

Exploring the Relationship Between Coping Strategies and Resilience Among First-Year Kindergarten Children in Sapele, Delta State

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: March 2026; Revised: April 2026; Published: June 2026 Keywords Coping strategies; Problem-focused coping; Emotion regulation; Social support coping; Resilience; Kindergarten children	This study examined the relationship between coping strategies and resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State. Specifically, it investigated the associations between problem-focused coping, emotion regulation coping, social support coping, and resilience during children's early transition into formal schooling. A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The study population comprised first-year kindergarten children enrolled in public and private schools in Sapele Local Government Area, Delta State. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 316 children, ensuring proportional representation across school types. Data were collected using adapted measures of coping strategies and early childhood resilience. The instruments assessed problem-focused coping, emotion regulation coping, social support coping, and children's academic, emotional, and social adaptation. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to analyse the data at the .05 level of significance. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between problem-focused coping and resilience, $r = .263$, $p < .001$, $N = 316$, indicating that children who engaged more actively in problem-solving tended to demonstrate higher resilience. However, emotion regulation coping was not significantly related to resilience, $r = -.015$, $p = .793$, $N = 316$, and social support coping also showed no significant relationship with resilience, $r = -.026$, $p = .650$, $N = 316$. These findings suggest that problem-focused coping may be a more visible coping resource among first-year kindergarten children, while emotion regulation and support-seeking behaviours may still be developing at this stage. The study highlights the need for early childhood classrooms to incorporate structured problem-solving activities and developmentally appropriate social-emotional learning experiences.  https://doi.org/10.36312/j7v9r880 Copyright© 2026, Ekedama & Atubi This is an open-access article under the CC-BY-SA License 
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INTRODUCTION

Starting formal kindergarten is a significant developmental and educational transition in early childhood. For many children, the first year of kindergarten marks a shift from the familiar and relatively flexible environment of home or early childcare settings to a more structured classroom context. In this new environment, children are expected to follow routines, participate in teacher-directed learning activities, interact with peers, respond to

classroom rules, and adjust to adults outside their immediate family network. Although this transition is a normal part of early development, it can also be stressful, particularly for first-year kindergarten children who are still developing the emotional, social, and behavioural skills needed to adapt to formal schooling. How children respond to these early school experiences can shape their later academic engagement, peer relationships, and socio-emotional wellbeing (Stiehl et al., 2023).

Resilience is an important construct for understanding children's adjustment during the transition into kindergarten. In early childhood, resilience refers to the capacity to maintain, recover, or develop positive functioning despite stress, adversity, or developmental challenges. Resilience should not be understood as a fixed trait that children either possess or lack. Rather, it develops through the interaction of individual strengths, coping behaviours, supportive relationships, and the broader educational environment. In the kindergarten context, resilient children are more likely to persist with classroom tasks, manage frustration, participate in peer interactions, respond positively to teacher guidance, and adapt to unfamiliar routines. These abilities are particularly important during the first year of formal schooling, when children are learning to balance academic expectations with social and emotional demands (Chen et al., 2021; Yan & Wu, 2024).

Coping strategies are closely connected to resilience because they reflect the ways children respond to challenging, stressful, or unfamiliar situations. The transactional theory of stress and coping explains stress as a dynamic relationship between the individual and the environment, while coping involves the cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and social efforts used to manage demands that are perceived as challenging (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Although the theory was originally developed in relation to broader stress processes, it remains useful for studying young children because it emphasizes that coping is shaped by context, appraisal, and available resources. In early childhood, coping may appear in simple but meaningful behaviours, such as trying to solve a problem, calming oneself after disappointment, asking for help, or seeking reassurance from adults and peers.

This study focuses on three coping strategies that are relevant to resilience among first-year kindergarten children: problem-focused coping, emotion regulation coping, and social support coping. Problem-focused coping refers to active efforts to address a challenge directly, such as attempting a task again, seeking a practical solution, or changing one's approach when difficulties arise. Emotion regulation coping involves children's attempts to manage emotional responses such as fear, anger, frustration, disappointment, or anxiety. Social support coping refers to seeking help, guidance, comfort, or reassurance from teachers, parents, caregivers, or peers. These coping strategies are developmentally important because first-year kindergarten children often encounter situations that require both behavioural adjustment and emotional control. However, because children at this stage are still developing language, self-regulation, and social awareness, the strength of the relationship between each coping strategy and resilience may differ.

Previous research has shown that coping strategies are associated with resilience and socio-emotional adjustment in early childhood and school settings. Children who use constructive coping strategies tend to show stronger persistence, social competence, emotional stability, and adaptive functioning in learning environments. Problem-focused coping has been linked to resilience because it encourages children to engage directly with challenges rather than avoid them. Emotion regulation coping may support resilience by helping children manage negative emotional reactions and maintain psychological balance during stressful situations. Social support coping may also strengthen resilience by connecting children to external sources of reassurance, guidance, and emotional security. These findings

suggest that coping strategies may play an important role in children's capacity to adapt to the demands of early schooling.

Problem-Focused Coping and Resilience in Early Childhood

Empirical studies have increasingly examined the role of problem-focused coping and related adaptive behaviours in strengthening resilience among young children. In early childhood settings, problem-focused coping is particularly relevant because children are frequently required to respond to new tasks, solve simple problems, negotiate peer interactions, and persist despite difficulty. Such behaviours may help children develop a sense of competence and control in the school environment.

A quasi-experimental study on preschool social skills education showed that structured social skills programmes emphasizing problem-solving and adaptive coping strategies improved psychological resilience among kindergarten children (Kayabali & Özbey, 2024). This finding suggests that structured learning experiences that strengthen problem-solving and coping behaviours may contribute positively to resilience in early childhood. A study of coping behaviours and socio-emotional wellbeing among preschool children also found that constructive coping skills were positively associated with indicators of resilience, including emotional regulation, persistence, and social competence (Ogelman & Kahveci, 2024). These results suggest that children who are able to use adaptive coping behaviours may be better positioned to manage everyday stressors in early learning environments.

Further evidence from school settings showed that problem-focused coping strategies were associated with lower school-related stress and stronger resilience-related outcomes (Flores-Buils & Andrés-Roqueta, 2023). This supports the view that active coping may enable children to respond more constructively to academic and social challenges within school environments. Research conducted during educational disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic also found that children who demonstrated constructive coping behaviours, particularly problem-focused coping and help-seeking, were better able to adapt to changing educational conditions (González-Puerto et al., 2023). Although this study was conducted in a different educational context, it reinforces the importance of proactive coping behaviours in supporting resilience during periods of uncertainty and adjustment.

Recent studies on children and adolescents at risk of socio-emotional difficulties have also indicated that adaptive coping processes are important in improving socio-emotional wellbeing and resilience-related outcomes (Llistosella et al., 2024). Similarly, problem-focused coping has been associated with stronger socio-emotional functioning and resilience among children experiencing school-based stress, whereas maladaptive coping patterns such as avoidance have been linked to poorer adjustment outcomes (Helmer et al., 2025). These findings highlight the importance of distinguishing between adaptive and maladaptive coping behaviours when examining children's resilience.

The role of coping strategies has also been emphasized in children's adjustment during school re-entry after the COVID-19 pandemic. Problem-solving, positive appraisal, and supportive school-based activities may help children re-engage academically, emotionally, and socially after disruptions (Capurso et al., 2020). Taken together, these studies suggest that problem-focused coping is likely to be positively related to resilience because it enables children to engage more actively with school-related demands.

Emotion Regulation Coping and Resilience among Kindergarten Children

Emotion regulation coping is another important dimension of children's adjustment and resilience. In kindergarten settings, children often experience emotions such as anxiety, frustration, disappointment, fear, and excitement as they encounter new routines, tasks, and

peer relationships. The ability to regulate these emotions can help children respond more adaptively to stressful experiences and participate more successfully in classroom activities.

A quantitative cross-sectional study among preschool left-behind children in rural China found that emotion regulation was significantly associated with psychological resilience (Zhang et al., 2021). Children who demonstrated adaptive emotional coping strategies, including emotional control and self-comforting behaviours, showed higher levels of resilience. This finding suggests that emotion regulation may help young children manage stress and maintain adaptive functioning.

Research on resilience coping among preschool children has also shown that emotional ability, including the capacity to recognize, manage, and express emotions appropriately, is significantly associated with resilience (Chen et al., 2021). Children with stronger emotional abilities were more likely to demonstrate adaptive behaviours when confronted with challenging situations. This supports the idea that emotion regulation may function as a foundational coping resource during early childhood.

A study on preschool children's resilience and emotion regulation skills reported a positive relationship between children's emotion regulation abilities and resilience-related outcomes (Ogelman & Kahveci, 2024). Children who were able to manage emotions such as anger, frustration, and disappointment were more capable of maintaining psychological stability and adapting to challenging experiences. This evidence suggests that emotion regulation may support resilience by helping children remain calm and responsive in stressful circumstances.

Evidence from a resilience-based intervention among children affected by parental HIV also showed that emotion regulation mediated the relationship between coping and mental health outcomes (Jiang et al., 2022). This suggests that children who develop stronger emotional control may show better psychological adjustment over time. Although this study focused on a specific vulnerable population, it provides important evidence that emotion regulation can contribute to resilience processes.

Research on emotion regulation within preschool educational contexts has also shown that teacher emotion regulation can contribute to a supportive classroom climate that promotes children's emotional development (Keleynikov et al., 2022). Although the study focused on teachers rather than children, its findings are relevant because emotionally supportive classroom environments may indirectly strengthen children's opportunities to develop resilience and adaptive coping skills.

Overall, the literature suggests that emotion regulation coping is often positively associated with resilience in early childhood. However, the relationship may depend on children's developmental stage, the quality of adult support, and the extent to which children have acquired the language and self-regulatory skills needed to manage emotions independently. This issue is especially important among first-year kindergarten children, who may still be in the early stages of developing stable emotional regulation capacities.

Social Support Coping and Resilience among Kindergarten Children

Social support coping involves seeking assistance, comfort, reassurance, or guidance from significant others when faced with stressful or unfamiliar situations. For young children, social support may come from teachers, parents, caregivers, peers, siblings, and other adults within the school or home environment. In kindergarten, supportive relationships can help children feel safe, express their needs, manage uncertainty, and respond more positively to school demands.

A randomized controlled trial on supportive preschool interventions among children exposed to early adversity found that children who participated in supportive preschool programmes demonstrated stronger resilience, improved emotional adjustment, and greater social competence over time (Sanders et al., 2020). These findings suggest that early supportive environments can have lasting benefits for children's adaptive development.

Teacher emotional support has also been associated with children's social competence in preschool classrooms. Higher levels of teacher emotional support were linked to increased prosocial behaviour and improved social competence among preschool children (Pakarinen et al., 2020). This indicates that teacher-child relationships may play a significant role in children's classroom adjustment and resilience-related functioning. Peer-mediated support strategies have also been shown to improve social interaction skills and classroom participation among socially isolated preschoolers (Foster et al., 2024). These findings highlight the role of peer relationships as a potential source of social support in early childhood classrooms. When children are supported by peers, they may become more confident in participating in classroom activities and social interactions.

Supportive peer classroom environments have also been found to contribute to learning outcomes and positive behavioural adjustment in early childhood education (Botvin et al., 2024). This suggests that children's resilience may be strengthened not only through adult support, but also through peer interactions that encourage participation, cooperation, and belonging. Research on social support and children's physical activity has shown that parental social support is associated with healthier child behaviours (Atubi, 2024). Although this study focused on physical activity rather than resilience, it demonstrates that support from significant adults can shape children's adaptive responses and behavioural engagement. Family and community support networks have also been associated with resilience and psychological wellbeing among family caregivers of kindergarten children (Feng et al., 2024). This reinforces the broader argument that supportive social environments may contribute to children's adaptive functioning.

Structured social skills education has also been found to improve psychological resilience among preschool children (Kayabali & Özbey, 2024). Structured opportunities for interaction, cooperation, and support may help children develop stronger coping abilities and resilience. These findings suggest that social support coping is theoretically and empirically relevant to children's resilience, although its strength may vary depending on whether support is naturally occurring or intentionally structured through school-based programmes.

Research Gap

Although previous research has provided valuable evidence on coping strategies and resilience in early childhood, several gaps remain. First, much of the existing literature has been conducted outside Nigeria. Findings from China, Finland, Türkiye, the United States, Colombia, and other contexts may not fully reflect the social, cultural, economic, and educational realities of children in Sapele, Delta State. Early childhood education settings differ in terms of classroom structure, teacher-child interaction, family involvement, school resources, and expectations placed on children. These contextual differences make it necessary to examine coping and resilience within local Nigerian educational settings.

Second, many previous studies have focused on preschool children in general, older school-age children, children exposed to specific adversities, or children participating in structured interventions. Less attention has been given to first-year kindergarten children who are newly adjusting to formal schooling. This group is developmentally important because children at this stage may not yet have fully developed the emotional language, self-

regulatory capacity, or social confidence required to use all coping strategies effectively. As a result, some coping strategies may be more strongly related to resilience than others during the first year of kindergarten.

Third, although problem-focused coping, emotion regulation coping, and social support coping have each been discussed in the literature, limited empirical attention has been given to how these three coping strategies relate to resilience within the same group of first-year kindergarten children in Sapele. Understanding these relationships is important because children may rely on different coping strategies depending on their developmental readiness and the support available in their immediate environment.

In Sapele, Delta State, first-year kindergarten children may experience adjustment challenges as they move into structured classroom routines, interact with unfamiliar peers and teachers, and respond to new academic and behavioural expectations. These challenges may appear as emotional distress, withdrawal, difficulty following routines, peer conflict, or limited classroom participation. However, there is limited empirical evidence on the coping strategies that are associated with resilience among children in this local context. This study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between problem-focused coping, emotion regulation coping, social support coping, and resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between coping strategies and resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State. Specifically, the study investigates the relationship between problem-focused coping, emotion regulation coping, social support coping, and resilience. It seeks to determine how these coping strategies are associated with children's ability to adapt to the academic, social, and emotional demands of their first year in formal kindergarten.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between problem-focused coping and resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State?
2. What is the relationship between emotion regulation coping and resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State?
3. What is the relationship between social support coping and resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between problem-focused coping and resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State.
2. There is no significant relationship between emotion regulation coping and resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State.
3. There is no significant relationship between social support coping and resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between coping strategies and resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele Local Government Area, Delta State. The cross-sectional design was considered appropriate because the study measured coping strategies and resilience at one point in time and sought to determine the direction and strength of the associations among the variables.

The study did not attempt to establish causal or predictive effects, but focused on the relationships between problem-focused coping, emotion regulation coping, social support coping, and resilience.

Setting, Population, and Sample

The study was conducted in Sapele Local Government Area, Delta State. The target population comprised all 1,120 first-year kindergarten children enrolled in 35 public and private schools in the area (Delta State Ministry of Education, 2024). The minimum required sample size was estimated using Krejcie and Morgan's sample size determination table (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970, as cited in Ekedama et al., 2026), which indicated a minimum sample of 286 children for the population size. To strengthen the adequacy of the sample and account for possible non-response or incomplete responses, the target sample was increased. The final analysis was based on 316 children with complete and usable data.

Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling technique was used to select participants. Stratification was based on school type to ensure that children from both public and private schools were proportionately represented. Gender representation was also considered during the sampling process to reduce sampling imbalance. This approach was adopted to improve the representativeness of the sample and to ensure that the selected participants reflected the major characteristics of the first-year kindergarten population in the study area.

Instruments

Data were collected using two adapted instruments: the Coping Strategies Questionnaire for Young Children (CSQ-YC) and the Early Childhood Resilience Scale (ECRS). The CSQ-YC was used to measure three dimensions of coping strategies: problem-focused coping, emotion regulation coping, and social support coping. Problem-focused coping assessed children's tendency to deal directly with challenges or attempt practical solutions. Emotion regulation coping assessed children's ability to manage emotional responses such as frustration, fear, disappointment, or anxiety. Social support coping assessed children's tendency to seek help, reassurance, or guidance from teachers, peers, parents, or caregivers.

The Early Childhood Resilience Scale was used to assess children's resilience in relation to academic, emotional, and social adaptation. These dimensions reflected children's ability to participate in classroom activities, manage emotional demands, adjust to routines, and interact positively within the school environment. Both instruments used a 5-point Likert-type response format. Higher scores indicated stronger coping strategy use or higher resilience, depending on the scale being assessed.

Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

The instruments were adapted to suit the developmental level of first-year kindergarten children and the local context of the study. Because the participants were young children, attention was given to item clarity, age appropriateness, and ease of comprehension. A pilot test was conducted with 30 first-year kindergarten children who were not included in the main study. The pilot test helped to assess the clarity of the items, the suitability of the response format, and the practicality of administering the instruments in classroom settings. Reliability evidence from the adapted instruments indicated acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients above .70. This reliability level was considered adequate for the study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant authorities before data collection. Permission was also obtained from the selected schools. Because the participants were minors, parental consent was secured before the children participated in the study. Child assent was also obtained in an age-appropriate manner. Participation was voluntary, and no child was forced to respond to any item. The confidentiality of participants' responses was maintained, and the data were used only for research purposes. Names and other identifying information were not used in the analysis.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected in the selected schools with the assistance of trained research assistants. The research assistants were guided on how to administer the instruments consistently and in a manner suitable for young children. The questionnaires were administered in classroom settings under conditions that minimized disruption to normal school activities. Since the participants were first-year kindergarten children, the items were read aloud when necessary to support comprehension. Care was taken to avoid leading the children toward particular responses. Completed instruments were checked for completeness before data entry.

Data Analysis

Data were screened for completeness and coding accuracy before analysis. Composite scores were computed for problem-focused coping, emotion regulation coping, social support coping, and resilience based on the scoring procedure of the instruments. Descriptive information was used to summarize the data, while Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to answer the research questions and test the null hypotheses. Pearson correlation was appropriate because the study examined the direction and strength of the relationship between each coping strategy and resilience. The hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance. Statistical results were interpreted using the correlation coefficient, p-value, and sample size.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationship between each coping strategy and resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State. The analysis was organized according to the three research questions and corresponding null hypotheses. All hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance.

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between problem-focused coping and resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State?

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between problem-focused coping and resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State.

To answer Research Question 1 and test Hypothesis 1, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between problem-focused coping and resilience. The result of this analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Pearson correlation between problem-focused coping and resilience

Variable	Statistic	Problem-focused coping	Resilience
Problem-focused coping	Pearson correlation	1	.263**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		< .001
	N	316	316

Variable	Statistic	Problem-focused coping	Resilience
Resilience	Pearson correlation	.263**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	< .001	
	N	316	316

Note. **Correlation is significant at the .05 level (two-tailed).

Table 1 shows a positive and statistically significant relationship between problem-focused coping and resilience, $r = .263$, $p < .001$, $N = 316$. This indicates that children with higher problem-focused coping scores also had higher resilience scores. However, the magnitude of the correlation was small, suggesting that although problem-focused coping was significantly associated with resilience, the strength of the association was limited. Since the p-value was less than .05, the first null hypothesis was rejected.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between emotion regulation coping and resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State?

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between emotion regulation coping and resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State.

To answer Research Question 2 and test Hypothesis 2, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between emotion regulation coping and resilience. The result of this analysis is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Pearson correlation between emotion regulation coping and resilience

Variable	Statistic	Emotion regulation coping	Resilience
Emotion regulation coping	Pearson correlation	1	-.015
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.793
	N	316	316
Resilience	Pearson correlation	-.015	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.793	
	N	316	316

Note. Correlation was tested at the .05 level of significance, two-tailed.

Table 2 shows that emotion regulation coping was not significantly related to resilience, $r = -.015$, $p = .793$, $N = 316$. The correlation coefficient was close to zero, indicating no meaningful linear relationship between emotion regulation coping and resilience in the present sample. Since the p-value was greater than .05, the second null hypothesis was retained.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between social support coping and resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State?

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between social support coping and resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State.

To answer Research Question 3 and test Hypothesis 3, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between social support coping and resilience. The result of this analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Pearson correlation between social support coping and resilience

Variable	Statistic	Social support coping	Resilience
Social support coping	Pearson correlation	1	-.026
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.650
	N	316	316
Resilience	Pearson correlation	-.026	1

Variable	Statistic	Social support coping	Resilience
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.650	
	N	316	316

Table 3 shows that social support coping was not significantly related to resilience, $r = -.026$, $p = .650$, $N = 316$. The correlation coefficient was close to zero, indicating little or no linear relationship between social support coping and resilience in the present sample. Since the p -value was greater than .05, the third null hypothesis was retained.

The results indicate that problem-focused coping was the only coping strategy with a statistically significant relationship with resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State. Emotion regulation coping and social support coping were not significantly related to resilience.

Discussion

The finding in Table 1 showed that problem-focused coping had a positive and statistically significant relationship with resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State. This indicates that children who showed higher problem-focused coping scores also tended to have higher resilience scores. Although the correlation was small, the result suggests that active attempts to deal with challenges may be relevant to children's early adjustment in the school environment. For first-year kindergarten children, problem-focused coping may appear in simple behaviours such as trying again after difficulty, attempting to complete a classroom task, following teacher guidance, or looking for practical ways to respond to a problem. These behaviours may help children experience a sense of competence and control during the transition into formal schooling.

This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that problem-solving and adaptive coping behaviours are associated with stronger resilience and socio-emotional adjustment in early childhood. Structured social skills programmes that emphasize problem-solving and adaptive coping have been found to improve psychological resilience among preschool children (Kayabali & Özbey, 2024). Similarly, constructive coping skills have been linked to resilience indicators such as persistence, emotional regulation, and social competence among preschool children (Ogelman & Kahveci, 2024). Evidence from school settings also suggests that problem-focused coping is associated with lower school-related stress and stronger resilience-related outcomes (Flores-Buils & Andrés-Roqueta, 2023). The present finding therefore supports the view that problem-focused coping is an important coping resource for young children as they encounter classroom routines, peer interactions, and early learning demands.

The result also aligns with studies indicating that active coping behaviours are more adaptive than avoidance or passive responses in school-related stress contexts. Children who demonstrate problem-focused coping and help-seeking behaviours have been shown to adapt more effectively during educational disruptions and changing school conditions (González-Puerto et al., 2023). Similarly, problem-focused coping has been associated with stronger socio-emotional functioning among children experiencing school-based stress, whereas maladaptive coping patterns have been linked to poorer adjustment (Helmer et al., 2025). In the context of Sapele, Delta State, the significant relationship found in this study suggests that even at the early stage of formal education, children's practical attempts to manage classroom challenges may be connected to their resilience. However, because the correlation was small, the finding should be interpreted cautiously. Problem-focused coping appears to be related to resilience, but it is unlikely to be the only factor associated with children's adaptive functioning.

The finding in Table 2 showed that emotion regulation coping was not significantly related to resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State. The correlation coefficient was very close to zero, suggesting that emotion regulation coping did not show a meaningful linear relationship with resilience in the present sample. This result does not necessarily mean that emotion regulation is unimportant in early childhood. Rather, it suggests that, in this study, measured emotion regulation coping was not statistically associated with resilience among first-year kindergarten children.

This finding differs from several previous studies that reported positive associations between emotion regulation and resilience. Emotion regulation has been found to be significantly associated with psychological resilience among preschool children, especially when children demonstrate adaptive strategies such as emotional control and self-comforting (Zhang et al., 2021). Emotional ability, including the capacity to recognize, manage, and express emotions appropriately, has also been linked to resilience among preschool children (Chen et al., 2021). Other studies have shown that children with stronger emotion regulation skills tend to display greater psychological stability and adaptive functioning in challenging situations (Ogelman & Kahveci, 2024), while emotion regulation has also been identified as a mechanism connecting coping processes with mental health and resilience-related outcomes (Jiang et al., 2022).

The difference between the present finding and earlier studies may be explained by developmental and contextual factors. First-year kindergarten children may still be at an early stage of developing emotional awareness, emotional language, and self-regulation skills. At this age and stage of schooling, children may not yet regulate emotions independently in ways that are stable enough to show a significant statistical relationship with resilience. Their emotional coping may also depend heavily on adult guidance, teacher responses, classroom routines, and parental support. In addition, previous studies often involved older preschool children, broader preschool populations, or children in structured intervention settings. The present study focused specifically on first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State, where children may still be adjusting to the demands of formal schooling. Therefore, the non-significant result may reflect the developmental reality that emotion regulation coping is still emerging among children in this context.

The finding in Table 3 showed that social support coping was not significantly related to resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State. The correlation was very weak and negative, indicating little or no linear relationship between social support coping and resilience in the present sample. This finding suggests that children's tendency to seek help, reassurance, or guidance from others was not statistically associated with their resilience scores. However, this result should not be interpreted as evidence that social support is irrelevant to young children's development. It may instead suggest that naturally occurring support-seeking behaviours among first-year kindergarten children are not yet sufficiently developed or consistently expressed to show a significant relationship with resilience.

The result differs from earlier studies that emphasized the importance of supportive relationships and social environments in children's adjustment. Supportive preschool interventions have been associated with stronger resilience, improved emotional adjustment, and greater social competence among children exposed to adversity (Sanders et al., 2020). Teacher emotional support has also been linked to children's prosocial behaviour and social competence in preschool classrooms (Pakarinen et al., 2020). Peer-mediated support strategies have been found to improve social interaction and classroom participation among socially isolated preschoolers (Foster et al., 2024), while supportive peer classroom environments have

been associated with positive behavioural adjustment and learning outcomes (Botvin et al., 2024). Family and community support networks have also been connected with resilience and psychological wellbeing in kindergarten-related contexts (Feng et al., 2024).

The non-significant relationship found in the present study may be explained by the difference between available support and children's ability to seek or use support. Many earlier studies examined structured forms of social support, such as teacher-led interventions, peer-mediated programmes, family-based support systems, or social skills training. In contrast, the present study examined social support coping as a behaviour among first-year kindergarten children. Children at this stage may not yet have the social awareness, verbal confidence, or communication skills needed to seek help consistently and effectively. Some children may depend on adults without actively identifying such behaviour as coping, while others may hesitate to seek help in unfamiliar school environments. As a result, social support coping may not have appeared as a significant correlate of resilience in this sample.

Taken together, the findings suggest that problem-focused coping was the only coping strategy significantly associated with resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State. Emotion regulation coping and social support coping were not significantly related to resilience. This pattern may indicate that practical, observable efforts to deal with problems are more closely connected to resilience at the early stage of formal schooling than internal emotional regulation or active support-seeking. The findings contribute to the literature by providing context-specific evidence from a Nigerian early childhood setting. They also suggest that early childhood classrooms should provide structured opportunities for children to practise problem-solving, while gradually strengthening emotional regulation and help-seeking behaviours through developmentally appropriate teacher support, guided play, peer interaction, and social-emotional learning activities.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between coping strategies and resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele Local Government Area, Delta State. The coping strategies examined were problem-focused coping, emotion regulation coping, and social support coping. The findings showed that problem-focused coping had a positive and statistically significant relationship with resilience. This indicates that children with higher problem-focused coping scores also tended to have higher resilience scores. Although the strength of the relationship was small, the result suggests that children's active efforts to deal with challenges, solve simple problems, and respond directly to classroom demands may be relevant to their adjustment during the first year of formal schooling.

The findings also showed that emotion regulation coping and social support coping were not significantly related to resilience among the children in the study. These results suggest that, within this sample, children's reported use of emotion regulation and support-seeking behaviours did not show meaningful statistical associations with resilience. This may reflect the developmental stage of first-year kindergarten children, who may still be developing the emotional awareness, self-regulation capacity, verbal confidence, and social skills needed to regulate emotions or seek support consistently. Overall, the study highlights problem-focused coping as the coping strategy most clearly associated with resilience among first-year kindergarten children in Sapele, Delta State, while also showing the need to support the gradual development of emotional regulation and social support coping in early childhood classrooms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Early childhood teachers should integrate developmentally appropriate problem-solving activities into classroom instruction. Guided play, collaborative tasks, storytelling, role play, and simple decision-making activities can provide children with opportunities to practise problem-focused coping in familiar classroom situations. Such activities may help children become more confident in responding to challenges during early schooling.

Schools should provide structured social and emotional learning experiences that gradually strengthen children's emotional awareness, self-regulation, and positive peer interaction. Since emotion regulation coping was not significantly related to resilience in this study, classroom-based support should focus on helping children identify feelings, express emotions appropriately, calm themselves after frustration, and respond constructively to classroom difficulties.

Parents and caregivers should be encouraged to support children's coping development at home. They can do this by guiding children to talk about simple problems, think through possible solutions, express feelings in appropriate ways, and seek help when needed. Consistent support between home and school may provide children with a more stable environment for developing adaptive coping behaviours during the transition into formal kindergarten.

Author Contributions

The authors have sufficiently contributed to the study, and have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Declaration of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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