

INFORMASI ARTIKEL

Received: March, 07, 2026

Revised: May, 03, 2026

Available online: May, 04, 2026

at: <https://e-jurnal.iphorr.com/index.php/mhc>

Peer social support and academic adaptation among new nursing students

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Abstract

Background: New students experience a transition period to university life that requires academic, social, and emotional adaptation. Students in the Bachelor of Nursing and Professional Nurse Program face more complex adaptation demands due to high academic workloads. Peer social support is considered to play an important role in helping new students adjust to the university environment.

Purpose: To determine the relationship between peer social support and the adaptation of new students.

Method: A quantitative approach with a descriptive correlational design and a cross-sectional method. The research population consisted of all new students of the Bachelor of Nursing and Professional Nurse Program at 'Aisyiyah University Yogyakarta in the 2025/2026 academic year, totaling 233 students. A sample of 77 respondents was selected using random sampling. Data were collected using a peer social support questionnaire and the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ). Data analysis was conducted using Kendall's Tau test.

Results: The results of Kendall's Tau statistical test showed a p-value of $p = 0,390$ ($p > 0.05$) with a correlation coefficient of -0.097 . These findings indicate that there is no significant relationship between peer social support and the adaptation of new students. The correlation coefficient shows a very weak relationship with a negative direction.

Conclusion: Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that peer social support has no significant relationship with the adaptation of new students. However, peer social support remains important as a supporting factor in the adjustment process of new students in the university environment.

Keywords: New Student Adaptation; Peer Social Support; Transition Period.

INTRODUCTION

Entering higher education represents a crucial developmental transition phase for first-year students. During this stage, students face significant changes in learning systems, patterns of social interaction, and more complex academic demands compared to their previous level of education. Students are required to be independent in managing their time, understanding learning materials more deeply, and adapting to a new academic culture. These conditions often lead to psychological pressure, academic stress, and role confusion as university students. Failure in the adaptation process can result in feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and negative impacts on students' psychological well-being and academic performance (Dyson & Renk, 2016). Therefore, understanding the dynamics of first-

year student adaptation is essential in the context of higher education. Student adaptation in higher education is a multidimensional process that includes academic, social, and emotional adjustment. Students must be able to manage academic demands, build relationships with lecturers and peers, and cope with psychological pressures such as stress and anxiety. These challenges become even more complex for students in the Faculty of Health Sciences, who are not only engaged in theoretical learning but also in practical sessions, clinical practice, and field experiences as integral components of professional education. The adaptation process is influenced by internal factors such as motivation, self-regulation, resilience, and mental health conditions, as well as external factors such as the campus environment,

academic workload, and social conditions (Cassaretto, Espinosa, & Chau, 2024). An imbalance between these factors may lead to difficulties in adjustment.

The consequences of unsuccessful adaptation are not only academic but also psychological. In the early stages, students may experience stress, anxiety, confusion, social isolation, and decreased learning motivation. If these conditions persist, the impact may develop into mild to severe depression, declining academic performance, increased absenteeism, and even the decision to discontinue studies. Research at Universitas Airlangga showed that 49.1% of first-year students experienced mild depression and that there is a reciprocal relationship between adaptation ability and levels of depression (Christy & Suprayogi, 2022). Students with low adaptation ability are more vulnerable to life stressors that worsen their mental condition. This phenomenon occurs not only locally but also nationally and globally. A study at Universitas Al Azhar Indonesia reported that 44.7% of first-year students were in the low adaptation category and only 13.6% in the high category (Rahmadani & Rahmawati, 2020). Research among medical students in West Jakarta showed that 25.3% had low adaptation, with 18.7% experiencing mild anxiety and 1.2% experiencing moderate to severe anxiety (Jeremi & Biromo, 2023). Globally, adaptation ability has been shown to correlate with emotional well-being and academic achievement. Good adaptation contributes to positive learning experiences and more stable mental health.

In response to these challenges, the government, through the "Kampus Berdampak" initiative initiated by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology, encourages strengthening the role of universities in shaping students' social character and responsibility (Tobondo & Tondowala, 2023). In addition to macro-level policies, campus communities also provide various support programs such as new student orientation, peer mentoring, group counseling, and student organizations (Nurjanah, 2020). However, the effectiveness of these programs has not been fully optimal, particularly in faculties with high academic demands such as the Faculty of Health Sciences (Shiddiq, Fitra, Patricia, Afriani, Bahar, & Malay, 2020). This indicates that interpersonal factors, especially social support, play an important role in supporting successful adaptation. Social support is a protective factor that can

increase feelings of security, self-confidence, and reduce student stress (Holliman, Waldeck, & Holliman, 2022). This support can come from family, lecturers, institutions, and peers (Shiddiq et al., 2020). Conceptually, social support includes emotional, instrumental, informational, and network support (Nasution, Dewi, & Fadilah, 2024). Such support helps students build learning motivation, increase academic engagement, and strengthen psychological resilience (Mutmainnah, 2024). Research shows that peer social support contributes to students' academic and psychosocial adjustment (Rinda, Amrain, & Nurushobah, 2025), as well as enhances learning motivation and psychological well-being (Shanti, Janssens, & Setiadi, 2021). A preliminary study conducted among first-year students indicated that 100% of respondents received social support during the early stages of their studies, with the majority of support coming from peers (60%). The dominant forms of support were emotional and informational support. However, some students still experienced difficulties in understanding the new learning system and communication patterns within the campus environment. This suggests that variations in social support experiences and levels of adaptation do not always occur in a linear manner (Rahayu, Aidi, Rizki, & Mandagi, 2021).

RESEARCH METHOD

A quantitative correlational design with a cross-sectional approach. The study was conducted at Aisyiyah University of Yogyakarta in January 2026, with Preliminary Study Letter No. 226/FIKES-UNISA/Ad/X/2025 and an ethics committee approval letter from Aisyiyah University of Yogyakarta, No. 39/FIKES-NAP/I/2025. The study population consisted of all new undergraduate nursing students, with a sample size of 233 respondents selected using purposive sampling based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. Data analysis in this study was performed using univariate and bivariate methods. Univariate analysis was used to describe the characteristics of the respondents and the frequency distribution of each research variable. Meanwhile, bivariate analysis was used to determine the relationship between peer social support and the adaptation of new students. The statistical test used was Kendall's Tau correlation test because the data scale was ordinal. The significance level was set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

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Doi: 10.56922/mhc.v5i1.2791

RESEARCH RESULTS

Table 1 Frequency Distribution of Respondent Characteristics (N=77)

Variable	Results	<i>P value</i>	<i>Korelasi koeficient</i>
Age (n/%) (Mean±SD) (Range) (Year)	(18.7±0.4) (18-19)		
18	20/26.9		
19	57/73.1		
Gender (n/%)			
Male	10/12.8		
Female	67/87.1		
Peer social support (n/%)		0.390	-0.097
Very good	0/0.0		
Good	6/7.7		
Fair	66/84.6		
Poor	5/6.4		
Very poor	0/0.0		
New Student Adaptation (n/%)			
High	20/25.6		
Moderate	57/73.1		
Low	0/0.0		

Table presents the characteristics of respondents and the distribution of research variables. The mean age of respondents was 18.7 ± 0.4 years, with a range of 18–19 years. Most respondents were 19 years old (73.1%), while 26.9% were 18 years old. Based on gender, the majority of respondents were female (87.1%), while males accounted for 12.8%. In terms of peer social support, most respondents were in the fair category (84.6%), followed by good (7.7%) and poor (6.4%), with no respondents in the very good or very poor categories. This indicates that the level of peer support received by students is generally moderate and not yet optimal. Regarding new student adaptation, most respondents were in the moderate category (73.1%), while 25.6% were in the high category, and none were categorized as low. This suggests that most first-year students are still in the process of adjusting to the academic and social environment of higher education. The results of the correlation analysis showed no significant relationship between peer social support and new student adaptation, with a p-value of 0.390 and a correlation coefficient of -0.097, indicating a very weak and negative correlation.

DISCUSSION

The majority of first-year students fall into the moderate category of peer social support (84.6%), indicating that the support received is not yet optimal. Most first-year students are categorized at a moderate level (Wenno, Ellis, & Wakasala, 2025). This condition reflects that students are still in the stage of exploring and adjusting to new social networks in higher education. Theoretically, peer support plays an important role in helping students cope with academic and social demands through emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal support (Syawitri & Jaro'ah, 2025; Worley, Meter, Ramirez Hall, Nishina, & Medina, 2023).

Most respondents are also in the moderate adaptation category (73.1%), indicating that the adjustment process is still ongoing during the early transition to university life. The majority of first-year students are in a moderate adaptation phase due to changes in learning systems, increased demands for independence, and social adjustment (Salsabila, 2025). Student adaptation is a multidimensional process influenced by internal factors

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such as self-efficacy, psychological readiness, and coping strategies, as well as external factors such as the academic environment (Zhu, Lu, Wang, Ma, & Xu, 2025).

The results of statistical analysis show no significant relationship between peer social support and first-year student adaptation ($p = 0.390$; $r = -0.097$). These findings indicate that peer support is not a dominant factor in determining adaptation. The relationship between peer support and adjustment can be very weak and non-significant depending on the context (Lestari & Purnamasari, 2022). Social support often operates through mediating variables such as academic resilience (Nur'aini, Miswanto, Munir, Pristanti, & Ravsamjani, 2024), psychological capital (Hassan, Fang, Malik, Lak, & Rizwan, 2023), sense of purpose (Feng, Xiao, & Mao, 2024), and learning motivation (Wicaksono & Utami, 2025). Peer support is also more strongly associated with psychological outcomes such as resilience and self-regulated learning rather than direct academic adaptation (Kusnah, Musawwir, & Nurhikmah, 2023). In certain contexts, such as students living away from home, peer support plays a greater role in psychological well-being (Afifah, Maulana, Azzahra, & Purwantini, 2025).

The presence of peer groups involving senior students at Universitas 'Aisyiyah Yogyakarta functions as a supportive mechanism through the provision of information and academic assistance. However, its role is indirect, strengthening students' internal factors rather than acting as a primary predictor of adaptation. The very weak and negative correlation coefficient may reflect individual differences in adaptation abilities, where some students are able to adapt independently despite receiving low levels of support (Sari & Zaini, 2024). Overall, first-year student adaptation is a complex process influenced by the interaction of psychological, social, and academic factors. Peer social support does not show a significant direct contribution to adaptation in this study (Satria & Kurniawati, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The absence of a significant relationship and the weak association between peer social support and freshman adaptation suggest that freshman adaptation is not directly influenced by the level of peer social support, but is more likely influenced by other factors such as individual motivation, coping skills, and support from family and the educational institution.

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