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Experiences, perceptions, and educational expectations of university students affected by the February 6, 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes in Türkiye

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences, perceptions, and educational expectations of university students enrolled in different faculties at Uşak University who were affected by the February 6, 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes. Designed as a case study, the research was carried out with the voluntary participation of 43 students from 10 different faculties. Participants were selected through purposive sampling. The data collection tool, developed by the author, consisted of five open-ended questions with accompanying sub-questions. Following a pilot study conducted with semi-structured interview questions, the questions were revised and transformed into open-ended questions in line with the case study design. During the coding process and the development of categories and themes, participant confirmation and expert opinions were obtained, and feedback on the themes and codes was taken into consideration. The findings were presented under four main themes: Daily Life, Educational Expectations, Emotions, and Future Plans. Overall, the findings indicated that the students' daily routines changed considerably after the earthquakes and that they experienced difficulties in coping with these changes. Online education and group assignments were perceived as particularly challenging. Communication with university staff regarding students' needs appeared to provide important psychological support. The findings also showed that individuals who had not previously been in contact re-established communication out of concern for one another. Finally, participants reported uncertainty about their future plans and expressed a need for additional time to make decisions about their future.

Keywords: Effects of the earthquake; Kahramanmaraş Earthquakes; Post-earthquake experiences; University students

1. Introduction

Disasters are events that occur frequently and cause significant disruptions to daily life, often resulting in material and emotional losses (Miyazaki, 2022). They may also be defined as situations that affected individuals cannot overcome without professional support (Inal et al., 2018). In Türkiye, various disasters, including earthquakes, erosion, floods, and avalanches, have occurred throughout history and have caused substantial material damage (Ergunay, 2007).

It is evident that disasters affect not only those who are directly exposed to them but also society as a whole in psychological, social, and economic terms. For this reason, disaster education is of great importance in raising public awareness, minimizing the negative consequences of disasters, managing disaster-related processes more effectively, and preventing natural events from turning into disasters (Celik & Gundogdu, 2022). In addition, disaster education has become a necessity in Türkiye due to the lack of a common understanding among institutions regarding disasters (Sengun & Kucuksen, 2019). Disaster education programs implemented in schools aim to equip students with the knowledge and skills needed for pre-disaster preparedness, appropriate behaviors during disasters, and post-disaster recovery processes (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2019).

Education plays a significant role in reducing the direct and indirect negative impacts of earthquakes, which are unavoidable natural disasters (Cvetković et al., 2015; Siriwardena et al., 2013). When adequate pre-earthquake awareness education is not provided, necessary precautions are not taken, and pre- and post-earthquake processes are not managed effectively, loss of life, material damage, energy losses, and negative psychological outcomes may become inevitable (Maya & Caliskan, 2016). In addition to earthquakes, floods, landslides, and droughts are also examples of natural disasters. Due to the frequent occurrence of earthquakes in Türkiye,

earthquakes are often the first type of disaster that comes to mind when the term "disaster" is mentioned (Ocal, 2005). Natural disasters are defined in this way because they are not directly caused by human actions (Sahin & Sipahioglu, 2002). Such disasters have adverse effects on both society and the economy, hindering the development of countries and individuals (Wisner et al., 2004). According to Lutz et al. (2014), the long-term deterioration and stagnation caused by disasters can only be minimized through effective disaster management and disaster education initiatives.

Earthquakes, which occupy a central place in disaster education in Türkiye, require effective protective measures to reduce their negative consequences for society (Ocal, 2005). Providing earthquake education from an early age has been considered an effective way to protect individuals from the adverse effects of earthquakes (Aydogdu & Fofana, 2023). In this regard, organizing social activities and establishing school-based clubs to raise awareness of earthquakes may be beneficial (Degirmenci et al., 2019). Although previous studies have shown that teachers' preparedness for and sensitivity toward disasters are relatively high, their levels of practical implementation remain insufficient. Awareness is therefore essential for minimizing the damage caused by earthquakes, which are among the most common natural disasters in Türkiye (Kirikkaya et al., 2011). In a study conducted by Dogan and Kirkincioglu (2020) with 100 children aged 4–6 years, a statistically significant majority of the children were found to be aware of the behaviors that should be adopted individually and collectively during and after an earthquake. Previous research has also indicated that earthquake education and information about protective actions can contribute to individuals' psychological resilience, survival, and recovery from psychological trauma.

University students constitute one of the key at-risk groups affected by disasters due to their developmental characteristics, educational processes, and expectations for the future. Following earthquakes, students may face not only direct consequences such as loss of life and property but also various challenges, including housing problems, economic hardship, disruptions to their education, and weakened social support systems (Dai et al., 2016; Norris et al., 2002). Such experiences may negatively affect students' psychological well-being and academic lives (Demirci et al., 2024). The literature reports that university students who have experienced earthquakes may show increased levels of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and stress. For example, a study conducted in China one year after the Wenchuan Earthquake found that 14.1% of college students exhibited typical symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Fu et al., 2013). Longitudinal evidence from child and adolescent survivors of the same earthquake also suggests that post-traumatic stress symptoms may persist over time (Chen et al., 2021). Similarly, studies conducted in different countries have shown that post-disaster psychological problems are common among young adults and may adversely affect academic performance (Dai et al., 2016; Norris et al., 2002). Research conducted following the February 6, 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes in Türkiye indicates that university students directly affected by the earthquakes exhibited higher levels of anxiety, depression, and trauma symptoms (Ayık et al., 2025). Furthermore, the loss of loved ones, forced relocation, and uncertainty about the future may reduce students' levels of hope and complicate their psychological adjustment processes. Therefore, identifying the psychological and academic challenges faced by university students after earthquakes is crucial for developing effective support programs and planning psychosocial interventions in response to disasters. In this context, psychological support services and educational activities should be addressed through a holistic approach when restructuring the educational processes of students affected by earthquakes.

Large-scale destructive earthquakes have the potential to affect individuals, families, and society as a whole in various ways over the long term, creating financial, psychological, and physical burdens (Gil-Rivas & Kilmer, 2016). Such earthquakes can cause severe damage to buildings, and schools are among the institutions affected by these events. Educational materials may be damaged, the psychological effects experienced by students in learning environments may disrupt teaching and learning processes, and students may be unable to access education (Gil-

Rivas & Kilmer, 2016). On February 6, 2023, two earthquakes with magnitudes of 7.7 and 7.6 occurred in Türkiye, and official statements indicated that 11 provinces were affected. Many buildings collapsed, significant material damage occurred, and many people lost their loved ones. These events clearly demonstrated that disasters have psychological, sociological, and financial consequences. Hundreds of buildings were destroyed, and according to official data, more than 50,000 people lost their lives (Azak & Ay, 2023). While teachers were reported to have experienced a loss of motivation following the devastating earthquakes (Demirhan & Uludag, 2024), students were also reported to have experienced various problems, including anxiety disorders, insomnia, and memory difficulties (Çetin Dagli et al., 2018). At the moment an earthquake occurs, fleeing and freezing may be considered normal reflexive responses. However, when long-term effects are considered, problems such as memory loss and difficulty concentrating may also emerge (Uguz, 2023). These long-term effects may negatively influence the academic lives of university students who have experienced an earthquake. According to the findings of Kirikkaya et al. (2011), although teachers' levels of disaster preparedness and their knowledge of the actions to be taken during and after an earthquake appear adequate, their levels of practical implementation remain insufficient. Providing psychological support after an earthquake, ensuring personal safety before and after the event, and guiding students in developing the resilience needed to cope with these negative effects are therefore of great importance (Lutz et al., 2014).

The aim of this study is to examine the experiences, perceptions, and educational expectations of students enrolled in different faculties at Uşak University who were affected by the February 6, 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes. The contribution of this study to the field lies in its comprehensive examination of not only the emotional states of university students after the earthquakes but also their expectations and needs regarding higher education processes. The existing literature includes numerous studies on the psychological effects of disasters on individuals (Beaglehole et al., 2018; Harada et al., 2015; North & Pfefferbaum, 2013). However, there are relatively few studies examining university students' post-earthquake emotional experiences in relation to their educational processes and expectations. This study is expected to contribute to filling this gap in the literature by making students' expectations regarding post-earthquake higher education processes more visible. In addition, the study provides data on students' academic, psychological, and social needs in post-disaster contexts for higher education institutions. It is anticipated that the findings will contribute to the development of needs-based and student-centered educational policies after disasters.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study was designed as a qualitative case study. The case examined in the study was the post-earthquake experiences, perceptions, and educational expectations of university students at Uşak University who were directly affected by the February 6, 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes. A case study design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to examine a contemporary phenomenon within a bounded real-life context, as suggested by Yin (2018). Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire and analyzed using qualitative content analysis.

2.2. Participants

Purposive sampling was used to determine the participants based on the criterion of having experienced or been directly affected by the February 6 earthquakes. Purposive sampling is a technique used in situations where participants are difficult to reach, where rare conditions involve a limited number of individuals, or where special circumstances, such as natural disasters, are present (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). In this study, students enrolled in various faculties at Uşak University were recruited based on the criterion of having experienced the earthquakes that occurred in Türkiye on February 6, 2023 and affected 11 provinces. To reach potential participants, the researcher provided information about the study and shared their email address in courses

attended by students from various faculties, such as common elective courses offered under the rectorate and pedagogical formation courses. Posters including information about the study and the researcher's contact details were also displayed on bulletin boards at the entrances of the faculties. Students who wished to participate voluntarily contacted the researcher.

A total of 43 university students, including 21 men (48.84%) and 22 women (51.16%), voluntarily participated in the study. An open-ended questionnaire developed by the researcher was used as the data collection tool. Information on the participants' gender, the faculties in which they were enrolled, and the provinces where they experienced the earthquakes is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Participant Characteristics

Gender and Participant Code	*Year of Birth*	*Location Where the Earthquake Was Experienced*	*Faculty*
M1	2000	Adana, Yüreğir	Humanities and Social Sciences
M2	2002	Hatay, Kırıkhan	Sport Sciences
M3	2002	Hatay, Kırıkhan	Sport Sciences
M4	2001	Gaziantep, Şahinbey	Sport Sciences
M5	2004	Diyarbakır, Ergani	Humanities and Social Sciences
M6	2000	Diyarbakır, Bağlar	Sport Sciences
M7	2000	Malatya, Battalgazi	Education
M8	2002	Malatya, Yeşilyurt	Economics and Administrative Sciences
M9	2001	Mardin, Derik	Humanities and Social Sciences
M10	2000	Hatay, Antakya	Education
M11	1999	Gaziantep; Erasmus student in Würzburg, Germany, with family living in Gaziantep	Humanities and Social Sciences
M12	1999	Hatay, Dörtyol	Education
M13	2000	Adıyaman, Besni	Education
M14	2001	Diyarbakır	Theology
M15	2001	Hatay, İskenderun; university rescue team member	Sport Sciences
M16	1999	Diyarbakır, Kulp	Applied Sciences
M17	2004	Hatay, Altınözü	Engineering and Natural Sciences
M18	2005	Malatya	Communication
M19	2000	Hatay, Antakya	Theology
M20	2002	Kahramanmaraş, Onikişubat	Sport Sciences
M21	1989	Hatay, Antakya; family living in Hatay	Humanities and Social Sciences
F1	1999	Adıyaman, Kahta	Humanities and Social Sciences
F2	2003	Osmaniye, Kadirli	Sport Sciences
F3	2000	Diyarbakır, Bağlar	Fine Arts
F4	2000	Diyarbakır, Bağlar	Humanities and Social Sciences
F5	2000	Gaziantep, Şahinbey	Sport Sciences
F6	2003	Adana, Ceyhan	Humanities and Social Sciences
F7	2001	Hatay, Altınözü	Education
F8	2000	Gaziantep	Architecture and Design
F9	2001	Şanlıurfa, Siverek	Humanities and Social Sciences
F10	2000	Diyarbakır, Ergani	Applied Sciences
F11	1998	Şanlıurfa, Karaköprü	Humanities and Social Sciences
F12	1999	Malatya	Engineering and Natural Sciences
F13	2001	Adana, Ceyhan	Theology
F14	2000	Şanlıurfa, Suruç	Humanities and Social Sciences
F15	2002	Adana, Çukurova	Humanities and Social Sciences
F16	2001	Gaziantep, Şahinbey	Humanities and Social Sciences
F17	2001	Kahramanmaraş, Onikişubat	Sport Sciences

Table 1 continued

Gender and Participant Code	*Year of Birth*	*Location Where the Earthquake Was Experienced*	*Faculty*
F18	2000	Antalya; relatives relocated to her home after the earthquake	Education
F19	1999	Adıyaman	Applied Sciences
F20	1998	Gaziantep, Nizip	Sport Sciences
F21	2003	Osmaniye, Bahçe	Sport Sciences
F22	2000	Diyarbakır	Agricultural Sciences

2.3. Data Collection Tool and Data Collection Process

The data collection tool was developed by the author. The first draft of the questions was prepared after a review of the relevant literature. The draft questions were then sent to two experts in Counseling, one with 20 years of experience and the other with 26 years of experience. The expert with 20 years of experience, who was a professor in the Department of Counseling, stated that the phrase *earthquake victim* was not appropriate for an academic study and suggested using *earthquake-affected person* or *individual who experienced an earthquake* instead. Accordingly, the wording was revised as *earthquake-affected person*. The questions were also reviewed by the second expert in Counseling, who had 26 years of experience, and feedback was obtained regarding their alignment with the aims of the study and the appropriateness of the wording.

A pilot study was conducted with two male university students. Following the pilot study, the interview questions were revised and converted into open-ended questions with the support of an expert in Curriculum and Instruction, taking fluency and accuracy into consideration. Although none of the questions were considered offensive, an explanation was added to the questionnaire stating that participants could stop answering the questions at any time or withdraw from the study entirely. These explanations were included in the introductory section of the questionnaire in accordance with research ethics.

After ethical approval was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Commission of the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences at Uşak University (No. E-89784354-050.99-214695), the researcher began recruiting participants in September 2024. The questionnaires were sent via email to students who expressed willingness to participate. The questions included in the questionnaire are presented below:

1) Do you think the earthquake affected your academic life? If so, could you explain how it affected you?

1a) Could you describe the difficulties you experienced?

1b) What has changed in your daily life?

2) As a university student, could you share your views on the online education process?

2a) What were the advantages and challenges of online education?

3) As a student who experienced the earthquake, what are your expectations of the university administration?

3a) What are your expectations of the faculty?

3b) What are your expectations of your university peers?

4) How has the earthquake generally affected your life?

5) Did the earthquake cause any changes in your future plans? If so, could you explain?

The purpose of these questions was to identify the changes in students' daily lives, the effects of the earthquake on their personal and educational experiences, and their expectations from university administrators, faculty members, and peers.

2.4. Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

After the data collection process was completed, qualitative content analysis was conducted. During the analysis, every fifth questionnaire was analyzed collaboratively with a second researcher. The content, themes, and codes were discussed until consensus was reached. Following the initial analysis, the themes and codes were presented to a faculty member with 20 years of

experience and expertise in Curriculum and Instruction in order to obtain expert opinion. Feedback from the expert was then taken into consideration in the refinement of the coding structure.

After the codes had been determined, the expert suggested that the code *Comfort Zone*, which was initially placed under Theme 1, overlapped conceptually with the code *Daily Routines*. Based on this feedback, the code *Comfort Zone* was revised and renamed as *Home Life*. This process contributed to the credibility and consistency of the analysis by ensuring that the codes and themes were conceptually clear and appropriately named.

3. Findings

The findings of the study are presented under four themes: Daily Life, Educational Expectations, Emotions, and Future Plans. Under the Daily Life theme, the codes Earthquake Moment, Daily Routines, Home Life, and Social Support emerged. Under the Educational Expectations theme, the codes Online Education and Expectations from Faculty Members were identified. Under the Emotions theme, the emotions Reconciliation, Helplessness, Anger, and Powerlessness emerged. Under the Future Plans theme, the codes Resistance to Living in a Different City, Needs for Time to Pass, and Resignation were identified. Table 2 shows themes and coding based on the findings of the study. Four themes and connected codings related to themes were presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Themes and Codings

Theme and Codings	*f*
Daily life	
Earthquake Moment	43
Daily Routines	43
Home Life	40
Social Support	38
Educational Expectations	
Online Education	36
Expectations from Faculty Members	17
Emotions	
Reconciliation	31
Helplessness and Powerlessness	28
Anger	12
Future Plans	
Resistance to Living in a Different City	20
The Need for Time to Pass	18
Acceptance	3

Table 2 presents the themes and codes generated through the analysis. The four main themes and their related codes are explained in detail in the following sections.

3.1. Theme 1: Daily Life

In line with the findings of the study, the first theme was identified as *Daily Life*. The codes included under this theme were *Earthquake Moment*, *Daily Routines*, *Home Life*, and *Social Support*.

3.1.1. Earthquake moment

Describing the moment of the earthquake emerged as an issue that participants found difficult to talk about but nevertheless felt a need to express. The findings indicated that the snow, rain, and cold weather conditions during and after the earthquake made the situation even more challenging for those who experienced it. Following the earthquake, participants were concerned about the safety of their relatives and friends and felt a strong need to obtain information about the earthquake's epicenter and magnitude. The findings also showed that even participants who were

not directly exposed to the earthquake experienced anxiety after hearing the news, suggesting that the earthquake affected not only those who experienced it directly but also individuals in their wider social environment.

> I was very scared on the night of the earthquake. When I woke up, everything in the house was shaking, and the noise had woken me up. I was trying to get out and open the door, but I couldn't. When I finally managed to open it, I hurt my foot because I went outside barefoot and there was snow on the ground. We couldn't go back into the house for a while after the earthquake. We waited on a street corner with our neighbors in the snow. It was very difficult. At that moment, I wondered whether my family had managed to get out of the house. Had the earthquake happened everywhere? What was its magnitude? Had anything happened to people or animals? I had so many fears. When I learned the magnitude of the earthquake online, I felt even worse. (F10)

Participants' statements showed that they were worried about their relatives and significant others during and immediately after the earthquake. Survivors tried to reassure themselves that their loved ones were still alive. Their recollections of the earthquake included being unable to reach family members because of the severe shaking, evacuating the building immediately, trying to reach siblings' rooms in order to protect them, and being exposed to adverse environmental conditions such as darkness, rain, snowfall, cold weather, and going outdoors barefoot or without appropriate footwear. These recollections were consistently associated with intense fear and anxiety. Participants also reported that the lack of adequate shelter and blankets after the earthquake further intensified the difficulties they experienced. Other memories from the initial post-earthquake period included not having identification documents or money with them, as well as facing large crowds and long queues at gas stations.

> The next day, AFAD teams had arrived in the city, but there were not enough tents or food. There were also unsanitary conditions, as we had not been able to use the restroom or take a shower for several days. Therefore, we decided to leave the city, but this was not easy either. There was a fuel shortage at gas stations. Some stations in the city were on fire, and at those that were still operating, fuel was so limited that they provided only 100 Turkish lira worth of fuel per person. So, on the fourth day after the earthquake, while the weather was still very cold, we left the city in an open-top aid vehicle. My family and I went to a dormitory. I did not even have any clothes for the first few days, so I had to wear clothes given to me by others. Having to depend on others for help in this way is something that still weighs heavily on my mind. Of course, apart from crying every time I see a news report about Kahramanmaraş. (F17)

3.1.2. Daily routines

University students affected by the earthquake reported that the first month following the disaster was particularly difficult. They emphasized that, beyond the disruption of their daily routines, they were unable to meet even their most basic needs, such as eating, drinking, bathing, and wearing clean clothes. Participants noted that in the early days after the earthquake, the people they encountered appeared helpless and disoriented. In the following weeks, whenever a few people gathered, conversations often turned to news about relatives, friends, and acquaintances who had been lost in the earthquake. They emphasized that even weeks after the disaster, the earthquake remained the main topic of conversation.

During the data collection process, participants reported that although at least one year had passed since the earthquake, they continued to experience sleep problems (n = 27). They also noted that even the slightest movement while sitting could trigger feelings of fear. One participant stated that because they had difficulty opening the door during the earthquake, they avoided locking doors afterward and kept them open for a long time.

> For a few weeks after the earthquake, we faced problems related to shelter, food, and clothing. For one week, our family took turns sleeping in the car. For three weeks, I had to continue my daily life without showering and wearing the same clothes. I saw people who were lost and people who had lost their loved ones. I lost friends. We heard that Antakya was in terrible condition, completely destroyed, but you couldn't even reach out to help the person right next to you. I still tremble whenever I think about those days. We decided to go to the village, thinking that a detached house would make us feel safer, but as expected, all our relatives were already there. (M17)

Participants indicated that they were unable to enter their homes for nearly a month and faced significant challenges in meeting essential needs, including food, potable water, personal hygiene, and clean clothing. They described the first months after the disaster as particularly traumatic and memorable, marked by chaos, extreme cold, and a constant perception of ongoing seismic activity, accompanied by the fear that another earthquake could occur at any moment.

> My sleep schedule has been disrupted since the earthquake; I can't sleep at night. I always keep the light on. I look at the chandelier several times a day. Even if I move slightly on the couch and it sways, I panic. We keep a flashlight beside us. We keep our phones and chargers ready. Our jackets are next to us. We have designated a safe living area inside the house. We are trying to be more alert. I still feel restless at night. Whenever I enter a new environment, I think about where the safe spots would be in case of an earthquake. (F19)

3.1.3. Home life

The findings showed that individuals who were indirectly affected by the earthquake, such as those whose home lives changed because relatives from earthquake-affected provinces moved in with them, were also influenced by the disaster. Since safety and shelter are among the most basic human needs, participants were asked to describe the changes that occurred in their home lives after the earthquake. Various challenges were reported under this code, including moving to a different city, living with relatives, several young people sharing one room, limited access to computers or the internet, and waiting in long queues for basic necessities such as food.

> We moved to a different city. It has been two years, and we are still trying to adjust. I found a job and started working because I felt that I needed to help my family. This is very difficult for me because I had never worked before. I used to make time for myself, but now I cannot do so at all. I cannot do any of the things I used to do regularly; unfortunately, neither my psychological state nor the circumstances allow it. I struggle greatly even with tasks that are part of my responsibilities. (M2)

> Our house was damaged in the earthquake, and we could not enter it after the quake. We tried to go inside about 15 to 20 days later, but I was very scared when we first entered. During that period, we could not return to our house, so we stayed at my aunt's house for about 40 days and lived with them. (M12)

As reflected in the quotations above, the inability to return home, limited access to accurate information, and exposure to reports of destruction from other provinces significantly shaped participants' experiences. Realizing that the earthquake had affected multiple provinces and that some regions had suffered even greater devastation increased feelings of uncertainty, fear, and distress among the participants. The following quotation further illustrates how changes in home life affected participants' educational lives and intensified feelings of helplessness.

> My cousin was going to take the university entrance exam that year. Out of desperation, we moved to my uncle's house in Eskişehir, but my uncle has two children, and we are three siblings. My father requested a transfer after the earthquake, but Hatay was our hometown. The places where we were born and raised were all destroyed; we became strangers to our own city. The buildings around the Asi River were all destroyed, and the landscape of the city changed. It is such a heavy feeling. There was a saying: 'Anyone who marries someone from Hatay must move to Hatay; a person from Hatay cannot be separated from their hometown.' We cannot be separated either; we will go back. While my uncle's daughter, who was preparing for the exam, used to stay alone in her room, the three of us also started staying there. When her study environment was disrupted, we felt guilty too, but there was nothing we could do. One morning, while my brother was using the bathroom, my aunt said to him, 'Come on, get out already.' If we had said, 'Let's go back home,' where would we have gone? I would not have taken it personally at another time, but I was really hurt that day. Our minds are always back home, in the old days. (M21)

3.1.4. Social Support

Participants who stated that emergency response teams did not arrive immediately, particularly during the first three days after the earthquake, emphasized that this delay made them feel very alone (n = 5). These statements highlighted the importance of social support in the immediate

aftermath of the disaster. One participant from Hatay also reported feeling uncomfortable while describing some clothing items included in the aid supplies, which she perceived as inappropriate and disrespectful, even though the researcher was of the same gender. Regarding institutional support, participants stated that being contacted by the administration of the university where they were enrolled gave them strength and made them feel supported (n = 27).

> I was caught in the earthquake while I was in Hatay, İskenderun, for relief efforts. I was part of the relief team established by Uşak University. Eighteen of us went to Hatay to provide aid, but only three of us stayed there for 11 days; the others returned. Since we had gone there for relief work, we did not experience food shortages, but we faced serious difficulties in terms of shelter, hygiene, and psychological well-being. For example, we would feel dizzy from exhaustion, but we would think it was another earthquake and lie down on the ground. We knew that we would eventually return to our normal lives, but the people there had to find a way to continue. The psychological burden was immense. Everything was destroyed: buildings, people, lives. People were frozen, helpless. Elderly men and women, from another city and another way of life—what were they supposed to do? People were pleading to find at least the remains of their mother, father, or child under the rubble. I need psychological support now too, even though I was only there to help. (M15)

3.2. Theme 2: Educational Expectations

Educational Expectations was identified as the second theme of the study and consisted of two codes: *Online Education* and *Expectations of Faculty Members*. The statements related to this theme are presented in the following.

3.2.1. Online Education

Participants' views on online education varied. Some participants stated that a transition to in-person education was necessary because it would enable them to socialize, distance themselves from environments where the earthquake was constantly discussed, and return to normal life more quickly (n = 9). It was also noted that limited internet access and crowded living conditions made in-person education more effective and necessary for some students. In contrast, some participants criticized online education as ineffective (n = 10), although three of these students added that "the circumstances still made online education advantageous." Other participants emphasized that if in-person education had resumed immediately after the disaster, they would have faced additional difficulties, including leaving their families behind, coping with financial hardship, and the fear of experiencing another earthquake in the city where the university is located (n = 14).

One participant emphasized that, immediately after the earthquake, attending classes was not a priority for students who had directly experienced the disaster. However, the same participant also acknowledged that the issue was complex, especially for departments with practical courses:

> After coming face-to-face with death, classes were the last thing on our minds at that time. While the impact of the earthquake was still so fresh and so many people had died, the idea of attending classes never even crossed my mind. In fact, at first, I was angry at students who had not been affected by the earthquake but wanted universities to resume in-person education. While we were trying to attend classes on the streets in that condition, they were sitting in their warm homes listening to lectures. Of course, after a few weeks passed, I started thinking, 'It's not their fault; at least let them go to school.' For me, online education in the Faculty of Sports Sciences is especially challenging. I take courses such as swimming and tennis, and I struggled a lot during the pandemic. Most of our classes are practical, and learning them remotely is very difficult for us. Despite all these difficulties, online education was the right choice for all departments. (F20)

This quotation shows that participants evaluated online education not only in terms of their own needs but also by considering the circumstances of other students. However, some participants focused more directly on the limitations of online education, particularly in relation to access, participation, and the quality of instruction. One participant stated:

> The online process was very inefficient. No one was paying attention to the lectures; everyone was just doing whatever was easiest. Both students and instructors were negatively affected by this process. There are places with no internet access, and there are people without smartphones. If

> universities had reopened and students had been placed in dormitories, this problem would have been completely resolved. (F16)

In addition to these concerns, some participants associated the interruption or weakening of education with broader social problems. From this perspective, continuing education was seen as necessary, but online education was not considered sufficient to meet students' needs under post-disaster conditions:

> First and foremost, as an earthquake-affected person, I still remember my inner plea: 'Our university must not suspend education under any circumstances.' Education must not stop no matter what, and we should not switch to online education because whatever has happened to us stems from a lack of education and ignorance. In many of our provinces, it was said that electricity would not be available for three or four months because of the earthquake. What needed to be done for us was to waive the attendance requirement because where we were, let alone electricity, there was no computer or phone. So how were we supposed to attend classes? But these needs were met. In fact, the university administration, once our names were forwarded to the professors, responded with understanding; that was the best they could do. It was impossible to benefit from those classes under such circumstances. University education should have been conducted in person. (M1)

Another issue raised by participants was the difficulty of maintaining attention and interaction in online classes. In particular, participants stated that course participation, peer learning, and group assignments became more difficult in the online environment:

> It is really hard to listen and stay focused during online classes. Even if the instructor asks questions to keep us engaged, it does not create the same flow as in-person classes. Some lecturers ask students to give presentations, but even if everyone thoroughly learns their own topic, they may not be able to understand the other presentations. Constantly preparing group assignments really exhausted me; I wish the assignments had been individual. (F15)

Despite these criticisms, some participants acknowledged that certain arrangements, such as flexibility in attendance, helped reduce the pressure on students in the earthquake-affected region. This indicates that students did not evaluate online education only as positive or negative, but rather in relation to the extent to which it responded to their specific needs. As one participant stated, "We are not unfamiliar with this system because of the pandemic. However, I expected them to be more understanding toward people in the earthquake-affected region. I suppose they already addressed that by not requiring attendance" (F19).

As a result, participants' statements suggest that online education was experienced as an ambivalent process. While it was seen by some as a necessary and protective measure under extraordinary circumstances, it was also criticized for limiting interaction, reducing instructional effectiveness, and creating difficulties for students without adequate technological access or suitable study environments.

3.2.2. Expectations from faculty members

Participants who mentioned difficulties in fulfilling course requirements and completing assignments emphasized the challenges they experienced in accessing the internet (n = 12). Participants who referred to the discussions about suspending education also underlined the importance of continuing education even under difficult circumstances (n = 2). In general, students affected by the earthquake expected faculty members to show flexibility, understanding, and sensitivity to their living conditions. They particularly emphasized that group assignments and student-led presentations were not effective during this period, as many students were struggling with limited technological access, psychological distress, and disrupted daily routines.

> Some participants stated that faculty members were understanding once they were informed by the university administration about students who had been affected by the earthquake. One participant described this process as follows: "Our university administration reported the names of those affected by the earthquake, and the faculty members were understanding. We struggled a lot with assignments and group work; accessing the internet was a problem in itself. Professors trusted our sincerity—thank goodness—and both sides did their best (F16).

However, other participants criticized instructional practices that placed too much

responsibility on students during the post-earthquake period. In particular, they stated that asking students to divide lecture topics and present them to one another was ineffective under such difficult conditions. One participant expressed this expectation clearly:

> We want to listen to our lectures from our professors. I was very angry with them after the earthquake. You know, when you are explaining the constructivist approach, having students share the topic and explain it to each other does not mean that the student is active. You said that the student does the practice and the teacher explains the theory, right? We experience this a lot. During the earthquake period, they kept assigning lecture topics to students. We could not sleep, and there was no internet connection. While we were waiting to hear the voices of a couple of friends or see their faces, telling us, 'Go ahead, explain the topic; it is your turn this week,' was ineffective and shifted the responsibility onto the student. (M5)

To conclude, participants' statements suggest that their expectations from faculty members were not limited to academic flexibility. They also expected instructors to recognize the psychological and material difficulties caused by the earthquake and to adapt their teaching practices accordingly. In this regard, participants valued understanding and flexibility but also expected more direct instructional support from faculty members during the online education process.

3.3. Theme 3: Emotions

Participants described their emotional states using expressions such as anger, loneliness, and helplessness in response to several questions. The emotion with the highest frequency under the "Emotions" theme was identified as "Reconciliation" (n = 31). Participants who emphasized that they had come together in solidarity with people from whom they had previously been estranged stated that no one in their surroundings could remain distant from one another after the earthquake (n = 29). One participant reported that their parents, who had been separated for five years, reunited after the earthquake.

Participants also described helplessness as the inability to take action or provide support to others (n = 28). They stated that the helplessness experienced on the first day after the earthquake later turned into anger (n = 12). Loneliness was also identified as a source of anger, particularly in relation to the lack of support during the first three days after the disaster. According to the participants' statements, anger was also associated with the failure to construct earthquake-resistant buildings, which they attributed to a lack of education, negligence, and indifference.

3.3.1. Reconciliation

One of the findings of the study was that the February 6, 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, commonly referred to as the "Disaster of the Century," appeared to reduce existing resentments and conflicts among people. Participants stated that after the earthquake, disagreements that had previously kept family members, relatives, or neighbors apart lost their significance. One participant described this process through the reconciliation of family members who had not spoken for years:

> When we went to the area where the tents were, we experienced a different kind of trauma. We were only talking about death and the earthquake. My father and uncle hadn't spoken in years. When my father saw his brother, he ran straight over and hugged him. They had already spoken with my aunt when they met her earlier. There's no such thing as a feud left. There are no feuds left among the neighbors or in our family. (F22)

This statement indicates that the disaster led some participants to reconsider the meaning of resentment, conflict, and emotional distance. Similarly, another participant stated that "the earthquake shattered all the familiar and accepted orders of the world" and reminded them how meaningless "holding a grudge, getting angry, or being hurt" could be (F18). These statements suggest that the earthquake not only caused emotional distress but also created a context in which some participants re-evaluated their relationships with others.

3.3.2. Helplessness and powerlessness

Helplessness and powerlessness were among the most frequently expressed negative emotions in participants' statements. Participants described these feelings in relation to being unable to provide solutions, offer support, or reach people trapped under the rubble. Some participants also emphasized that the lack of timely support during the first three days after the earthquake intensified these feelings and led them to feel abandoned (n = 3). Others stated that being unable to intervene while hearing voices from under the rubble caused deep psychological wounds (n = 4). One participant summarized this feeling by stating, "I realized that the two hardest things in life are helplessness and having to accept it" (F17).

For some participants, helplessness was closely associated with anger. They stated that witnessing destruction and being unable to help others led to intense emotional reactions:

> The earthquake didn't kill; it was the buildings constructed by ignorant, uneducated people that killed, that destroyed lives. Lives were destroyed, and we could only watch. May no one ever hear the screams and pleas for help coming from under the rubble again. Helplessness, powerlessness… There's nothing you can do. It leads to anger afterward, asking, 'Where were you? Why weren't you there? (M11).

Another participant linked helplessness to the loss of safety associated with home. This participant emphasized that the home, which is normally perceived as the safest place, had become a source of fear because of negligence:

> Helplessness is terrible; it eats away at a person's soul. The place where you feel safest is your home—but now no one will feel safe there. Because of negligence. Because people used less steel, less concrete, cheaper materials. May God swiftly reveal His divine justice, and may they too be deprived of what they trusted most, left helpless. (F22)

These statements show that helplessness was not experienced only as an individual emotion but was also connected to broader perceptions of negligence, injustice, and loss of trust in the built environment.

3.3.3. Anger

Anger was another prominent negative emotion expressed by the participants. A total of 11 participants stated that they experienced anger after the earthquake; eight of these participants were men and three were women. Participants associated their anger mainly with feelings of abandonment, helplessness, and perceived negligence. They noted that after experiencing intense anger, they eventually felt that they had no alternative but to accept what had happened. However, they also expressed uncertainty about how suppressing or denying the psychological effects of this process might affect them in the future.

Seven participants stated that they felt anger because helplessness was an emotion incompatible with human dignity (n = 7). For these participants, anger was directed not only at the consequences of the earthquake but also at the human actions and omissions that they believed had increased the scale of destruction. One participant expressed this feeling as follows:

> I don't think all this is fate. I believe it's entirely due to negligence and carelessness. Take precautions; make sure the building is constructed properly. Things we can't control are fate. But who signed off on these shoddy buildings? Who used too little rebar and cement? They are murderers. Those who don't do their jobs properly are murderers. This isn't fate. I'm filled with rage. (M10)

This quotation illustrates that anger was closely tied to participants' perceptions of preventable loss. Rather than interpreting the destruction solely as the result of a natural event, participants associated it with negligence, inadequate precautions, and failures in responsibility.

3.4. Theme 4: Future Plans

When participants were asked about their future plans, they stated that the earthquake had led them to better understand the importance of education and the value of fulfilling one's responsibilities properly. Some participants reported that their future plans had changed after the

earthquake. These changes included a desire to live in a detached house, reconsidering where to live, and developing a stronger sense of responsibility toward society. Participants who wished to become educators also emphasized the importance of transmitting human values and the virtue of doing one's job properly. In addition, some participants stated that the earthquake had made them feel more resigned, as they realized that many aspects of human life are beyond one's control.

3.4.1. Reluctance to move to another city

Twelve participants who experienced the February 6 earthquakes in their hometowns stated that the possibility of living in another city was saddening, exhausting, and difficult to accept. Participants emphasized that people who had lived on the same land for generations could not easily accept such a sudden and unpredictable change in their lives (n = 2). For these participants, moving to another city was not merely a practical decision but also an emotional rupture from family history, belonging, and familiar social ties.

One participant from Antakya described this reluctance through the experiences and disagreements within his family:

> We're from Antakya. My grandmothers and grandfathers are here, and they're elderly. My older brother and sister-in-law are here too. None of us want to go to another city. My sister-in-law tried to convince my brother to go for a few years, saying we'd come back, but he said, 'My work is here,' as if it were his own business. He works at someone else's shop. She begged, saying it was for my nephew's future, so we told her to go, but she says leaving everything behind isn't easy. But whose life is still in order in Antakya anyway? (M21)

This statement shows that participants' future plans were shaped not only by material losses but also by strong emotional attachments to their hometowns. The idea of leaving the city was associated with uncertainty, loss of belonging, and the difficulty of rebuilding life elsewhere.

3.4.2. The need for time to pass

Another prominent code under the theme of Future Plans was the need for time. Many participants stated that they needed time to adapt to post-earthquake life and to think more clearly about the reality of changing their plans (n = 18). They emphasized that the problems experienced in the first year after the earthquake might be resolved over time, but they also underlined that being prepared for future disasters requires a high-quality education system. In this regard, participants pointed to the need for a more practice-oriented and effective education system that would help individuals and society become better prepared.

One participant expressed the need for time while also emphasizing the importance of learning from the earthquake and taking precautions for the future:

> Because nothing matters more than my friends and everyone in this country—we must all learn from this earthquake and live accordingly. We need to be prepared for anything; anything can happen to a person in life. You get used to it over time, you die and it passes, you forget and it passes, you find a solution and it passes—but it passes with time. We must learn from this earthquake so that we don't suffer such a loss of life in the next one; I want measures to be taken to prevent this. I don't want our people to die or suffer harm in the future because they were unprepared for these earthquakes and disasters. The innocent must survive. (F6)

This quotation indicates that participants' need for time was not limited to personal recovery. It was also connected to a broader expectation that society should draw lessons from the disaster and develop stronger forms of preparedness.

3.4.3. Acceptance

Some participants stated that many things in life cannot be fully controlled and that accepting this reality had become part of their post-earthquake outlook. However, this sense of acceptance did not mean ignoring human responsibility. Participants emphasized that necessary precautions should be taken and that the deaths caused by the earthquake were closely related to the construction of unsafe buildings for profit. Therefore, acceptance was expressed together with a demand for justice and accountability. A small number of participants described this process

through a more spiritual or resigned perspective (n = 3).

One participant explained how the earthquake changed her perspective on the future and led her toward a sense of surrender:

> My perspective and my ideas about the future have changed; I no longer view everything with certainty. We suddenly experienced a disaster—we never know what will happen next. I realized that we are essentially nothing; I reached the state of nothingness through a disaster. I feel that if I don't live by entrusting myself to God, I'll lose my sanity. Surrender brings peace of mind, I believe. I won't torment myself over anything anymore. I hope those responsible face their punishment, and my heart finds even more peace. (F20)

This statement shows that acceptance was experienced as a coping mechanism for some participants. At the same time, the participant's emphasis on punishment for those responsible indicates that resignation and the search for justice coexisted in participants' future-oriented reflections.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

University students who voluntarily participated in this study reported that the earthquake affected their daily lives, emotions, educational processes, and future plans. Under the "Daily Life" theme, participants stated that one of their first thoughts during the earthquake was the safety of their family members. However, the intensity of the shaking often prevented them from reaching their relatives or moving toward them. This finding is consistent with Tuccar and Yavuz (2023), who reported that thinking about family members was among the first reactions of both women and men during an earthquake. Their study also indicated that some individuals, particularly men, tended to run toward others in an attempt to reach them.

Similarly, the findings of the present study showed that participants, regardless of whether they were at home, in another city, or even abroad during the earthquake, tried to obtain information about their parents, siblings, or other family members. For example, one participant who was abroad as an Erasmus student stated that their primary concern was to learn whether their parents and siblings were safe, even though physically reaching them was not possible. Some participants reported falling while trying to move, whereas others described freezing as one of their first reactions. Since fleeing and freezing are among the most frequently observed behaviors during earthquakes (Nakajima, 2012), the findings of this study suggest that these responses were accompanied by a strong desire to escape together with family members. Participants who described fleeing behavior also emphasized that they were unable to move easily because of the intensity and jarring effect of the earthquake, and that they called out to their family members during this process.

In this study, none of the participants reported being awakened by another person. Instead, they stated that they woke up upon feeling the tremor, experienced a brief moment of freezing, and immediately thought of their families. Afterward, they described trying to evacuate the building together with family members. This finding is also consistent with Jon et al. (2016), who reported that attempting to contact family members is a common behavior following an earthquake. In that study, individuals' reactions were also associated with the perceived intensity of the tremor and the level of fear experienced. In addition, Bozgedik et al. (2024) emphasized that family members' concern for one another during an earthquake, their mutual support during evacuation, and their solidarity in adapting to post-earthquake life may strengthen psychological resilience. In this respect, the present findings underline the importance of family unity and trusted social relationships in the aftermath of a disaster.

The findings also revealed certain differences in how emotions were expressed. While men more frequently emphasized anger, women more often referred to loneliness and helplessness. Guo et al. (2025) reported that women's tendency to share their feelings after an earthquake is higher than that of men. In the present study, the gender distribution of participants was relatively balanced, with 21 men and 22 women. Although all participants were negatively affected by the earthquake, the analysis suggests that there were differences in the emotions they foregrounded.

In particular, 11 of the 21 male participants reported feelings of anger. Previous research has also shown that women tend to think about disasters and recall their experiences more frequently, which may contribute to the development of post-traumatic stress symptoms (Naeem, 2011). It has also been reported that women's levels of rumination are statistically higher than those of men, whereas men may cope with such situations through sports and physical activities (Bugay Sökmez, 2025).

In line with these findings, it may be beneficial for university administrations to provide appropriate opportunities for physical activity, including activities that women students may prefer. Tamer et al. (2023) also showed that physical activity and exercise programs can support the reduction of sleep problems. Therefore, one recommendation of the present study is to offer physical activity, aerobic exercise, and resistance-based activities to students affected by earthquakes. Considering that all participants in this study wished to describe the moment of the earthquake and that many continued to report emotional and sleep-related difficulties, sports activities may provide meaningful psychological support and contribute positively to the mental well-being of university students affected by earthquakes.

The analysis of the "Educational Expectations" theme revealed that students' evaluations of the transition to online education were complex and multifaceted. On the one hand, online education was considered a limitation because it reduced opportunities for face-to-face interaction, classroom socialization, and peer connection, which may have made it more difficult for students to cope with loneliness and emotional isolation (Acebes et al., 2022; Chogyel et al., 2021; Özdoğan, 2021). On the other hand, some participants stated that returning immediately to in-person education might have caused additional psychological difficulties, particularly for students who did not want to leave their families after the earthquake. Thus, although participants emphasized the educational limitations of online education, they also acknowledged its potential contribution to psychological well-being under extraordinary conditions.

The findings of the present study also showed that online education after the earthquake was shaped by students' living conditions and access to learning resources. Participants stated that students who had become homeless, moved in with relatives, or lived in crowded households did not have appropriate study environments. Limited internet access, lack of technological devices, and the absence of quiet spaces were among the factors that made online learning more difficult. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that online learning may reproduce access and equity problems when students do not have reliable internet connectivity, appropriate devices, or conducive learning environments (Beruin, 2022; Karaca & Akyüz, 2024; Sattayaraksa et al., 2023; Telli & Altun, 2023; Ullah et al., 2021). Participants also stated that some faculty members' instructional practices, such as assigning group work or asking students to divide topics among themselves and present them, did not sufficiently take into account the conditions faced by earthquake-affected students. In this sense, the findings suggest that online instructional practices in post-disaster contexts should be planned with greater sensitivity to students' housing conditions, technological access, psychological readiness, and daily routines. These difficulties were reflected under the "Daily Routines" code within the "Daily Life" theme and were further discussed under the "Educational Expectations" theme.

Participants' expectations from faculty members mainly centered on flexibility, understanding, and direct instructional support. They emphasized that assigning students the responsibility of presenting course content was particularly ineffective during this period. Similar concerns were discussed in Temli-Durmus' (2014) study, which addressed the ineffectiveness of presenting theoretical topics without practical application, despite claims of adopting a student-centered learning-teaching approach. In the present study, participants similarly criticized the transfer of instructional responsibility to students who were affected by the earthquake and who had difficulty accessing educational resources in the online learning process. However, regarding attendance, participants stated that their expectations were generally met and that problems were avoided when both students and faculty members adopted a well-intentioned and honest approach.

Another important finding was that participants perceived the university administration's contact with students as a form of social and institutional support. They stated that being called by university-assigned staff to ask about their well-being and needs made them feel that they were not alone. This finding is noteworthy because students' expectations were not limited to concrete or physical needs. Rather, they also involved emotional recognition, care, and the feeling of being remembered by their institution. This interpretation is consistent with research showing that social support and institutional factors contribute to students' subjective well-being, and that educational support should address not only academic or material needs but also students' relational and emotional needs (Sarzhanova et al., 2026; Yang & Yu, 2024).

The findings related to the theme of "Emotions" revealed that university students who experienced the earthquake needed support particularly in coping with feelings of helplessness and loneliness. Participants emphasized that the support provided by the university administration through phone calls helped reduce their sense of loneliness. Similarly, Can and Kerkez (2024) found that loneliness was one of the sources of negative emotions following the February 6 earthquakes. In this study, helplessness was closely associated with the inability to help others, reach people under the rubble, or find immediate solutions. Participants also associated helplessness with anger, particularly when they interpreted the destruction not merely as the result of a natural event but also as a consequence of negligence, poor construction practices, and lack of responsibility.

Findings related to the "Future Plans" theme indicated that forced relocation to another city contributed to university students' anxiety and uncertainty about their future. More than half of the participants stated that being separated from their hometowns, childhood friends, neighborhoods, and the places to which they felt a sense of belonging was not something they could have anticipated. For this reason, returning to their hometowns remained an important part of their future plans. Forced relocation after disasters has similarly been associated with uncertainty and anxiety about future life plans, especially among university students whose place attachment and social networks are disrupted (Norris et al., 2002).

Participants also stated that they had come to accept certain difficulties in life and that this acceptance had contributed to their personal maturation. It is significant that some participants described a reduction in resentment and bitterness in human relationships after the earthquake. They reported setting aside negative feelings toward loved ones, coming together in solidarity, and developing a stronger tendency to accept events beyond their control. This finding deserves further examination by researchers in psychology. Previous studies have also shown that post-disaster adjustment may involve meaning-making, adaptive acceptance, strengthened social solidarity, and reduced negative emotions such as resentment, all of which are related to broader patterns of psychological resilience in traumatic contexts (Bonanno, 2010; Drury et al., 2016).

Another important finding under the "Future Plans" theme was the "Need for Time to Pass" code. Although data collection for this study began one year after the earthquake, participants still recounted the moment of the earthquake in detail and expressed anxiety about events they perceived as beyond their control. Many participants believed that, over time, they would be able to accept the situation and cope with it more easily. This finding is consistent with Yilmaz and Bahadir (2025), who showed that the passage of time after an earthquake is an important variable affecting trauma levels and mental well-being. Their study also indicated that the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder remained high approximately eleven months after the earthquake, suggesting that recovery is a complex and non-linear process that unfolds over time.

5. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the study was designed as a qualitative case study and focused specifically on earthquake-affected students enrolled at Uşak University. Therefore, the findings are context-bound and are not intended to be generalized to all university students affected by the February 6, 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes. Although the participants were enrolled in different faculties and

had experienced or been affected by the earthquakes in various provinces, the study reflects the experiences of a specific group of students who voluntarily agreed to participate.

Second, the study relied on purposive and voluntary participation. Students who chose to contact the researcher and complete the questionnaire may have had particular experiences, concerns, or expectations that motivated their participation. As a result, the views of students who did not wish to participate, who were more difficult to reach, or who may have experienced the earthquake differently may not be fully represented in the data.

Third, data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire sent by email. While this method allowed participants to express their experiences in their own words, it did not provide the opportunity for follow-up questions, clarification, or deeper probing, as would be possible in face-to-face or online interviews. In addition, because the data were based on participants' self-reports, the findings reflect their subjective perceptions and personal accounts of the earthquake and its effects on their academic and daily lives.

Another limitation concerns the timing of data collection. The data were collected after the earthquake experience, and participants' responses may have been shaped by the passage of time, memory, later experiences, and the ongoing psychological, social, and educational consequences of the disaster. Moreover, the participants were affected by the earthquakes in different ways and at different levels. Some experienced the earthquakes directly in the affected provinces, while others were affected through their families, relatives, or post-earthquake responsibilities. This variation enriched the data but also limited the possibility of making direct comparisons among participants.

Future research may build on the present study by including larger and more diverse samples from different universities, regions, and educational levels. Comparative studies may examine whether students' experiences and expectations differ according to faculty, gender, province, degree of earthquake exposure, socioeconomic background, or access to institutional support. In addition, longitudinal studies are needed to understand how earthquake-affected students' academic lives, psychological well-being, future plans, and expectations from higher education institutions change over time. Such studies may also examine students' psychological well-being at different time intervals after earthquakes in order to better understand how recovery, adaptation, and educational engagement change over time.

Future studies may also employ mixed-method or interview-based designs to obtain more detailed and in-depth data. In particular, individual interviews, focus groups, or narrative approaches may provide a deeper understanding of students' post-disaster educational needs and coping processes. These approaches may also help reveal which emotions remain suppressed over time and how students retrospectively evaluate the educational practices implemented during the post-earthquake period, including the transition to online education and institutional support practices. Furthermore, future research could examine the effectiveness of university-based academic, psychological, social, and financial support mechanisms developed for students affected by natural disasters. Intervention-based studies may specifically investigate the role of psycho-educational programs, psychodrama practices, and structured psychological support services in supporting earthquake-affected university students' academic adjustment, emotional recovery, and sense of belonging. Finally, further research may explore the long-term effects of the February 6 earthquakes on students' professional lives, particularly in relation to disruptions in their educational processes, career planning, and transition from higher education to employment. Such studies would contribute to the development of more inclusive, responsive, and disaster-sensitive higher education policies.

Data availability: The data supporting the findings of the current study will be made available from the author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethics declaration: Ethical approval for this research was granted by Uşak University Ethics Committee (approval date and reference number: July 07, 2024/E-89784354-050.99-214695), and

written consent to conduct the study was obtained. An informed consent form was prepared for the participant parents, and they were informed about the study and that they could withdraw at any time.

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