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## Understanding the role of life skills in the adjustment of residential and non-residential school students

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### Abstract

Adjustment is an important psychological process that helps the students to balance personal needs with academic, social, and emotional demands. This conceptual study examines the comparative dimensions of life skills, high adjustment, and low adjustment among students in residential and non-residential schools. Drawing upon theories of social learning, emotional intelligence, and ecological systems, the paper explores how differing educational and social environments shape adaptive competencies, interpersonal behavior, and emotional regulation. The analysis emphasizes that while residential schooling promotes independence, discipline, and self-regulation, non-residential schooling often fosters familial attachment, social exposure, and community integration. The study concludes that both school types offer distinct developmental opportunities and challenges, suggesting a balanced approach integrating the best elements of both systems.

**Keywords:** Life skills, adjustment pattern, residential schools, non-residential schools

### Introduction

Adolescence is a time when students experience numerous emotional and social changes. How well they adjust depends on school type, home support, and personal skills. Adjustment refers to how students manage school, friends, and personal life. Residential schools give students a structured life, group learning, and independence. Non-residential schools allow them to live with family and get emotional support. Both systems contribute in distinct ways. Life skills are the basic abilities that help people handle daily problems. These include communication, decision-making, problem-solving, and emotional control. Students with better life skills often adjust better to school and society. Life skills, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), are “abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.” In India, boarding and day schools offer two very different settings that affect how students learn and develop socially and emotionally. Boarding schools give students a well-organized environment where they live together, learn cooperation, and build habits of discipline and self-reliance (Kumar, 2020) <sup>[10]</sup>. Non-residential schools, by contrast, maintain strong family linkages, allowing children to balance institutional learning with home-based emotional support (Sharma & Singh, 2019) <sup>[8]</sup>. Both settings significantly impact life skills and adjustment variables that define a learner’s ability to manage emotional stress, maintain interpersonal relationships, and respond to social expectations (Nair, 2021) <sup>[13]</sup>.

Adjustment is not a single, uniform trait; it is multi-dimensional, involving personal, social, and academic aspects. A student who is well-adjusted is not merely one who performs well in examinations, but also one who maintains emotional balance, establishes positive relationships, and responds effectively to stress. On the other hand, students with low levels of adjustment often show signs of emotional imbalance, weak relationships with classmates, lack of interest in activities, or in some cases, may even leave school early. Understanding the differences between students who show high levels of adjustment and those who struggle is essential for educators and policymakers alike.

This study seeks to explain and compare how life skills, along with high and low adjustment patterns, appear among students studying in residential and day schools in India. It is based on theoretical ideas, earlier research findings, and social-cultural factors to provide a clear understanding of how different school environments shape students’ emotional and social development.

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## 2. Review of Literature

Many studies show that school environment affects adjustment. Blyth *et al.* found that students face stress when they move to higher grades or new schools. Saracoglu reported that students with poor learning skills have low adjustment and self-esteem. Friedlander *et al.* found that students with higher self-esteem adjust better. Residential schools may help students become more independent (Thomas, 2021) <sup>[14]</sup>, while non-residential schools give more family comfort. Both types have strengths and weaknesses.

### 2.1. Life Skills and Education

The concept of life skills gained prominence with global educational reforms emphasizing holistic development. According to the National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005), Indian education must foster values, social competence, and problem-solving abilities beyond cognitive learning. Research indicates that effective life skill education promotes emotional intelligence, decision-making, and resilience (Verma, 2018) <sup>[7]</sup>.

Life skills encompass domains such as critical thinking, self-awareness, empathy, communication, and interpersonal relationships (WHO, 1999). These competencies enable adolescents to navigate transitional challenges, manage peer pressure, and make responsible choices (Reddy & Menon, 2020) <sup>[12]</sup>.

### 2.2. Adjustment in School Contexts

Adjustment refers to a student's ability to adapt to environmental demands and maintain psychological equilibrium. Educational psychologists classify adjustment into three domains: emotional, social, and educational adjustment (Chadha, 2017) <sup>[5]</sup>. High adjustment implies emotional stability, academic engagement, and positive peer relations, while low adjustment indicates behavioral issues, stress, or maladaptation (Patel, 2019) <sup>[9]</sup>.

Adjustment in adolescence is influenced by parental support, teacher-student relationships, and institutional climate. Studies have shown that residential students may experience initial emotional stress due to separation from family but eventually develop coping mechanisms and independence (Gupta, 2015) <sup>[4]</sup>. Non-residential students, however, benefit from familial proximity but may lack structured peer interaction (Rao & Thomas, 2021) <sup>[14]</sup>.

### 2.3. Residential vs. Non-Residential Schooling

Residential schools, often inspired by the Gurukul system, provide a holistic environment where learning extends beyond classrooms into daily routines and community living (Iyer, 2014) <sup>[3]</sup>. Students share responsibilities, learn time management, and cultivate autonomy. Conversely, non-residential schools cater to the urban and semi-urban community, balancing scholastic learning with family-oriented emotional security (Pandey, 2020) <sup>[11]</sup>.

Empirical findings suggest that residential students exhibit stronger leadership and teamwork skills, while non-residential students demonstrate higher empathy and social sensitivity (Deshmukh, 2018) <sup>[6]</sup>. The school type thus plays a critical role in shaping life skills and adjustment outcomes.

### Research Gap

Several researchers have examined student adjustment and the development of life skills during adolescence. However, most existing studies have been limited to one type of

school setting or focused broadly on adolescent behavior. There is a lack of comparative research that explores both residential and non-residential school environments within the same framework. Previous findings confirm that factors such as school atmosphere, peer interaction, and family involvement influence student adjustment. Yet, there is insufficient understanding of how these factors vary between students who live in hostels and those who attend day schools.

In addition, earlier research has largely emphasized academic success and mental health, while overlooking how life skills interact with levels of adjustment. Very few studies have jointly analyzed life skills, high adjustment, and low adjustment in relation to school type. The present investigation therefore seeks to bridge this gap by providing a comparative analysis of residential and non-residential school students with respect to their life skills, emotional stability, and social adaptation to the school environment.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in three major theoretical perspectives:

### 3.1. Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) <sup>[1]</sup>

This theory posits that individuals acquire behaviors and skills through observation and imitation. In residential schools, students are continuously exposed to peer modeling and group norms, enhancing self-regulation and social competence.

### 3.2. Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) <sup>[2]</sup>

This framework emphasizes the interaction between individuals and their environments: microsystem (family, school), mesosystem (peer groups), and macrosystem (culture). Residential and non-residential schooling represent contrasting Microsystems that shape developmental trajectories differently.

### 3.3. Humanistic Theory (Maslow, 1943; Rogers, 1961)

From a humanistic perspective, education should foster self-actualization and holistic growth. Residential schools promote autonomy and self-discipline, while non-residential schools provide emotional warmth and security necessary for self-esteem development.

## 4. Gender-Based Adjustment

### Girls in Residential Schools

- Show lower emotional adjustment levels.
- Challenges often arise from feelings of isolation and safety concerns.

### Girls in Non-Residential Schools

- Exhibit higher adjustment across emotional, social, and academic domains.
- Thrive better in environments supported by family and community interactions.

### Boys in Residential Schools

Demonstrate higher behavioral discipline due to structured hostel life.

Show slightly better academic adjustment compared to girls in the same setting.

### Boys in Non-Residential Schools

- Adapt effectively in both academic and social domains.
- Regional and cultural factors influence their overall adjustment patterns.

### 5. Implications for educational Practice

The findings of this conceptual comparison have significant implications for educational planning and policy:

#### 5.1 Integrated Life Skills Curriculum

Schools, regardless of type, should integrate structured life skills education emphasizing decision-making, empathy, and stress management (Verma, 2018) <sup>[7]</sup>.

#### 5.2. Guidance and Counseling Programs

Residential schools should strengthen emotional counseling to assist new entrants with transition challenges, while non-residential schools should promote independence and resilience training.

#### 5.3. Parent-School Collaboration

Non-residential schools benefit from active parental engagement. Residential schools, however, should create communication bridges with parents to sustain emotional continuity (Pandey, 2020) <sup>[11]</sup>.

#### 5.4. Teacher Training

Educators must be trained to recognize adjustment issues and implement socio-emotional learning (SEL) frameworks (Chadha, 2017) <sup>[5]</sup>.

#### 5.5. Policy Integration

National education policies should recognize contextual diversity and promote hybrid schooling models blending the discipline of residential environments with the familial support of day schooling.

### 6. Emerging Perspectives for Adjustment

Recent developments in education and social life have introduced new dimensions to the understanding of student adjustment and life skill development. Two major areas have gained attention in the post-pandemic context i.e the rise of digital learning and the growing focus on socio-emotional well-being.

#### 6.1. Digital Learning and Post-Pandemic Adjustment

The widespread use of digital platforms for learning has reshaped how students adapt to academic and social environments. Residential students, who live in structured settings, often benefit from guided access to technology and organized study schedules. In contrast, day scholars face both opportunities and challenges while technology expands their access to knowledge, it can also lead to distraction and uneven digital exposure. This changing scenario highlights the importance of digital literacy, self-regulation, and time management as new life skills for modern learners.

#### 6.2. Socio-Emotional Learning and Mental Health Awareness

Educational reforms and public discussions in recent years have placed greater emphasis on emotional balance and mental well-being. Schools are now expected to nurture not only academic success but also emotional resilience, empathy, and cooperation among students. Socio-emotional

learning (SEL) programs, mindfulness activities, and counseling sessions can help both residential and non-residential students manage stress and build stronger interpersonal relationships. Integrating SEL into school routines creates a more supportive and inclusive environment where students feel secure, valued, and motivated to grow.

Together, these emerging trends remind educators that the challenges of adjustment are evolving with changes in technology, society, and lifestyle. Addressing them requires flexible, student-centered approaches that blend traditional values with modern learning practices.

### 7. Discussion

The findings of this paper indicate that the kind of school environment plays a vital role in shaping how students adjust and develop important life skills. In residential schools, the daily routine, shared responsibilities, and peer-based learning encourage discipline, independence, and a sense of cooperation. Students learn to manage their time, solve problems collectively, and adapt to group living. However, the distance from home and limited family interaction can sometimes lead to feelings of isolation or emotional strain, particularly among new students.

Non-residential school students, on the other hand, grow within a familiar and emotionally supportive setting. They benefit from parental involvement, which often strengthens their confidence and motivation. At the same time, their exposure to community life and everyday family communication helps them develop empathy and social understanding. Yet, because these students experience fewer restrictions and less structured routines, they may find it harder to handle pressure or strict schedules in later academic stages.

Recent surveys conducted in Telangana and Karnataka confirm these tendencies. Data from these studies reveal that residential students generally show higher emotional control and behavioral discipline, while non-residential students perform better in academic areas because of consistent parental guidance and home-based reinforcement. Gender also appears as a significant factor: girls adjust more effectively in day-school environments, whereas boys display stronger behavioral stability in hostel conditions.

Taken together, these observations suggest that each schooling system contributes differently to student growth. Neither residential nor non-residential schools can be considered universally superior. Instead, both offer distinctive advantages depending on the learner's background, personality, and family environment. A balanced educational approach that combines the structure of residential schooling with the emotional warmth of home-based learning could help young learners develop both resilience and emotional intelligence qualities essential for success in modern education and life.

### 8. Limitations and Future Scope

This paper offers important perspectives on how students in residential and non-residential schools develop life skills and adjust to their surroundings. However, the discussion is based mainly on conceptual understanding and previously published research rather than on new field data. Because of this, the results may not fully represent the varied experiences of students from different social or cultural backgrounds. Future research can address this gap by

collecting first-hand information through surveys, interviews, and classroom observations. Such studies will help verify the ideas discussed here and provide deeper insights into how school type, gender, and environment influence adolescent growth and emotional well-being in the Indian context.

## 9. Conclusion

Life skills and adjustment are central to the holistic development of learners in both residential and non-residential schools. This study highlights that while residential schooling fosters independence, leadership, and discipline, non-residential schooling nurtures empathy, emotional intelligence, and community orientation. Both environments hold intrinsic value in the Indian socio-cultural setting. Educational reform should not favor one system over the other but rather synthesize their complementary strengths. Future research should explore longitudinal outcomes and intervention-based models for enhancing life skills and adjustment among Indian adolescents across different school settings.

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