

ADJUSTMENT OF RESIDENTIAL SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN RELATION TO SOCIAL INTEGRATION: A SECONDARY-DATA-BASED REVIEW

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Abstract: Residential schooling creates a distinctive educational environment in which academic learning, peer relationships, institutional routines, recreation, discipline, and personal development occur within the same social space. Consequently, students' adjustment cannot be understood only in terms of academic performance; their ability to develop meaningful relationships, experience belonging, negotiate diversity, and participate constructively in the residential community is equally important. This paper examines the adjustment of residential secondary school students in relation to social integration through an exclusively secondary-data-based descriptive research design. Published scholarly literature, government policy documents, international reports, and institutional sources were reviewed thematically and comparatively. The evidence indicates that residential education can create strong opportunities for peer bonding, collective identity, independence, cooperation, and social learning, but these benefits are not automatic. Adjustment may be influenced by school climate, teacher support, peer acceptance, discrimination, cultural and linguistic diversity, institutional routines, family separation, and opportunities for meaningful participation. Recent research consistently identifies school belonging and connectedness as important dimensions of adolescent adjustment and well-being. Indian policy developments, including the National Education Policy 2020 and expansion of Eklavya Model Residential Schools, increasingly emphasize holistic development, inclusion, socio-emotional learning, and safe learning environments. The review suggests that residential schools should move beyond an academic-hostel model toward an integrated psychosocial ecosystem in which students are supported academically, emotionally, culturally, and socially.

Keywords: Residential schools, student adjustment, social integration, school belonging,

1. Introduction

Residential secondary schools occupy a distinctive position within educational systems because they combine schooling and living within a common institutional environment. Unlike day-school students, residential students spend substantial portions of their daily lives with peers, teachers, wardens, support staff, and administrators. Consequently, adjustment in a residential school involves adaptation not only to academic expectations but also to shared accommodation, institutional routines, interpersonal relationships, group norms, food arrangements, discipline, recreation, cultural diversity, and reduced day-to-day contact with family. Adjustment is therefore best understood as a multidimensional developmental process rather than merely an individual student's ability to comply with school requirements.

The adolescent years are particularly important in this context. Adolescents increasingly seek autonomy while simultaneously requiring acceptance, emotional security and meaningful social relationships. Contemporary research conceptualizes school adjustment through academic, emotional and relational dimensions. Azpiazu et al. (2024), for



example, identify emotional engagement, school-integration problems and perceived academic performance as interconnected components of school adjustment. Their findings emphasize that adjustment is influenced by contextual support, resilience and positive affect rather than being solely an individual characteristic.

The Indian context gives this issue additional importance. Residential educational institutions such as Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, Eklavya Model Residential Schools and state-run residential schools serve students from diverse geographical, socioeconomic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The expansion of Eklavya Model Residential Schools is particularly notable. Government information indicates that 405 EMRS institutions were functional nationally in 2023–24, with enrolment exceeding 123,000 students. The expansion means that questions concerning adjustment, inclusion and social integration are no longer marginal concerns but important components of educational quality. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 also provides a relevant policy foundation by emphasizing holistic development, socio-emotional learning, psychological well-being, inclusion and the development of communication and social competencies. Similarly, the PM SHRI framework explicitly emphasizes schools in which every student feels welcomed and cared for and where diverse backgrounds and multilingual needs are accommodated.

2. Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives:

1. To examine the concept and dimensions of adjustment among residential secondary school students.
2. To analyze the relationship between social integration and students' adjustment based on existing secondary evidence.
3. To identify institutional, interpersonal, cultural and psychosocial factors influencing adjustment in residential schools.

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Suryakant (2024): *Adjustment Problems among Residential School Students*

Suryakant examined adjustment problems among residential-school students in Chikkamagalur, Karnataka. The study focused on secondary-level residential students and considered adjustment as a process through which students respond to internal needs and environmental demands. Its empirical design used student-level primary information and examined differences associated with demographic characteristics. The study is particularly relevant because it addresses residential schooling directly rather than treating residential students as a minor subgroup. Its limitation is its geographically specific context and relatively narrow focus on adjustment problems.

3.2 Azad (2024): *Social, Emotional and Educational Adjustment*

Azad examined social, emotional and educational adjustment among residential school students and considered their relationship with academic achievement. The study used an adjustment inventory and academic-performance information and compared groups according to adjustment characteristics. Although the methodology was primary and quantitative, its relevance to the present review lies in its multidimensional treatment of adjustment.

3.3 Kumari and Jyoti (2023): *Social Skills and Social Adjustment*

Kumari and Jyoti investigated the relationship between social skills and social adjustment among secondary school students. Their study used primary student data and social-skills and adjustment measures. The relevance of this work is conceptual: students who possess communication, cooperation, interpersonal and conflict-management competencies are better positioned to negotiate social environments.

3.4 Joshi (2020): *Social Integration in Indian Schools*

Joshi investigated whether India's Right to Education provisions could promote social integration. Using friendship-network information and achievement measures among schoolchildren, the study identified persistent social homophily: students tended to form friendships with others sharing similar backgrounds. Importantly, greater cross-group friendship was associated with better academic outcomes for disadvantaged students. The study concluded that institutional commitment is important for successful integration.

3.5 Montoro et al. (2021): Discrimination and School Belonging

Montoro et al. studied discrimination from peers and adults and its relationship with school belonging among adolescents. Their evidence demonstrated that discrimination can undermine students' sense of belonging, while coping processes may influence how adolescents respond to discriminatory experiences. The study is particularly important for residential schools because prolonged peer interaction can magnify both supportive and exclusionary relationships.

3.6 Allen et al. (2022): Interventions for School Belonging

Allen et al. conducted a systematic review of school-based interventions designed to improve adolescent school belonging. The researchers searched seven databases and identified 22 controlled trials, with 14 reporting effective interventions. Successful approaches generally emphasized students' strengths and positive relationships between students and school staff. The review's major contribution is that belonging is not simply a personality characteristic; schools can actively create conditions that strengthen it. A limitation was the relatively small intervention evidence base and inconsistency in terminology and measurement.

3.7 Raniti et al. (2022): School Connectedness and Mental Health

Raniti et al. systematically reviewed prospective studies and interventions concerning school connectedness and youth depression and anxiety. The review treated connectedness as a potentially modifiable protective factor. Its findings support the proposition that students' relationships with peers, teachers and the broader school environment matter for well-being. The limitation is that the review was not specific to residential schools and included studies across diverse educational contexts.

3.8 Too et al. (2022): Adolescent Connectedness

Too et al. conducted a scoping review of measures of adolescent connectedness across school, family, community, peer and cultural domains. The review identified substantial diversity in how connectedness is conceptualized and measured, with school connectedness being one of the most frequently examined dimensions. A major limitation was the dominance of research from North America and Europe, indicating a geographical imbalance in the evidence base.

3.9 Cipriano et al. (2023): Social and Emotional Learning

Cipriano et al. synthesized evidence from 424 studies representing universal school-based social and emotional learning interventions across 53 countries. The meta-analysis reported improvements in social-emotional skills, peer relationships, school functioning, school climate and academic outcomes, while also identifying substantial variation in intervention content and implementation. The study's major limitation is heterogeneity across programmes and educational contexts.

3.10 Zhang et al. (2024): Teacher Support and School Belonging

Zhang et al. investigated daily relationships between teacher and peer support and school belonging among rural Chinese adolescents. Their evidence indicated that teacher support was positively associated with same-day school belonging, while the relationship with peer support was more complex. The study demonstrates that belonging can fluctuate according to everyday social experiences rather than remaining a fixed student characteristic

3.11 Azpiazu et al. (2024): Social Support, Resilience and School Adjustment

Azpiazu et al. examined school adjustment through emotional engagement, school-integration problems and perceived academic performance. Their findings showed that teacher and peer support, resilience and positive affect were associated with adjustment through interconnected pathways. Teacher support was particularly important for emotional engagement, while peer support was related to fewer school-integration problems.

3.12 Allen et al. (2024): School Belonging and Long-Term Well-Being

Allen et al. examined adolescent school belonging in relation to mental-health outcomes in young adulthood through a multi-wave prospective cohort design. Higher levels of school belonging were associated with fewer later mental-health symptoms. The study is particularly significant because it moves the discussion beyond immediate school adjustment and indicates that belonging during adolescence may have implications for later well-being.

Comparative Discussion and Research Gap

The literature reviewed reveals several consistent themes. First, adjustment is multidimensional. Academic achievement alone cannot adequately represent whether a residential student is successfully adapting. Second, social integration is closely connected with teacher support, peer relationships, school belonging, emotional engagement and school climate. Third, discrimination and exclusion can undermine belonging even where students have physical access to education. Fourth, social-emotional skills and structured interventions can strengthen relational outcomes.

However, the evidence also exposes important gaps. Residential-school research in India remains comparatively fragmented. Much of the literature focuses on adjustment generally, gender differences, academic performance or residential versus non-residential comparisons. Fewer studies explicitly conceptualize social integration as a central mechanism through which residential students adjust to institutional life. Furthermore, evidence from India is less developed than the international literature on school belonging and connectedness. The present secondary-data study therefore brings these strands together to construct a broader evidence-based interpretation.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive research design based exclusively on secondary information. No primary data were collected from students, teachers, parents or administrators.

4.2 Nature and Type of Study

The research is qualitative-descriptive and analytical in orientation. It synthesizes published evidence concerning residential schooling, adjustment, social integration, school belonging, social-emotional development, inclusion and adolescent well-being.

4.3 Sources of Secondary Data

The study draws upon:

- Peer-reviewed journals indexed in Scopus and/or Web of Science where available;
- Scholarly literature accessible through Google Scholar and academic databases;
- Government of India policy documents;
- Ministry of Education reports;
- Ministry of Tribal Affairs and NESTS information;
- UDISE+ publications;

- National Education Policy 2020;
- UNESCO reports;
- UNICEF reports;
- WHO guidelines;
- OECD education reports; and
- Relevant institutional and policy documents.

4.4 Data Collection Procedure

Relevant literature was identified using combinations of terms such as residential school students, school adjustment, social adjustment, social integration, school belonging, school connectedness, adolescent adjustment, residential education, social-emotional learning and student well-being. Priority was given to literature published between 2019 and 2026, while older foundational evidence was considered where it directly informed conceptual interpretation.

4.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected evidence was interpreted through:

1. Thematic analysis;
2. Comparative analysis;
3. Trend analysis;
4. Content analysis;
5. Narrative synthesis; and
6. Descriptive interpretation.

4.6 Limitations

Secondary-data research is dependent on the availability, quality and methodological diversity of existing studies. Residential-school research is uneven across regions, institutions and demographic groups. Definitions of adjustment, belonging and social integration also vary substantially. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as an evidence-based synthesis rather than as estimates of the adjustment level of a particular student population.

5. Discussion and Analysis

5.1 Adjustment as a Multidimensional Process

The evidence indicates that adjustment among residential secondary students involves academic, emotional, social and institutional adaptation. Residential students must simultaneously learn the curriculum, understand institutional expectations, establish relationships, manage personal independence and negotiate group life. Therefore, a student who performs well academically may still experience weak social integration, loneliness or difficulty adjusting to residential routines.

Azpiazu et al. (2024) demonstrate that adjustment is associated with emotional engagement, social integration problems and perceived academic performance. This supports a multidimensional understanding in which social relationships are not peripheral to education but form part of educational adjustment itself.

5.2 Social Integration and School Belonging

Social integration can be understood through several overlapping dimensions: friendship, acceptance, participation, trust, cooperation, recognition, cultural inclusion and perceived membership of the school community. In a residential institution, these dimensions become especially important because the school becomes a major social environment. International evidence strongly supports the importance of belonging. Raniti et al. (2022) identify school connectedness as a modifiable protective factor, while Allen et al. (2024) link adolescent school belonging with later mental-health outcomes. The implication is straightforward: residential schools should not interpret integration simply as students living peacefully in the same hostel. Physical proximity does not guarantee social inclusion. Genuine integration requires meaningful participation and a perception of being accepted by peers and adults.

5.3 Peer Relationships

Peer relationships can be both a protective factor and a source of adjustment difficulties. Residential life creates continuous opportunities for cooperation, friendship and collective activities. At the same time, prolonged peer contact can produce exclusion, bullying, group formation and social hierarchies. Joshi's Indian evidence on social integration illustrates the persistence of friendship homophily and the importance of institutional commitment to creating cross-group interaction. For residential schools serving students from different communities, structured cooperative activities may therefore be more effective than simply expecting integration to emerge spontaneously.

5.4 Teacher and Adult Support

Residential-school adjustment also depends on the adults who organize and supervise institutional life. Teachers, wardens, counsellors and administrators can either reinforce students' sense of security or contribute to alienation. Recent evidence suggests that teacher support has a meaningful relationship with school belonging and emotional engagement. Zhang et al. (2024) found that teacher support was positively associated with adolescents' same-day school belonging. Azpiazu et al. (2024) similarly identified teacher support as especially relevant to emotional engagement.

5.6 Policy Environment in India

The policy environment increasingly supports a holistic conception of student development. NEP 2020 places emphasis on physical and psychological well-being, socio-emotional learning and holistic development. The expansion of EMRS provides an important contemporary example. Government data show substantial growth in EMRS enrolment from 2019–20 through 2023–24, alongside expansion in the number of functional schools. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has also emphasized academic, cultural and skill development in EMRS.

6. Major Findings

1. **Residential adjustment is multidimensional:** It encompasses academic, emotional, social and institutional adaptation rather than academic performance alone.
2. **Social integration is a central component of adjustment:** Students who feel accepted, respected and connected are better positioned to participate constructively in school life.
3. **Residential proximity does not automatically produce integration:** Living together creates opportunities for interaction, but genuine inclusion requires supportive institutional practices.
4. **Teacher and adult support are critical:** Evidence consistently identifies supportive relationships with teachers and school staff as important for belonging and emotional engagement.
5. **Peer relationships have dual effects:** Friendship and cooperation can strengthen adjustment, while exclusion, discrimination and negative peer dynamics can weaken it.
6. **School belonging has implications beyond immediate schooling:** Recent evidence associates adolescent belonging with later well-being, indicating that residential adjustment may have longer-term developmental relevance.

7. **Social-emotional learning offers a practical pathway:** International evidence indicates that structured SEL programmes can improve social skills, peer relationships, school climate and school functioning.
8. **Indian residential education is expanding:** The growth of EMRS demonstrates the increasing scale of residential education, particularly for tribal students, making psychosocial and social-integration concerns increasingly important.
9. **Inclusion must address diversity explicitly:** Language, culture, socioeconomic background, caste and community identity can influence students' social experiences.
10. **Policy must move beyond access and infrastructure:** A genuinely successful residential school should be judged not only by enrolment and academic achievement but also by students' safety, belonging, participation and social development.

7. Suggestions

1. Establish structured student-transition programmes: New residential students should receive orientation that explains academic expectations, hostel routines, institutional norms, available support systems and conflict-resolution mechanisms. Transition support can reduce uncertainty during the initial adjustment period.

2. Develop peer-mentoring systems: Senior students can be trained as peer mentors for newly admitted students. Such programmes can facilitate friendship formation, communication and informal guidance while strengthening student leadership.

3. Strengthen teacher-student relationships: Teachers and residential staff should receive professional development in adolescent psychology, communication, conflict resolution, cultural sensitivity and supportive classroom practices. Evidence indicates that teacher support contributes meaningfully to belonging and engagement.

4. Introduce systematic social-emotional learning: Residential schools should incorporate age-appropriate SEL activities addressing self-awareness, empathy, communication, cooperation, responsible decision-making and conflict management. International evidence supports the potential of school-wide SEL interventions.

5. Create inclusive cultural programmes: Cultural festivals, multilingual activities, sports, arts, storytelling and student clubs can provide structured opportunities for students from different backgrounds to interact. Participation should avoid tokenism and instead encourage reciprocal cultural learning.

8. Conclusion

The present secondary-data-based study examined the adjustment of residential secondary school students in relation to social integration. The review demonstrates that adjustment is a complex process involving academic adaptation, emotional well-being, peer relationships, teacher support, institutional participation and a sense of belonging. The evidence does not support treating adjustment as an individual student's responsibility alone. Rather, it emerges from the interaction between the student and the social environment created by the residential institution. For India, the issue has increasing policy relevance because residential educational systems are expanding, particularly through programmes such as EMRS. Government evidence demonstrates considerable growth in EMRS enrolment and institutional coverage, making the quality of residential social environments increasingly important. NEP 2020 provides a supportive policy framework by emphasizing holistic development, psychological well-being, inclusion and socio-emotional learning. The central implication of this study is that a residential school should not be viewed merely as a school with hostel facilities. It is a living social ecosystem. Academic success, therefore, needs to be complemented by belonging, participation, mutual respect and emotional security. Future research should use longitudinal and mixed-method designs across different categories of Indian residential schools to examine how adjustment changes over time and how institutional practices influence social integration. Such evidence could contribute to more humane, inclusive and developmentally responsive residential education policies.

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