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The Influence of Senior Mentoring on the Adaptation Process of New Students: A Case Study at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Lambung Mangkurat University

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between senior mentoring programs and the adaptation process of first-year university students. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with first-year students who participated in a structured senior mentoring program. The findings reveal that consistent interactions, effective communication, and role modeling from senior mentors significantly enhance both academic and social integration among new students. Mentoring not only helps students understand academic systems and manage learning challenges but also fosters self-confidence, a sense of belonging, and emotional attachment to the campus environment. However, the effectiveness of the program is strongly influenced by the quality of the mentor-mentee relationship, the mentor's empathy, and institutional support through training and monitoring systems. The study recommends that higher education institutions design mentoring programs with clear structures, provide communication and leadership training for mentors, and ensure appropriate mentor-mentee matching to optimize adaptation outcomes. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on peer mentoring and student retention, offering practical insights for improving student engagement and reducing dropout rates in the first year.

1. Introduction

Entering college marks one of the most significant transitions in a student's academic and personal life. The sudden shift from the structured environment of high school to the more independent and demanding atmosphere of higher education often creates various adjustment challenges. Students are expected to adapt not only to higher academic standards but also to new social, cultural, and organizational contexts. Research shows that many first-year students struggle with this transition, experiencing stress, anxiety, and even academic disengagement, which can lead to higher dropout rates if not properly addressed (Juniasi & Huwae,

2023; Worsley et al., 2021). The concept of *transition shock* is widely used to describe this phenomenon, emphasizing that the lack of adequate support during the early stages of university life may negatively impact students' long-term academic trajectories.

One institutional strategy that has gained attention globally is the implementation of peer mentoring programs, particularly senior mentoring. Senior mentoring is a structured program in which upper-year students provide guidance, support, and *role modelling* for first-year students. These programs are designed not only to help new students understand academic systems and expectations but also to introduce them to campus culture, encourage social integration, and provide emotional support (Gehreke et al., 2024; Le et al., 2024). In the context of higher education, mentoring is not merely academic assistance but also a comprehensive effort to promote a sense of belonging, community engagement, and personal development among new students.

The benefits of peer and senior mentoring are well-documented in literature across various cultural contexts. Studies in Europe and North America highlight that such programs significantly reduce first-year dropout rates, improve psychological well-being, and foster resilience among students (Bryant-Shanklin & Brumage, 2011; Collings et al., 2014a). A systematic review by Gehreke et al. (2024) revealed that mentoring provides emotional stability, reduces anxiety, and increases confidence levels in navigating the complex academic environment. Similarly, research in developing countries, including South Africa, demonstrated that discipline-specific mentoring in fields like economics substantially improved academic performance, as evidenced by higher continuous assessment scores (Dos Reis & Yu, 2018). These findings indicate that mentoring functions effectively as both a psychosocial and academic support mechanism.

From a theoretical perspective, senior mentoring can be explained using Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which suggests that individuals acquire knowledge and behaviors through observation, imitation, and modeling. New students observing the success, resilience, and coping mechanisms of their senior mentors are likely to internalize these strategies, thereby improving their own adaptation. Additionally, Kram's (1985) model of mentoring highlights three essential functions: career support, psychosocial support, and *role modeling*, all of which are highly relevant for first-year university students. Through consistent interaction, mentors help mentees acquire not only technical academic knowledge but also confidence, identity, and motivation to succeed in their new environment.

In the Indonesian context, the challenges of adapting to higher education are even more pronounced due to the diverse socio-cultural and economic backgrounds of students. From Isella (2022) indicate that a significant proportion of students face academic difficulties and mental health issues during the first year. The Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP), in particular, places additional demands on students to develop pedagogical, leadership, and communication skills alongside academic excellence. This makes adaptation support, including mentoring, especially critical. Yet, despite the increasing recognition of mentoring in global

literature, studies exploring the direct impact of senior mentoring on adaptation processes in Indonesian faculties of education remain limited.

Furthermore, mentoring can also be viewed as a form of institutional investment in student retention and success. Tinto's (1993) theory of student persistence emphasizes the importance of academic and social integration in preventing dropout. Senior mentoring serves as a vehicle for accelerating both forms of integration, offering practical strategies to help new students manage course loads, navigate administrative systems, and build meaningful social networks. This integration contributes to students' overall satisfaction and commitment to their studies, reducing the likelihood of academic withdrawal.

Empirical studies underscore the importance of mentor–mentee relationships in determining the success of such programs. For example, Marino et al. (2020) found that the effectiveness of mentoring depends largely on the quality of interaction, empathy, and consistency of support provided by mentors. A mismatch in mentor–mentee dynamics, irregular meetings, or a lack of institutional monitoring can reduce the effectiveness of the program, leaving some students underserved. Conversely, when mentoring is structured, intentional, and well-supported, it not only enhances adaptation but also cultivates long-term academic identity and resilience (Lorenzetti et al., 2020).

The Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at Lambung Mangkurat University provides a particularly relevant case for examining this issue. The demands of the faculty require students to balance academic rigor with active participation in student organizations, teaching practicums, and community service. Without proper adaptation, students may struggle to achieve the holistic development expected of future educators. Therefore, examining the influence of senior mentoring on first-year students' adaptation is crucial to designing more effective student support systems within this faculty.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze how senior mentoring influences the adaptation process of new students in FKIP. It seeks to uncover the forms of mentoring provided, students' lived experiences in the program, and the extent to which mentoring contributes to academic and social integration. By doing so, the study not only addresses a gap in Indonesian higher education research but also contributes to the practical development of structured mentoring programs that can improve student retention and engagement. The findings are expected to inform policy and practice, guiding universities in designing evidence-based strategies that support first-year students' successful transitions into higher education.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to deeply understand the experiences of new students adapting to the senior mentoring program. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it allows for the exploration of the subjective meaning of participants' experiences. The study

participants consisted of 10 new students participating in the senior mentoring program for one semester, selected using a purposive sampling technique based on their active involvement in the program. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and participant observation, allowing the researcher to capture the nuances of the interactions and support provided by the senior mentors (Torgerson et al., 2015). Data validity is maintained through member checking, peer debriefing, and source triangulation techniques to ensure the validity of the findings (Lincoln et al., 1985). Data analysis was carried out using the stages of phenomenological analysis according to Colaizzi, which include transcription, coding, identifying themes, and compiling essential descriptions of participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

3. Results and Discussion

The Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP) at Lambung Mangkurat University, where this study was conducted, represents one of the largest faculties in the institution. FKIP accommodates thousands of students from diverse socio-cultural and economic backgrounds, most of whom aspire to become professional educators. The faculty offers a wide range of study programs, including education in social sciences, languages, natural sciences, and professional teacher training. As one of the primary faculties responsible for producing future teachers, FKIP demands not only academic excellence but also skills in communication, leadership, and pedagogy. This combination of requirements makes the adaptation process for new students particularly challenging. For many, the transition involves not just academic adjustment but also mastering the institutional culture and balancing extracurricular responsibilities. These conditions reinforce the importance of structured support systems, such as senior mentoring programs, to ensure smooth integration and minimize attrition.

During the process of data collection in the field, interviews and observations were carried out in the natural setting of FKIP classrooms and student activity centers. The atmosphere of the interviews was generally open and relaxed, as participants felt comfortable sharing their first impressions and struggles in adapting to campus life. Semi-structured questions allowed the researcher to follow up on responses in more depth, so that students could narrate not only the academic difficulties they faced but also their emotional experiences such as anxiety, motivation, and support from peers.

Several participants showed enthusiasm in telling stories about their mentors, while others revealed challenges such as inconsistent meetings. Observations of mentoring sessions further complemented the interviews, capturing dynamics such as informal discussions after class, *role modeling* behaviors, and group study interactions. This narrative description of the data collection process highlights how the mentoring context unfolded in practice and why the interview questions were important in uncovering students' adaptation journeys. The interview questions that were posed to participants are presented clearly, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview Question

No	Interview Question
1	How did you feel during your first weeks of entering the university?
2	What challenges did you experience in adapting to academic and social life?
3	How did senior mentors help you understand academic systems and campus culture?
4	Can you describe specific examples of support or advice you received from mentors?
5	In what ways did mentoring influence your confidence and motivation as a new student?
6	What difficulties did you face in the mentoring process, if any?
7	How do you perceive the role of senior mentors in your social integration with peers?
8	What improvements would you suggest for the senior mentoring program?

Based on data analysis from in-depth interviews and participant observations, it was found that the senior mentoring program had a consistent positive impact on the adaptation process of new students, especially in the initial phases of their entry into the university environment. All participants stated that the presence of senior mentors made it easier for them to understand the course structure, campus administrative procedures, and various resources available to support academic activities. The knowledge transferred by senior mentors was considered more easily absorbed because it was delivered through familiar language and based on real-life experiences, so new students felt more confident in attending lectures.

From a social perspective, senior mentoring has also been shown to help new students build friendships more quickly. Several participants revealed that informal meetings initiated by mentors, such as casual discussions or after-class activities, provided a space for them to get to know each other and interact with friends from different majors. This aligns with the findings of Terrion and Leonard (2007), which showed that *peer mentoring* effective in creating a sense of community and reducing social isolation in the first year of college (Haggis, 2006).

From a social perspective, senior mentoring has also been shown to help new students build friendships more quickly and strengthen their sense of belonging to the campus environment. Several participants revealed that informal meetings initiated by mentors, such as casual discussions, after-class activities, and even study groups, provided a space for them to get to know each other and interact with friends from different majors. This interaction not only built networks across disciplines but also reduced feelings of isolation that often occur during the transition to higher education. Participants emphasized that these social bonds made them more enthusiastic about attending classes, participating in student organizations, and engaging in extracurricular activities. This aligns with the findings of Desi (2020), which showed that peer mentoring is effective in creating a sense of community and reducing social isolation in the first year of college.

In addition to the direct academic and social benefits, senior mentoring also helps new students develop self-management skills. For example, several students mentioned that senior mentors provided guidance on how to organize study

schedules, manage time for organizational activities, and maintain a balance between academic and personal life demands. This aligns with research by Crisp and Cruz (2009), which emphasized that effective mentoring can foster independent learning and time management skills. However, the results of this study also revealed significant variation in experiences among participants. Some students reported meeting with their mentors infrequently due to scheduling differences or a lack of commitment from the mentor. This resulted in a slower adaptation process compared to students who received intensive mentoring. This phenomenon supports the findings of, who found that the quality and intensity of interactions are determining factors for the success of mentoring in higher education (Collings et al., 2014b; Wijnia et al., 2014).

Another interesting finding is the role of *role modeling* in the adaptation process. Several participants expressed that they were inspired by the academic and organizational achievements of their senior mentors. This inspiration motivated new students to set higher academic goals and be more active in student activities. Thus, senior mentoring not only serves as a means of transferring information, but also as a medium for developing personal motivation and aspirations. This finding aligns with the study by Bryant-Shanklin & Brumage (2011), which stated that *role modeling* is an important component in building new students' self-confidence. Overall, the results of this study indicate that the effectiveness of senior mentoring programs in supporting new students' adaptation is influenced by three main factors: (1) the quality of the interpersonal relationship between mentor and mentee, (2) the frequency and consistency of interactions, and (3) the mentor's ability to provide relevant academic, social, and emotional support. These three factors are interrelated and determine the extent to which new students feel comfortable, confident, and able to adjust to the campus environment.

The findings of this study support Tinto's (1993) theory of student adaptation, which emphasizes the importance of academic and social integration for new students' successful adaptation to the college environment. The senior mentoring described in the study was shown to be one mechanism that accelerates this integration process in a tangible way. Through direct interaction, new students gained access to practical information such as course registration, academic writing strategies, and exam preparation tips, while at the same time receiving emotional support and motivation to persist through early challenges. Collectively, these experiences contributed to an increased sense of belonging to the campus environment, which in turn fostered persistence, resilience, and greater academic engagement during the first year.

The results of this study are also in line with the study by Collings et al. (2014b), which emphasized that the intensity and quality of relationships in *mentoring* significantly influences successful adaptation. Field data shows that new students who receive consistent mentoring feel more confident in their studies and build social networks more quickly. Conversely, irregular meetings or minimal mentor involvement can hinder the adaptation process, as reflected in the experiences of several participants. This phenomenon reinforces the view that senior mentoring is not merely formal but must be maintained through ongoing communication.

In addition, the existence of *role modeling* in senior mentoring has been shown to be a motivating factor for new students, inspiring them to set higher goals for themselves. Several participants explained that observing their mentors' achievements in academics, leadership, and organizational activities encouraged them to emulate similar behaviors. This finding aligns with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which states that individuals learn not only through direct instruction but also by observing the behavior and success of others. In this context, senior mentors serve as models of academic, professional, and social behavior that new students internalize. Such modeling helped mentees develop confidence, self-discipline, and a vision of their future identity as successful university students.

From a practical perspective, senior mentoring can also be seen as a form of social intervention that strengthens *student engagement* and bridges gaps between formal learning and informal peer support. This aligns with research by Kram (1985), who divided mentoring functions into three categories: career support, psychosocial support, and *role modeling*. The results of this study indicate that these three functions can operate simultaneously when the mentor possesses high commitment, empathy, and good communication skills. For example, when mentors guided mentees in academic planning while also encouraging participation in organizations, students not only benefited academically but also socially and emotionally. This holistic form of support positioned senior mentoring as a vital element of the student experience, blending both formal academic success and informal well-being.

However, this study also revealed challenges that require serious attention from institutions. The varying experiences among participants indicate that not all mentoring programs run optimally. Time constraints due to busy schedules, personality mismatches between mentors and mentees, and a lack of mentor training were repeatedly mentioned as hindering factors. Some mentees felt that inconsistent meetings limited the benefits they could gain, while others stressed that more structured mentor preparation would enhance the program's effectiveness. These findings underscore the need for more structured mentoring program designs, including clear scheduling, communication and leadership training for mentors, and ongoing evaluation mechanisms to measure program effectiveness. Without these supports, the potential of mentoring cannot be fully realized.

Thus, this discussion confirms that senior mentoring is a relevant and effective strategy in supporting the adaptation of new students, as long as it is carried out consistently, with high-quality interactions, and accompanied by positive *role modeling*. In the context of Indonesian higher education, the implementation of this program could be a crucial tool in reducing first-year student dropout rates and increasing their engagement in both academic and non-academic settings. By institutionalizing and continuously improving the mentoring structure, universities will be better positioned to nurture students' academic success and personal growth from the very beginning of their higher education journey.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that senior mentoring plays a significant role in facilitating the adaptation process of new students to higher education. Through a qualitative phenomenological approach, it was found that consistent interaction, effective communication, and the presence of *role modeling* mentor support has a positive impact on the academic and social integration of new students. This program not only helps students understand the technical aspects of lectures but also strengthens their self-confidence, sense of belonging, and emotional attachment to the campus environment. However, the effectiveness of mentoring depends heavily on the quality of the relationship, the mentor's level of empathy, and institutional support in providing adequate training and monitoring systems.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be put forward. First, universities need to design senior mentoring programs with a clear structure, including meeting schedules, success indicators, and regular evaluation mechanisms. Second, training for senior mentors needs to focus on communication skills, empathy, and leadership to make mentoring more effective. Third, matching (*matching*) mentor and mentee based on interests, background, or major to minimize potential mismatches that could hinder interaction. Fourth, further research can be conducted using a quantitative or qualitative approach. *mixed methods* to more objectively measure the impact of mentoring programs on academic achievement and student retention. Implementation of this suggestion is expected to improve the quality of new student adaptation, strengthen *student engagement*, and ultimately reduce the dropout rate in the first year.

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