A Questionnaire Survey on Hoa Sen University Students' Positive and Negative Achievement Emotions in Learning

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: achievement, emotions, learning, positive, negative	Achievement emotions are defined as emotions that are directly linked to achievement activities or achievement outcomes. Achievement emotions are very important in the learning process because they can affect learning performances and learning outcomes. This study was carried out with the intention of examining the types of emotions that students experience and the affective factors related to achievement emotions. In the current study, three positive emotions, including enjoyment, hope, and pride, and three negative ones, including anger, anxiety, and boredom, are examined using an adapted version of the Achievement Emotions Questionnaire by Pekrun (2002). Students' emotional experiences are studied in learning-related achievement situations at university. Three hundred eighty students currently attending Hoa Sen University participated in the study. The results reveal that the students have a moderate and high level of positive and negative emotions. In addition, there is a significant difference in students' level of positive achievement emotions in terms of gender, hometown, and major and negative emotions in terms of hometown. Moreover, in-depth interview results reveal that most of the problems which lead to negative emotions are related to individual students. From the results, some educational implications are drawn to help minimize learners' negative emotions and foster their positive emotions.

Introduction

The Communist Party of Vietnam has stated that the overarching objective of Vietnamese education is to create a society of learning in which all Vietnamese people would have equal access to an open, diverse, adaptable, and contemporary educational system (2021–2030). Higher education and vocational training must be prioritized in particular. Therefore, it becomes essential for educators to ensure the standard of higher education.

In higher education settings, students go through a range of emotions. Since not much learning can occur without emotions, it has been demonstrated that certain emotions are crucial to students' learning activities. (Seli et al., 2016; Tyng et al., 2017; Um et al., 2012).

Emotions that are connected to activities or results that promote achievement are called achievement emotions. Two sets of emotions that learners experience the most frequently are

positive emotions, such as enjoyment, hope, and pride, and negative emotions, including anger, anxiety, boredom, etc. Moreover, positive emotions are proven to be positively related to higher learning performances, and negative emotions are associated with poorer learning outcomes (Pekrun et al., 2002).

Understanding and acknowledging learners' achievement emotions in the classroom promotes a good rapport between teachers and learners in the classroom, which creates a learning environment, and leads to a better quality of learning (Hosotani & Imai-Matsumura, 2011). Additionally, by understanding their role in fostering confidence and encouragement in their students, teachers can assist students in overcoming negative emotions like anxiety while they are studying (Nguyen, T.H., 2022).

Despite the crucial roles that achievement emotions play in the learning process, only a small number of researchers have investigated the range of emotions that students encounter (Reilly & Sanchez Rosas, 2019; Linnenbrink & Pekrun, 2011).

Considering the variety of achievement emotions which learners experience in their learning and the importance of achievement emotions in education, and the lack of insightful research into the field of achievement emotions, this research was conducted to understand students' achievement emotions in learning different courses at university and how different their level of achievement emotions is considering their individual differences.

Research Questions

This study aims at answering these two research questions:

1. What achievement emotions do the students experience during their learning?
2. Does the level of achievement emotions differ between students of different backgrounds?

Literature review

Definitions and types of achievement emotions

According to Pekrun et al. (2002), achievement emotions, also known as academic emotions, are those feelings that are directly linked to students' achievement activities or outcomes. Enjoyment or hope, which can increase students' enthusiasm for learning, or boredom and anger, which lead to monotonous experiences during class time, are examples of emotions associated with achievement activities. Achievement emotions, such as pride, shame, hope, and fear, are related to the outcomes of the learning process, such as past-oriented or future success or failure.

Using the control-value theory, Pekrun et al. (2002) categorized achievement emotions into groups based on valence: positive – negative emotions and activating – deactivating emotions (see Figure 1 below). Accordingly, there are four groups of emotions: positive–activating (enjoyment, hope, pride), negative–activating (anger, anxiety, shame), positive–deactivating (relief), and negative–deactivating (boredom and hopelessness).
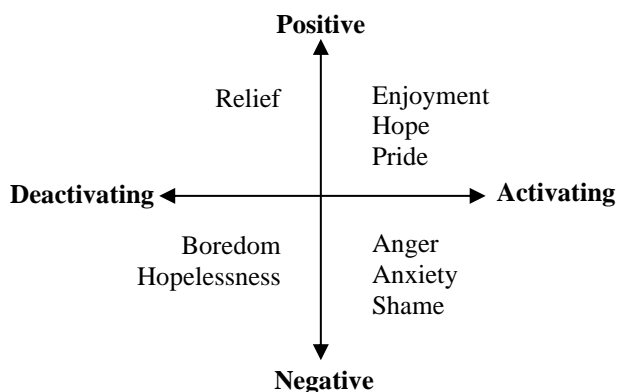
Figure 1. A summary of achievement emotions (Pekrun et al., 2002)

The importance of achievement emotions in academic learning

Achievement emotions are an essential component of academic learning because they influence learners' involvement, performance, and autonomy (Zull, 2006; Ellis & Ashbrook, 1988; Susan, 2018; Pekrun et al., 2002; Carver & Scheier, 2000).

Firstly, achievement emotions can increase or decrease learners' involvement in learning (Ellis & Ashbrook, 1988). Positive emotions can improve learners' motivation, which increases their engagement in learning and allows them to stay engaged longer. On the other hand, when students are exposed to a high level of negative emotions throughout the learning process, they either engage with greater passion and a desire to succeed or disengage and give up because they feel unable to handle it (Susan, 2018). In addition, students can set objectives for the future and make strategies to achieve those goals with the assistance of positive emotions like hope, which results in a better degree of involvement in learning activities.

Secondly, achievement emotions strongly correlate with students' performances (Pekrun et al., 2002; Pekrun, 2006). Specifically, positive emotions such as enjoyment, hope, and pride were found to improve academic performance. The explanation for this is that students who experience a high level of positive achievement emotions frequently exert more effort in their academic work, engage in extensive self-study, and apply learning strategies to aid in their learning. On the other hand, negative emotions such as anger, shame, anxiety, and boredom usually lead to lower performances because students are forced to engage with learning through unpleasant experiences and reluctance. In an English-speaking classroom, for instance, one of the obstacles that significantly increases students' anxiety is their perception of their own language proficiency (Tran, T. T. L., 2022). This is to prove that positive emotions are linked to improved academic performance, and negative emotions are negatively related to achievement and performance.

Moreover, positive emotions can foster learner autonomy and self-regulated learning in the way they help students anticipate the future by setting learning goals, controlling and reflecting on their learning process as well as conducting a lot of self-studies (Carver & Scheier, 2000; Boekaerts et al., 2000; Fredrickson, 2001; Clore & Huntsinger, 2009). Thus, their learner autonomy level is increased, leading to better learning outcomes.

Overall, these studies provide important insights into a theoretical framework for achievement emotions and the important role that achievement emotions play in students' learning.

In the present study, achievement emotions are investigated in the domain of learning only. In

addition, achievement emotions are selected according to their valance of positive and negative. Specifically, the authors selected the six most popular achievement emotions that could happen in the learning process: enjoyment, hope, and pride for positive achievement emotions and anger, anxiety, and boredom for negative ones.

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The current research involved the participation of 380 first-year students, including 160 male and 220 female students, from 16 EIC (English for International Communication) classes from Hoa Sen University in the second main term of the academic year 2019-2020. The participants were from five faculties of Economics & Business (32.6%), Social Sciences (24.5%), Tourism (15.5%), Design & Art (14.2%), and IT (13.2%). Concerning students' hometowns, 46.8% of the students were from the city, 30.5% were from the outskirts, and 22.6% were from the countryside. In addition, eight students were selected to conduct an in-depth interview.

Design of the Study

This study was descriptive quantitative research that aimed to systematically report the achievement emotions of students at Hoa Sen University. In order to collect the data, Likert-scale questionnaires were administered to 380 first-year students at Hoa Sen University. The sampling design was convenience sampling. In addition, to specify students' answers, an in-depth interview was also used.

Data collection & analysis

An online survey was conducted using an online questionnaire which includes seven five-point Likert Scale questions from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questionnaire was adapted from the AEQ, namely Achievement Emotions Questionnaire by Pekrun. The authors only chose the six most frequently experienced emotions, including enjoyment, hope, pride, anger, anxiety, and boredom. In addition, an in-depth interview was conducted with the participation of eight students who volunteered to join. Descriptive statistics and independent sample T-tests, and Anova were employed to reach the results. Interview results were also analyzed to support the data from questionnaires.

Findings

Students' learning-related achievement emotions

Table 1. Learning-related achievement emotions of university students

	Research content	Mean	SD	Rank	Percentage (%)				
					Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
POSITIVE ACHIEVEMENT EMOTIONS	Enjoy challenge	3.70	1.17	1	8.4	26.1	29.7	21.6	14.2
	Enjoy new knowledge	3.55	1.11	2	7.9	6.8	25.5	41.6	18.2
	Get physically excited	3.51	1.29	3	9.2	15.5	17.1	31.3	26.8
	Have a rush	3.46	1.22	4	6.6	15.8	28.4	23.4	25.8
	Enjoy course material	3.33	1.09	5	6.3	13.2	37.4	27.1	16.1
	Study more than required	3.32	1.12	6	5.3	19.5	30.3	28.2	16.8
	Learning-related enjoyment	3.47							
	Be motivated	3.72	1.15	1	6.1	12.4	11.8	44.2	25.5
	Be inspired by the achievement	3.53	1.34	2	11.3	14.5	12.1	33.9	28.2
	Feel confident	3.19	1.10	3	6.1	20.3	36.6	22.6	14.5
	Learning-related hope	3.42							
	Be proud of your learning capacity	3.38	1.36	1	13.4	15.0	17.1	29.5	25.0
	Swell with pride	3.24	1.29	2	11.6	20.3	20.3	28.4	19.5
	Be motivated by pride	2.71	1.44	3	28.7	21.6	14.7	20.0	15.0
	Learning-related pride	3.26							
	Positive achievement emotions	3.33							
NEGATIVE ACHIEVEMENT EMOTIONS	Feel restless	3.85	1.26	1	5.5	6.6	34.7	3.7	49.5
	Get angry	3.79	1.33	2	8.2	5.8	34.5	1.8	49.7
	Feel irritated	3.77	1.30	3	6.6	8.2	34.5	3.2	47.6
	Feel like throwing the textbooks away	3.75	1.31	4	6.3	9.5	35.0	1.3	47.9
	Get annoyed	3.71	1.28	5	6.1	9.7	35.3	5.3	43.7
	Learning-related anger	3.77							
	Distract oneself to reduce anxiety	3.77	1.12	1	2.6	3.2	51.6	0.3	42.4
	Worry about not completing the material	3.69	1.32	2	8.2	6.3	39.7	0.0	45.8
	Get tense and nervous	3.61	1.25	3	5.8	8.9	43.9	1.3	40.0
	Scared about not understanding the material	3.23	0.73	4	3.2	0.0	76.1	12.6	8.2
	Worry about not being able to cope	2.10	1.09	5	33.2	39.7	17.6	3.2	6.3
	Learning-related anxiety	3.28							
	Feel depleted with boring material	3.73	1.24	1	5.3	6.8	41.6	1.8	44.5
	Find one's mind wandering	3.29	1.11	2	8.2	2.9	63.7	1.8	23.4
	Drift off because of boring study	3.12	1.22	3	15.8	0.8	60.0	2.6	20.8
	Think time stands still	3.04	1.22	4	16.6	2.4	60.5	1.1	19.5
	Find studying dull and monotonous	2.95	0.76	5	8.4	1.1	83.2	2.1	5.3
	Learning-related boredom	3.23							
	Negative achievement emotions	3.43							

In the current study, achievement emotions were examined in two aspects of positive emotions and negative emotions. The mean score of the three positive learning-related emotions (enjoyment, hope, pride) is 3.33, which is at an average level. On the other hand, the mean score of three negative ones (anger, anxiety, boredom) is 3.43, which is at a high level.

Considering positive learning-related achievement emotions, the emotion with the highest mean score is enjoyment (M = 3.47, rank 1, high level). The next highest mean score belongs to hope (M = 3.42, rank 2, high level). Pride takes a mean score of 3.26, which is an average level. Specifically, choice distribution in positive emotions questions ranges from strongly disagree to agree strongly. What should be taken into consideration is that most items in learning-related enjoyment attract more than 40% of the choices of agree and strongly agree. They include enjoying acquiring new knowledge (59.8%), getting physically excited when studying well (58.1%), having a rush when studying well (49.2%), enjoying the course material (43.2%), and studying more than required because of the enjoyment of learning (45%). As for hope, most of the students reported being motivated by their achievement in learning (69.7%), and 62.1% of them stated to take their achievement in learning as an inspiration to put more effort into studying and hoping to have an even better learning result. Considering students' pride in their learning (M = 3.26), which is the lowest among the three positive emotions, 54.5% of the students are proud of their learning capacity, whereas 50.3% of them are not motivated by their pride in their accomplishments in learning.

Concerning negative achievement emotions, Table 1 shows that the mean score for students' learning-related negative achievement emotions is high (Mean = 3.43). The highest mean score (M = 3.77, high level) is for anger. Learning-related anxiety comes in second (M = 3.28), followed by learning-related boredom (M = 3.23, average level).

The first factor in analyzing is learning-related anger, which has a high mean score of 3.80. All factors associated with anger elicit high-level responses, which must be taken into account. Irritation when sitting at a desk for a long time has the highest mean score (M= 3.85). Other categories with high mean ratings include becoming angry when studying, getting annoyed about having to study, feeling irritated while studying, and feeling like throwing the textbook out the window (3.79, 3.77, 3.75, and 3.71, respectively).

Table 1 demonstrates that students' anxiety level is average (M = 3.28) when it comes to learning-related anxiety, which shows a wide range of responses. Specifically, over half of the participants strongly believe that worrying about not finishing the content (45.8%), distracting oneself from relieving anxiety (42.4%), and being tense while studying are all good ideas (40%). 76.1% of the participants, on the other hand, are unsure whether they are scared when they don't comprehend the content, and 72.9% disagree that they are concerned about being able to complete all of their work.

Finally, students' levels of learning-related boredom range from medium to high. The impression of being depleted as a result of the uninteresting material has the highest mean score (M = 3.73, high level). The majority of the other options are on the neutral spectrum. For example, when studying in a dreary and monotonous environment, time stops still, the mind wanders, and the mind drifts off due to the boredom of learning. The majority of participants are unsure, with 83.2 percent, 60.5 percent, 63.7 percent, and 60.0 percent, accordingly.

In conclusion, with a mean score of 3.43, it dents' learning-related negative achievement feeling is at a high level. In their learning process, the participants display a high level of anger and a little lower level of anxiety and boredom. The majority of the participants are irritated by having to study or study for an extended period of time. Furthermore, while the majority of them are

worried about studying at university, many others are more confident in their ability to cope with the workload. Furthermore, the learning content is the thing that bores the students the most. The results of the in-depth interviews suggest that the majority of the participants in this study expect university learning to be simple. The reality, however, differs from their expectations. They stated that when they were in high school, they were used to being passive recipients of knowledge rather than active acquirers. As a result, they found it difficult to adjust to the new learning environment, which required a lot of self-study and knowledge investigation. Furthermore, they must finish required classes such as philosophy and English, which are not their majors, during their first year at university. As a result, they have little interest in those topics.

Comparing students' positive and negative achievement emotions
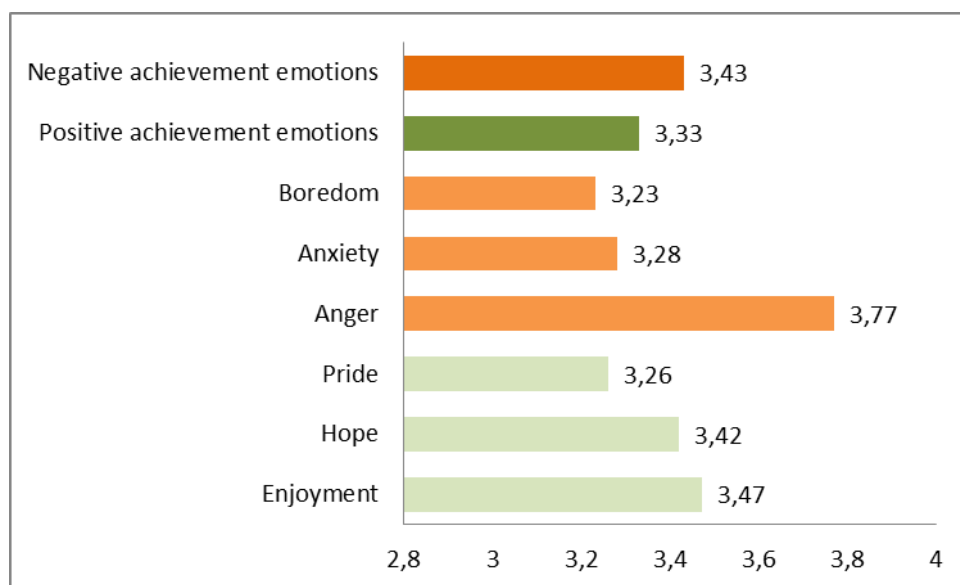
Figure 2. An overview of students' achievement emotions

Figure 2 provides an overview of students' learning-related achievement emotions. As can be seen from Table 3, students' negative emotions are higher than students' positive emotions. In addition, among six emotions, anger ranks the highest, with a mean score of 3.77 (high level). In-depth interview results (see Table 2) show the reasons why the participants have a high level of negative emotions when they study in a university environment.

Table 2. In-depth interview results about students' negative achievement emotions (N = 8)

Reasons for experiencing negative emotions	N	Percentage (%)
Problems related to administration	2	25%
Problems related to instructors	2	25%
Problems related to individual students	4	50%

Table 2 reveals the factors which affect students' negative emotions about their learning. An in-depth interview with eight students was conducted for the purpose of finding out why they have a high level of negative emotions. The results show three issues coming from school administration, instructors, and individual students. Firstly, one student out of 8 (12.5%) stated

they had trouble with attendance regulations and exam rules. The student reported feeling "disappointed and angry" when he was marked absent for three sessions because he was more than 15 minutes late when moving from one campus to another. Another student showed her "anger" because she was disqualified from the final exam twice in one semester because she forgot to bring her Student Card and another time for being late. She stated that she didn't blame the university because she had been accounted for those exam rules right from the beginning of the semester, but she wished the university had other ways of offering helps to students who had similar problems. Secondly, 25% of the students reported feeling "anxious and irritated" because their instructors were too "strict." They said that they were required to make a lot of group presentations, whereas what they preferred was to listen to the instructor's expertise. They "didn't get much knowledge from those presentations at all." They also reported that some instructors did not accept any of their excuses for their lateness in attendance and in submitting midterm or final papers. They also stated to prefer to choose "easy teachers" when registering for a course. Last but not least, 50% of the students (4 students) interviewed showed their negative emotions about learning at university due to individual factors such as learning strategies, learning styles, learning ability, and responsibility. They reported feeling "difficult and didn't know what to do and how to deal with many reading materials", especially for non-major subjects. This result may be due to their lack of learning strategies in a new learning environment. Other students stated to feel negative about learning at university because it requires "too many responsibilities". They "thought about learning at university as an easy thing", but the reality is "the opposite".

Factors influencing students' achievement emotions

Table 3. Differences in students' learning-related achievement emotions

Variables	Test	Number	AE +		AE -	
Gender	Independent Sample T-Test		T	sig	T	sig
	Male	220	-3.9	.000	-0.6	.002
	Female	160				
Hometown	One-way ANOVA (F)		F	sig	F	sig
	City	178	101	.000	12.6	.000
	Suburb	116				
	Countryside	86				
Major	One-way ANOVA (F)		F	sig	F	sig
	Economics & Business	124	5.0	.001	.77	.32
	Tourism	58				
	Design & Art	54				
	IT	50				
	Social Sciences	94				

In this study, we explored students' achievement emotions in their process of learning at university. A series of independent sample T-tests and one-way ANOVAs were used to examine the effects of the independent variables on students' academic emotions. The results can be found in Table 5. We found that there is a significant difference in students' positive emotions in terms of gender (T = -3.9, sig = .000), hometown (F = 101, sig = .000), and major (F = 5.0, sig = .001). Specifically, female students' positive emotions were significantly lower than those of male students. Interviews with the students revealed that they love this university

environment more than the one in their high school because, at university, they can freely and confidently express their personalities and characteristics, for example, through styles and appearance. In addition, what matters more is that their differences are respected. That's why female students feel more positive about the learning environment at university. Secondly, the positive emotions of students from the countryside were significantly higher than those of students from the city and suburban areas. This result is related to students' mindsets when they enter university. Those students who are from the countryside have a more positive mindset about learning. They step into this new learning environment with that positive mindset and feel more positive in comparison with students from the city. Last but not least, the positive achievement emotions of students from majors in Economics and Business, Social Sciences, and Design and Art were significantly higher than those of students from Tourism and IT majors. This positive emotion is explained by the fact that some majors from the university are seen to be more prestigious than others in the aspect that they are recognized to achieve ACBSP (Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs) accreditation, such as faculty of Economics and Business or to meet AUN-QA (ASEAN University Network-Quality Assurance) standards such as English Linguistics and Hotel Management programs. On the other hand, for negative achievement emotions, there is only one significant difference in terms of hometown. Specifically, students from rural areas have a higher level of negative achievement emotions than students from suburbs and cities. This result is related to the students' significantly higher level of positive achievement emotions as compared to those of students from the city or suburban areas. They reported putting high expectations into the quality of the learning program and the university's learning environment. However, they sometimes feel disappointed with their learning during their first year due to differences in terms of learning strategies and subject matters related to their majors.

Discussion

The current study aims to investigate students' learning-related achievement emotions when learning different subjects at university. Three positive emotions, including enjoyment, hope, pride, and three negative emotions of, anger, anxiety, and boredom, were investigated. From the results, two main points can be drawn from the study.

Firstly, students' learning-related negative achievement emotions are higher than their positive emotions. Specifically, students' learning-related negative achievement emotions are at a high level. The participants display a high level of anger and a little lower level of anxiety and boredom. Their high levels of negative emotions can be attributed to a combination of factors, including their unfamiliarity with the university's new learning environment and their unhappiness with the gap between their expectations and reality. The students may put a high level of expectations into the quality of the learning program as well as the learning environment at the university. Then they feel disappointed with their learning during their first year due to differences in terms of learning strategies and subject matters related to their majors. Moreover, three main factors which lead to students' negative emotions are problems related to individual students, too strict instructors, and administration. Considering negative emotions, students' positive learning-related achievement is at an average level, with the highest mean score belonging to learning enjoyment. Most of the participants are excited to acquire new knowledge related to their majors of choice, and they are also motivated and proud of their learning accomplishments. This fact can be explained by the variety of majors in the university from which the students to choose, and they are contented to pursue their dream major. This result is different from the results of the research by Pekrun et al. (2002), in which German

students had a higher level of positive achievement emotions than negative emotions. One theory to explain the result is that Vietnamese students tend to self-evaluate their achievement emotions more than German students. However, more research is required to prove this theory. The result of the current study is also different from that of Reilly & Sanchez Rosas' (2019) in the way that English language learners in Reilly & Sanchez Rosas' reported significantly higher levels of positive emotions than negative ones. The differences can be explained by the different characteristics between English and other subjects, which lead to different emotions in learners.

Secondly, considering factors that affect students' achievement emotions, there is a significant difference in students' positive emotions between groups of different genders, hometowns, and majors. Specifically, female students' positive emotions were significantly lower than those of male students. This result is different from the research by Reilly & Sanchez Rosas (2019), in which the authors found no gender differences in students' achievement emotions. In addition, the positive emotions of students from the countryside were significantly higher than those of students from the city and suburban areas. Last but not least, the positive achievement emotions of students from majors in Economics and Business, Social Sciences, and Design and Art were significantly higher than those of students from Tourism and IT majors. These differences can be attributed to the respect for differences as one of the philosophies of Hoa Sen University. Considering students' backgrounds, those students from the countryside, who often have more difficult living conditions, have more positive mindsets about learning and try to make changes to their lives. For students' majors, positive emotion is explained by the fact that some majors from the university are seen to be more prestigious than others because they are recognized to achieve international accreditations.

Conclusions & Recommendations

The present study aims at examining students' achievement emotions in learning at university. There are two significant findings revealed from the results. Firstly, the students who participated in this study have a moderate level of positive learning-related achievement emotions and a high level of learning-related negative emotions.

Specifically, the students have a high level of negative achievement emotions with a high level of anger and an average level of anxiety and boredom. Especially the students find it angry and irritating when studying and sitting at their desks for a long time to study. They also get so angry that they even want to throw the textbook away and give up. In addition, their level of anxiety is lower than their level of anger, which shows that all the work at university does not scare them. Moreover, what bores them the most is the learning materials.

According to Pekrun et al. (2004), a certain level of negative achievement emotions is needed to enhance engagement and performance because they motivate effort to avoid failure. Thus, although anger, anxiety, and boredom seem to be not very good for learning, those factors are actually necessary for helping students to keep their motivation and put more effort into learning. However, teachers should take into consideration the fact that the students in the current study have a high level of negative emotions, which can lead to a lower level of performance. The students feel angry while studying because they are not acquainted with the learning environment as well as the learning methods at the university. Thus, as a teacher, what can be done is to introduce the students' study skills at university. Those study skills will help students have a better feeling about studying at university in their first year. In addition, teachers can avoid frustrating the students and help them achieve their full potential by trying multilevel teaching strategies such as workshop approaches, contract learning, and tiered instruction. As a

result of this, when the students get home, they get motivated to do more exercises or do more self-study. This is also a way to promote learner autonomy.

Secondly, there is a significant difference in positive emotions between male and female students, students from the city, suburb, and countryside, and students from different majors. A good use of pair work, group work, and individual work will help in this situation because students from different genders, backgrounds, and majors will have a chance to blend in and interact with each other. As a result, their level of enjoyment, hope, and pride will be maintained.

Moreover, as a teacher or teaching staff, what can be done is to foster interest in learning in and outside the classroom by using humor, games, and more practice or extra materials utilizing the online learning system.

Last but not least, in order to increase students' positive emotions, there are techniques that teachers can employ. Teachers can try strategies to inspire hope in students by helping them to set clear and attainable goals, then develop multiple strategies to reach those goals, and also stay motivated to attain their goals. In addition, teachers should also connect students with their interests by providing time for students to research and plan their own passion projects. There are plenty of opportunities for students to focus on a hobby or passion while applying their emerging skills. This is a good way to increase students' positive emotions in and outside the classroom. On the other hand, university administrators also play an important role. In 2021, the university was ranked first in the Top 10 universities with the best study environment in Ho Chi Minh City by Toplist.vn. This is also one of the factors which can foster students' positive emotions when they can get access to international-standard education services to get many opportunities to exchange, study, work, and experience from a more developed education system at the university.

Acknowledgments

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