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Coping Strategies and Social Adjustment of Boarding Students in Uyo Local Government Area

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between coping strategies and social adjustment among boarding students in secondary schools in Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Three research questions and corresponding null hypotheses guided the study. A correlational survey design was adopted. The population consisted of all boarding students in selected secondary schools in Uyo, with a sample of 350 SS II boarding students selected via multistage sampling techniques. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Coping Strategies and Social Adjustment Questionnaire (CSSAQ)", which was face validated and had a reliability coefficient of 0.84. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used for data analysis at the 0.05 level of significance. The results showed that there is a significant moderate positive relationship between problem-focused coping strategy and social adjustment, a significant low to moderate positive relationship between emotion-focused

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coping and social adjustment, and a significant moderate negative relationship between avoidance coping strategy and social adjustment among boarding students. The study concluded that coping strategies significantly impact boarding students' social adjustment, with problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies enhancing adjustment, while avoidance coping undermines it. It was recommended that school counsellors, administrators, parents, and teachers develop programmes to teach adaptive coping skills, provide emotional support, identify students using avoidance coping early, and collaboratively reinforce positive coping strategies for better social adjustment in boarding schools.

Keywords: Coping strategies, social adjustment, boarding students, problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping.

Introduction

The transition from a home environment to a boarding school represents one of the most significant life changes for an adolescent. This move requires a student to rapidly adapt to a new world that demands independence, resilience, and the ability to navigate complex social networks without the immediate physical support of parents. The boarding school environment presents an extraordinarily unique and intense social context that can dramatically amplify the challenges of adolescents' adjustment. Unlike day schooling, the 24/7 communal life forces immediate and profound adaptation to institutional structures, complex social hierarchies, and a sharp, prolonged separation from primary family support. This setting demands a heightened and sustained reliance on peer relationships, pushing the influence of peers beyond typical academic hours and into all aspects of daily life. Critical to navigating this transition from home environment to a boarding school is the student's social adjustment, which serves as a vital indicator of overall well-being and success within the institutional setting.

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Social adjustment in this context is defined as the capacity of an individual to establish satisfying and harmonious relationships with peers, teachers, and the broader school community (Dude, 2022). Dude (2022) stated that some common aspects of social adjustment include specific social competencies such as the ability to initiate friendships, participation in school activities, compliance with school rules and authority, and the ability to resolve conflicts with roommates without aggression. When a student achieves effective social adjustment, they are better positioned to experience psychological stability, higher self-esteem, and improved academic performance. These students can leverage peer networks for academic support and emotional buffering, essentially turning the school environment into a "second home" that fosters growth. Conversely, when social adjustment fails, the consequences are detrimental. Poor adjustment often manifests as profound social isolation, severe homesickness, anxiety, and maladaptive behaviours. A student who cannot integrate socially is likely to suffer from emotional distress that distracts them from their studies, creating a cycle of academic failure and personal dissatisfaction.

The continuous pressure to assimilate, manage privacy constraints, and negotiate new social rules taxes an adolescent's existing coping mechanisms. When a student in a demanding boarding school environment perceives their resources as insufficient, the resulting stress triggers the deployment of coping strategies, which refers to methods individuals use to manage stress and anxiety. Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model of stress and coping, as cited in Iruloh and Ukaegbu (2017), distinguishes between problem-focused coping, which aims at addressing the source of stress, and emotion-focused coping, which seeks to manage emotional responses to stressors. The choice and efficacy of these strategies are hypothesised to be the primary determinants of social adjustment outcomes, especially given the established role of emotional management in local adjustment literature (Okodi, 2020). This study systematically investigates three distinct, yet interrelated, classifications of coping:

Problem-focused coping, a strategy directed at actively mastering or altering the source of the distress (e.g., seeking advice, planning, or time management). These "approach" strategies are typically linked to better adjustment outcomes when the stressor is controllable. Problem-focused coping strategy involves actively addressing the source of stress by organising tasks, seeking information, or developing time-management skills to reduce the academic workload (Iruloh and Ukaegbu, 2017).

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Emotion-focused coping is a strategy aimed at regulating the associated emotional response (e.g., positive reinterpretation, venting, or acceptance). This is closely tied to the emotional regulation construct found to be vital in Nigerian adjustment studies. While necessary, over-reliance can sometimes lead to passive maintenance rather than mastery (Basith et al., 2021).

According to Ukaegbu and Obikoya (2017), avoidance coping refers to efforts made by individuals to disengage from the stressor (e.g., denial, behavioural disengagement, or social withdrawal). This style is consistently shown to be maladaptive in the long term and is a strong predictor of poor adjustment and increased psychological vulnerability.

Understanding how boarding students in the Uyo Local Government Area deploy these specific mechanisms is paramount, as the influence of peer groups (a known significant factor in the Nigerian adolescent environment) may selectively reinforce certain coping behaviours, either adaptive or maladaptive. Despite the acknowledged intensity of boarding school life and the critical importance of social adjustment for adolescent development, a significant empirical and contextual gap persists. Specifically, while the importance of emotional regulation and peer influence is established, there remains a lack of specific research that systematically correlates the deployment of distinct coping strategies (problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidance) with observed social adjustment success among secondary school boarders in Uyo LGA. Existing literature, while foundational, fails to isolate the predictive power of specific coping styles on social integration within this particular, high-demand educational environment. This study, therefore, is critically justified, as it aims to fill this gap.

Statement of the Problem

Boarding schools in Uyo Local Government Area are supposed to be places where students learn to be independent, disciplined, and socially mature. Parents send their children there with the hope that they will learn to live well with others and stand on their own two feet. However, the reality for many of these students is very different and quite worrying. The problem is that a large number of boarding students are struggling to fit in. Instead of building strong friendships and settling down to study, they are facing serious social difficulties. Some of them feel extremely lonely and often isolate themselves, often refusing to participate in school activities or breaking school rules out of frustration.

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Worst of all, these students do not even know how best to cope in this new environment, as everything seems to be strange to them, and every effort to get them in tune with the school system often proves abortive. When faced with the pressure of boarding life, many students, instead of talking to someone to fix a conflict, might decide to hide in their dorms and cut everyone off, or they might just get angry and lash out. This situation has specified a case of poor social adjustment caused by a poor coping strategy.

It is against this backdrop that this study is carried out by the researchers to examine the relationship between coping strategies and social adjustment among boarding students in secondary schools in Uyo Local Government Area.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between coping strategies and social adjustment among boarding students in secondary schools in the Uyo Local Government Area. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the relationship between problem-focused coping strategies and social adjustment among boarding students.
2. Examine the relationship between emotion-focused coping strategies and social adjustment of boarding students.
3. Investigate the relationship between avoidance coping strategies and social adjustment among boarding students.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the relationship between problem-focused coping strategies and social adjustment among boarding students?
2. What is the relationship between emotion-focused coping strategies and social adjustment among boarding students?
3. What is the relationship between avoidance coping strategies and social adjustment among boarding students?

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Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in the work:

1. There is no significant relationship between problem-focused coping and social adjustment among boarding students.
2. There is no significant relationship between emotion-focused coping and social adjustment among boarding students.
3. There is no significant relationship between avoidance coping and social adjustment among boarding students.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study would offer significant benefits to education stakeholders such as students, school counsellors, teachers, parents and guardians and future researchers.

First, the study would benefit students as it helps them become more self-aware of the coping strategies they use in managing stress and interpersonal challenges within the boarding school environment. By understanding the positive effects of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, students can consciously adopt healthier coping habits that enhance social relationships, emotional balance, and overall well-being.

Also, to school counsellors, it will provide evidence-based insights that will enable counsellors to design and implement more effective intervention programmes aimed at promoting adaptive coping and social adjustment among students. Counsellors can integrate these findings into group guidance, peer support sessions, and life skills training, helping students develop resilience, empathy, and effective problem-solving abilities.

Further, the study benefits teachers who interact with students daily. By understanding how coping patterns affect classroom behaviour and social interaction, teachers can adopt more supportive instructional strategies and classroom management approaches that encourage positive adjustment.

For parents and guardians, the study underscores the need to provide emotional support and consistent communication with their children in boarding schools. Awareness of coping challenges will enable parents to identify early signs of maladjustment and collaborate with school personnel to provide psychological and emotional assistance to their children.

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Finally, the study is valuable to future researchers, as it provides a conceptual and empirical foundation for further investigation into other psychosocial variables affecting adolescent adjustment, such as self-efficacy, resilience, and emotional intelligence.

Scope of the Study

This study was delimited to selected secondary schools in the Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. The focus is on boarding students at the secondary school level during the 2024/2025 academic session, examining their coping strategies and social adjustment patterns. The study considered three main coping dimensions, namely problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidance coping.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984).

Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

The Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping was propounded by Lazarus and Folkman in 1984. The theory was presented by the proponents as a dynamic and interactive process between individuals and their environment. This model posits that stress is not inherent to an event itself but arises from the cognitive appraisal of the situation. The process begins with primary appraisal, where the individual judges an event as a threat, challenge, or harm/loss. If appraised as a threat, secondary appraisal follows, involving the evaluation of one's available resources and potential coping options (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). This appraisal process is continuous, leading to ongoing adjustments in coping efforts, a process known as reappraisal. The type of strategy employed is heavily influenced by whether the stressor is perceived as controllable or uncontrollable. Coping strategies are then employed based on these appraisals.

In the context of this study, boarding students experience stress from homesickness, peer influence, academic workload, and disciplinary expectations. Their choice of coping strategies is determined by their cognitive appraisals, such as primary appraisal and secondary appraisal. These appraisals lead them to make the choice of

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coping strategy to engage in, which ultimately determines their level of social adjustment. Students who employ problem-focused coping are more likely to engage in constructive peer relationships and school activities, whereas those relying on avoidance coping may experience withdrawal, isolation, or behavioural maladjustment.

Conceptual Literature

Coping Strategies

Coping strategies are the methods individuals use to manage stress and adversity, and they generally fall into distinct categories that reflect different ways of handling problems and emotions. They help individuals deal with challenges, reduce discomfort, and restore emotional equilibrium in the face of adversity (Bondarchuk et al., 2024). Coping differs from defence mechanisms in that it generally involves conscious and voluntary actions aimed at mitigating stress, whereas defence mechanisms are mostly unconscious. Broadly, coping strategies are categorised based on their focus: some target the stressor itself, and others aim to regulate the emotional responses to stress. Among the most researched coping strategies are problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidance coping, each with unique characteristics and implications for psychological well-being.

Problem-focused coping involves taking active steps to resolve or mitigate the root causes of stress. This strategy includes identifying the problem, generating solutions, and implementing plans to overcome obstacles. It empowers individuals to control the source of their stress rather than just accommodating its emotional impact. According to recent research, problem-focused coping is associated with better adjustment and resilience because it addresses challenges directly, thereby reducing the stressor's intensity (Munroe et al., 2022). For example, planning and seeking instrumental support are typical problem-focused actions that promote problem resolution and reduce uncertainty.

Emotion-focused coping refers to strategies aimed at managing emotional responses to stress rather than changing the situation itself. Common emotion-focused coping strategies include relaxation techniques, mindfulness practices, and engaging in hobbies to alleviate negative emotions associated with academic pressure (Watkins & Gold, 2019). For guidance students, managing emotional responses may also involve applying the therapeutic techniques they learn in their coursework, such as cognitive-behavioural strategies or self-reflection.

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In contrast, avoidance coping entails efforts to evade the stressor or the feelings it generates. While avoidance can provide immediate relief by distracting or distancing oneself from the problem, it generally fails to address the underlying issues (Petrova et al., 2021). Prolonged reliance on avoidance strategies is linked to greater psychological distress and poorer outcomes, as unresolved problems tend to worsen over time (De Castella et al., 2018). Examples of avoidance include denial, substance use, or withdrawing from social interactions, which may interfere with effective coping and adaptation.

Social Adjustment

The concept of social adjustment is central to human psychology, representing the ongoing behavioural and psychological process through which an individual achieves a functional equilibrium between their own needs and the demands, standards, and values of the surrounding social environment (Dhingra et al., 2022). Social adjustment is critical for personal well-being and overall mental health, as it affects one's capacity to navigate social roles, maintain social support networks, and cope with social stressors. The concept is dynamic, influenced by individual characteristics and external social factors such as support systems and environmental contexts (Kozlova et al., 2024).

According to Amos (2022), the process of social adjustment is not static; it involves continuous adaptation and integration across multiple critical life domains, and a comprehensive understanding requires examining the specific roles an individual occupies. Contemporary research, often utilising tools like the Social Adjustment Scale–Self-report (SAS-SR), identifies key functional areas of social life, which commonly include the work role, the social and leisure role, the extended family role, and the primary relationship role, with impairment in any of these roles signalling a degree of maladjustment (Weissman, 2021). For example, successful adjustment in a new university setting requires integrating into the social life, building a supportive network, and managing social freedoms in a new environment, elements that are particularly salient for groups like international students.

Literature Review

Iruloh and Ukaegbu (2017) carried out a study to determine the extent to which social support and coping strategies predict academic adjustment of first-year university

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undergraduates in Rivers State, Nigeria. Correlation design was adopted for the study. Three research questions and three corresponding hypotheses guided the conduct of the study at 0.05 alpha levels. A sample of 382 first-year university undergraduates of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, 2015/2016 academic session, was drawn from the population through purposive and proportional stratified random sampling techniques. Three instruments, namely, the Multidimensional Scale for Perceived Social Support, the Coping Strategies Inventory and the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire – Academic subscale, were used for data collection. Simple and multiple regression analyses were used for data analysis. All data were subjected to analysis using the statistical package for social science (SPSS). Results showed that social support statistically significantly predicted academic adjustment of first-year university undergraduates; coping strategies (problem-focused and emotion-focused) taken together statistically significantly predicted academic adjustment of first-year university undergraduates; on the basis of individual contribution, problem-focused was a significant contributor to academic adjustment of first-year university undergraduates, while emotion-focused was not. Based on the findings, conclusions and recommendations were made.

Odofin and Agamugoro (2023) carried out a study to investigate the association between social support, coping strategies and academic adjustment among junior secondary school boarders in the Ughelli North Local Government Area, Delta State, Nigeria. Three research questions were raised to guide the study; the correlational research design was used. In the Ughelli North Local Government Area, Delta State, 2600 junior secondary school one students make up the population of the study. The sample size was 250 using simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. Three instruments were used: the Social Support Scale (SSS), the Coping Strategies Scale (CSS) and the Academic Adjustment Scale (AAS) to collect data. The reliability of the instruments was determined through Cronbach's alpha, and it yielded 0.65, 0.68 and 0.71, respectively. All three instruments used for data collection in this study were adapted, and the items in the instruments were clearly explained by the researchers to the respondents for proper understanding before responding to them. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to answer research questions 1-3. The study shows that social support and coping strategies have a significant positive relationship with academic adjustment. Based on the findings, it was recommended, among others, that students should go for counselling and should be taught how to schedule their time

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effectively in order to make necessary adjustments in their academic, personal-social activities, and emotional demands and follow the rules and regulations of the school, and more professional counsellors should be employed to assist students to adjust to the new school environment.

Ahmed et al. (2023) investigated how students at an Islamic boarding school in Tangerang, Indonesia, perceived various pressures and the strategies they employed to deal with them. It included the sample of 150 students from the first, second, and third grades enrolled in the school. The data were analysed using Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory to identify recurring themes related to students' stress-coping strategies. The findings indicated that the majority of stressors stemmed from non-academic sources, encompassing issues such as interpersonal relationships, environmental factors, and health-related concerns. Interestingly, despite a substantial female representation in the sample, exceeding 60% of the total participants, a significant proportion of students employed problem-based coping strategies to address these stressors. The study suggests further exploration of coping strategies within the framework of human development theories and their potential contributions to future educational interventions, policies, and practices.

Ukaegbu and Ekpeyong (2025) investigated the relationship between coping strategies and academic stress of undergraduate students of guidance and counselling, University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Three research questions and three corresponding null hypotheses guided the study. A correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of 684 undergraduate regular students of the Guidance and Counselling Department, University of Uyo, Uyo. A sample of 200 undergraduate students of Guidance and Counselling was selected for the study via the stratified random sampling technique. The Coping Strategies Questionnaire (CSQ) and Academic Stress Questionnaire for Undergraduate Students (ASQUS) were used for data collection. The instruments were face validated, while the reliability coefficients of 0.72 and 0.71 were obtained for CSQ and ASQUS, respectively. Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics were used for data analysis at the 0.05 level of significance. The results were that there is a negative and no significant relationship between problem-focused coping strategy and academic stress of students, and there is a significant positive relationship between emotion-focused coping strategy and academic stress of students.

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Methodology

Design of the Study

The design employed in this study is the correlational survey design. Correlation research designs are useful in determining whether two or more variables are related. Correlational research design is more suitable for this study because the researcher sought to ascertain the nature of the relationship between coping strategies and social adjustment among boarding students.

Population of the Study

The population of this study consisted of all boarding students in public secondary schools in the Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. This includes both male and female students in senior secondary classes 1-3 (SSS 1-3). There are about 3 government-approved public secondary schools in Uyo that operate boarding facilities, with an estimated student population of approximately 3,600 boarding students (State Education Board, Uyo, 2025).

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample of 350 SS II boarding students was drawn from the target population using the multistage sampling technique. This method was adopted to ensure fair representation of students across different schools, class levels, and gender groups. In the first stage, a simple random sampling technique (balloting without replacement) was used to select six boarding schools (four public and two private) from the list of government-approved schools in Uyo Local Government Area.

In the second stage, proportionate stratified random sampling was used to determine the number of students to be selected from each school based on the school's total boarding population. Within each school, students were stratified by class level (SSS) to ensure representation across subgroups. Finally, in the third stage, students were selected from each stratum using a simple random sampling technique until the required sample size of 350 respondents was achieved. The sampling approach ensured that each boarding student in the area had an equal and independent chance of being included in the study, thereby reducing sampling bias and improving the external validity of the results.

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Instrumentation

The major instrument used for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire titled “Coping Strategies and Social Adjustment Questionnaire (CSSAQ)”. The questionnaire consisted of two main sections: sessions A and B. Section A contained items on coping strategies, covering the three dimensions: emotion-focused coping, problem-focused coping, and avoidance coping, while Section B contains items measuring social adjustment. The questionnaire used a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1).

Validation of the Instrument

To ensure face validity, the draft instrument was submitted to three experts in the Department of Guidance and Counselling, University of Uyo. The experts reviewed the items for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives and variables. Their feedback led to the refinement of ambiguous items and improved scaling. A pilot test was also conducted among 30 boarding students in Itu Local Government Area, which was not part of the study area, to confirm the clarity and comprehensibility of the items. Based on feedback, necessary adjustments were incorporated into the final draft.

Reliability of the Instrument

To determine the internal consistency reliability of the instruments, the researchers randomly selected 50 boarding students who were part of the population but not part of the study sample to respond to the instruments. Data generated were subjected to inter-item analysis using Cronbach's alpha statistics and reliability coefficients of 0.84, indicating that the instrument was reliable and suitable for the main study.

Method of Data Collection

The researchers personally visited the selected secondary schools. After obtaining the necessary permission and approval from school principals and housemasters/mistresses in the respective selected schools, copies of the questionnaire were administered by the researchers directly to the respondents with the assistance of two trained research assistants. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to the students, emphasising confidentiality and voluntary participation. Respondents were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaire during evening prep hours in their hostels or classrooms. All

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completed questionnaires were retrieved immediately to prevent loss or damage. Out of 350 distributed copies, 340 were correctly filled and returned, representing a 97% response rate.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were coded and analysed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) for testing the research questions and hypotheses, respectively, at a 0.05 level of significance ($p < 0.05$).

Results

RQ 1. What is the relationship between problem-focused coping strategies and social adjustment among boarding students?

Table 1: Relationship between Problem-Focused Coping and Social Adjustment among Boarding Students

Variable	n	r	Remark
Problem-Focused Coping (X)	350	0.58	Significant moderate positive relationship
Social Adjustment (Y)			

The correlation coefficient $r = 0.58$ indicates a moderate positive relationship. This means that boarding students who use problem-focused coping strategies (e.g., planning, seeking advice, taking direct action) tend to have better social adjustment; therefore, there is a moderate positive relationship between problem-focused coping and social adjustment among boarding students. Students who scored high on problem-focused coping tend to show better social adjustment.

RQ 2. What is the relationship between emotion-focused coping strategies and social adjustment among boarding students?



Table 2: Relationship between Emotion-Focused Coping and Social Adjustment among Boarding Students

Variable	n	r	Remark
Emotion-Focused Coping (X)	350	0.36	Significant low to moderate positive relationship
Social Adjustment (Y)			

The correlation coefficient $r = 0.36$ shows a low to moderate positive relationship. Students employing emotion-focused coping (e.g., acceptance, venting emotions, positive reappraisal) somewhat improve their social adjustment. A significant low to moderate positive relationship exists between emotion-focused coping and social adjustment. Students using emotion-focused coping strategies somewhat adjust better socially in the boarding environment.

RQ 3. What is the relationship between avoidance coping strategies and social adjustment among boarding students?

Table 3: Relationship between Avoidance Coping and Social Adjustment among Boarding Students.

Variable	n	r	Remark
Avoidance Coping (X)	350	-0.42	Significant moderate negative relationship
Social Adjustment (Y)			

The correlation coefficient $r = -0.42$ reflects a moderate negative relationship. Boarding students who habitually use avoidance coping methods (denial, social withdrawal, escapism) demonstrate poorer social adjustment. This implies that there is a moderate negative relationship between avoidance coping and social adjustment among boarding students. Higher avoidance coping is associated with poorer social adjustment.

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Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between problem-focused coping and social adjustment among boarding students.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between problem-focused coping and social adjustment among boarding students.

Variable	n	r	p-value	Remark
Problem-Focused Coping (X)	350	0.58	<0.001	Significant moderate positive relationship
Social Adjustment (Y)				

The p-value (<0.001) is less than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This implies there is a significant moderate positive relationship between problem-focused coping and social adjustment among boarding students. Higher use of problem-focused coping is associated with better social adjustment.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between emotion-focused coping and social adjustment among boarding students.

Table 5: Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between emotion-focused coping and social adjustment among boarding students.

Variable	n	r	p-value	Remark
Emotion-Focused Coping (X)	350	0.36	<0.001	Significant low to moderate positive relationship
Social Adjustment (Y)				

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The p-value (<0.001) is less than 0.05, so the null hypothesis is rejected. There is a significant low-to-moderate positive relationship between emotion-focused coping and social adjustment among boarding students, indicating that greater use of emotion-focused coping is related to improved social adjustment.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between avoidance focused coping and social adjustment among boarding students.

Table 6: Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between avoidance-focused coping and social adjustment among boarding students.

Variable	n	r	p-value	Remark
Avoidance Coping (X)	350	-0.42	<0.001	Significant moderate negative relationship
Social Adjustment (Y)				

The p-value (<0.001) is less than 0.05, leading to rejection of the null hypothesis. There is a significant moderate negative relationship between avoidance coping and social adjustment, meaning that higher reliance on avoidance coping is associated with poorer social adjustment among boarding students.

Discussion of Findings

Relationship between Problem-Focused Coping and Social Adjustment

The findings show a significant moderate positive relationship ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$) between problem-focused coping and social adjustment among boarding students. This implies that students who actively engage in planning, seeking advice, and taking direct action toward their problems tend to adjust better socially in boarding schools. This result aligns with Lazarus and Folkman (1984), Compas et al. (2001), and Modo (2010), who highlighted problem-focused coping as an adaptive strategy facilitating positive psychosocial development and peer integration.

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Relationship between Emotion-Focused Coping and Social Adjustment

Emotion-focused coping showed a significant low to moderate positive correlation with social adjustment ($r = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that students who manage their emotions, through acceptance, venting, or positive reappraisal, experience somewhat better social integration. This is consistent with research by Nwafor and Eze (2018) and Obot and Modo (2021), confirming that emotional regulation supports adjustment but may not be as effective as proactive coping in social contexts.

Relationship between Avoidance Coping and Social Adjustment

A significant moderate negative relationship was found between avoidance coping and social adjustment ($r = -0.42$, $p < 0.001$). Students relying on avoidance behaviours, like denial or social withdrawal, exhibited poorer social adjustment. This finding supports Eyo and Ekpenyong (2017), who emphasised the maladaptive nature of avoidance coping in boarding environments, leading to emotional detachment and peer conflicts.

Conclusion

This study empirically established the critical role of coping strategies in determining the social adjustment outcomes of boarding secondary school students in Uyo Local Government Area. The findings provided a definitive contrast between adaptive and maladaptive strategies; specifically, problem-focused coping emerged as the most significant predictor of positive social adjustment, indicating that students who actively engage in planning and direct action are best equipped to navigate institutional and peer-related stressors. Similarly, emotion-focused coping demonstrated a complementary, positive relationship with social adjustment, validating the importance of emotional regulation in maintaining psychological stability. Conversely, the study confirmed that avoidance coping poses a significant threat to student well-being, displaying a moderate negative correlation that links behaviours such as denial and withdrawal to social isolation and maladjustment. Ultimately, this research concludes that social adjustment is not merely a function of the environment but is heavily dependent upon the student's ability to deploy effective coping strategies.

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Recommendations

1. School counsellors and administrators should develop programmes to teach problem-focused coping skills such as goal-setting, active problem-solving, and seeking support.
2. Emotional coping strategies should be supported through counselling services that promote healthy emotional regulation, stress management, and peer support.
3. Early identification of students using avoidance coping should lead to supportive interventions encouraging social engagement and constructive problem resolution.
4. Parents and teachers should work together to reinforce positive coping strategies, model effective communication, and support students' psychosocial needs.

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Appendix

Coping Strategies and Social Adjustment Questionnaire (CSSAQ)

Section A: Coping Strategies

Instruction: Please tick (✓) the appropriate box.

S/N	Problem-Focused Coping	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
1.	I try to come up with a step -by-step plan to deal with problems (e.g., peer conflict, academic challenge).				
2.	I take direct action to solve the problem (e.g., confronting an issue or studying harder).				
3.	I seek advice or information from teachers or older students on how to manage the situation.				
4.	I set goals and manage my time better when I feel stressed by academic work.				
5.	I make an effort to change the thing that is causing me stress.				

S/N	Emotion-Focused Coping	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
6.	I try to see the good side of a difficult situation (positive reappraisal).				
7.	I accept the situation because I know I cannot realistically change it.				
8.	I talk to my friends about how I feel just to let out my emotions (venting).				
9.	I pray or rely on my faith to help me feel better about the problem.				
10.	I tell myself that things could be worse to feel less upset.				

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S/N	Avoidance Coping	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
11.	I try to pretend the stressful problem isn't real or hasn't happened (denial).				
12.	I avoid being around people to keep from thinking about the problem (social withdrawal).				
13.	I sleep more than usual or stay in bed to escape from the situation.				
14.	I go to great lengths to avoid the person or place causing me stress.				
15.	I daydream or fantasize about things to take my mind off the problem.				

Section B: Social Adjustment (SA)

S/N	Statement	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
1.	I feel like I am a part of the school community and belong here.				
2.	I find it easy to make friends and maintain positive relationships with my peers.				
3.	I get along well with my teachers and school staff.				
4.	I participate actively in school social activities, clubs, or sports.				
5.	I am comfortable seeking help from my classmates or seniors when I need it.				

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6.	I feel emotionally stable and comfortable in the boarding environment.				
7.	I understand and can easily follow the social expectations and rules of the boarding house.				