Coping Strategies Adopted by Regular Undergraduate International Students in Southern Ghana Universities on Their Adjustment Needs

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Abstract
The study investigated the coping strategies adopted by regular undergraduate international students of the universities in southern Ghana on their adjustment needs. The descriptive design of the quantitative research approach was employed for the study. The research instrument used to elicit responses was a questionnaire. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency and percentage) and inferential statistics (Independent samples t-test and Kruskal-Wallis H test). The findings showed that there was no significant difference in the coping strategies on the adjustment needs of undergraduate regular international students based on both gender and age. It was recommended, among other things, that policy makers and management of the universities must take into account the reality of the adjustment needs of regular undergraduate international students and consider effective ways of making their stay in southern Ghana's universities less stressful.

1. Introduction
In Psychology, coping refers to efforts to overcome, reduce, or tolerate the demands created by stress or conflict (Weiten & Lloyd, 2008; Taylor and Stanton, 2007; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It describes the way individuals employ psychological coping mechanisms, otherwise termed coping styles or strategies, to aid in the process of managing, minimizing or overcoming stress. Often, coping mechanisms arise in situations that are appraised as taxing or exceeding of one's resources (Thompson & Greve, 2013; Taylor and Stanton, 2007). The effectiveness of an individual's ability to cope depends on the coping strategy employed, the type of stress/conflict encountered, and the situational circumstances. Coping strategies and styles often vary in their adaptive value with some forms of coping being highly adaptive and constructive in their ability to mediate or reduce the impact of a stressor. Over the years, psychological coping has been categorized into several different coping styles each with overlapping and distinct characteristics. The following section discusses the main paradigms of coping as identified in the literature on psychological coping and explore the evolution of this broad and complex field.

1.1 Research Question
What coping strategies do regular undergraduate international students of universities in southern Ghana adopt to mitigate the adjustment needs they have?

1.2 Hypotheses
H1: There is no significant difference in the coping strategies of international students of universities in southern Ghana based on gender.
H2: There is no significant difference between the coping strategies of international students of universities in Southern Ghana based on age.

2. Problem-focused Coping and Emotion-focused Coping
Early research separated coping into two broad dimensions, which included problem focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Lazarus, 1984). Problem-focused coping is aimed at problem solving and altering the source of stress: taking steps to remove, evade, or to diminish its impact. For example, if layoffs are expected, an individual may apply for other jobs or work harder at their current job to reduce the likelihood of being let go (Carver & Conner-Smith, 2010). Emotion-focused coping is aimed at minimizing the emotional distress that is associated with or caused by the stressor. Emotion-focused coping included a wide range of responses, such as self-soothing (e.g., relaxation, seeking emotional support, expression of negative emotions (crying, yelling), focusing on negative thoughts (e.g., rumination) and attempts to escape stressful situations (e.g., avoidance,

denial and wishful thinking) (Carver & Conner-Smith, 2010).

According to Lazarus (1984), emotion focused coping dominates when stressful conditions are viewed as difficult to change; however, when they appear as controllable by action, problem focused coping dominates. In addition, the same goal (e.g., seeking support) can be both emotion-focused and problem-focused depending on the type of support that is sought after. It would be classified as emotion-focused if the desire is to obtain emotional support and reassurance, but problem-focused if the goal is to obtain advice or instrumental help (Lazarus 1984; Carver & Conner-Smith, 2010). As such, emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping are not two distinct and independent coping strategies; they complement and support one another. To illustrate, emotion-focused coping used effectively can diminish negative emotional distress, making it possible to problem solve more calmly and possibly allow for better problem focused coping.

Moreover, problem-focused coping can diminish the threat, and while doing so can reduce the negative emotional distress. While, the distinction between problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping is an important one, the research on coping psychology has evolved towards a much broader and more in-depth understanding of coping styles and strategies (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989). Paradigms of coping that soon followed emotion and problem-focused coping included engagement and avoidance coping, as well as focused coping and proactive coping. For the sake of this paper, I did not talk about focused coping and proactive coping.

3. Engagement and Disengagement Coping

Engagement coping is aimed at dealing with the stressor or related emotions, and includes problem-focused coping and some forms of emotion-focused coping (Carver & Conner-Smith, 2010; Thompson & Greve 2013). Within engagement coping attempting to directly control the stressor has been termed primary control coping or assimilative coping. On the other hand, attempts to adjust or adapt to the stressor has been termed accommodative or secondary control coping. Within primary control coping an individual may try to maintain their goal when confronted with obstacles. They may engage in direct problem solving (e.g., taking action to find ways to fix or better the situation), or seeking out information or support to improve the situation (Compas, Champion & Reeslund, 2005). Primary control coping also involves emotion regulation (engaging in activities to calm oneself), as well as emotional expression (e.g., talking or writing about one's feelings and emotions) (Carver & Conner-Smith, 2010; Compas, Champion & Reeslund, 2005). Secondary control coping is best understood when individuals are confronted with situations that cannot be changed or obstacles that cannot be overcome. Secondary control coping involves adaptation to the stressor through acceptance, positive thinking, and cognitive restructuring (e.g., revising one's goals to meet the current situation, reframing loss into a different perspective, focusing on different opportunities).

In contrast to engagement/approach-oriented coping is disengagement/ avoidance-oriented coping. Disengagement coping is aimed at escaping the threat or related emotions, and involves responses such as avoidance, denial, and wishful thinking (Carver & Conner-Smith, 2010). It is often more emotion focused, as it involves attempt to escape feelings of distress. Sometimes avoidance coping is almost literally an effort to act as though the stressor does not exist. In this way the stressor does not have to be behaviorally or emotionally reacted to. Often wishful thinking, fantasy creation and denial, distance the person from the cause of stress and create a boundary between reality and the individual experience. However, escaping distress is often an ineffective way to reduce distress over the long-term, as it does nothing to address or reduce the threat (Carver & Conner-Smith, 2010). To illustrate, an individual experiencing a threat in their life might respond by going 'taking in alcohol to become intoxicated', however the threat will remain to be there after the alcohol influence is over and in essence the stressor will not have been dealt with. Studies have shown that engagement coping is often associated with more positive psychological outcomes and less distress compared to disengagement coping (i.e. denial, avoidance, and wishful thinking) (Varni et al., 2012).

A study on adolescent mental health showed that those who transitioned over a one-year period from disengagement to engagement coping had a significant decrease in depressive symptoms (Herman-Stabl, Stemmler, & Petersen, 1995). While those who changed over time from engagement to disengagement coping evidenced a significant increase in depressive symptoms. The study implied that the adolescents who engaged in social support, cognitive restructuring and problem solving were more likely to successfully negotiate the challenges that they encountered.

4. Methodology
4.1 Research Design
The descriptive survey was used because it helped me to find out the existing situation of the adjustment needs of international students, and their coping strategies which was a prime concern of this study. It also helped in analyzing, interpreting and reporting the present status of the coping strategies on the adjustment needs of international students in the study area (Taylor & Buku, 2006).

4.2 Population and Sampling Procedure

The quality of any research is not only about the appropriation of methodology and instrumentation but also by the suitability of the sample strategy that is adopted (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

Table 1 shows a sample size made up of 322 international students out of a total population of 2,102 from four selected universities. These were: The University of Cape Coast, University of Ghana, Zenith University and Ashesi University. These four universities were chosen purposely because they have quite a substantial number of foreign students on their campuses. For the purpose of fair representation, I used the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size table to determine the required size of the sample. According to Krejcie and Morgan, a fair representation of a population of 2,102 is 322. Thus, in proportion, I selected the sample sizes for each university.

Table 1: The total number of International Students in each University

Name of University	Population	Sample size
University of Cape Coast	108	17
University of Ghana	829	127
Zenith University	171	26
Ashesi University	994	152
Total	2,102	322

Source: Field survey (2020)

4.3 Data Collection Instrument

In carrying out the study, a questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. The adapted form of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) developed by Baker and Siryk (1999) and the Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WCQ) developed by Folkman and Lazarus (1988) were used for the study. This was because Punch (2009) suggested that for a complex and multidimensional variable, it is appropriate to use an existing instrument if one exists. However, the items on these questionnaires were not used without due critique and evaluation. Some items were modified to suit the focus of the research whilst others were used as found in the original text of the authors. For instance, there was an item on the original questionnaire that reads, "I get mad often." This was modified to read, "I get angry easily". This was done to get rid of ambiguities since 'mad" can connote a different meaning to some of the participants especially those from francophone countries.

4.4 Data Processing and Analysis

Data collected was processed using the Statistical Product and Services Solution (SPSS) version 22 software. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) was used for the analysis of the research question. Inferential statistics (the independent samples t-test and the Kruskal-Willis H-test) was used to analyze the hypotheses.

5. Result

5.1 Research Question

Bringing out some of the coping strategies international students adopt in the universities in southern Ghana is one of the prime focus of this study. In gathering evidence from the students, they were made to rate the degree of coping strategies using a four-point Likert scale. Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations and Ranks of Coping Strategies adopted by international students.

Coping Strategies	M	SD	MR
I tried to analyse the problem in order to understand it better	3.89	.613	1st
I slept more than usual	3.88	.613	2nd
Had fantasies or wishes about how things might turn out	3.76	.595	3rd
I tried to see things from the other person's point of view	3.73	.599	4th
I told myself things that helped me to feel better	3.72	.579	5th
I apologized or did something to make up	3.68	.542	6th
Kept others from knowing how bad things were	3.67	.584	7th
I changed something about myself	3.65	.747	8th
Tried to get the person responsible to change his or her mind	3.65	.581	9th
I came out of the experience better than when I went in	3.64	.583	10th
Found new faith	3.56	.538	11th
Avoided being with people in general	3.54	.494	12th
Accepted it, since nothing could be done	3.53	.805	13th
I prepared myself for the worst	3.52	.745	14th
Turned to work or substitute activity (or a vacation) to take my mind off things	3.51	.538	15th
Talked to someone to find out more about the situation	3.49	.479	16th
Tried to make myself feel better by eating, drinking, smoking, using drugs or medication, etc.	3.39	.479	17th
I prayed	3.34	.464	18th

Source: Field survey (2020)

As depicted in Table 2, the results suggest that almost all the pre-coded items on the questionnaire could be said to be coping strategies international students adopted to mitigate the adjustment needs they experienced. This was apparent after the calculated mean of means for all the items/statements on coping strategies scored a mean greater than the test value of 2.50 (MM=3.09, SD=.62).

5.2 Hypothesis One

The objective of this hypothesis was to determine if there was any significant difference in the coping strategies on the adjustment needs of male and female regular undergraduate international students in the universities in southern Ghana. To achieve this, independent samples t-test was used to test the hypothesis. The independent samples t-test was utilized because it appropriately helps to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the means of two unrelated groups. The dependent variable here was coping strategies on the adjustment needs of international students and the independent variable was gender (male and female). The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Results of independent t-test Comparing differences in coping strategies on the adjustment needs of male and female international students.

Variable	N	M	SD	Cal.t-value	Df	p-value
Male	240	45.41	5.72	-1.532	320	.127(ns)
Female	82	46.50	4.99			
Total	322					

Source: Field survey (2020)

As shown in the table, the females (M=46.50, SD=4.999) experience slightly more coping strategies on adjustment needs than their male counterparts, (M=45.41, SD=5.724). The calculated t-value of -1.532 was not significant (df=320) =-1.532, p>0.05, (t df=320) = -1.532, p > 0.05, 2-tailed. Hence, I failed to reject the null hypothesis.

5.3 Hypothesis Two

To further achieve the purpose of the study, I tested the above hypothesis, using a one–way analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical procedure. However, prior to conducting the ANOVA, the normality assumption (Kolmogorov-Smirnova and Q-Q Plot), and test for homogeneity of variance were ascertained. Table 4 presents a test for the assumptions.

Table 4: Normality Test Results of the Variables

Ages	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
17-25	.132	282	.000**	.948	282	.000**
26-34	.180	32	.010**	.922	32	.024**
35-41	.302	8	.030**	.813	8	.039**
Total		322				

Source: Field survey (2020)

Table 4 presents results of the normality of the data. The Shapiro-wilk was reported because it handles data with larger sample size more than 50 (N> 50). The Shapiro-wilk produced a statistic of (Shapiro-Wilk Statistic= .948, n=282, p=0.00, p<=.0.05) for students from 17-25 years old, (Shapiro-Wilk Statistic = .922, n=32, p=.024, p<.05) for students from 26-34 and those from 35-41 produced a statistic of (Shapiro-wilk Statistic = .81 3, n=8, p=0.39, p<0.05). From the Shapiro-Wilk results, all the age levels produced a sig values less than the p-value of 0.05 implying that the data was not normal. Therefore, the application of ANOVA was not statistically sound and as such Kruskal-Wallis H test (alternative test for ANOVA) was deemed appropriate for the analysis. Means plot in figure 1 shows how the data did not meet normality assumption
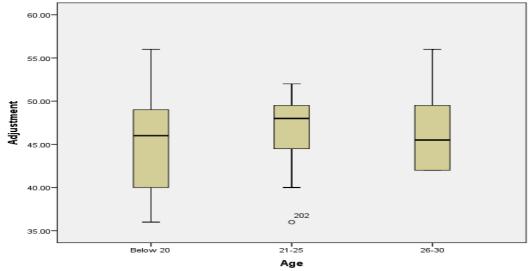

Figure 1: Normality Probability plots

The normality probability plot is a graphical technique for assessing whether or not a data set is approximately normally distributed. Figure1 results show that the data were not normally distributed. This means that the best statistical too to be used was the Kruskal-Wallis H test.

Table 5 - Kruskal-Wallis H test of coping strategies on adjustment needs of international students on the basis of age

AN*Age Range	N	MR	Chi-Square (χ^2)	df	Monte Carlo Sig. value	Asymp. Sig
17-25	282	159.19				
26-34	32	178.77	1.431	2	. 498(ns)	.489
35-41	08	174.00				
Total	322					

Source: Field survey (2020)"

The Kruskal -Wallis H test showed that there was no statistically significant difference in the coping strategies on adjustment needs of international students on the basis of age, the Kruskal-Wallis H test of χ2 (df=2) =1.431, p=.498, with a mean rank (MR) of students age, attitude towards their adjustment needs of MR=159.19, n=282 for those from 17-25 5, MR= 178.77, n=32 for those from 26-34 and MR= 174.00, n=8 for those from 35-41. Hence, the null hypothesis was upheld.

6. Discussion

On the issue of coping strategies that international students adopt to address their adjustment needs, the results support the work of Dyson and Renk (2006). In their study, it was reported that the regular use of escape-avoidance coping among International Students was related to higher levels of depression. Tao et al. (2000) also observed that among the coping mechanisms, peer support and peer networks were critical in a person's adjustment to university life. Furthermore, Kranz (2008) in a study found that 70.5% of the participants reported using some form of active approach such as exercising, playing basketball or swimming to manage their stressful

situations or adjustment needs.

In a similar study, Seyedfatemi, Tafreshi, and Hagani (2007) found that among the coping strategies of international students, majority of the respondents indicated they adopted active problem-solving strategies. Similarly, the study of Sreeramareddy et al. (2007) in Nepal revealed that the most used coping strategies among respondents were active coping strategies such as planning rather than avoidance strategies. In a similar vein, Al-Dubai, Al-Naggar, Alshagga and Rampal (2011) found that the students used active coping strategies such as planning more than avoidant strategies. The studies point to the fact that most students usually adopt positive and active coping strategies.

Heiman (2004) indicated that there is a significant difference in the coping strategies of old and young students. He argued that younger students employed more emotional strategies and reported having more social support from friends than older students. Similarly, Feinstein and Hammond (2004) suggested that resilience and coping was a function of age, because older adults had the necessary resources needed to maintain their course of action as they have had longer years to develop those resources.

However, the study of Santacana et al. (2012) found that in terms of the specificity of coping there was no significant difference in terms of age. Munro and Pooley (2009) also revealed that there was no difference in the resilience or coping of mature entry students and that of high school leavers in adapting to the university environment. The studies reviewed imply that there is no general consensus as to whether there was age difference in the coping strategies of young and mature students. However, this current study revealed that there was slight significant difference between the coping strategies of young and mature students. According to my findings, young students cope better than mature students. This may be attributed to the fact that young students, because of their youthful exuberance, socialize better than mature students.

The results could be nested into the General Needs Satisfaction Theory. According to Deci and Ryan (1991), needs have been defined by Deci and Ryan as the nutrients essential to the psychological growth, integrity and health of any living individual. There are several needs identified such as: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The need for autonomy deals with ownership and authenticity of an individual's activities.

Lending the results to empirical review, Santacana, Kirchner, Abad, and Amador (2012) found that with regard to the specificity of coping, gender introduced significant differences. This implied that male and female respondents in the study coped with adjustment needs in different ways. Similar findings were reported by Wadsworth (2008) that gender differences exist in the coping strategies used by men and women to deal with stress and adjustment needs. Specifically, Wadsworth indicated that men use more avoidance-focused coping strategies than women. However, Wang (2009) indicated that men used more problem-focused coping strategies and women used more emotion-focused coping strategies. Thus, women sought more emotional support than men. In explaining the reason for the differences in coping strategies, Wang (2009) suggested that the gender differences in coping behaviour were likely to be due to differences in gender socialization rather than to be due to inherent differences in coping behaviour of men and women.

The study of Matheny, Ashby, and Cupp (2005) also found that there were significant gender differences in coping strategies. However, the study of Gentry, Harris, Baker and Leslie (2007) on gender differences in stress and coping in Hawaii showed that there was no significant difference between genders in overall perceived coping effectiveness. Most of the previous studies on gender and coping strategies have found gender differences in coping strategies making it a point of interest as to whether the findings of the current study will support or contradict the previous studies. Thus, concisely, this current study confirmed the previous studies reviewed in the literature that coping strategies on adjustment needs of international students in terms of gender were not the same.

7. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was obvious that regular undergraduate international students do go through adjustment needs that call for coping strategies. Their adjustment needs are: academic, personal-social and emotional adjustment needs. Each adjustment need has its unique coping strategy that these students adopted. From this, it can be said that regular undergraduate international students in the universities in southern Ghana have problems with the academic pressure and academic work, social-personal problems and emotional challenges during their stay of study in the universities in Southern Ghana and they devised strategies to cope with these adjustment needs

8. Recommendation

For international students to be comfortable in their stay of study in southern Ghana universities, the timetable must not be' over- loaded' for all students since international and native students go for the same lectures. This will reduce the burden of the academic pressure they experience so as to enhance their commitment to academic work. In addition, the content and the guidelines of the orientation rendered to international students must be modified considering the fact that they (international students) come from entirely different cultures. I

recommend that, the orientation organized specifically for foreign students after the general orientation for all fresh students must be very comprehensive and expatriate lecturers (if any) must be involved as resource persons.

International students in the universities in southern Ghana find it difficult to adjust to the social life on campus. This is as a result of the cultural shock they go through especially the fresh students. These students are therefore encouraged to attend orientation programmes organized by their universities. This will help them (international students) understand their way around campus thereby reducing the amount of pressure they go through especially in their first few weeks. The residential (halls of residence) authorities are in the best position to encourage international students to attend the orientation programmes since they are the first authority figures in the University that international students meet.

I recommend that, through the appropriate centres (example Counselling Centre) seminars/workshops must be organised intermittently for international students in order to equip them with the necessary skills for handling the problems they are likely to encounter in their stay on university campuses in southern Ghana. Such programmes will cater for the emotional challenges they may be going through. A counsellor with multicultural background should be assigned to the office of international affairs in the various universities to specifically handle international students.

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