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Evaluation of an Embedded Transition Support Module: Bringing Academic Skills and Peers into First-Year Classrooms

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Abstract

The transition to university can be challenging, and while universities provide orientation support, many students still struggle. Extending orientation through embedded supports and skill building in first-year curricula provides students opportunities to develop the academic skills required for university while growing confidence. This study evaluated the *My First Year Skills – Getting Started Module*; a support embedded in a first-year psychology undergraduate course at the University of South Australia. In-class activities were delivered by tutors and peer mentors, supplemented by asynchronous online materials. Students completed questionnaires, in Week 1 (N=155) and Week 8 (N=69), before and after the module. Student's self-reported confidence for nine out of 11 academic skills significantly increased, and the module was well received. These findings suggest embedded transition supports in the first-year curriculum, particularly with the involvement of peer leaders, can play an important role in building students' self-reported confidence with academic skills and support their transition.

***Keywords**:* Peer assisted study sessions; curriculum design; transition pedagogy, academic skill development.

Introduction

Navigating the Transition to University

The transition to university is difficult for many first-year students, propelled into unfamiliar academic learning environments which can be overwhelming, intimidating, and isolating (Heath et al., 2017; Schutze et al., 2021). First-year students must learn new academic skills whilst simultaneously adapting to social and cultural changes (Sanagavarapu et al., 2018). When students do not feel adequately prepared for university, they are more likely to experience low self-reported confidence, a sense of not belonging, underachievement, disengagement, and withdrawal (Schutze et al., 2021). Recent figures show that approximately one third of commencing students will fail to graduate from an Australian university within nine years of commencing study (Department of Education, 2023); 20 percent of students will leave university in their first year (Cooper, 2018); and first time completions of bachelor's programs have been declining since 2018 (Department of Education, 2024). Universities, therefore, have a responsibility to better support first-year students to start university well and to prioritise activities that set them up for success at first year and beyond (Birbeck et al., 2021).

Orientation Activities

Orientation is a widely used transition support activity in higher education institutions with varying degrees of success (Stirling & Rossetto, 2015; Thalluri & Penman, 2019; Weiler, 2020). A range of orientation supports exist including introductory programs run over a few hours, pre-university bridging programs run over several weeks, and as separate courses extended over the semester (Fewster-Young & Concoran, 2023; Schutze et al., 2021;). Despite universities providing orientation support

to commencing students, high levels of attrition persist in the first year of study, suggesting that orientation alone is not enough (McPhail et al., 2015). The critical period for when students decide to engage in or disconnect from their studies, is in the first few weeks of the first semester (Heath et al., 2017). Evidence indicates that orientation is less effective in supporting students to acclimatise to academic culture when (a) provided as a one-off activity prior to commencing university; (b) provided as a separate course elective; and (c) when attendance is optional (Schutze et al., 2021). Indeed, orientation support offered as an activity outside of the classroom represents an additional time cost to students. Furthermore, students who attend intensive orientation programs at the start of their studies often feel overwhelmed by large volumes of information expounded by university staff, further fuelling an already stressful experience (Heath et al., 2017).

Orientation Reimagined

In her transition pedagogy approach, Kift (2009) posits that embedding support in the first-year curriculum nurtures a more inclusive and efficient learning environment for first-year students. Transition pedagogy acknowledges that first-year curriculum must support students moving from previous experiences to university, inspire students' early engagement and retention, and provide the foundation for subsequent learning success and professional practice (Kift et al., 2010). The transition pedagogy framework allows scope for students to develop the academic skills required for university, build relationships with peers and teachers, nurture confidence and belonging, and connect with appropriate support services (Cassar et al., 2012).

There is an emerging body of evidence which suggests that orientation can be enhanced through continuation and integration into the first-year curriculum (Cooper, 2018; Thalluri & Penman, 2019;). In a study by Cassar et al. (2012), orientation support for key academic skills in numeracy, literacy, referencing, essay writing, and information technology was embedded in the curriculum of a Bachelor of Nursing program of an Australian university, underpinned by transition pedagogy. The findings reveal that students in 2009 (N =227) and 2010 (N =217) considered the embedded approach helpful for developing academic skills, alongside easing the transition process by cultivating a sense of belonging and persistence to complete their bachelor's program (Cassar et al., 2012). In a similar study, Schutze et al. (2021), embedded academic support in relation to locating scholarly literature using library databases, writing reports and essays, and revising course content in a collaborative and scaffolded environment in the curriculum of an undergraduate interdisciplinary course at an Australian university. Following these embedded supports, students' level of knowledge and confidence in academic skills increased, including the confidence to apply these academic skills in other university courses (Schutze et al., 2021). Cooper (2018), contends that embedding support in the first-year curriculum is superior to standalone support as it is delivered in courses that students are required to attend, therefore reaching, and supporting students from diverse contexts.

Moving beyond standalone orientation activities to embedding support in the first-year curriculum, bolstered by principles of transition pedagogy, aligns with current educational best practice (Nelson et al., 2011). Embedding support provides students with greater academic support to become independent learners (Richardson et al., 2012) and minimises students' expectations of having to meet academic challenges on their own (McPhail et al., 2015). Indeed, tutors play a significant role in a students' transition to academic culture and engagement. The relationship between tutors and students is instrumental in the development of confidence, as well as academic and social belonging which is a key component linked to student success (Rohden & Dowling, 2006). While many previous studies exploring embedded transition support most commonly are delivered by teaching staff (e.g., Cassar et al., 2012; Schutze et al., 2021), it remains unclear whether the effectiveness of these approaches could be further enhanced through the inclusion of peer mentors; who can relate readily to the first-year experience and model success at university.

Embedding Transition Support into the First-Year Curriculum

The *My First Year Skills – Getting Started Module* was designed to support first-year students to develop the necessary academic and social skills needed to support independent learning (Heath et al., 2017; Richardson et al., 2012). The design of the module was underpinned by key elements of transition pedagogy in that it was designed for commencing students, explicitly supported students' transition to university, and integrated teaching approaches and pedagogies that engage students in learning. The module is made up of six topics, encompassing 11 academic skills, and includes 15-minute interactive classroom-based activities that are incorporated into the first six weeks of tutorials in the semester. The tutorial activities aim to explicitly support students' transition to university by focusing on academic skill development; just-in-time supports; making explicit the range of resources that are available to students and where to go for extra support; improving confidence and creating a sense of belonging; and nurturing connections between peers, including between the first-year learners in the classroom and peer mentors through Peer Assisted Study Support (PASS) leaders (Heath et al., 2017).

The delivery of the *Getting Started Module* draws on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (Schreiber & Valle, 2013), whereby students' learning benefits from the scaffolded support of tutors and more advanced peers to develop new academic skills (Liu, 2024). The inclusion of PASS leaders in the classroom to support transition is an innovative approach to support first-year students, acting as a springboard toward positive ongoing relationships between students and teaching staff (Schreiber & Valle, 2013), and improving students' confidence (Nelson et al., 2011). The design of module content and model of delivery also targets many of the common difficulties reported by first-year students such as understanding and preparing for assessment tasks, managing their time, adhering to academic writing and referencing styles (Reading, 2016), experiencing overwhelm and overloading of information (Heath et al., 2017). The topics covered include: (1) how to effectively use the library; (2) starting your assignment (3) referencing, plagiarism and Turnitin; (4) time management; (5) academic integrity and Gen AI; and (6) safety and wellbeing (Heath et al., 2017).

Research Aims

This exploratory study contributes to the existing literature on students' transition to university in which support is embedded in the first-year curriculum of an undergraduate bachelor's degree (Heath et al., 2017). Research in this area is becoming increasingly important as very few studies have explored embedding transition support into the first-year curriculum using both peer mentors and tutors in the classroom (Heath et al., 2017; Schutze et al., 2021). As such, the current study is an evaluation of the *My First Year Skills – Getting Started Module* embedded in the core psychology course, Personal and Professional Development (PPD). We sought to explore changes in students' self-reported confidence regarding the academic skills covered, student feedback on the module itself, as well as stakeholder feedback about the module and how it was delivered from students, PASS leaders, tutors, and the PASS coordinator.

The following research questions and hypothesis will be explored:

RQ1: *Do students' self-reported confidence levels related to the 11 academic skills targeted in the Getting Started Module change following the delivery of the embedded module?*

H_1: Student's confidence levels post-module will be higher than before completing the module.

RQ2: *How helpful did students find the embedded Getting Started Module*?

RQ3: *What are the perspectives of key stakeholders (students, PASS leaders, tutors, and the PASS coordinator) in relation to the benefits and potential areas for improvement of the Getting Started Module delivery?*

Method

Participants

Following approval of the University of South Australia Human Research Ethics Committee (Application ID: 2058530), first-year students (N=261) enrolled in the PPD course were invited to participate in the study. This course is delivered in the first semester of the year, and therefore is one of the first courses most students in Psychology will undertake. Participants were eligible for inclusion if they were (a) 18 years or older; (b) enrolled in the course; and (c) provided informed consent. Students in the study primarily identified as female (69.7%) and currently working as well as studying (60.6%). Roughly a third of students were the first in their family to attend university (38.7%) and a majority had no previous higher education experience (64.5%).

Online Questionnaire

Two online self-report questionnaires were distributed to participants hosted by Qualtrics XM Software (Qualtrics, 2024). Participant identifiers such as student username and student ID number were obtained to allow pre-post matching. Sociodemographic data were also collected including past higher-education experience and if they were first in family to attend university, as these may impact on levels of student self-reported confidence. Self-reported confidence related several key academic skills necessary for successful transition into university study were also asked at Time 1 and Time 2 while students' ratings of how helpful each module was were only asked at Time 2 (Cassar et al., 2012; Schutze et al., 2021). The academic skills students were asked to rate their confidence in aligned with the *Getting Started Module* (explained further below): (1) accessing the physical library, (2) accessing online library resources, (3) finding assessment information, (4) submitting assessments, (5) referencing correctly, (6) avoiding plagiarism, (7) academic integrity, (8) ethical use of Generative AI, (9) managing own time, (10) getting support for mental health and wellbeing, and (11) contacting security. Students rated

their confidence levels in relation to the previously listed academic skills using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1, "not at all confident" (no idea where to even start) through to 5, "very confident" (could do it right now, no problem). To support our evaluation of the usefulness of the module more broadly, students were asked to rank the helpfulness of each topic in the module on a Likert scale of 1-5 (1 = very unhelpful; 5 = very helpful), as well as responding about which they found most/least helpful.

Interviews

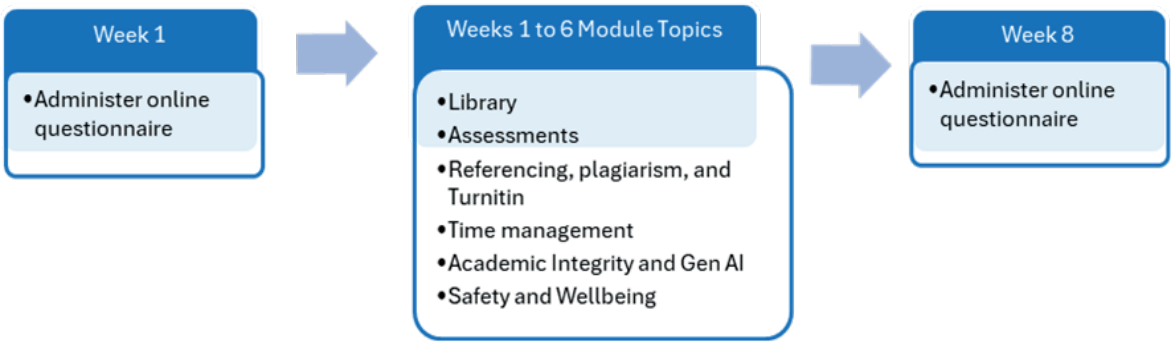
To further explore the experience and impact of the *Getting Started Module*, a series of semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders were conducted following the end of the course. Participants included four tutors, five PASS leaders, one student, and the PASS coordinator. Questions focused on each stakeholder's engagement with the initiative, what they felt they got out of participating and what impact they observed it to have on others, alongside strengths and areas for improvement. All interviews were conducted online and recorded for transcription. Transcripts were checked for accuracy against the recordings and then analysed using inductive reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and the six-step approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Initial codes and themes were subsequently refined through discussions between the research team.

Procedure

All students in PPD were introduced to the study during their first tutorial (Week 1, Time 1). PowerPoint slides featuring information on the study was presented to the students and the details explained by their tutor. An additional video clip was available to view via the *My First Year Skills – Getting Started Module* course site detailing the study and what student participation would involve. Participation in the tutorial activities was a mandatory part of the course, however completing the questionnaires and interviews was optional, and students could opt out of the study with no effect on their course grade. The research team were not directly involved in the delivery of tutorial sessions for the course. Interactive activities for the *Getting Started Module* were facilitated by tutors and PASS leaders in the first 15-20 minutes of each tutorial class for the first six weeks of the semester. PASS leaders then remained in the classroom for the duration of the regular class, interacting and connecting with students while supporting the planned classroom activities. Asynchronous resources aligned with each topic were available to students within and after their tutorial classes on the *Getting Started Module* site. Data collection commenced in Week 1 (Figure 1), with the questionnaire accessible online via a QR code and link on the PPD course site, completed by students during their Week 1 classes. The questionnaire took between 5-10 minutes to complete. Students completed the second questionnaire in the Week 8 tutorial (Time 2).

Figure 1

Data Collection Process



Statistical Analysis

A priori power analysis using G*Power version 3.1.9.7 (Faul et al., 2007), for a one-tailed paired-samples t-test indicated that the minimum sample size needed to achieve a statistical power of at least 95 percent with an alpha of 0.05 and a medium effect size (d=.05) was 45 participants. To explore RQ1, Likert scale responses were used to identify changes in self-reported confidence levels relating to each of the six module topics across time, and H1 was analysed using a paired samples t-test (one-tailed; Sullivan & Artino, 2013), to determine whether there was a significant change in confidence across time. Open-text survey responses were analysed thematically to address RQ2 (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Raw data retrieved from QualtricsXM were compiled into a SPSS version 29 datafile and analysed. Overall, the assumption of normality was met for

most of the variables and paired samples t-tests were run to obtain pre-post test scores for all confidence scores for academic skills. *Submitting assessments* and *plagiarism* required a non-parametric statistical test (the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test) to be used due to significant negative skew.

Results

Students' Self-Reported Confidence Levels Following the Embedded Module

The result for RQ1 shows that students' level of self-reported confidence in using the academic skills were lower pre-module (see Figure 2), when compared to post-module ratings (as depicted by more blue shading; see Figure 3).

Figure 2

*Time 1 Students Self-Confidence Ratings on Each Module Skill (*N=155)

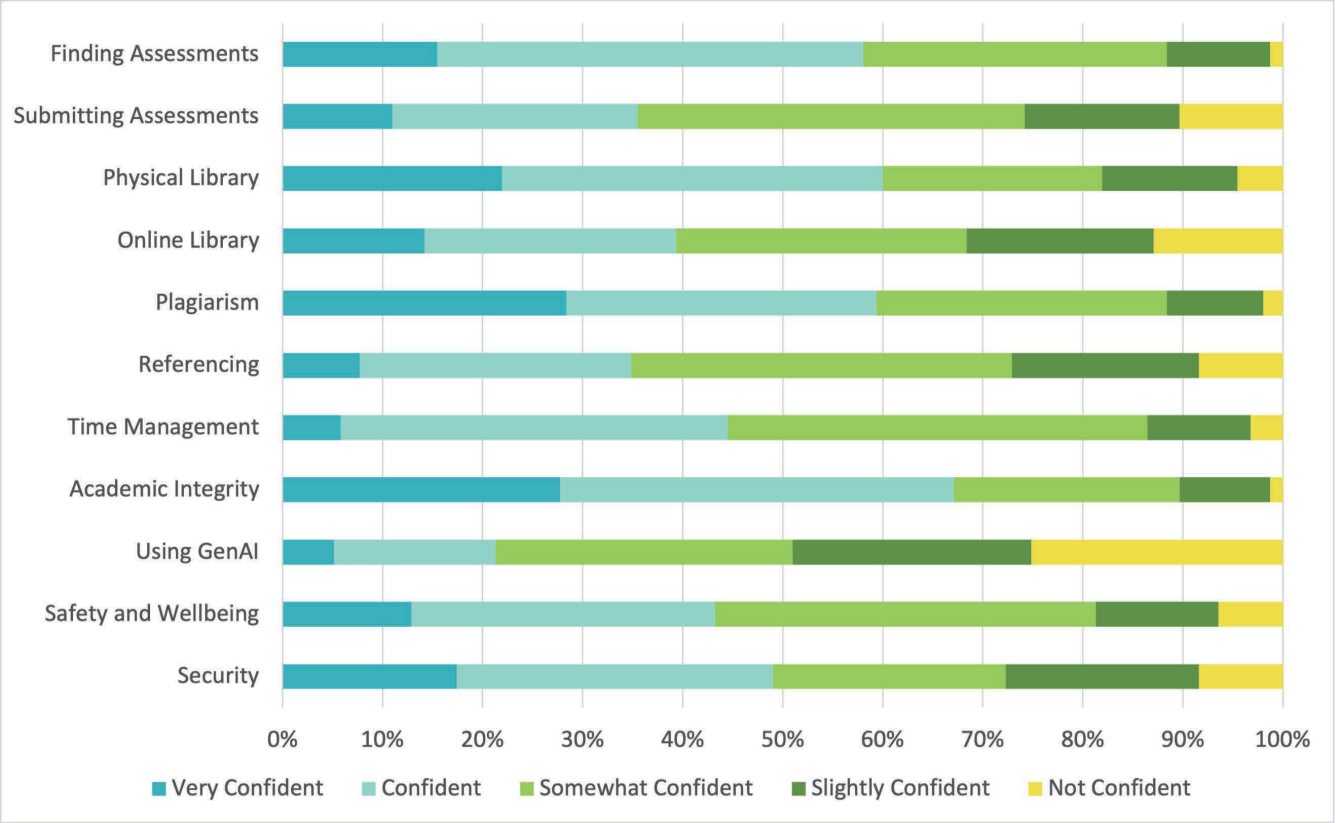
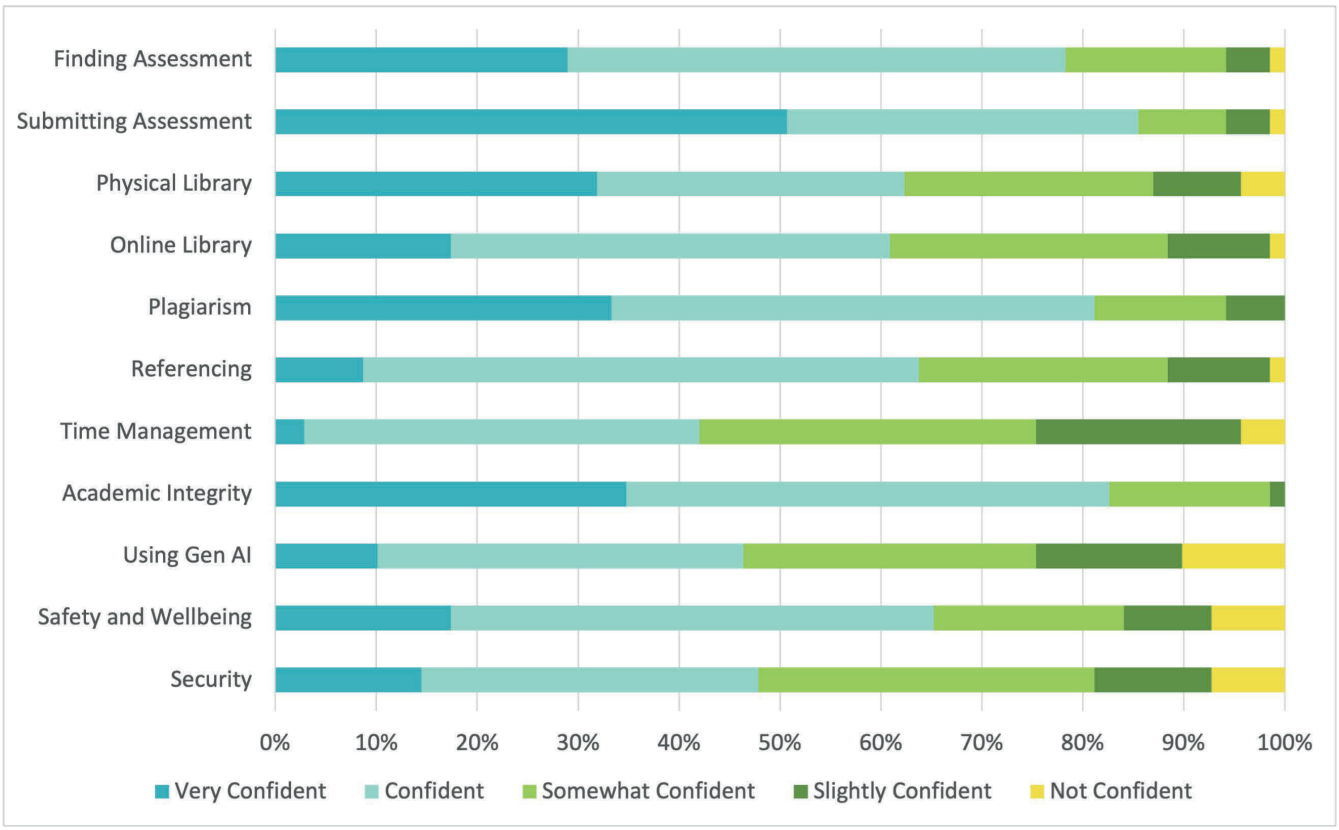


Figure 3

Time 2 Students Self-Confidence Ratings on Each Module Skill (N=69)



Paired Samples t-test

Paired samples t-tests were run for H1 to determine if there were significant increases between student's pre-module and post-module self-reported confidence scores. Overall, there were significant increases in students' self-reported confidence scores post-module for all academic skills, with large effect sizes, except for "time management" and "finding and accessing the physical library" (see Table 1). Time management was significantly lower post-module than before, while physical library had no significant difference.

Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test

Wilcoxon signed-rank tests showed that students' confidence in submitting assessments (Z=-6.31, p<.001) significantly increased from T1 (Md=3) to T2 (Md=5), with a large effect size of (r=0.54), while confidence in relation to plagiarism (Z=-2.75, p=.006) significantly increased from T1 (Md=4) to T2 (Md=4), with a small effect size of (r=0.24).

Table 1

Changes in Students' Confidence Scores for Key Academic Skills at Time 1 and Time 2 (Paired t-test and Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks; N=69)

	T1 (N=69)		T2 (N=69)		*t*(68)	Cohen's d	Z
Academic Skills	M	SD	M	SD			
Finding assessment	3.59	0.880	4.00	0.874	-3.906*	0.863	
Submitting an assessment	3.03	0.985	4.29	0.909			-6.301**
Physical library	3.57	1.169	3.77	1.26	-1.603	1.051	
Online library	2.94	1.282	3.65	0.937	-5.012*	1.177	
Plagiarism and Turnitin	3.68	1.00	4.09	0.836			-2.750*
Referencing	3.01	1.050	3.59	0.846	-4.078*	1.181	
Time management	3.36	0.785	3.16	.933	1.696	0.994	
Academic integrity	3.65	0.888	4.16	0.740	-5.693*	0.740	
Using Gen AI	2.30	1.115	3.22	1.136	-6.148*	1.234	
Mental health and wellbeing	3.12	1.078	3.59	1.102	-2.976**	1.335	
Security	3.10	1.214	3.36	1.098	-2.178**	0.995	

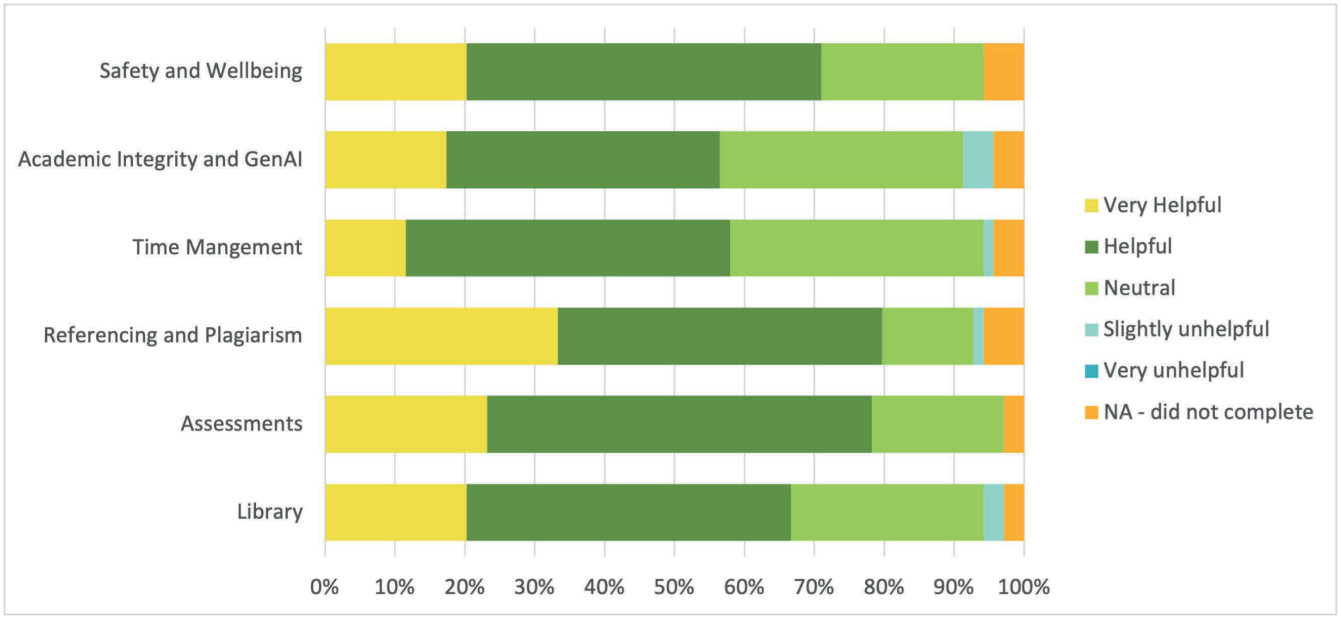
Note. Data are expressed as Means, Standard Deviations, *t*-values, Cohen's d and Z scores. *p<.001. **p<.05 (one-tailed).
The Cohen d's (1988), effect size was determined by the following cut off values 0.1 (Small), 0.3 (medium), and 0.5 (large).

How Helpful did Students Find the Embedded "Getting Started" Module?

In response to the question of whether students felt that participating in the module improved their confidence in using these academic skills, 80% of students said *yes,* while 20% said *no*. Students were asked how *helpful* they found each of the modules, and all topics had at least 50% or more students responding either *helpful* or *very helpful*; with Referencing and Plagiarism rated the most helpful at just under 80% of the T2 sample (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Proportion of Students Rating Helpfulness of Each Module at Time 2 (N=69)



When asked about the module topics they found *most*/*least* helpful, students reported the *most* helpful were referencing and plagiarism, time management, Turnitin, and library. Conversely, the *least* helpful modules reported were time management, library, academic integrity and Gen AI. Students were also asked *why* they selected specific modules to be the most helpful and least helpful. The findings from the thematic analysis for RQ2 reveal *why* students found the topics of referencing and plagiarism, time management, Turnitin, and library as the most helpful:

> Referencing, Plagiarism and Turnitin was the most helpful module as it was the most memorable and the information was given well. Participant #5
>
> Time management - gave me skills to better balance uni and life. Participant #45
>
> The library, it helped me understand the main resource for gathering data and references for my assessments and learning as a student. Participant #21

Conversely, students reveal *why* they found the topics of time management, library, academic integrity and Gen AI, as the least helpful:

> Time management, because I still struggle with it. Participant #22
>
> Library. Rushed and confusing. Participant #52
>
> GenAI because I don't really understand it normally so was just confusing. Participant #69

Key Stakeholder Perspectives: Benefits and Potential Areas for Improvement

A recurring theme from all stakeholders who participated in interviews was that the initiative was beneficial for all individuals involved; students, PASS leaders, and tutors. For the students, it was identified that having PASS leaders in the classroom helped to bridge the gap between students and tutors and helped to facilitate greater collaboration and confidence, i.e. "I got to get to know some of the first years and help them out, because some of them were a little bit hesitant, um, to ask questions to the tutors" (PASS leader 5) and "As they became more familiar with me … they did become more comfortable with, uh, opening up and talking to me, especially as, as another student (PASS leader 4). Student 1 similarly expressed "I had like the set perception in my mind that approaching a tutor is a more serious way of going around, and approaching a PASS Leader would be kind of more friendlier" and indicated the PASS leader helped ensure they took the most from what was being offered in the course by articulating how it was important throughout (and beyond) their degree. The value-add of peers in the classroom for students was also noted by the PASS coordinator in that students:

> … already go to class, they already have an amazing course coordinator and tutors and academic team to do that. So we need to go, okay, what's missing? It's the peers. It's the peer support. It's the perspective of a student who's just been there and done that.

PASS leader 3 emphasised the value of being able to explain concepts in "simple, I don't know, student language" and how this particularly resonated with students in the course. Indeed, several PASS leaders noted they wished a similar initiative had been available to them as a first-year student.

There were also clear benefits observed for the PASS leaders and tutors. The PASS Coordinator highlighted the value of the opportunity for PASS leaders in being able to connect with academic staff and gain practical teaching experience and mentoring with larger student groups in classroom settings. Typically, PASS leaders facilitate smaller group activities outside of set class times. These in-class experiences were also in alignment with the professional aspirations noted by many of the PASS leaders to work in education in the future. Many tutors also observed how having a PASS leader in the classroom enabled more engagement and interaction during small group discussions due to there being additional facilitators who were perceived as being very relatable and approachable. Tutors who had taught PPD the year prior, without PASS leaders, observed differences in the classroom dynamics and a more relaxed atmosphere with student-student and student-tutor connections forming more quickly. Tutor 4 also noted how helpful it was to have the support of a PASS leader who has more recent lived experience of being a student in the program in answering some of the commencing student questions.

More broadly, the initiative was also described as being more cost effective than traditional PASS programs for impacting a large cohort of students and had the additional benefit of increasing awareness of, the PASS program and leaders for other courses in the psychology degree.

While the feedback on the embedded *Getting Started Module* and delivery of the topics in a partnership between PASS leaders and tutors was positive overall, there were some specific areas identified in relation to how the initiative may be improved in the future. Ensuring all topics/weeks have an interactive element or activity for students was noted by PASS leader 3 and Tutor 4, suggesting this would help increase engagement and impact. PASS leaders 2 and 4 also identified an opportunity to better highlight within the topics some of the resources freely available to students through their university accounts that they may not be aware of, such as Microsoft products and OneDrive. Adapting some of the existing resources for the time management topic away from paper-based toward more technology-based tools was also identified as a strategy to potentially increase relevance and uptake for today's learners. Finally, there were some gaps in the existing resources, or knowledge/skills of the tutors and PASS leaders, that relate to bigger challenges universities are facing. For example, Tutor 3 expressed "there were some questions from students which I wasn't quite sure how to answer, and that was more so for the […], generative AI stuff." Thus, while this is an important topic all universities are grappling with, this suggests more support resources and training are likely needed to support those in the classroom to engage with students around these complex issues.

Finally, in relation to the duration of the initiative (across six weeks) we received mixed feedback. Some respondents suggested it would be great to expand the embedded transition support over an even longer period, while others felt six weeks worked well.

Discussion

The present study evaluated the *My First Year Skills – Getting Started Module* and demonstrated that transition support embedded in the first-year curriculum, co-delivered by peer mentors and academic staff, improves students self-reported confidence across many of the academic skills required for university (Kift, 2009; Heath et al., 2017). The majority of students reported finding each of the six topics helpful/very helpful, while interviews with tutors, PASS leaders and the PASS coordinator uncovered broader benefits to students, staff and transition initiatives.

Students' Self-Reported Confidence Levels

Students' self-reported confidence levels increased post-module on nine of the 11 skills when compared to pre-module self-reported confidence levels. In week one, approximately fifty percent of students experienced low self-reported confidence, suggesting that orientation week alone, held in the week immediately preceding the start of teaching, was not enough (Heath et al., 2017; Schutze et al., 2021). Yet, as noted above, students' self-reported confidence levels post-module for the majority of the key skills were significantly higher than before completing the module, showing large effect sizes. Consistent with previous research conducted by Schutze et al. (2021), these results support the embedding of academic support in the first-year curriculum to improve students' confidence in using the key academic skills required for successful transition to university. In this case, substantial improvement was shown in accessing online library, finding assessments, submitting assessments, referencing, plagiarism, academic integrity, Gen AI, mental health, and security.

Contrary to our expectations, a significant decrease in self-reported confidence for time management was observed following the completion of the *Getting Started Module*. A similar finding was reported by Soares and colleagues (2023), who identified that while students may have broad ideas about time management skills, they often experience difficulties in the application of these skills or have had insufficient opportunity to implement them. As a result, students experience challenges in meeting academic deadlines, avoiding procrastination and distractions, and balancing study with life (Soares et al., 2023). Indeed, students in this study may have overestimated their level of self-reported confidence in time management skills at T1, before testing them in a university setting with far less externally controlled structure and unfamiliar pressure points. Results suggest that at T2, in the middle of the semester when assessments are due, students may have revised their assessment of their confidence in their time managements skills. Furthermore, when students started experiencing the increased assessment-related pressures around T2, the PASS leaders had finished their support of the classroom activities. Considering this situation through a just-in-time support lens (Kift, 2009), first-year students may have benefited more from having the topic of time management strategies and PASS leaders sharing their tips and tricks at that point in time. Students may have struggled to action the advice given earlier in the course; the distance being too great. A nonsignificant result was also found for "finding and accessing the physical library". While a somewhat unexpected result, the context of the course and broader study patterns encouraged at the university emphasise accessing most learning resources via online course sites or the online library resources. It is entirely plausible that many students did not have reason to seek out and utilise their local physical library spaces, thereby not improving their confidence in this skill. Opportunities exist for refining this topic in the *Getting Started Module* and reframing the value of on-campus library spaces to emphasise quiet study areas, computer pools, and bookable study rooms.

The Helpfulness of an Embedded Module in the Course Curriculum

The analysis for research question two revealed that for each of the embedded topics, 50 percent or more of students indicated that they were either helpful or very helpful. Embedding these supports within the classroom curriculum, and spreading them across multiple weeks, appears to have eased the information overload for students through breaking down content into smaller manageable chunks, allowing them to focus on each week more effectively (Heath et al., 2017). Somewhat unsurprisingly, students rated the topics that tackled assessment, referencing and plagiarism, and time management as *most* helpful. Indeed, first-year students often experience academic difficulties in understanding assessment tasks, preparation and assimilation of information for assessments, and adhering to writing and referencing styles (Reading, 2016). Any additional support that can be provided in relation to these areas is likely to be well received.

Conversely, the *least* helpful modules reported were time management, library, academic integrity, and GenAI. The topic that presented academic integrity and GenAI only scratched the surface of these two rather complex academic skills. As noted by tutors and PASS leaders in the interviews, they found answering students' questions tricky in the classroom, and highlight the need for further support and training for staff in these areas. Curiously, time management was rated as both one of the most and least helpful topics by some students. Open text responses spoke to rating it as unhelpful as they were still struggling with time management, suggesting an expectation to be able to pick up the skill more quickly. Yet others noted that this topic gave them many ideas and tips that they will try. The materials in this topic may need to do more in relation to expectation setting around time management skills and their ongoing development and practice beyond any single session.

Key Stakeholder Perspectives on the Getting Started Module

Through interviews with key stakeholders, our findings suggest that students' confidence improved not only because of the content of the *Getting Started Module*, but also due to how the topics were delivered. In particular, the delivery model that brought PASS leaders into the class was identified as benefitting all stakeholders from students and teaching teams to the PASS leaders and PASS program more broadly. This aligns with previous research, for example, Schreiber and Valle (2013), have shown that transition pedagogy underlined by Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) emphasises the crucial role that tutors and more advanced peers play in enhancing students learning. A ZPD framework nurtures classroom practice to create a supportive and scaffolded environment, building a dynamic learning environment through interactive engagement with peers and the tutor (Schreiber & Valle, 2013).

Heath et al. (2017) suggests that students view the relationship with tutors and peers as one of the most significant relationships in the university. This view is further supported by Rohden and Dowling (2006), who reported that tutors and peers were pivotal in adapting students to university culture and enhancing students' confidence. The findings from this research also suggest that the module provides greater academic support for students to independently access the course site for study information (Richardson et al., 2012) and minimises student's expectations of having to meet academic challenges on their own through the opportunity to ask questions of and seek advice from more experienced peers (McPhail et al., 2015). There are also opportunities to reimagine PASS offerings from only extra-curricular sessions to also provide targeted embedded transition support, bringing peer mentors *inside* classrooms.

Limitations and Future Research

While the research demonstrates promising findings in relation to the capacity of embedded transition support to enhance first-year student confidence, this study did not collect data on academic performance or longer-term confidence with the academic skills. This study was also limited to one discipline area and was unable to fully explore the influence of peers in the classroom given there was no version of the module run without PASS leader involvement. Future research would benefit from longitudinal measures that also consider academic performance and student attrition following such programs, as well as non-academic measures such as belonging or connection to peers and the university. Conducting similar investigations within first-year courses from other discipline areas, as well as delivering the module with and without PASS leaders, would further inform the broader applicability of the *Getting Started Module* and PASS leader involvement, allowing for exploration of discipline and teaching context specific differences.

Conclusion

This study provides positive evidence that extending orientation through embedded supports and skill building in first-year curriculum with peer and academic facilitation improved students' confidence in their abilities to perform the academic skills required for university. This study adds to the growing body of research evidence and best practice in relation to transition support being embedded into first-year curricula, and may continue to influence future practice in other discipline areas or institutions to best equip students for success, and potentially increase the number of first year commencers who go on to successfully complete their education.

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