yourself, about the people that involved in that event)?
4. When the event happened, what did you want to do (to get yourself out of the negative emotional situation/ to prolong the pleasant experience)?
5. Do you think what you did helped you in a positive way? And why?
6. Do you think what you did hindered you or made things worse? And why?
7. If you could go back and change one thing in your situation/ experience, what would you change? And why?

**Issues related to your life more generally**

1. On a scale 0 – 10 (with 0: very bad day and 10: very good day), can you rate how your day was?
2. If you could do one thing to improve your day, what would you do?
3. If you have done it, how did it improve your feeling about your day?
4. If you have not done the things that could improve your day, what prevented you from you from doing it?

## Appendix J

### CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT: PROGRAMME ASSISTANCE

Principal Investigator: **Phuong Anh Do**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to work as a programme assistant for Phuong Anh Do and help her in setting up and organising the implementation of her intervention programme. I understand that during the course of my duty as an assistant, I will gain knowledge of the information related to the identity of participants and the contents of their discussion as parts of the intervention as well as the content of the intervention.

I agree to take the following precautions:

- I will use extreme caution to protect the confidentiality of the participants as well as the information related to the research project.
- I will not copy, distribute or destroy any information, regardless of its form, except in the accordance with the instructions of Phuong Anh Do.
- I will not discuss any aspect of the information related to the research project with anyone except Phuong Anh Do.

Research Assistant

Signature:

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Date:

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Principal Investigator

Signature:

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Date:

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## Appendix K

### **Cogenerative Dialogue (Cogens) Confidentiality Guidelines for Participants**

- At the start of each group cogens, the facilitator will revisit key points agreed in the consent forms.
- She will then facilitate a short discussion on creating a protocol for a safe and successful dialogue:

She will say:

“Thank you for participating in these group cogens. In order for these cogens to be safe and successful, can we agree on the following protocols?

1. Listen actively – listen attentively and considerately, without interrupting
  2. Critique with respect – respectfully ask insightful questions, critique ideas but not people
  3. Take turns to speak – we will all have a turn to contribute to the discussions
  4. Honour confidentiality - what is discussed in this room stays in this room”
- The facilitator will ask participants to contribute to the discussion of the protocols as well and I seek consensus for these. She will request everyone to honour them throughout the dialogue. If anyone break one of the protocols, the facilitator will remind all participants of the rules and direct their attention to a poster that display them.
  - At the end of the session, the facilitator will provide a verbal summary of the main points discussed for the participants to review and agree to the information they have provided.

## **Appendix L: Guidelines of disclosure process for researchers**

### **DISCLOSURE PROCESS – GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCHERS**

Researchers will take steps to clearly spell out to participants during the consent process, that their confidentiality will be preserved except where participants disclose something that causes the Researcher to be concerned about a risk of harm to a participant and/or to other people.

Where a participant indicates that they or someone they know are at risk of harm, are being harmed, or may be harming others the following disclosure process will be followed:

1. The Researcher should discuss the issue(s) further with the participant individually. If the Researcher has no concerns following this discussion, the matter is at an end.
2. If the Researcher still has concerns following this discussion then s/he must inform the participant that s/he (the Researcher) is obliged to report the disclosure to the Supervisor in accordance with this process.
3. The Researcher should ensure that they have the individual's name and contact details so that further contact with the person is possible if the need arises.
4. Where the Researcher has concerns but is not sure what action to take, the Researcher, should advise the participant as above, and discuss the matter with their supervisor as set out below.
5. The Researcher will then discuss the situation with his/her supervisor. Following this discussion the supervisor will decide whether follow up is appropriate. This decision may involve informing appropriate support agencies/services and a joint decision being made.

In all cases the researcher will also encourage the participant to seek help from their own existing support services (e.g., their GP, counsellor) and informal support (e.g., teachers, friends and family) and provide participants with a list of support services (e.g., mental health and counselling services, Lifeline, etc.).