

## Coming Back to Campus: Factors Contributing Post-COVID-19 Adjustment of University Students\*\*

### Kampüse Dönüş: Üniversite Öğrencilerinin COVID-19 Sonrası Uyumunu Etkileyen Faktörler\* \*\*

F. Cemre YAVUZ ŞALA<sup>1</sup>, Sema Nur TOKER<sup>2</sup>, Kübra BERBER<sup>3</sup>, Esra Ece TAŞKIN<sup>4</sup>,  
Ecem ÇİÇEK HABEŞ<sup>5</sup>, Müge ARTAR<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi, Eğitim Psikolojisi Anabilim Dalı. e-posta: [fcyavuz@ankara.edu.tr](mailto:fcyavuz@ankara.edu.tr)

<sup>2</sup> Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi, Eğitim Psikolojisi Anabilim Dalı. e-posta: [stoker@ankara.edu.tr](mailto:stoker@ankara.edu.tr)

<sup>3</sup> Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi, Rehberlik ve Psikolojik Danışmanlık Anabilim Dalı. e-posta: [kberber@ankara.edu.tr](mailto:kberber@ankara.edu.tr)

<sup>4</sup> Kapadokya Üniversitesi Beşeri Bilimler Fakültesi, Psikoloji Bölümü, e-posta: [ece.taskin@kapadokya.edu.tr](mailto:ece.taskin@kapadokya.edu.tr)

<sup>5</sup> Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi, Rehberlik ve Psikolojik Danışmanlık Anabilim Dalı. e-posta: [ciceke@ankara.edu.tr](mailto:ciceke@ankara.edu.tr)

<sup>6</sup> Kapadokya Üniversitesi Beşeri Bilimler Fakültesi, Psikoloji Bölümü, e-posta: [muge.artar@kapadokya.edu.tr](mailto:muge.artar@kapadokya.edu.tr)

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#### ABSTRACT

The transition to face-to-face education after COVID-19 has brought along new changes that need to be adapted for students. This study aims to reveal how the state anxiety levels of individuals predict life satisfaction through the adjustment to university life after post-COVID face-to-face education. Besides, the differences in anxiety, life satisfaction, and university adjustment in 2nd and 3rd-graders were tested. The study group consists of 263 university students. Data were collected through The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, The Adjustment to University Life Scale, and The Satisfaction with Life Scale. Independent groups t-test was used to test whether the scores differed at the grade level, and Structural Equation Modelling was used to

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test the hypothesized model. Research findings indicate that there is no difference between the levels of state anxiety, life satisfaction, and adjustment to university life of second and third-year students. In other words, there is no significant difference between students who started university face-to-face and online in terms of relevant variables after the pandemic. According to the structural equation modeling findings, state anxiety is a significant predictor of life satisfaction through adaptation to university life. The model-data fit was found to be good and the indirect effects were statistically significant. The findings were discussed in line with the relevant literature. Based on the findings of the present study, a focus on university adaptation programs and interventions can be recommended after possible crises in the future.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Anxiety, Adjustment, Life Satisfaction

## ÖZ

Türkiye’de bir buçuk yıllık çevrimiçi eğitimden sonra tekrar yüz yüze eğitime geçilmesi öğrenciler için uyum sağlanması gereken yeni değişiklikleri beraberinde getirmiştir. Bu çalışma, yüz yüze eğitime geçilmesinin ardından kampüse dönen bireylerin durumluk kaygı düzeylerinin üniversite yaşamına uyumları aracılığıyla yaşam doyumlarını nasıl yordadığını ortaya koymak amacıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Ayrıca ikinci ve üçüncü sınıf öğrencilerinin uyum, kaygı ve yaşam doyumunu düzeylerinde farklılaşma olup olmadığı test edilmiştir. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu 263 üniversite öğrencisi oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmada Durumluk Kaygı Ölçeği, Üniversite Yaşamına Uyum Ölçeği ve Yaşam Doyumu Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Söz konusu değişkenlerden alınan puanlarda sınıf düzeyinde fark olup olmadığını incelemek için bağımsız gruplar t-testi, kurulan modeli test etmek için yapısal eşitlik modellemesi kullanılmıştır. Araştırma bulguları, ikinci ve üçüncü sınıf öğrencilerinin durumluk kaygı, yaşam doyumunu ve üniversite yaşamına uyum düzeyleri arasında fark olmadığı yönündedir. Bir başka deyişle üniversiteye yüz yüze ve çevrimiçi olarak başlayan öğrenciler arasında pandemi sonrası ilgili değişkenler açısından anlamlı bir fark bulunmamaktadır. Araştırma kapsamında test edilen model bulgularına göre durumluk kaygı, üniversite yaşamına uyum aracılığıyla yaşam doyumunun anlamlı bir yordayıcısıdır. Bu modelin verilerle uyumu iyi düzeyde bulunmuş ve dolaylı etkiler istatistiksel olarak anlamlı çıkmıştır. Bulgular literatürdeki çalışmalarla karşılaştırılarak tartışılmıştır. Gelecekte meydana gelebilecek olası kriz durumları sonrasında üniversite öğrencilerinin kaygı düzeylerinin yaşam doyumuna olan negatif etkisinin önlenmesi için üniversiteye uyum programlarına ve müdahalelerine ağırlık verilmesi önerilebilir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** COVID-19, Kaygı, Uyum, Yaşam Doyumu

## INTRODUCTION

Pandemic can be defined as a phenomenon that, throughout history, not only threatens the physical health of many people on a global scale, but also changes and transforms daily life and social practices. The current COVID-19 pandemic has brought and continues to bring various physical, emotional, social, and economic challenges to

individuals. While some of these challenges are due to the nature of the pandemic, others are due to the regulations put in place. Restrictions of mobility and social interaction, as well as the closure of businesses and institutions, have had a negative impact on physical activity, social interaction, and access to educational opportunities, social media use and employment (Caputo & Reichert, 2020; Sahin, Tasci & Yan, 2020; Salceanu, 2020; Zhao & Zhou, 2021). As a result of these changes, mental health has come to the fore as one of the dimensions where the effect is most visible in the COVID-19 process, both as a result of changes in other fields and as a separate dimension. An examination of prior studies by Rajkumar (2020) on the mental health effects of the pandemic indicates that prevalent psychological responses to the COVID-19 outbreak include symptoms of anxiety and depression, affecting approximately 16% to 28% of individuals, alongside self-reported stress levels reported at 8% (Rajkumar, 2020).

Rates of psychological problems increase after major crises (Ettman et al., 2020). On the other hand, the nature and severity of the problems encountered vary by age and group specification. Haliwa et al. (2020) underscored that university students constitute one of the groups most profoundly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the physical robustness and reduced susceptibility to viral infection among university students may offer some protection against the negative repercussions of the pandemic, certain developmental traits could still pose risks for them. University life introduces new issues to students' agendas, such as completing course credits, managing time; interpersonal relationships with family, peers, and teaching staff; dealing with stress; and preparing for a post-university career/work life. Because there are many changes in multiple areas of their lives, university students may experience stress. When stress is not effectively addressed, individuals might encounter symptoms that adversely affect their quality of life, happiness, and overall life satisfaction, thereby impeding their ability to adjust (Long, Halvorson & Lengua, 2021). Many developmental difficulties may make it difficult for them to adjust to their environment and make them vulnerable to mental health problems (Beiter et al., 2015). Moreover, following the COVID-19 era,

various stressors linked to the pandemic have worsened adjustment issues among students and affected their mental well-being (Singh, Sharma, Sharma & Zaidi, 2022), which may be related to the distinctive obstacles and changes they faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the regulations made for this unique situation.

COVID-19 brought drastic changes to university life. Many countries have closed higher education institutions due to quarantine and social distancing measures. Thus, university students have been deprived of face-to-face education opportunities, particularly peer interaction. Before the onset of COVID-19, college students typically centered their daily routines around freely engaging in diverse social groups, engaging in leisure activities, and fostering relationships. During COVID-19, changes in communication channels with instructors and other authorized persons, course load changes, and new performance evaluation methods have all resulted in academic and technological stress (Morales-Rodríguez, 2021). Also there have been residential changes during the pandemic, many students had to leave their dormitories and return to their homes where they were mostly stuck because of curfew. These changes took away their opportunities for entertainment and negatively affected their social lives.

The disruption of daily routines and reduced social and physical interaction with others lead to negative emotions such as disappointment, frustration, and boredom (Cao et al., 2020). As a result, anxiety is one of the most intense emotions felt in this situation (Batista et al., 2021). Recent studies indicate that the regulations for isolation, as well as the consequences of the pandemic, such as uncertainty and rapid change, put young people in jeopardy (Pappa et al., 2020). Moghanibashi-Mansourieh (2020) found in their study that anxiety levels increased with education level. According to research carried out by Deng and colleagues (2021), students who continue their university education during the COVID-19 process exhibit more anxiety symptoms than graduate students (Deng et al., 2020). In a meta-analysis study on mental health during the pandemic, being a student and being exposed to social media content were identified as important risk factors for emotional distress (Xiong et al., 2020) and anxiety emerges as

one of the primary indicators of emotional distress, especially among young individuals (Salguero et al., 2012).

University students may experience anxiety about their future education, career, and social life, the well-being of themselves and their loved ones, the uncertainty of the disease's course and the isolation process, and their social relations and economic conditions during the pandemic process. (Trzebiński, Cabański & Czarnecka, 2020). Studies suggest that anxiety levels of university students may differentiate depending on their grade levels (i.e., the number of years they spent in university). In terms of age, younger students demonstrated heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and depression (Andrades-Tobar et al., 2021) and particularly those in their first year of university, are more vulnerable to psychological symptoms and experience intense anxiety (Brady & Kendall, 1992). Certain researchers have observed that for many beginners in higher education, learning through virtual media platforms is deemed adequate and relatively uncomplicated (Al-Mawee et al., 2021), and the psychological distress symptoms of senior-level students differed significantly from those of junior-level students (Al-Dwaikat et al., 2020). Therefore, it can be concluded that the psychological effects of the pandemic on university students vary depending on their stage of education.

Moreover, anxiety is significantly influenced by gender, socioeconomic status, and social media usage. According to research, women, and individuals with lower socioeconomic status tend to experience higher levels of anxiety during the COVID-19 process (Ozdin & Bayrak Ozdin, 2020; Zhou & Guo, 2021), and using social media predicts emotional distress (Marzouki, Aldossari & Veltri, 2021). It has been discovered that the findings of these studies on the general population are also applicable to university students (Silva et al., 2021). While anxiety levels may vary depending on factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, and educational level, the pivotal role of anxiety in adjustment is emphasized. Anxiety makes it difficult to deal with and adjust to adversity in a functional manner (Lopes & Nihei, 2021). When viewed in the context of university adjustment, anxiety has a negative impact on the process because it reduces school attendance, motivation, and success (Cai, 2000).

When studies related to anxiety were examined, it was discovered that many variables were associated with anxiety. Life satisfaction is one of the most prominent of these variables (Lopes Nihei, 2021; Paolini, Yanez, & Kelly, 2006). The evaluation of one's current quality of life, which serves as a fundamental gauge of psychological health and overall well-being, is known as life satisfaction (Li et al., 2021). Life satisfaction is important for subjective well-being and adaptive psychosocial functioning (Suldo & Huebner, 2006). It has also been regarded as a construct worthy of specific attention because it provides a global index of well-being based on criteria determined by individuals rather than researchers (Diener, 2000). According to the findings, a high level of anxiety is associated with a low level of life satisfaction (Lam & Zhou, 2020; Satici et al., 2021). When examining studies involving university students, a similar pattern emerges, and anxiety is identified as one of the most important determinants of university students' life satisfaction (Bukhari & Saba, 2017; Serin, Serin & Ozbas, 2010). Studies indicate that the pandemic has a pronounced adverse effect on students' life satisfaction and levels of anxiety. Maria-Ioanna and Patra (2022) discovered that students experiencing higher levels of anxiety, psychological distress, and depressive symptoms report lower levels of life satisfaction. Paschali and Tsitsas (2010) noted that students with low levels of state anxiety scored higher on measures of life satisfaction in their research.

On the other hand, life satisfaction, unlike anxiety, is said to have a positive effect on university adjustment. Adolescents who express high levels of life satisfaction demonstrate better performance across all academic, personal, and interpersonal functioning scales compared to those who report dissatisfaction with their lives. (Gilman & Huebner, 2006). Considering being away from family, making new friends, differences in teaching strategies, and other difficulties differ from previous education levels, it is necessary to adjust to and improve life in order to feel satisfied without experiencing any psychological discomfort (Roberts & Zelenyanski, 2002). According Diener (2012), a high level of life satisfaction is identified as one of the most crucial indicators of successful adjustment to life, with successful adjustment to school, work,

and family life being strongly correlated with high levels of life satisfaction (Diener, 2012). In this context, life satisfaction has a significant influence on the mental health of young individuals. Because it is associated with better adjustment in difficult situations and plays an important role in daily life events (Liu et al., 2014), it can be considered an important variable in understanding adjustment after the COVID-19 process. On the other hand, based on a study by Rogowska and colleagues (2021), the majority of university students (60.54%) are satisfied with their lives; however, Turkey has the lowest score reported by participants (28.06%). Life satisfaction is regarded as an important variable in this context, and the discovery that the variables predicting life satisfaction differ from one society to another (Rogowska et al., 2021) emphasizes the importance of studying this relationship. The fact that it serves as a central protective factor against psychological symptoms implies that it might act as a mediator in the relationship between variables linked to the COVID-19 pandemic (Trzebiński et al., 2020).

Variables such as anxiety and life satisfaction have been highlighted in studies that affect students' university adjustment during COVID-19. However, returning to the pre-COVID lifestyle in the post-COVID period brings about several changes that must be adjusted. In the studies conducted during the COVID-19 process, it is stated that once higher education institutions reopen, students will not face the same situation they did prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Aristovnik et al., 2020). The ending of restrictions and the transition to face-to-face education necessitated a reversal of the changes made in the process and altered the daily routines established in the pandemic. Many restrictions have been removed in the current period, and face-to-face education has begun in the 2021 fall semester. In the relevant literature, many studies focus on adjustment to university life during the COVID-19 period (Branje & Morris, 2021; Salceanu, 2020) and those studies revealing the adjustment experiences of university students in the post-COVID period (Ren et al., 2021) are limited. As humanity approaches the post-COVID-19 pandemic period, life satisfaction aids in the reduction

of anxiety symptoms and also is critical for improving mental and adjustment to university.

In this context, the research aims to investigate a) the mediating role of life satisfaction in the relationship between the anxiety level of university students and their adjustment to university life after coming back to the campus b) the differences of anxiety, adjustment, and life satisfaction levels between 2nd and 3rd year students. Second graders commenced their college education through distance learning due to pandemic conditions, whereas third graders enrolled in university prior to the pandemic and, after one semester of in-person instruction, transitioned to online education. Following a year and a half of online education, in-person education has commenced in Turkey. Therefore, studying with these two grade level students makes it possible to examine the post-pandemic anxiety, adjustment, and life satisfaction of university students.

## **METHOD**

In line with the research questions, a correlational study was conducted using structural equation modeling and inter-group comparisons. Correlational research can have a purpose of examining predictive relationships between variables (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2022), and this approach is undertaken in line with the present study aims.

### **Procedure and Participants**

Data were gathered from university students in Nevşehir and Ankara, Turkey. After the restrictions were lifted, the participants were recruited by convenience sampling. A fast and practical approach was needed because of the time-sensitive conditions (i.e., changes in post-COVID-19 anxiety and adjustment), hence the study group was determined due to convenience. 2nd and 3rd graders were chosen since 2nd graders started online to their university education while 3rd graders' courses turned online after a semester of face-to-face education. This aligned with the research question of whether



this situation made a difference in their adaptability, anxiety levels, and life satisfaction. Participants were informed about the aims of our study and their permission was taken through consent forms before they filled out the surveys. The research was approved by the ethical committee of Cappadocia University.

Initially, 279 university students were reached using convenience sampling. The data for this study were collected shortly after the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, which resulted in some challenges for participant recruitment. Due to time-sensitive conditions about the study concepts (i.e., post COVID-19 university adjustment, state anxiety), the sample size was determined by the number of participants who could be feasibly recruited within the available timeframe. Data were collected during the fall semester of 2021 which was the first face-to-face semester after one and a half years of online education in Turkey. After removing two missings (participants who filled out only demographics and no further), and nine older adults who were not in the scope of the emerging adult sample, the data distribution was checked. Skewness and kurtosis coefficients were all between -1 +1, ranging from -.84 to .92. Thus, the data was close to normal distribution. Mahalanobis Distance was used in order to test if there are any outliers, in other words, to test if there are any violations in multivariate normality. There were 263 participants remained in the final dataset after removing 5 outliers. The following analyses were conducted with 263 undergraduate students whose ages changed between 19-29 with a mean age of 21.53 (SD: 1.60). Regarding gender, there were 208 females, 52 males, and 3 others.

### **Measures**

Data were collected through the following measures: The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI), The Adjustment to University Life Scale, and The Satisfaction with Life Scale.

#### *The Personal Information Form*

The personal information form was prepared by researchers. It contains questions about participants' demographics such as age, gender, university, and department.

*The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI)*

The original inventory developed by Spielberger, Gorsuch, Lushene, Vagg, and Jacobs (1983) and adapted into Turkish by Öner and Lecompte (1985), contains two separate forms for measuring state and trait anxiety levels. Each measure consists of 20 items evaluating how one feels in terms of anxiety at certain times or in general. Both measures have items on whether anxiety is present (“*I feel nervous.*”) or absent (“*I feel calm.*”). Participants rate each item on a 4-point Likert-type scale (for Trait Anxiety: (1) Almost never, (4) Almost always; for State Anxiety (1) Not at all, (4) Very much so). A total score is obtained separately for each of the two subscales. Each scale has 4-point Likert-type 20 items, therefore the scores from the scales vary between 20 and 80. Higher scores from each scale mean higher anxiety levels (Öner & Le Compte, 1985). Öner and Le Compte (1985) reported that the inventory is administered to a variety of groups: University students, high school students, patients, and typical adults. Kuder-Richardson-20 coefficients ranged between .83 and .87 for the State-Anxiety form which was used in the present study. Test re-test reliability coefficients ranged from .71 to .86 in the adaptation study.

*The Adjustment to University Life Scale*

The composite measure of 60 items developed by Aslan (2015) evaluates the academic, social, and personal adjustment of university students. Responses were given on a 5-Point Likert-type scale (1= “I do not agree at all”, 5= “I completely agree”). High scores on the scale indicate good university adjustment, while low scores indicate maladjustment. The scale is developed to measure university adjustment, and therefore was administered to university students (ages ranging from 18-30) in the original scale development study. According to the original study, test re-test reliability coefficients were .82 for personal adjustment, .61 for social adjustment, and .84 for academic adjustment. Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficients were .92 for personal adjustment, .89 for social adjustment, and .93 for academic adjustment. CFA results confirmed the three-factor construct of the scale ( $\chi^2/df = 3.38$ , RMSEA= .08, CFI= .93, NFI= .91).

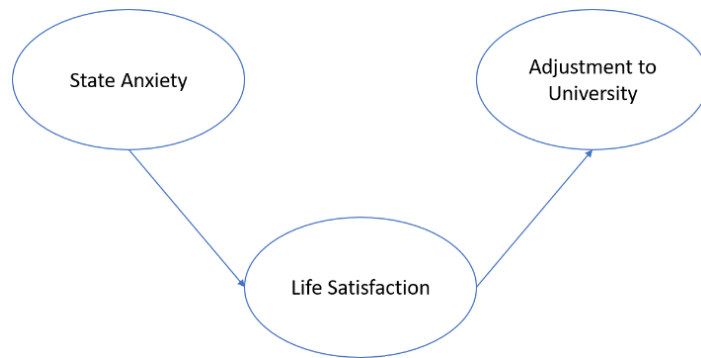
### *The Satisfaction with Life Scale*

The 5 items scale by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) was used to measure to assess individuals' life satisfaction. Participants rate each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Yetim (1993) adapted the scale to Turkish in a group of university students (ages ranging from 18 to 32), and EFA results showed that the items clustered on a single factor. Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient was reported as .86 and test re-test reliability was .73 (Yetim, 2003).

### **Data Analysis**

This study has two purposes: The first aim was to examine differences in anxiety, life satisfaction, and university adjustment in 2nd and 3rd-grade students. For this purpose, independent samples t-test was conducted. For the second purpose, a hypothetical model (presented in Fig. 1) was tested using structural equation modeling.

**Figure 1.** The Hypothetical Model



After examining the data, and confirming that the assumptions for the analyses were met (which was explained before), structural equation modeling was used for analyzing the indirect effects. In accordance with this purpose, first, the measurement model was tested, to see if the data collection tools were valid, if the constructs in the model were differing from each other and if the data-model fit was acceptable. After testing the measurement model, structural model was tested, using maximum likelihood estimates. The results of these analyses are presented and discussed in the next part.

## FINDINGS

### **Grade Differences in Anxiety, Adjustment, and Life Satisfaction**

In order to investigate the differences in anxiety, adjustment, and life satisfaction levels between 2nd and 3rd-year students, t-tests were conducted. The results indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between the anxiety levels of second and third-grade students ( $t(246) = 400, p > .05$ ). Also, there is no statistically significant difference between the university adjustment scores of these two groups, either ( $t(246) = -1.078, p > .05$ ). Finally, no significant difference was found between their levels of life satisfaction ( $t(246) = -1.545, p > .05$ ).

### **Structural Equation Modeling Results**

#### *Measurement Model Findings*

The first step of structural equation modeling is testing the measurement model. There are three latent variables in the model: State anxiety, life satisfaction, and adjustment to university. Adjustment to university has three observed variables: Personal adjustment, social adjustment, and academic adjustment. Life satisfaction is a one-dimensional variable. Therefore, the five items of the scale were the observed variables of life satisfaction. State anxiety is also a one-dimensional variable; however, it consists of 20 items. Therefore, the item parceling method was used and three parcels were created. While creating the parcels, items were rank-ordered by the size of their item-total correlation, and they were distributed evenly. The Pearson correlation coefficients between the observed variables are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Observed Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. PA	-										
2. SA	.59*	-									
3. AA	.45*	.48*	-								
4. LS I1	.44*	.20*	.35*	-							
5. LS I2	.29*	.11	.25*	.57*	-						
6. LS I3	.42*	.22*	.27*	.65*	.69*	-					
7. LS I4	.29*	.17*	.29*	.59*	.50*	.55*	-				
8. LS I5	.24*	.06	.19*	.58*	.46*	.46*	.55*	-			
9.SAP1	-	-	-	-	-	-.42*	-.21*	-	-		
10.SAP2	.42*	.28*	.34*	.35*	.30*			.23*			
11.SAP3	-	-	-	-	-	-.38*	-.13*	-.11	.79	-	
	.45*	.34*	.26*	.31*	.20*						
	-	-	-	-	-	-.42*	-.15*	-	.83*	.84*	-
	.47*	.30*	.31*	.34*	.28*			.18*			

(PA: Personal Adjustment; SA: Social Adjustment; AA: Academic Adjustment; LS I1-15: Life Satisfaction Item 1-5; SA P1-P3: State Anxiety Parcel 1-3).

The Pearson Correlation coefficients for the observed variables in Table 1 were found to vary between .06 and .84. Only two relationships in the correlation matrix turned out to be statistically insignificant. All of the remaining relationships were found to be statistically significant at the .05 and .01 levels.

**Table 2.** Fit Indices for the Measurement Model

Fit Indices	Values	Fit Situations
$\chi^2$	101.31	
df	40	
$\chi^2/df$	2.53	Great fit (Kline, 2005).
RMSEA	0.076 (90% CI: .058-.095)	Good fit (Jöreskog ve Sörbom, 1993).
CFI	0.98	Great fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999).
NFI	0.96	Great fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999).
NNFI	0.97	Great fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999).
SRMR	0.059	Good fit (Brown, 2006; Hu & Bentler, 1999)
GFI	0.93	Good fit (Schumacker & Lomax, 1996).

The measurement model shows excellent and good results in all goodness-of-fit indices as seen in Table 2. In other words, the model-data fit was between good and excellent.

**Table 3.** Factor Loads, Standard Errors, and t Values

Latent and Observed Variables	Unstandardized Factor Loads	SE	t	Standardized Factor Loads
Adjustment				
Academic	7.83	0.79	9.96	0.61
Personal	11.30	0.74	15.22	0.87
Social	6.93	0.60	11.59	0.69
State Anxiety				
SA1	3.94	0.20	19.25	0.92
SA2	3.30	0.18	17.89	0.88
SA3	3.62	0.18	20.07	0.94
Life Satisfaction				
LS1	1.38	0.08	16.26	0.86
LS2	1.09	0.10	11.27	0.66
LS3	1.15	0.08	13.51	0.76
LS4	1.15	0.09	12.47	0.71
LS5	1.21	0.11	11.45	0.67

When the factor loads and t values in Table 3 are examined, it can be stated that the factor loads for the scales of the variables are at high levels and the error values are quite low. This is proof that the used scales for measuring the variables in the model work well (Şimşek, 2007).

**Table 4.** Correlation coefficients between latent variables

Latent Variable	1	2	3
1. Adjustment	-		
2. Life Satisfaction	.51*	-	
3. State Anxiety	-.56*	-.41*	-

\*(p<.05)

The correlation levels between the latent variables defined in the measurement model are presented in Table 4. The correlation levels were found as -.41, .51, and -.56, all being statistically significant.

Structural Model Findings

Figure 2. Path Coefficients for the Structural Model (Standardized Values)



In Figure 2, the results of the structural model with standardized coefficients are presented. The path from state anxiety to life satisfaction was found to be statistically significant ( $r=-.44$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Life satisfaction also predicted university adjustment ( $r=.53$ ;  $p<.05$ ). All relationships defined in the model were found to be significant.

The indirect effect of state anxiety on university adjustment was found to be  $-.24$ , and this effect is statistically significant ( $t=-5.43$ ;  $p<.05$ ). These findings show that state anxiety significantly predicts university adjustment through life satisfaction. The model explains 29% of the variance in university adjustment and 20% of the variance in life satisfaction.

**Table 5.** Fit Indices for the Structural Model

Fit Indices	Values	Fit Situations
$\chi^2$	143.35	
df	49	
$\chi^2/df$	2.92	Great fit (Kline, 2005).
RMSEA	0.086 (90% CI: .070-.10)	Poor fit (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).
CFI	0.96	Great fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999).
NFI	0.95	Great fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999).
NNFI	0.96	Great fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999).
SRMR	0.089	Poor fit (Kline, 2005)
GFI	0.91	Good fit (Schumacker & Lomax, 1996).

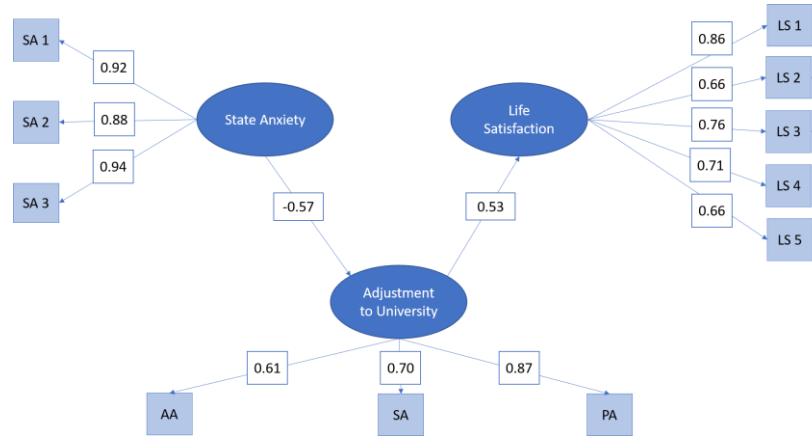
As seen in Table 5, most of the indices show that data fit the hypothesized model adequately ( $\chi^2/df$ , CFI, NFI, NNFI, and GFI). However, RMSEA and SRMR values indicate the opposite. The SRMR and RMSEA values can be interpreted that the model isn't capturing the data well (in other words, there is a misspecification with the model.). The software recommended that a path from adjustment to university to life satisfaction would be more suitable. And because that would also be theoretically correct, an alternative model, where adjustment to university is the mediator, was tested.

*Structural Model Findings (The Alternative Model)*

Standardized values for the path coefficients of the alternative structural model is presented in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Path coefficients for the alternative structural model (Standardized values)



In Figure 3, the results of the alternative structural model with standardized coefficients are presented. The path from state anxiety to life satisfaction was found to be statistically significant ( $r=-.57, p<.05$ ). Life satisfaction also predicted university adjustment ( $r=.53; p<.05$ ). All relationships defined in the model were found to be significant.

**Table 6.** Fit Indices for the Alternative Structural Model

Fit indices	Values	Fit Situations
$\chi^2$	106.90	
sd	49	
$\chi^2$ /sd	2.18	Great fit (Kline, 2005).
RMSEA	.067 (90% CI: .050-.085)	Good fit (Steiger, 2007; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993).
CFI	.98	Great fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999)
NFI	.96	Great fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999).
NNFI	.98	Great fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999).
SRMR	.069	Good fit (Brown, 2006; Hu & Bentler, 1999)
GFI	.93	Good fit (Schumacker & Lomax, 1996).

The model gave excellent and good results in all goodness-of-fit indices in Table 6. In other words, the model-data fit was between good and excellent.

**Table 7.** Indirect Effects

	State Anxiety
Life Satisfaction	
Standardized Path Coefficient	-.30
SE	(.05)
T	-6.29*

\* $t \geq |1.96|$  (statistically significant indirect effect)

As seen in Table 7, the indirect effect of state anxiety on university adjustment is -.30, and this effect is found to be significant ( $t=-6.29$ ;  $p<.05$ ). These findings show that state anxiety significantly predicts life satisfaction through university adjustment. This model explains 33% of the variance in university adjustment; and explains 28% of the variance in life satisfaction.

Overall, the indirect effects and explained variance levels were higher in the second model. It showed a good and perfect fit with the data. The mediating role of university adjustment in the relationship between state anxiety and life satisfaction was found to be significant. These findings are discussed in the next section.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to investigate the differences in anxiety, adjustment, and life satisfaction levels between 2nd and 3rd year students and the mediating role of life satisfaction in the relationship between the anxiety level of university students and their adjustment to university life after coming back to the campus.

The results suggested that all students have high levels of adjustment to university and life satisfaction, and their anxiety levels are below average. Studies indicated that the anxiety levels of university students in many countries during lockdown have increased

compared to pre-pandemic (Hajduk et al., 2022; Islam et al., 2020; OEDC, 2021; Ozdin & Bayrak-Ozdin 2020). It has been observed that most of the studies examining the anxiety levels of university students were conducted during quarantine and periods when the effects of the pandemic were intense. In a study conducted by Daly and Robinson (2021), the authors stated that anxiety levels increased at the beginning of the pandemic, but they returned to average levels over time after the restrictions were lifted. Robinson et al. (2022) also reached similar results in a meta-analysis study that compared the mental health of youth before and after the pandemic. The current research was conducted after the quarantine was over and students returned to campus. This may be one of the reasons why anxiety levels are below average.

This might be also due to the students' longing for a normal university life since it is harder for them to socialize through online education. The loss of one's usual daily routines, reduced social and physical contact with others, and lockdown practices such as age restrictions limited the support resources and increased loneliness (Banerjee & Rai, 2020; Porcelli, 2020; Saeed et al., 2022). As a result, their anxiety levels were increased (Barbosa-Camacho et al., 2022; Cao et al., 2020; Faisal, Jobe, Ahmed, & Sharker, 2022; Fu et al., 2020; OECD, 2021; Odriozola-González, 2020; Şahin, Aydın, & Kulakaç, 2020; Şahin & Baz, 2021) and life satisfaction was decreased (Aslan, Ochnik, & Çınar, 2020; Ruggieri, Ingoglia, Bonfanti, & Coco, 2021; Satici et al., 2020). In the study conducted by Çubuk (2020), university students stated that their freedom and socialization were restricted due to being confined to their homes, and at the same time, they felt lost because they could not meet with their friends face to face. Ekiz (2020) also highlighted the students' longing for their normal lives in their studies. In the study conducted by Karaman, Güven, Öztürk, Deniz, Can & Yavuz (2022) the students stated that they do not feel like a university student during the distance education process.

The pandemic and lockdowns also increase the risk of conflicts in families (Cassinat, Whiteman, Serang, Dotterer, Mustillo, Maggs, & Kelly, 2021; Zhang, 2022). In the research conducted by Zhan et al., (2022) it was observed that university students had

problems in terms of getting along, communication and conflict with their families during the lockdown period. Tasso et al. (2021), Çamur, Ersanlı, Abukan, & Canım (2022), and Son et al. (2020) also found similar results in their studies. Students who started to live with their families again during the pandemic period felt that their freedom was restricted and that they had problems such as not being able to adapt to family life. According to the research of Topçu, Yasak, Kalafat and Dikmeer (2021), as the time spent by university students in the pandemic period with their families increases, their psychological well-being decreases. With school closures and pandemic restrictions, a group of students have been forced to abandon the social advantages of the university experience, and yet another group of students, on the other hand, could not get acquainted with the university experience. For this reason, it is thought that students may not have been able to meet their needs such as independence and autonomy while living with their families (Asıcı & Günlü, 2020; Lee, Solomon, Stead, Kwon, & Ganti, 2021; Topçu et. al., 2021). Considering all these situations, pandemic restrictions might have a detrimental effect on youths' life satisfaction and mental health. Therefore, they might be more content with their life when they come back to campus and easily adjust to university.

We expected differences in adjustment levels between 2nd and 3rd year students but results suggest that there were no significant differences. The results are consistent with the previous studies. In a study carried out after universities opened, no difference was found between grades in the level of life satisfaction (Gül, 2022). In Özkara and Özkara's study (2022), which examined the level of university adjustment of first and second grades after the pandemic, no significant difference was found between first and second grades, and both groups had high levels of adjustment. Park and Kang's study (2022) indicated that the level of adjustment to university life in all grades was above the average. However, contrary to our study, the adjustment levels of the 3rd and 4th grades were higher than the 1st and 2nd grades. Considering the time period in which the current study was conducted, perhaps the level of university adjustment may have naturally increased for both groups. Bowman, Jang, Jarratt and Bono's (2019) research also supports this view. In their research, in which they examined the university

adjustment process and made weekly measurements, they found that university adjustment tended to increase during the first half year, especially in the first 3 weeks of school. Lastly, one reason why there is no significant difference between the two grades might be due to the distance education experience of the students. In the study conducted by Mittelmeier et al. (2019), it was observed that first-year students who had positive experiences with distance education had a high degree of university adjustment – especially academic adjustment.

The second purpose of the current study was to test a hypothetical model about anxiety, life satisfaction and adjustment of university students during the post-COVID period. The alternative model proposes that the relationship between state anxiety and life satisfaction is mediated by adjustment to university. Following the transition to face-to-face education, students' elevated levels of state anxiety predicted low life satisfaction in relation to the decrease in adaptation to university life. This finding, consistent with previous studies, shows that anxiety is related to adjustment to university life and predicts adjustment difficulties (Lam & Zhou, 2020; Lee et al., 2009; Satici et al., 2020). Similarly, it supports the findings that anxiety, as well as academic, social, and personal functioning in terms of adjustment, is related to life satisfaction among youth and adolescents (Gilman & Huebar, 2006; Tsitsas et.al., 2019).

Studies conducted during the pandemic have shown that university students report high levels of anxiety and poor life satisfaction, along with changes that require adaptation in their academic and social daily life practices (Rogowska et al., 2020; Pretorius & Padmanabhanunni, 2021). Similarly, the transition to face-to-face education after returning to campuses requires readjustment to changes in daily life practices. Therefore, anxiety accompanied by uncertainties, level of adjustment, and life satisfaction, which are closely related to psychological well-being, can be defined as important psychological variables for university students in the post-COVID as well as pandemic period.

Our results indicated that the increase in students' state anxiety at the onset of post-COVID was associated with poor life satisfaction. The relationship between state

anxiety and life satisfaction in relation to the changing life practices of students was found to be mediated by adjustment to university life which was evaluated in terms of academic, social, and personal adjustment (Aslan, 2015). Concordantly, adjustment to university life can be defined as an important domain for understanding the mechanism in the relationship between the state anxiety and life satisfaction of university students which is constituted by personal adjustment as the well-being of mental and physical health; social adjustment as the ability to establish and maintain social relations; academic adjustment as being able to maintain academic duties and responsibilities and engaging with the academic environment. Thereby, the functionality of university students in personal, social, and academic fields in relation to life satisfaction, which represents psychological well-being (Li et al., 2021), can be defined as areas that need to be strengthened and supported in the presence of negative emotions such as anxiety and stress brought about by uncertainty and changes.

Thus, it can be argued that empowering interventions are required in educational settings for university students, who are classified as a risk group for many psychological disorders (Yorgason et al., 2008), to be able to manage stress and anxiety and support their well-being in the presence of life crises as a pandemic. Similar to the intervention programs carried out during the pandemic (Arenas et al., 2021; Rutkowska, 2022), psychosocial interventions that support university adaptation should be continued on campuses in order to support the academic and social functionality of university students in the post-COVID period.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

This study has some limitations: Firstly, the sample size was not calculated before the data collection process. And secondly, the sample consisted of students from only Nevşehir and Ankara. However, there are practical reasons behind these limitations. During a worldwide crisis, such as a pandemic, the necessity for expedited research has arisen. Consequently, power analysis was not applicable for determining the sample size in our investigation. The sample size was established based on prevailing conditions and

the number of accessible participants. This issue may restrict the generalizability of the results and constitutes a methodological drawback of the study.

Given that state anxiety is a key predictor of life satisfaction via adaptation to university life, it is advisable to design support programs aimed at managing anxiety and enhancing adaptation, such as orientation studies and guiding services, for students newly returning to university. Subsequent studies may evaluate the impacts of these actions. Comparative studies may be undertaken to analyze the cultural variations in the post-pandemic experiences of university students in Turkey. This can offer significant insights into how the post-pandemic process ought to be managed within a cultural framework. The impact of the pandemic on university students' state anxiety, life satisfaction, and adaptive processes underscores the necessity of preemptive preparation for such crises. Adaptable psychological support systems (e.g., virtual counseling services, and stress management seminars) can be established to aid students' adjustment throughout the shift to remote education in anticipation of potential future closures. Future studies examining the impact of remote or hybrid education models on adaptation, anxiety, and life satisfaction can substantiate findings related to the resumption of face-to-face education post-pandemic. This will aid in identifying more effective instructional strategies that can be employed during shutdown periods.

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## GENİŞ ÖZET

COVID-19 pandemisi bireylerin yaşamını farklı düzeylerde etkileyen pek çok değişikliği beraberinde getirmiştir. Yüz yüze etkileşim ve hareket olanaklarının kısıtlanmasının en önemli yansımalarından biri de eğitim alanında olmuştur. Bu süreçten en fazla etkilenen gruplardan biri olan üniversite öğrencileri, COVID-19 Pandemisi sürecinde üniversite öğrencileri, içinde buldukları gelişim döneminin kendine özgü görevlerinin yanı sıra 1,5 yıl süren online eğitim uygulaması ile sosyal çevrelerinden ve günlük rutinlerinden uzaklaşarak farklı öğretim yöntemleri ve akademik görevlerle karşı karşıya kalmıştır. Normalleşme dönemiyle birlikte getirilmiş olan kısıtlamaların ortadan kalkmasıyla pandemi öncesindeki yaşam alışkanlıklarına geri dönmek tekrar uyum sağlamayı gerektirmektedir. Bu bağlamda pandemi döneminde üniversiteye yeni başlayan öğrenciler ile devam eden öğrencilerin üniversiteye uyumlarını incelemek önemli görülmektedir. Bu süreçte pandeminin doğası ve sürecin yönetimi ile ilişkili olarak gerçekleşen fiziksel, duygusal, sosyal ve ekonomik değişikliklerin üniversite öğrencilerinin ruh sağlığı üzerindeki etkisi ön plana çıkmıştır. Belirsizlik ve hızlı değişimler, kaygı beraberinde getirmekte; kaygı bireylerin yaşam doyumlarını etkileyen faktörlerin başında gelmektedir. Ruh sağlığı açısından temel koruyucu faktörler arasında yer alan yaşam doyumunun yüksek olması bireyin kişisel, akademik ve kişilerarası uyumunu olumlu etkileyen bir faktör olarak değerlendirilebilmektedir. Buradan hareketle, mevcut araştırmada üniversite öğrencilerinin kaygı düzeyleri ile kampüse döndükten sonra üniversite yaşamına uyumları arasındaki ilişkiyi yaşam doyumunun aracı rolünü ve 2. ve 3. sınıf öğrencilerinin kaygı, uyum ve yaşam doyumunu düzeyleri arasında farklılaşma olup olmadığının incelenmesi amacıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Araştırma grubunu, 1,5 yıl süren çevrimiçi öğretimin ardından yüz yüze eğitime geçilen 2021-2022 Eğitim-Öğretim yılı güz döneminde Nevşehir ve Ankara'da üniversite 2. ve 3. sınıf düzeyinde öğrenim görmekte olan 279 lisans öğrencisi oluşturmaktadır. Grup karşılaştırmalarının yapılması amacıyla tamamen çevrimiçi olarak öğrenim gören 2. sınıf öğrencileri ile bir dönem yüz yüze eğitimin ardından çevrimiçi eğitime geçen 3. sınıf öğrencileri seçilmiştir. Çalışma grubu toplamda 279 katılımcıdan oluşmaktadır. Kayıp verilerin, uç değerlerin ve araştırma grubunun özelliklerine uymayan katılımcıların verilerinin çıkarılmasının ardından kalan 263 katılımcıdan oluşan veri seti ile analizler yürütülmüştür. Araştırma grubu yaş ortalaması 21.53 (ss=1.60) olup 208 kadın, 52 erkek ve 3 cinsiyeti belirtilmemiş bireyden oluşmaktadır. Veriler, araştırma kapsamında oluşturulmuş olan Kişisel Bilgi Formu, Durumluk-Süreklilik Kaygı Envanteri, Üniversite Yaşamına Uyum Ölçeği ve Yaşam Doyumu Ölçeği kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Verilerin çözümlenmesi sürecinde araştırmanın amaçları doğrultusunda iki tür analiz yapılmıştır. İlk kısımda 2. ve 3. sınıfların kaygı, uyum ve yaşam doyumunu bakımından karşılaştırılması için bağımsız gruplar için t testi yapılmış, ikinci kısımda ise durumluk kaygı ile üniversiteye uyum arasında yaşam doyumunun aracı rolünün test edildiği yapısal eşitlik modeli kullanılmıştır.

2. ve 3. sınıflar arasında kaygı, uyum ve yaşam doyumunu düzeyleri bakımından anlamlı bir fark bulunmamıştır. Yapısal eşitlik modelinin testinde ise öncelikle ölçme modeli, ardından yapısal model test edilmiştir. Ölçme modelinde verilerin modelle uyumu iyi ve mükemmel aralığında bulunmuş ( $\chi^2/df=2.53$ ; RMSEA= .076 (%90 GA: .058-.095); CFI=.98; NFI=.96; NNFI=.97;

SRMR= .059; GFI=.93); faktör yükleri de .61-.94 aralığında ve istatistiksel olarak anlamlı çıkmıştır. Yapısal modelde ilk olarak önerilen durumluk kaygı ile üniversiteye uyum arasında yaşam doyumunun aracılık ettiği hipotetik model test edilmiştir. Bu model sonucunda; elde edilen uyum iyiliği değerlerinin bir kısmı yeterli düzeydeyken bir kısmı sınırdan ve yetersiz bulunmuştur. Analizin yürütüldüğü yazılım tarafından üniversiteye uyum değişkeninin durumluk kaygı ve yaşam doyumunu ilişkisinde aracı olduğu alternatif bir yol önerilmiştir. Bu model de kuramsal olarak mantıklı ve tutarlı olduğundan söz konusu alternatif modele yönelerek analizlere devam edilmiştir. Alternatif modelin testinde tüm yollar anlamlı bulunmuş ve uyum iyiliği değerleri iyi-mükemmel aralığında çıkmıştır ( $\chi^2/df= 2.18$ ; RMSEA=.067 (%90 GA: .050-.085=; CFI=.98; NFI= .96; NNFI=.98; SRMR=.069; GFI=.93). Durumluk kaygının üniversiteye uyum üzerindeki dolaylı etki düzeyi -.30 ve istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bulunmuştur ( $t=6.29$ ;  $p<.05$ ). Bu model üniversiteye uyumdaki varyansın %33'ünü; yaşam doyumundaki varyansın %28'ini açıklamıştır.

Sonuç olarak, bu çalışmada COVID-19'un ardından üniversite öğrencilerinin kampüse dönüş sonrasında durumluk kaygı, üniversite uyumu ve yaşam doyumunu düzeyleri ile bu değişkenler arası ilişkiler incelenmiştir. Katılımcıların genel olarak kaygı ortalamaları düşük; uyum ve yaşam doyumunu ortalamaları ise yüksek çıkmıştır. Bu durum, salgın başlangıcında yüksek olan kaygı düzeylerinin kısıtlamaların kalkmasıyla düştüğünü bulan araştırmalarla tutarlıdır. Alanyazında pandemi nedeniyle gerçekleştirilen kısıtlamaların, öğrencilerin sosyalleşme imkanlarında ve günlük rutinlerinde aksaklıklarla ve yalnızlık düzeylerinde artışla ilişkili olduğu gösterilmiştir. Bu nedenle, öğrencilerin kampüse dönmüş oldukları dönemde gerçekleştirilmiş mevcut çalışmada uyum ve yaşam doyumlarının yüksek, kaygı düzeylerinin düşük olması alanyazınla tutarlı bir bulgudur. Analiz sonuçları ayrıca bu üç değişken bakımından 2. ve 3. sınıflar arası anlamlı bir fark olmadığını göstermiştir. Bu bulgu da pandemi sonrası farklı sınıf düzeylerinde öğrenim gören üniversite öğrencilerinin karşılaştırıldığı çalışmaların birçoğuyla tutarlıdır. Araştırmanın ikinci amacına ilişkin kurulan, durumluk kaygı ile yaşam doyumunu arasındaki ilişkiye üniversite uyumunun aracılık ettiğini öne süren alternatif model doğrulanmıştır. Yüz yüze eğitime geçişin ardından öğrencilerin durumluk kaygı düzeylerinin artması, üniversite yaşamına uyumun azalmasına bağlı olarak yaşam doyumunun düşük olmasını yordamaktadır. Bu sonuç alanyazınla tutarlı olup kaygının üniversite yaşamına uyum ile ilişkili olduğu ve uyum güçlüklerini yordadığı ve akademik, sosyal ve kişisel işleyişin yanı sıra kaygının da gençler ve ergenler arasında yaşam doyumunu ile ilişkili bulunduğu çalışmalar ile örtüşmektedir. Bu bağlamda üniversite yaşamına uyumun, üniversite öğrencilerinin durumluk kaygıları ile yaşam doyumları arasındaki ilişkideki mekanizmayı anlamak için önemli bir alan olduğu söylenebilir.

Kırılgan bir grup olarak kabul edilen ve ruh sağlığı sorunları bakımından risk grubunda yer alan gençliğin öğrenme ortamlarında desteklenmesi bu gibi kriz dönemlerinde önem taşımaktadır. Bu bulgulardan hareketle, üniversite öğrencilerine yönelik kişisel, akademik ve sosyal uyumlarını destekleyici uygulamaların yapılması önerilebilir. Her üç boyuta da odaklanan üniversiteye uyum müdahalelerinin, kaygının yaşam doyumunu üzerindeki olumsuz etkilerine karşı koruyucu olacağı söylenebilir.

## **ORCID**


F. Cemre Yavuz Şala  ORCID 0000-0002-6715-2717

Sema Nur Toker  ORCID 0000-0002-7034-3776

Kübra Berber  ORCID 0000-0003-0758-1736

Esra Ece Taşkın  ORCID 0000-0003-4351-1735

Ecem Çiçek Habeş  ORCID 0000-0002-2242-1397

Müge Artar  ORCID 0000-0002-9988-3362

## **Contribution of Researchers**

Author contributions to this article are as follows:

Conceptualization of the study: Müge Artar

Introduction: Ecem Çiçek Habeş

Data Collection: Cemre Yavuz Şala, Sema Nur Toker, Kübra Berber, Ece Taşkın

Data Analysis, Method and Results: Cemre Yavuz Şala

Discussion: Sema Nur Toker, Ece Taşkın, Kübra Berber

Manuscript preparation and revisions: Cemre Yavuz Şala, Sema Nur Toker

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## **Conflict of Interest**

The researchers do not have any personal or financial conflicts of interest with other individuals or institutions related to the research.

### **Ethics Committee Declaration**

This study was conducted with the approval of Cappadocia University Ethics Commission dated 03.12.2021 and numbered ETK.FR.010.

Throughout the research process, ethical principles were strictly adhered to at all stages from planning to reporting. Data were collected from adult participants on a voluntary basis. Participants were provided with detailed information about the purpose and scope of the research, both verbally and in writing, and questions were answered when necessary. Informed consent was obtained from participants, and privacy and confidentiality rights were fully respected.



