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# Determining the Effect of Peer Mentoring Programme Applied to Nursing Students on Perceived Stress and Adaptation to University Life: A Quasi - Experimental Study

## ABSTRACT

Beginning university is an important change for most young people, but it can limit relationships with family and friends. The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of a peer mentoring programme on the perceived stress and adaptation to university life of nursing students studying at a newly established nursing education institution. This study used a 'pre-test and post-test non control group' design, one of the quasi-experimental research methods. Data were collected using the Introductory Information Form, the Perceived Stress Level Scale and the Adaptation to University Life Scale. Parametric tests were employed in data analysis. Descriptive characteristics of the participants were presented as frequency, percentage, and mean. For normally distributed data, the independent samples t-test was used to analyze two-group comparisons, and the One-Way ANOVA test was used for comparisons involving more than two groups. The mean age of the nursing students who underwent peer mentoring was 19.6 years, 64% of the students were female, 60.8% were first year students (mentees) and more than a third (33.6%) had no information about peer mentoring. The outcomes obtained in this study reveal the effectiveness of the peer mentoring programme. Implementation of the peer mentoring programme decreased the perceived stress level of nursing students and increased their adaptation to university life.

**Keywords:** Nursing education, peer mentoring, adaptation to university life, perceived stress university life, perceived stress.

## Introduction

The transition to university represents a significant change for many young people, potentially limiting their relationships with family members, pre-university peers and new peers they encounter at university. University freshmen are confronted with various stressors, including separation from family, adaptation to a different academic system, and acclimatization to a new environment. Universities implement counseling services to support students in managing the challenges of university life, and the demand for these services increases steadily (Brewster et al., 2014; Thorley, 2017; Williams et al., 2015). Furthermore, universities are equipped to apply peer support and mentoring programs to enable students to manage stress and transition effectively into the university setting (Lillekroken et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2023).

Text Peer mentoring is a relational process in which a more experienced individual (mentor) is capable of contributing to the professional and personal

development of a less experienced individual (mentee) (Otu, 2024). Peer mentoring programs, encompassing peer support practices, constitute a sustainable and cost-effective opportunity to support first-year university students. These programs are shown to yield diverse benefits, including enhanced academic performance, improved adaptation to university life, an increased sense of belonging, reduced perceived stress levels, and greater mental well-being (Kachaturroff et al., 2020; Lillekroken et al., 2024; Pointon et al., 2024). Moreover, peer mentoring programs facilitate participation in volunteer activities, augment social, communication, and organizational skills, and bolster self-confidence among university students (Crisp et al., 2020). Peer mentoring represents an informal but commonly favoured support mechanism among university students. Peer support renders students capable of achieving individual, social, and academic integration into their universities. Promoting teamwork and peer support within university settings is deemed essential to enhancing communication and interaction among students (Le et al., 2024; Mikkonen et al., 2020).

The review of national and international literature indicates that descriptive studies exist which evaluate university students' adaptation to university life and their perceived stress levels (Aslan, 2015; Cuesta-Martínez et al., 2024; Dogan, 2021; Konakçı et al., 2021; Sonmez & Gurbuz, 2022). Additionally, studies are conducted to assess the impact of peer mentoring programs on students' academic success (Kim et al., 2021; Venegas-Muggli et al., 2023) and their influence on psychological empowerment and satisfaction (Al Yahyaei et al., 2024; Amer et al., 2021). However, no studies are identified that implement and evaluate a peer mentoring program with the aim of enhancing students' adaptation to university life while simultaneously reducing their perceived stress levels. This situation constitutes the originality of the present study.

The institution where this study is conducted commenced its educational activities one year prior to the initiation of the study. Consequently, first-year nursing students enrolled during the study period are designated as mentees within the implemented peer mentoring program, while second-year students are appointed as mentors. Ordinarily, in peer mentoring programs at undergraduate institutions, first-year students assume the role of mentees, and third-year students undertake the role of mentors (Lillekroken et al., 2024; Otu, 2024). Nonetheless, in the absence of third-year students within the nursing department, second-year students are assigned the role of mentors. The health school affiliated with the nursing department is situated in a rural region characterized by low population density and limited social facilities. Therefore, the implementation of a peer mentoring program in the nursing department is considered a facilitating factor for first-year students transitioning to university. Through this program, first-year students are enabled to form new friendships and derive the benefits provided by the peer mentoring initiative.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine the effect of a peer mentoring programme on perceived stress and adaptation to university life among nursing students enrolled in a newly established nursing education institution

To reach the purpose of the research, answers were sought to the following research questions:

- Does the peer mentoring programme implemented for nursing students enrolled in a newly established nursing education institution affect their perceived stress levels?

- Does the peer mentoring programme implemented for nursing students enrolled in a newly established nursing education institution affect their adaptation to university life?

## **Method**

### **Research Model**

In this study, the "pretest-posttest design without a control group," one of the quasi-experimental research methods, was utilized. Quasi-experimental research is a study design that evaluates whether a program or intervention produces the intended effect on the participants involved in the research (Polit & Beck, 2014). For these reason, in this study, the quasi-experimental research was used since the effect of a peer mentoring programme on perceived stress and adaptation to university life among nursing students.

### **Study Group**

The study population consisted of first-year (79 students) and second-year (55 students) nursing students enrolled in the 2022-2023 academic year at Yozgat Bozok University School of Health. No sampling method was applied, and the entire population was included in the sample group. The inclusion criteria for the study were being enrolled in the program between October 2022 and May 2023 and agreeing to participate in both the peer mentoring programme and the study. Initially, all students agreed to participate in the study. However, during the study, three first-year and six second-year students who did not continue the programme or failed to complete the posttest form were excluded. The study was completed with a total of 125 students.

Prior to implementing the peer mentoring programme, information about the programme and the study was provided to the nursing students enrolled in the newly established nursing institution. Pretest data for the study were collected using data collection tools before the start of the programme. Posttest data were collected at the end of the peer mentoring programme in May of the 2022-2023 academic year.

### **Data Collection Tool**

The research data were collected using the "Demographic Information Form," the "Perceived Stress Scale," and the "University Life Adaptation Scale."

**Demographic Information Form:** This form was developed by the researchers based on the literature (Crisp et al., 2020; Horgan et al., 2013; Lillekroken et al., 2024; Pointon et al., 2024). It consists of five questions regarding the socio-demographic characteristics of the students (age, gender, and grades) and their knowledge about peer

mentoring.

**Perceived Stress Scale:** This scale was developed by Cohen et al., (1983) and consists of 14 items. The Perceived Stress Scale is designed to measure the extent to which individuals perceive certain situations in their lives as stressful. It includes questions such as, "In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something unexpected?" This measurement tool is a 5-point Likert scale, where each item is rated from "Never (0)" to "Very Often (4)." Seven items containing positive statements are reverse scored. The scale, which has no sub-dimensions, is evaluated based on the total score. It contains seven items with negative statements. The Turkish validity and reliability study of the scale was conducted by Eskin et al. (2013). The total score obtained from the scale indicates the individual's level of stress. Scores between 11–26 indicate low stress levels, 27–41 indicate moderate stress levels, and 42–56 indicate high stress levels. Eskin et al. (2013) found the internal consistency of the scale to be .86, while in this study, the internal consistency was found to be .82 (Eskin et al., 2013).

**University Life Adaptation Scale:** This scale, developed and validated by Aslan (2015), consists of three sub-dimensions: "Personal Adaptation," "Social Adaptation," and "Academic Adaptation." The scale includes 60 items and is a 5-point Likert-type measurement tool rated as "Strongly Agree," "Agree," "Undecided," "Disagree," and "Strongly Disagree." Higher scores indicate better adaptation, while lower scores indicate poor adaptation. In Aslan's (2015) study, the internal consistency of the scale was found to be between .89 and .92. In this study, the internal consistency was found to range from .95 to .97.

#### Implementation of the Peer Mentoring Programme

The faculty member responsible for the peer mentoring programme, along with the research team, introduced the programme in October 2022. During this introduction, details regarding the programme's content, implementation process, and expectations from both mentor and mentee students were explained. Pretest data for the study were collected prior to the programme introduction. In the programme, mentees and mentors were paired by the faculty member responsible, ensuring factors such as gender or academic performance were not considered as criteria. Some mentors were paired with one mentee, while others were paired with two, facilitating interaction among students. Monthly follow-ups were conducted to support these interactions. During these follow-ups, the nature of their interactions, topics in which they supported or did not support each other, and

any challenges encountered during the process were evaluated. Mentors were encouraged to communicate with their mentees regardless of whether the mentees actively sought support. The programme continued for eight months.

The ethical process in the study was as follows:

- Ethics committee approval was obtained from Yozgat Bozok University University Social and Humanitarian Ethics Committee (Date: 19.10.2022, Number: E-37/28)
- Informed consent has been obtained from students who participated in this study.

#### Data Analysis

The statistical analysis of the study was conducted using the "SPSS 25.0" software package. To assess whether the data followed a normal distribution, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used, and it was determined that the data did follow a normal distribution. Parametric tests were employed in data analysis. Descriptive characteristics of the participants were presented as frequency, percentage, and mean. For normally distributed data, the independent samples t-test was used to analyze two-group comparisons, and the One-Way ANOVA test was used for comparisons involving more than two groups. To compare pretest and posttest mean scores of the peer mentoring programme, the Paired samples t-test was applied. A significance level of  $p < .05$  was considered statistically.

#### Results

As shown in Table 1, the nursing students who participated in the peer mentoring programme had a mean age of 19.6 years (min: 18; max: 26). Of the students, 64% were female and 36% were male. Additionally, 60.8% were first-year students (mentees), while 39.2% were second-year students (mentors). More than one-third of the students (33.6%) reported having no prior knowledge about peer mentoring.

Table 2, which compares the pre- and post-program mean scores of nursing students on the subdimensions and total score of the University Life Adaptation Scale as well as the Perceived Stress Scale, shows the following findings; The mean score on the Perceived Stress Scale was  $28.05 \pm 7.60$  before the peer mentoring programme and  $27.12 \pm 5.82$  after the programme. No statistically significant difference was observed between the pre- and post-programme mean scores for perceived stress ( $p > .05$ )

**Table 1.**

*Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Students (n=125)*

	n	%
Age	19.60±1.33 (min:18;max:26) year	
Gender		
Female	80	64.0
Male	45	36.0
Peer Mentoring Status		
Mentee (First-year)	76	60.8
Mentor (Second-year)	49	39.2
Knowledge of Peer Mentoring		
Knowledgeable	38	30.4
Partially knowledgeable	45	36.0
Unknowledgeable	42	33.6

The mean score for the personal adaptation subdimension was  $63.28 \pm 16.06$  before the programme and  $64.44 \pm 15.47$  after the programme. No statistically significant difference was found between the pre- and post-programme mean scores for personal adaptation ( $p > .05$ ). The mean score for the social adaptation subdimension was  $78.67 \pm 13.37$  before the programme and  $78.90 \pm 14.90$  after the programme. No statistically significant difference was observed between the

pre- and post-programme mean scores for social adaptation ( $p > .05$ ).

The mean score for the academic adaptation subdimension was  $28.05 \pm 7.60$  before the programme and  $28.72 \pm 12.77$  after the programme. No statistically significant difference was found between the pre- and post-programme mean scores for academic adaptation ( $p > .05$ ). The total mean score on the University Life Adaptation Scale was  $220.68 \pm 36.57$  before the programme and  $221.95 \pm 37.60$  after the programme. No statistically significant difference was found between the pre- and post-programme total mean scores ( $p > .05$ ).

The findings indicate that the peer mentoring programme improved the students' adaptation to university life, including academic, social, and personal adaptation. Furthermore, the students' perceived stress levels showed a reduction. However, these changes were not statistically significant ( $p > .05$ ). While no statistically significant differences were observed between pre- and post-test scores for the total and subdimension scores of the University Life Adaptation Scale and the Perceived Stress Scale, post-test mean scores were consistently higher than pre-test mean scores.

**Table 2.**

*Comparison of the Mean Scores of the University Life Adaptation Scale Subdimensions, Total Score, and Perceived Stress Scale Before and After the Peer Mentoring Programme (n=125)*

Scale Score		Mean Score $\pm$ SD	Median (min-max)	t	p
Perceived Stress Scale Score	Pre-test	28.05 $\pm$ 7.60	27 (10 - 43)	-1.057	.290
	Post-test	27.12 $\pm$ 5.82	28 (6 - 45)		
Personal Adaptation Sub-dimension Score	Pre-test	63.28 $\pm$ 16.06	65 (26 - 91)	-.495	.621
	Post-test	64.44 $\pm$ 15.47	68 (26 - 95)		
Social Adaptation Sub-dimension Score	Pre-test	78.67 $\pm$ 13.37	82 (46 - 100)	-.198	.843
	Post-test	78.90 $\pm$ 14.90	80 (23 - 100)		
Academic Adaptation Sub-dimension Score	Pre-test	28.05 $\pm$ 7.60	28 (6 - 45)	-.187	.852
	Post-test	28.72 $\pm$ 12.77	31 (42 - 100)		
Total University Life Adaptation Scale Score	Pre-test	220.68 $\pm$ 36.57	225 (143 - 279)	-.253	.800
	Post-test	221.95 $\pm$ 37.60	228 (71 - 294)		

Abbreviations: t: Paired samples t-test, \*:  $p < .05$ , SD: Standard Deviation

**Table 3.**

*Comparison of the Mean Scores of the University Life Adaptation Scale Total Score, Subdimensions, and Perceived Stress Scale Based on Gender, Role in the Peer Mentoring Programme, and Knowledge of Peer Mentoring*

		<i>Gender</i>		<i>Peer Mentoring Status</i>		<i>Knowledge of Peer Mentoring</i>		
		Female	Male	Mentö (1. sınıf)	Mentör (2. sınıf)	Knowledgeable	Partially knowledgeable	Unknowledgeable
Perceived Stress Scale Score	Pre-test	29.36±6.54	27.48±6.10	27.48±7.45	28.93±7.84	27.02±5.70	29.24±7.57	28.42±7.64
	Post-test	26.92±5.68	25.73±8.81	26.19±6.21	28.52±7.87	26.23±7.47	27.66±6.21	26.64±5.59
	n	80	45	76	49	38	45	42
	t	-2.519		-2.262		F: 3.462		
		.012*		.025*		.701		
Personal Adaptation Sub-dimension Score	Pre-test	63.21±15.28	60.37±17.63	63.51± 17.17	62.81±17.19	62.76±17.61	61.40±17.08	61.72±14.72
	Post-test	64.92±14.97	66.62±15.74	65.48±14.28	62.93±14.32	69.52±17.82	62.68±13.16	65.78±13.28
	n	80	45	76	49	38	45	42
	t	-1.397		.941		F: 3.092		
		.162		.348		.049*		
Social Adaptation Sub-dimension Score	Pre-test	79.33±14.45	77.04±13.01	79.19± 17.05	76.12±11.81	77.86±13.84	75.31±15.65	78.54±13.23
	Post-test	79.58±13.56	78.13±15.81	80.31±14.12	78.44±10.91	83.55±14.87	79.40±11.38	78.62±13.23
	n	80	45	76	49	38	45	42
	t	-1.128		1.674		F: 3.283		
		.875		.097		.041*		
Academic Adaptation Sub-dimension Score	Pre-test	79.71±11.41	76.02±12.06	79.09±14.46	74.85±12.65	79.02±13.34	79.33±11.48	77.33±11.56
	Post-test	80.25±12.99	76.64±15.64	81.22±12.30	77.85±10.80	82.57±15.06	76.44±12.22	77.80±13.78
	n	80	45	76	49	38	45	42
	t	-1.953		1.674		F: .167		
		.041*		.097		.846		
Total University Life Adaptation Scale Score	Pre-test	222.26±34.60	213.44±36.99	223.77±41.31	213.91±34.42	219.65±40.20	214.44±36.38	217.59±32.30
	Post-test	224.76±35.92	221.40±42.83	225.05±37.46	219.12±31.18	235.65±41.53	220.13±32.16	222.21±38.38
	n	80	45	76	49	38	45	42
	t	-1.672		2.793		F: 3.875		
		.095		.006		.023*		

Abbreviations: t: Independent Samples t-test, F: One way anova test, \*:  $p < .05$

As shown in Table 3, there is a statistically significant difference between the gender of nursing students and their perceived stress scale scores and academic adaptation subdimension scores before and after the peer mentoring programme ( $p < .05$ ). These results indicate that the peer mentoring programme reduced the perceived stress levels of female students more than male students and increased the academic adaptation subdimension scores of male students more than female students.

Additionally, a statistically significant difference was found between the role of nursing students in the peer mentoring programme (mentor or mentee) and their perceived stress scale scores before and after the programme ( $p < .05$ ). This finding suggests that the programme reduced perceived stress levels of mentees more than those of mentors. A statistically significant difference was also found between students' knowledge of peer mentoring and their personal adaptation subdimension scores, social adaptation subdimension scores, and total scores on the University Life Adaptation Scale before and after the programme ( $p < .05$ ). This result

indicates that the peer mentoring programme increased the personal and social adaptation subdimension scores and total adaptation scores of students who were knowledgeable about peer mentoring more than those who had partial or no knowledge.

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**Table 4.**  
*Examination of the Relationship Between University Life Adaptation Scale Total Scores, Subdimension Scores, and Perceived Stress Scale Scores*

		<i>Perceived Stress Scale Score</i>
Personal Adaptation Sub-dimension Score	<i>r</i>	-.420
	<i>p</i>	.000*
	<i>n</i>	125
Social Adaptation Sub-dimension Score	<i>r</i>	-.057
	<i>p</i>	.475
	<i>n</i>	125
Academic Adaptation Sub-dimension Score	<i>r</i>	-.695
	<i>p</i>	.027*
	<i>n</i>	125
Total University Life Adaptation Scale Score	<i>r</i>	-.491
	<i>p</i>	.004*
	<i>n</i>	125

*Abbreviations: r: Pearson Korelasyonu, \*:p < .05*

As shown in Table 4, a negative and high-level correlation was found between the personal adaptation subdimension scores, academic adaptation subdimension scores, and total University Life Adaptation Scale scores and the perceived stress scale scores of nursing students ( $p < .05$ ). After the peer mentoring programme, it was observed that nursing students with higher personal adaptation, academic adaptation, and total adaptation scores exhibited lower perceived stress levels.

**Discussion**

This study, conducted at a newly established nursing education institution, suggests that the peer mentoring programme reduced the perceived stress levels of nursing students and enhanced their adaptation to university life. Jacobsen et al. (2022), in their meta-analysis, found that peer mentoring programmes empower students in becoming professional nurses, facilitate their clinical adaptation, and are beneficial for both mentees and mentors when planned effectively. Within the framework of the peer mentoring programme, the social interaction between mentees and mentors, which extends beyond academic support to include personal and social adaptation, is believed to have contributed to reducing students’ perceived stress levels and improving their adaptation to university life.

Similarly, Seshabela et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative study with 20 nursing students, examining their perspectives on the role of peer mentoring programmes in fostering professional relationships within a supportive environment. They found that mentor students significantly contributed to mentees’ ability to develop professional relationships by providing appropriate

support during nursing education and practice. Additionally, Bahari (2024) in their quantitative study evaluating the effectiveness of a peer mentoring programme implemented for nursing students, reported that mentees exhibited improvements in problem-solving skills, adaptation to the university environment, self-awareness, and self-confidence, and became more effective in building positive relationships with their mentors. Consistent with the findings in the literature, this study also found that the peer mentoring programme implemented in the nursing department resulted in reduced perceived stress levels and improved adaptation to university life.

Being a nursing student in a newly established institution located in a region with limited social opportunities can be a source of stress for students. The peer mentoring programme provided a supportive environment for these students, which is believed to have contributed to reduced perceived stress levels and improved university life adaptation.

In this study, female students participating in the peer mentoring programme showed a greater reduction in perceived stress levels compared to male students, while male students demonstrated greater improvement in academic adaptation levels compared to female students. Similar findings were reported in the study by Aslan and Erci (2021). The higher number of female students in this study may have influenced these results.

In a study conducted by Kiye et al. (2020) with students from an education faculty, they found that the peer mentoring programme they implemented increased students’ adaptation to university life. Similarly, Sune (2023) found in their study that the peer mentoring programme positively impacted students' sense of belonging to the university and their adaptation. Similar results were obtained in this study as well. It is believed that the interaction with different individuals during the programme, as well as mentees feeling supported by their mentors when encountering problems, led to these outcomes.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The results obtained in this study revealed that nursing students did not have sufficient knowledge about the peer mentoring programme. With the implementation of the peer mentoring programme, it was found that the students' perceived stress levels decreased, and their adaptation to university life improved. This adaptation was observed across all sub-dimensions: personal, social, and academic. The programme was particularly effective in

reducing perceived stress levels more significantly in female students compared to male students, and in mentee students compared to mentors. Additionally, the peer mentoring programme increased the academic adaptation levels of female students more than male students. Students who had knowledge about the peer mentoring programme showed greater improvements in personal adaptation, social adaptation, and overall university life adaptation after the programme compared to students with less or no knowledge of the programme.

The results of this study show that the peer mentoring programme enhances nursing students' adaptation to university life, personal and academic adaptation, and reduces their perceived stress levels. The findings from the existing literature and this study indicate that the peer mentoring programme brings about highly beneficial changes in the development of students in nursing education. Therefore, all institutions offering nursing education, particularly those introducing nursing education, should integrate the peer mentoring programme into their educational systems and monitor the outcomes to ensure the programme's sustainability. There is a limited number of intervention studies related to peer mentoring in nursing departments in national and international literature. This suggests the need for further research to evaluate the effectiveness of peer mentoring interventions.

In this study, due to the absence of third-year nursing students during the research period, second-year students were selected as the mentor group. This represents a limitation of the study. Additionally, data was not collected from nursing students not involved in the peer mentoring programme or from students in other departments of the same institution who had the opportunity to observe the mentors and mentees. This is another limitation of the study. The findings of this study reflect only the students from the nursing education institution where the research was conducted. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to all nursing students in Turkey.

**Ethics Committee Approval:** Ethics committee approval was obtained from Yozgat Bozok University Social and Humanitarian Ethics Committee (Tarih: 19.10.2022, Sayı: E-37/28)

**Informed Consent:** Informed consent has been obtained from from students who participated in this study

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