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البحوث المنشورة في المجلة
تعبر عن آراء الباحثين ولا تعبر
بالضرورة عن رأي المجلة

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قواعد وضوابط النشر في المجلة

أن يتسم البحث بالأصالة والجدة والابتكار والإضافة المعرفية في التخصص.

أن يلتزم الباحث بالأمانة العلمية.

لم يسبق للباحث نشر بحثه، بالإضافة إلى كونه ليس مستلّاً من أطروحة الدكتوراه أو الماجستير سواء بنظام الرسالة أو المشروع البحثي أو المقررات.

أن تراعى فيه منهجية البحث العلمي وقواعده.

أن يلتزم الباحث بتدقيق بحثه لغوياً.

أن لا تتجاوز نسبة الاقتباس في البحوث التربوية (25%)، وفي غيرها من التخصصات الاجتماعية لا تتجاوز (40%).

أن لا يتجاوز مجموع كلمات البحث (12000) كلمة بما في ذلك الملخصين العربي والإنجليزي وقائمة المراجع.

لا يحق للباحث إعادة نشر بحثه المقبول للنشر في المجلة إلا بعد إذن كتابي من رئيس هيئة تحرير المجلة.

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أن يلتزم الباحث بترجمة المصادر العربية إلى اللغة الإنجليزية.

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**Coping Strategies and Life Satisfaction among
International Students at the Islamic University in
Madinah**

استراتيجيات مواجهة الضغوط والرضا عن الحياة لدى الطلاب
الدوليين في الجامعة الإسلامية بالمدينة المنورة

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Abstract

International students often face various stressors as they adapt to new cultural and academic environments. This study investigated the relationship between coping strategies and life satisfaction among international students at the Islamic University in Madinah, employing a correlational research design. A total of 415 students from different countries participated and completed the Brief COPE Inventory and Satisfaction with Life Scale. Results indicated that religious coping, planning, and active coping were the most frequently used strategies. Problem-focused coping was positively associated with life satisfaction, whereas avoidant coping was negatively associated with it. Further regression analysis confirmed that greater use of problem-focused strategies significantly predicted higher life satisfaction, whereas reliance on avoidant coping predicted lower satisfaction. These results underscore the potential role of problem-focused and religious coping in promoting psychological adjustment and well-being, offering implications for support programmes targeting international students.

Keywords: coping strategies, life satisfaction, stress, international students, psychological adjustment

Introduction

International education has attracted growing global attention in recent decades, with student exchange emerging as a prominent form of academic mobility and intercultural engagement. The number of international students worldwide increased from approximately 1.6 million in 2000 to 5.6 million in 2020, underscoring the significance of this trend (Lu et al., 2024). Amid this global increase, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has become an increasingly attractive destination for international students, expanding its international student population from 1,404 in 1971 to nearly 64,000 by 2021. Among Saudi institutions, the Islamic University in Madinah has been particularly vital, enrolling students from over 155 countries and offering programmes in Islamic studies, Arabic language, and various applied sciences (Albeshir et al., 2024).

Despite these educational opportunities, international students often encounter adjustment challenges associated with cultural, academic, and social transitions. These difficulties can negatively affect psychological well-being and academic performance. International students tend to experience higher levels of stress than their domestic peers and are less likely to seek mental health support (Poyrazli, 2015; Xiong & Pillay, 2022). Common stressors include language barriers, cultural differences, financial strain, academic pressure, homesickness, social isolation, and diminished self-esteem (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Hirai et al., 2015; Mori, 2000; Poyrazli et al., 2002; Rathakrishnan et al., 2021; Sovic, 2008). When coping resources are inadequate, these stressors may increase the risk of suicidal ideation and academic withdrawal (Ochanda, 2024).

Coping strategies serve as essential mechanisms through which students manage these stressors. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping involves cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage internal and external demands assessed as exceeding personal resources. Effective coping strategies help mitigate psychological distress while promoting academic performance and overall

adjustment (Ochanda, 2024). Studies have highlighted significant differences in the coping strategies used by international versus domestic students (Sapranaviciute et al., 2012). Avoidant coping is commonly associated with adverse mental health outcomes, whereas problem-focused coping is associated with better psychological adjustment and academic achievement (Alkhaldeh et al., 2023; Gyan, 2021; Mydin et al., 2023; Power et al., 2021; Yue & Lê, 2013).

Cultural context is crucial in shaping these coping responses. For instance, students in Australia often engage in active coping and positive reappraisal (Yue & Lê, 2013), whereas postgraduate students in Malaysia tend to rely more on self-distraction, denial, and self-blame (Ismail et al., 2016). Among Asian international students, religious coping is particularly prevalent and has been more effective for this group than for their European counterparts (Chai et al., 2011). In China, students reported frequent use of religious coping, planning, and instrumental support, with less reliance on avoidant strategies (Ngwira et al., 2020).

Given that coping mechanisms are closely linked to emotional and psychological adjustment, it is essential to consider their impact on life satisfaction. Life satisfaction, a core dimension of subjective well-being, refers to an individual's cognitive appraisal of their overall quality of life (Diener et al., 1985). Previous studies have shown that coping strategies influence life satisfaction. Ineffective coping is associated with lower levels of life satisfaction and compromised well-being (Civitci, 2015), whereas problem-focused coping has been associated with greater psychological health and satisfaction with life (Kholodny et al., 2023; Odacı & Cıkrıkçı, 2012; Oo & Mohanan, 2019; Shermeyer et al., 2018).

Longitudinal evidence from Sweden suggests that international students experience improvements in somatic health, academic satisfaction, and financial stability over time, which enhances life satisfaction (Nilsson & Stålnacke, 2019). Conversely, avoidant coping

is associated with psychological distress and lower life satisfaction (Haider et al., 2022; Milas et al., 2021; Mineva, 2022). Findings on emotion-focused coping remain mixed, with studies reporting positive and negative associations with well-being (Mineva, 2022; Tran & Chantagul, 2018). Importantly, religious and spiritual coping strategies have been identified as positive predictors of life satisfaction, particularly during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Abu-Raiya et al., 2018; Haider et al., 2022).

Despite the expanding international literature, relatively few studies have explored these issues in the Arab region. Existing studies within this context have examined coping strategies and life satisfaction as separate constructs rather than investigating their interrelation (Al-Jkhaideb et al., 2022; Alsubhien & Al-Dhiyabi, 2020; Alsulami, 2022; Ismail, 2022). However, very limited attention has been given to these variables among international students in the Saudi context. Consequently, little information is available regarding how international students in these settings manage stress and how their coping mechanisms influence their overall well-being. Addressing this gap is crucial for developing culturally responsive and evidence-based interventions that support students' psychological adjustment, academic performance, and quality of life.

This study explores the coping strategies most commonly used by international students at the Islamic University in Madinah and examines how these strategies are associated with their overall life satisfaction. By focusing on the interplay between coping and well-being in Saudi Arabia, the study contributes to a broader understanding of student adaptation in cross-cultural settings. It also aligns with Saudi Vision 2030, which supports the privatisation of universities to create a more attractive educational environment, aiming to boost the enrolment of international students worldwide (Almutairi, 2020). Insights from this study may inform institutional efforts to enhance psychological support programmes and foster inclusive academic experiences for international students.

Method

Research Design

This study used a descriptive correlational design to examine the associations between coping strategies and life satisfaction among international students. A correlational approach is appropriate for identifying naturally occurring relationships among psychological variables without manipulation (Thomas & Zubkov, 2023). This design aligns with the study's objective to assess the direction and strength of relationships between continuous variables.

Population and Sampling

The target population for this study comprised international students enrolled at the Islamic University in Madinah during the 2024–2025 academic year. The participants were recruited through convenience sampling. Saudi nationals and participants with incomplete survey responses were excluded from analysis. The final sample comprised 415 international students representing a broad range of geographic regions, including Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

Most participants were under 30 years old (67.7%, $n = 281$), followed by those aged 30–40 years (25.8%, $n = 107$) and over 40 years (6.5%, $n = 27$). In terms of marital status, 61.4% ($n = 255$) were married, and 38.6% ($n = 160$) were unmarried. Academically, 62.7% ($n = 260$) were undergraduate students, 15.9% ($n = 66$) were in master's programmes, and 21.4% ($n = 89$) were doctoral candidates. In terms of GPA, the statistics were as follows: 69.2% ($n = 287$) for excellent; 23.4% ($n = 97$) for very good; 6.5% ($n = 27$) for good; and 1.0% ($n = 4$) for poor performance. Table 1 shows the summary of demographic characteristics.

Instrument

Brief COPE Inventory

Coping strategies were assessed using the Arabic version of the Brief COPE Inventory translated and validated by Al-Mansouri (2014). The original instrument developed by Carver et al. (1989) comprises 28 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (I have not engaged in this behaviour at all) to 4 (I have engaged in this behaviour extensively). It comprises 14 subscales grouped into three primary coping styles: (a) problem-focused coping: active coping, planning, positive reframing, and use of instrumental support; (b) emotion-focused coping: emotional support, acceptance, religion, venting, humour, and self-blame; and (c) avoidant coping: denial, substance use, self-distraction, and behavioural disengagement. In this study, the instrument demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$).

Life Satisfaction Scale

Life satisfaction was measured using the Life Satisfaction Scale developed by El-Dessouky (1998). This 30-item scale captures six dimensions: happiness, sociability, tranquillity, psychological stability, social appreciation, and contentment. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never applies) to 5 (always applies). The scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency in this study (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$).

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected between November 2024 – February 2025 during the academic year. The survey link was distributed through institutional communication platforms and student affairs offices. The questionnaire included a consent form, demographic questions, and the two standardised instruments. Participation was entirely voluntary, and the participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee at Taibah University.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Mac, version 31. Descriptive statistics were computed to summarise demographic variables and to examine the distribution of coping styles. Pearson's correlation coefficients were used to assess the relationships among the three types of coping strategies and life satisfaction. To determine the predictive power of coping strategies, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. Both analyses are appropriate for examining linear relationships among continuous variables and for identifying the relative contribution of predictors to an outcome variable. All statistical assumptions were checked and met prior to analysis, and a significance level of $\alpha = .05$ was adopted for hypothesis testing.

Results

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample (N = 415)

Characteristics	Category	N	Percentage (%)
Age	Under 30	281	67.7
	30–40	107	25.8
	Over 40	27	6.5
Marital status	Married	255	61.4
	Unmarried	160	38.6
Academic level	Undergraduate	260	62.7
	Master's	66	15.9
	PhD	89	21.4
GPA	Excellent	287	69.2
	Very good	97	23.4
	Good	27	6.5
	Poor	4	1.0

Note. n = number of participants; GPA = grade point average.

Descriptive Statistics for Coping Strategies

Descriptive analyses were conducted to examine the frequency of use of various coping strategies. Table 2 shows that the highest mean score was observed for religious coping ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.60$), followed by planning ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 0.72$) and active coping ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.71$)—these were the most frequently used strategies. Conversely, the lowest mean scores were found for denial ($M = 1.83$, $SD = 0.83$), behavioural disengagement ($M = 2.05$, $SD = 0.87$), and humour ($M = 2.21$, $SD = 0.91$)—these were the least frequently used coping strategies.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of coping strategies ($N = 415$)

Coping strategy	M	SD
Religion	3.54	0.60
Planning	3.29	0.72
Active coping	3.26	0.71
Acceptance	3.18	0.74
Positive reframing	3.19	0.76
Self-distraction	2.87	0.76
Substance use	2.84	0.75
Info support	2.83	0.80
Emotional support	2.71	0.83
Self-blame	2.70	0.89
Venting	2.58	0.74
Disengagement	2.05	0.87
Humour	2.21	0.91
Denial	1.83	0.83

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation

Correlations between Coping Strategies and Life Satisfaction

Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the relationships between the three main coping styles (problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidant) and life satisfaction. Table 3 shows that problem-focused coping is positively correlated with life satisfaction, $r(413) = .283$, $p < .001$. Emotion-focused coping was

weakly but significantly positively correlated, $r(413) = .146, p = .003$. Avoidant coping was negatively correlated with life satisfaction, $r(413) = -.119, p = .015$. These results suggest that adaptive coping styles are associated with higher life satisfaction, whereas avoidant coping is associated with lower life satisfaction.

Table 3. Pearson's correlation coefficients between coping strategies and life satisfaction

	1	2	3	4
1. Problem-focused				.283**
2. Emotion-focused		.575**	.271**	.146**
3. Avoidant coping	—	—	.504**	-.119*
4. Life satisfaction			—	—

Note. $N = 415$. $p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$

Multiple Regression Predicting Life Satisfaction

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the extent to which the three coping styles predicted life satisfaction. The overall model was statistically significant ($F[3, 411] = 19.97, p < .001$), accounting for approximately 12.7% of the variance in life satisfaction scores ($R^2 = .127$, Adjusted $R^2 = .121$).

Table 4 shows that problem-focused coping is a significant positive predictor of life satisfaction ($B = 0.324, SE = 0.063, \beta = .291, t = 5.16, p < .001$). Avoidant coping was a significant negative predictor ($B = -0.291, SE = 0.062, \beta = -.250, t = -4.69, p < .001$). Emotion-focused coping did not significantly predict life satisfaction after controlling for the other coping styles ($B = 0.136, SE = 0.082, \beta = .105, t = 1.67, p = .096$).

Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Life Satisfaction from Coping Strategies

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
(Constant)	3.158	0.196	—	16.13	<.001
Problem-focused	0.324	0.063	.291	5.16	<.001
Emotion-focused	0.136	0.082	.105	1.67	.096
Avoidant coping	-.029	0.062	-.250	-.44	<.001

Note. Dependent variable: Life satisfaction. B = unstandardised coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardised coefficient.

Discussion

This study explored the association between coping strategies and life satisfaction among international students at the Islamic University in Madinah. The findings provide valuable insights into the adaptive strategies students used while navigating the challenges of a new cultural environment.

1. Most Frequently Used Coping Strategies among International Students

The analysis revealed the predominant coping strategies used by international students, providing insights into their preferred ways of managing stress in a new cultural environment. Consistent with previous studies, religious coping, planning, and active coping emerged as the most frequently employed strategies. These results align with the findings of Ngwira et al. (2020), who reported that Asian international students in China used active rather than avoidant

coping mechanisms, including religious practices, strategic planning, active engagement, and seeking instrumental support.

Religious coping may promote emotional regulation, meaning-making, and social connectedness, all of which contribute to students' well-being (Brandão, 2025; Graça & Brandão, 2024; Hsu et al., 2009; Park, 2007). Chai et al. (2011) and Ariff and Razak (2022) observed the frequent use of religious and spiritual practices among international students in New Zealand and Malaysia. These findings underscore the cultural relevance of religious coping, particularly in diverse academic contexts where faith-based strategies are often integrated into students' responses to stress.

Although this study did not directly assess demographic predictors, most students at the Islamic University are Muslims and come from diverse backgrounds. Notably, the 14,793 international students enrolled comprised 56.75% from Asia, 33.3% from Africa, 7.66% from Europe, 1.85% from the Americas, and 0.38% from Australia (Islamic University of Madinah, 2024). This composition may explain the high prevalence of religious coping among participants.

2.Relationships Between Coping Strategies and Life Satisfaction Among International Students:

Previous research has highlighted various links between coping strategies and life satisfaction, and the present findings further clarify these associations. The results revealed significant correlations between coping strategies and life satisfaction. Problem-focused coping was positively associated with higher life satisfaction, which is supported by previous studies (Buser & Kearney, 2017; Kholodny et al., 2023; MacCann et al., 2011; Odacı & Cıkrıkçı, 2012).

This result aligns with Folkman and Lazarus's (1985) model, which conceptualises problem-focused coping as efforts to manage or alter stress-inducing situations. Individuals who adopt such strategies often report better psychological outcomes (Antaramian et al., 2016; Tran & Chantagul, 2018), which are likely due to increased perceived control and self-efficacy (Jensen et al., 2016; Park et al., 2004; Taiwo, 2015). Almeida et al. (2021) also found that reliance on problem-focused strategies was associated with higher life satisfaction compared with maladaptive coping. Collectively, these findings highlight the role of problem-focused coping in fostering resilience and psychological adjustment, particularly through active problem-solving and cognitive reappraisal (Rezaei et al., 2020). Conversely, avoidant coping was negatively associated with life satisfaction, which was consistent with its classification as a maladaptive strategy (Buser & Kearney, 2017; Milas et al., 2021; Haider et al., 2022; Mineva, 2022).

Strategies such as denial and disengagement are generally ineffective and associated with poorer mental health. Konaszewski et al. (2023) reported heightened psychological distress among individuals who relied on avoidance. These strategies are commonly used to avoid stressful situations or emotions, escape from thinking about problems, and withdraw from the current stressor. Although this coping style may provide short-term relief, it can lead to adverse consequences over time (Barański & Poprawa, 2024; Taylor & Stanton, 2007).

Emotion-focused coping initially showed a weak positive correlation with life satisfaction; however, this association did not remain significant in the regression model. This finding partially aligns with previous studies suggesting that the effectiveness of

emotion-focused coping varies by context and implementation (Aldwin & Revenson, 1987; Bangash, 2023; Graça & Brandão, 2024; Lopes & Nihei, 2021; Mohammadzadeh et al., 2018; Sari, 2019; Tran & Chantagul, 2018). Sari (2019) found that emotion-focused coping accounted for only 12% of the variance in life satisfaction, indicating a relatively weak predictive power compared to other variables.

The effectiveness of this coping style appears to depend on its application. Sari (2019) noted that excessive or maladaptive use may hinder effective problem-solving and lower life satisfaction. This supports the broader argument that strategies focused on emotional regulation without addressing underlying stressors may have limited benefits when used in isolation. Furthermore, life satisfaction is influenced by several factors beyond coping, including physical health, social relationships, religiosity, and personality. Therefore, the limited role of emotion-focused coping observed in this study may reflect the complexity and multidimensionality of life satisfaction (Sari, 2019).

Regression analysis further clarified these associations, identifying problem-focused coping as the strongest positive predictor of life satisfaction, in line with results by MacCann et al. (2011) and Antaramian et al. (2016). Conversely, avoidant coping was a significant negative predictor, corroborating findings of Milas et al. (2021) and Haider et al. (2022). Although emotion-focused coping was initially associated with life satisfaction, its lack of significance in the multivariate model underscored the nuanced nature of its effect.

These findings suggest that students who adopt proactive, solution-oriented coping strategies are better equipped to manage stress, contributing to greater life satisfaction. This highlights the

importance of promoting problem-focused coping and reducing avoidant behaviours through targeted psychoeducational or counselling interventions tailored to international student populations.

3.Limitations and Future Research:

Despite these contributions, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study's cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal conclusions about the relationships between coping strategies and life satisfaction. Longitudinal research is recommended to determine how specific coping strategies contribute to psychological adjustment over time and whether students shift strategies as they progress through their academic journey. Second, qualitative methods, such as interviews, could offer deeper insights into the cultural, religious, and personal meanings that students assigned to different coping behaviours, particularly strategies such as religious coping, which showed a high frequency in this study but was not examined independently.

Additionally, the study did not explore the influence of sociodemographic variables such as sex, nationality, academic discipline, or length of residence, all of which might shape coping preferences and perceptions of life satisfaction. Future studies should investigate these variables to better understand the nuanced differences in coping experiences across diverse student subgroups. Comparative research involving international and domestic students in similar academic institutions could clarify the influence of cultural context on coping strategies and well-being.

Conclusion

This study highlights the differential effect of coping strategies on the psychological adjustment of international students. Specifically, problem-focused coping was positively associated with life satisfaction, underscoring its role as an adaptive and beneficial strategy. Conversely, avoidant coping was negatively associated with life satisfaction, indicating its potential maladaptive effects.

These findings have important implications for higher education institutions aiming at enhancing the well-being of international students. Universities should consider implementing skill-based interventions that foster problem-focused coping abilities, such as training in planning, goal-setting, and active problem-solving techniques. Furthermore, the significant use of religious coping among participants suggests the value of providing culturally and spiritually congruent support services in university counselling (Ariff & Razak, 2022; Graça & Brandão, 2024; Hsu et al., 2009).

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