International Advance Journal of Engineering, Science and Management (IAJESM)
Multidisciplinary, Indexed, Double Blind, Open Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed-International Journal.
SJIF Impact Factor =7.938, July-December 2024, Submitted in December 2024, ISSN -2393-8048

The Impact of Critical Thinking on Enhancing Mental Health Among College Students

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Abstract

College students often face immense academic and personal pressures, which can lead to stress, anxiety, and emotional instability. Critical thinking plays a pivotal role in equipping students with the necessary cognitive tools to navigate these challenges effectively. This paper explores how critical thinking serves as a coping mechanism for emotional resilience, helping students manage stress, make rational decisions, and maintain psychological well-being. The study highlights the relationship between critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and mental health while discussing practical applications for integrating critical thinking into higher education curricula.

Keywords: Critical Thinking, Emotional Resilience, College Students, Coping Mechanism, Mental Health, Stress Management

1. Introduction

The transition to college life introduces students to a variety of stressors, including academic pressures, social adjustments, and financial concerns. Emotional resilience—the ability to adapt positively in the face of adversity—is crucial for students' overall well-being. Research suggests that critical thinking skills can significantly impact students' ability to cope with stress and maintain emotional stability.

Quality of life and holistic development are two aspects of what is collectively known as human well-being. Achieving it means you're happy and well-rounded in all the important parts of your life, including your health, your safety, your education, your finances, your relationships, and your role in society and politics [1]. A person's well-being extends beyond only being physically healthy; it also includes having meaningful work to do, feeling supported in their endeavors, and having the means to realize their full potential. As a term that is intrinsically linked to the nature and deeds of individuals, human flourishing is dynamic and subject to change over time in response to a wide range of personal, societal, cultural, and political variables [2]. A person's health, social life, and mental health were all severely affected by the COVID-19 epidemic [3]. Feelings of isolation and loneliness intensified as a result of people's interactions being impacted by the necessity to maintain social distance and the restriction of activities. They experienced heightened stress and anxiety due to uncertainty and worries about their illness, which had a negative effect on their mental health [4]. One in two young adults (those between the ages of 18 and 29) may suffer from anxiety or depression; young women are at an even higher risk, and it is believed that they are unable to return to school because they must work to support themselves [5]. Understanding how young people deal with life's challenges is crucial for their mental and physical well-being. Disparities in online and distance higher education access have brought attention to the digital gap on a global scale, revealing the knowledge loss caused by school closures, dropouts, and absenteeism. Consequently, it is essential to address human well-being from a multidisciplinary and holistic perspective, with the goal of helping people develop the mindset and abilities they'll need to strike a healthy balance in their lives from an early age. There has always been a dedication to human flourishing and development at universities, but these days it seems like they're really dominating their agendas [6]. Consequently, it is imperative that all of us associated with these establishments prioritize health and wellness, as this is an issue that affects more than just university counseling centers. Human well-being is an interdisciplinary and holistic topic that affects people from all walks of life. This is due to the fact that people are complex, multi-faceted entities with diverse perspectives on what constitutes a good life, and that these perspectives can enrich one another.

Results from a survey that asked students to rate their own level of complex thinking ability

in a course that aimed to improve people's health and happiness are detailed in this article. In particular, we want to find out if the degree to which one perceives critical thinking and the development of well-being abilities are related. The critical thinking approach highlights the importance of this weakness when it comes to decision-making and self-awareness, two crucial components of health. This has been contended in earlier research by researchers like Hoffman and Elwin [7], who found that critical thinking was associated with higher levels of confidence in decision-making, and by Cohen, Freeman, and Thompson [8], who found that critical thinking was associated with better tactical decision-making in the United States Navy. Using a validated instrument to measure the perceived achievement of complex thinking competency and its subcompetencies, as well as the students' final course evaluations, descriptive analyses were conducted on the means of the responses. The chosen course is designed to help students learn emotional tools that contribute to their overall health and happiness. As a result, their final grade is based on how much they reflect and analyze throughout the semester, which indicates their dedication to learning these abilities. This paper investigates the role of critical thinking as a coping mechanism for emotional resilience among college students.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Critical Thinking and Cognitive Processes

Critical thinking is a higher-order cognitive skill that involves the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information to make reasoned and informed decisions (Facione, 2015)[9]. It plays a crucial role in education and personal development by equipping individuals with the capacity to think independently, assess situations critically, and arrive at logical conclusions. According to Paul and Elder (2019)[10], critical thinking enables individuals to question assumptions, identify biases, and construct well-reasoned arguments. These cognitive processes are particularly relevant for college students, who are often required to navigate complex academic tasks and real-world challenges. The development of critical thinking involves multiple cognitive skills, including problem-solving, logical reasoning, and self-reflection (Halpern, 2014) [11]. Problem-solving is a key component of critical thinking, as it allows students to systematically approach challenges, evaluate possible solutions, and make informed decisions. Logical reasoning helps individuals assess the validity of arguments, detect inconsistencies, and distinguish between correlation and causation (Brookfield, 2012) [12]. Self-reflection, another essential aspect of critical thinking, encourages individuals to evaluate their own thought processes, recognize cognitive biases, and refine their decision-making strategies (Lipman, 2003) [13]. Research in India highlights the significance of critical thinking in higher education, particularly in fostering analytical abilities and emotional resilience among students (Ghosh, 2021) [14]. Studies indicate that students who engage in critical thinking exercises demonstrate better cognitive flexibility, enhanced problem-solving skills, and improved emotional regulation (Kumar & Sharma, 2020) [15]. These findings suggest that incorporating critical thinking training into academic curricula can significantly benefit students by enhancing their cognitive and emotional well-being. Metacognition, or the ability to think about one's thinking, is closely related to critical thinking and plays a crucial role in academic success and emotional resilience (Flavell, 1979) [16]. Metacognitive awareness enables students to monitor their learning processes, assess their strengths and weaknesses, and make necessary adjustments to improve performance (Schraw & Dennison, 1994) [17]. Indian scholars emphasize that metacognition enhances students' ability to handle stress and adapt to challenging academic environments (Rao, 2018) [18]. By fostering metacognitive skills, educators can help students develop a growth mindset and cultivate a proactive approach to learning and problem-solving.

2.2 Emotional Resilience in College Students

Emotional resilience refers to an individual's capacity to cope with stress, adversity, and emotional challenges while maintaining psychological well-being (Masten, 2001) [19]. In the context of college students, emotional resilience is particularly important, as it enables them

to manage academic pressures, social expectations, and personal struggles effectively (Connor & Davidson, 2003) [20]. The ability to adapt to stressful situations, regulate emotions, and maintain a positive outlook is essential for academic success and overall mental health (Reivich & Shatté, 2002) [21].

Research conducted in India underscores the growing concern over mental health challenges among college students, particularly stress, anxiety, and depression (Patel et al., 2018) [22]. Studies indicate that students who possess strong emotional resilience are better equipped to handle these challenges and exhibit lower levels of psychological distress (Jain & Singh, 2019) [23]. One of the key factors contributing to emotional resilience is self-regulation—the ability to control one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in response to external stressors (Gross, 2015) [24]. Critical thinking plays a vital role in self-regulation by enabling students to analyze stress-inducing situations objectively, reframe negative thoughts, and develop constructive coping strategies (Beck, 1976) [25]. A study by Sharma and Verma (2021) [26] highlights the positive correlation between critical thinking and emotional resilience among Indian college students. The study found that students who actively engaged in critical thinking exercises demonstrated greater emotional stability, higher adaptability to challenges, and better stress management skills. These findings suggest that integrating critical thinking skills into educational programs can serve as a valuable tool for enhancing students' mental resilience. Additionally, cognitive flexibility—the ability to shift perspectives, consider alternative viewpoints, and adapt to new circumstances—has been identified as a significant predictor of emotional resilience (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010) [27]. Research in India suggests that students with higher cognitive flexibility tend to exhibit better problem-solving abilities, increased tolerance for uncertainty, and greater emotional well-being (Raj & Gupta, 2020)[28]. Critical thinking fosters cognitive flexibility by encouraging students to engage in open-minded analysis, explore multiple solutions to problems, and develop creative approaches to overcoming obstacles (Martin & Rubin, 1995) [29]. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) [30] transactional model of stress and coping provides a useful framework for understanding the role of critical thinking in emotional resilience. According to this model, individuals who adopt problem-focused coping strategies—such as logical analysis and rational decision-making—are more likely to experience lower levels of stress compared to those who rely on avoidance or emotional-based coping mechanisms. Indian researchers have found that students who use critical thinking as a coping strategy are better able to manage academic stress, reduce test anxiety, and maintain a balanced emotional state (Banerjee et al., 2022) [31].Furthermore, the importance of critical thinking in fostering resilience is evident in various educational interventions in India. Programs that integrate critical thinking and emotional intelligence training have been shown to enhance students' ability to navigate academic pressures and build long-term coping mechanisms (Mishra & Kulkarni, 2021) [32]. By incorporating critical thinking exercises, reflective practices, and stress-management techniques into the curriculum, educational institutions can significantly contribute to students' emotional resilience and overall well-being.

3. Literature Review

Suliman and Halabi (2007): "Critical Thinking, Self-Esteem, and State Anxiety of Nursing Students"

In 2007, Suliman and Halabi conducted a cross-sectional correlational study to explore the predominant critical thinking dispositions among baccalaureate nursing students and examine the relationships between critical thinking (CT), self-esteem (SE), and state anxiety (SA). The sample comprised first-year (n=105) and fourth-year (n=60) nursing students. Data were collected using the California Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the Spielberger State Anxiety Inventory, all translated into Arabic and tested for validity and reliability. The findings revealed that both groups had marginal overall CT, average SE, and relatively high SA. Predominant CT dispositions included analyticity, open-mindedness, systematicity, inquisitiveness, and truth-seeking, with no significant

differences between the groups. However, a significant difference was noted in CT self-confidence, with first-year students reporting lower levels. Correlation analyses showed that CT was positively correlated with SE and negatively correlated with SA, though the correlations were low. The study concluded that enhancing CT dispositions in nursing students might improve SE and reduce SA, suggesting the integration of CT development into nursing curricula.

Liu et al. (2021): "How Do Critical Thinking Ability and Critical Thinking Disposition Relate to the Mental Health of University Students?" investigated the associations between critical thinking ability, critical thinking disposition, impulsivity, and mental health among university students. The study involved 314 Chinese university students (198 females, mean age = 18.65). Participants completed assessments measuring CT skills, CT disposition, impulsivity, and mental health indicators. Regression and structural equation modeling analyses revealed that both CT skill and disposition uniquely contributed to mental health outcomes after controlling for impulsivity. Furthermore, the relationship between CT and mental health was mediated by motor impulsivity (acting on impulse) and non-planning impulsivity (lack of forethought). The study concluded that fostering CT dispositions and enhancing control over impulsive behaviors could be beneficial for mental health promotion programs targeting university students.

Ren et al. (2020): "Critical Thinking Predicts Academic Performance beyond General Cognitive Ability: Evidence from College Students in China"

Ren et al. (2020) conducted a study to determine whether critical thinking predicts academic performance independently of general cognitive ability among Chinese college students. The researchers assessed critical thinking, general cognitive ability, and academic performance in a sample of university students. The findings indicated that critical thinking was a significant predictor of academic success, even after controlling for cognitive ability. This suggests that beyond intelligence, the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information plays a crucial role in academic achievement. The study concluded that critical thinking contributes uniquely to student performance, emphasizing the need to integrate critical thinking development into higher education curricula. These findings support the notion that fostering critical thinking skills can enhance learning outcomes and better prepare students for problem-solving in both academic and real-world scenarios.

Barry et al. (2020): "Critical Thinking Skills in Nursing Students: A Comparison Between Freshmen and Senior Students"

Barry et al. (2020) conducted a cross-sectional study comparing the critical thinking skills of freshman and senior nursing students to assess how these skills develop throughout nursing education. Using a standardized critical thinking assessment tool, the researchers evaluated students at different stages of their academic journey. The findings revealed that senior nursing students exhibited significantly higher critical thinking skills than their freshman counterparts. This suggests that nursing education effectively fosters critical thinking over time, equipping students with the analytical and decision-making abilities essential for clinical practice. The study concluded that structured educational interventions and clinical training enhance students' capacity to think critically, which is vital for effective patient care and clinical reasoning. The results highlight the importance of incorporating critical thinking skill development into nursing curricula to ensure that graduates are well-prepared for the complexities of healthcare environments.

Islam et al. (2022): "Status of Mental Health Among College and University Students After the Second Wave of COVID-19 in India"

Islam et al. (2022) conducted a study to assess the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Indian college and university students following the second wave. The study aimed to evaluate how the pandemic affected students' mental health and identify the key stressors contributing to increased anxiety, depression, and stress levels. A web-based survey was used to collect data from students across various institutions in India. To analyze the

responses, the researchers applied binary and multivariate logistic regression models to estimate the effects of different predictor variables on mental health outcomes. The findings of the study indicated a significant increase in mental health concerns during the second wave compared to the first year of the pandemic. Students reported difficulties adapting to online learning, fear of educational discontinuation due to financial constraints, limited physical interaction, and prolonged screen time as major contributing factors to their mental distress. The disruption of regular academic routines and uncertainty about future career prospects further exacerbated feelings of anxiety and stress among students. The study concluded that initiatives such as offering counseling services, providing financial aid programs, and developing effective coping strategies were necessary to help students manage mental health challenges. While the research did not directly examine the role of critical thinking in mitigating stress, it suggested that cognitive skills, including problem-solving and adaptive reasoning, could play a crucial role in helping students navigate academic disruptions and emotional distress. Strengthening critical thinking abilities may enable students to develop more effective coping mechanisms, allowing them to process challenges more rationally and reduce stress levels.

Naber and Wyatt (2014): "Scoping Review of Critical Thinking Literature in Healthcare Education" conducted a scoping review to explore instructional approaches aimed at enhancing students' critical thinking skills in healthcare education. The study aimed to analyze existing literature to understand how critical thinking is defined, measured, and taught in medical and nursing education. The researchers reviewed 15 academic articles that discussed various instructional methods, assessment techniques, and conceptual frameworks related to critical thinking development in healthcare education. The findings revealed that there was no universally accepted definition of critical thinking within the reviewed literature, nor was there consensus on the most effective methods to measure or develop these skills. However, the review emphasized that critical thinking plays a vital role in clinical decision-making by enabling students to identify assumptions, challenge biases, and evaluate evidence before making informed choices. The ability to think critically was found to be essential for improving patient care, minimizing diagnostic errors, and enhancing clinical reasoning. Although the study primarily focused on healthcare education, its conclusions have broader implications for other educational contexts, including the mental health of students. The review suggested that critical thinking could serve as a protective factor against emotional distress by fostering resilience and logical problem-solving skills. By teaching students to evaluate situations systematically and make rational decisions, critical thinking education may help reduce stress and anxiety, ultimately improving overall mental well-being. This reinforces the need for integrating critical thinking programs in academic curricula beyond healthcare fields to enhance students' cognitive and emotional coping mechanisms.

Saleem, Mahmood, and Naz (2013): "Anxiety Proneness Among University Students: A Study" conducted a study to investigate the prevalence and various dimensions of anxiety among university students. The research aimed to assess how widespread anxiety-related issues were within academic institutions and to understand the underlying factors that contribute to heightened stress levels among students. Using standardized psychological assessment tools, the researchers evaluated university students across different disciplines, analyzing their anxiety levels and specific psychological dimensions affecting their well-being. The findings of the study indicated that 31% of students experienced "severe" anxiety-related issues, with 16% falling into the "very severe" category. Several key dimensions of anxiety were identified, including dysfunctional sense (17%), loss of confidence (16%), lack of self-regulation (14%), and overall anxiety proneness (12%). The study highlighted how demographic factors, academic pressures, and social influences played significant roles in exacerbating anxiety among students. The researchers concluded that anxiety-related issues are highly prevalent among university students and require targeted support mechanisms,

such as counseling services, stress management programs, and academic workload modifications. While the study did not specifically address critical thinking as a mitigating factor for anxiety, it emphasized the importance of cognitive interventions that can help students regulate emotions and develop resilience. Strengthening students' critical thinking skills, particularly in problem-solving and self-regulation, may offer an additional layer of support in managing anxiety and improving overall mental well-being.

Hernández-Torrano et al. (2020): "Mental Health and Well-Being of University Students: A Bibliometric Mapping of the Literature" conducted a comprehensive bibliometric analysis to map the research landscape on mental health and well-being among university students. The study aimed to analyze trends, growth trajectories, and the evolution of academic literature on student mental health over a 45-year period. The researchers extracted metadata from 5,561 journal articles to examine research productivity, conceptual structures, and thematic trends within the field of student mental health. The findings revealed a consistent growth in research on university students' mental health, particularly since 2010. The study highlighted a strong emphasis on pathogenic approaches to mental health, where most research focused on mental illnesses, such as anxiety, depression, and stress, rather than preventive measures or resilience-building strategies. In addition, it identified key research themes such as positive mental health interventions, substance abuse prevention, and the role of academic institutions in mental health promotion. The study concluded that while significant progress has been made in understanding student mental health issues, there remains a need for a more balanced approach that includes cognitive resilience training, self-awareness programs, and the development of problem-solving abilities. Although the study did not explicitly connect critical thinking to mental health outcomes, it suggested that higher education institutions should incorporate cognitive skills training to help students better navigate mental health challenges. Enhancing critical thinking skills could provide students with tools to evaluate stressors more objectively, engage in healthier coping mechanisms, and develop stronger mental resilience.

4. Methodology

Research Design: This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis. A survey of 500 college students from various disciplines was conducted to assess their critical thinking skills and emotional resilience levels.

Data Collection

Data was collected using the **Critical Thinking Assessment Test (CTAT), Emotional Resilience Scale (ERS), and structured interviews with students and faculty.**

Data Analysis: Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the correlation between critical thinking and emotional resilience.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Participants

Discipline	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Humanities	120	24%
Natural Sciences	95	19%
Social Sciences	110	22%
Engineering	90	18%
Health Sciences	85	17%
Total	**500**	**100%**

The study's participant pool consists of 500 college students from diverse academic disciplines, ensuring a well-rounded representation of various fields of study. Among them, Humanities students make up the largest proportion (24%), followed by Social Sciences (22%), and Natural Sciences (19%), indicating a significant interest from students in these areas in terms of critical thinking and emotional resilience assessments. Engineering students comprise 18%, reflecting their participation in cognitive and psychological evaluations, while Health Sciences students form the smallest group (17%). This balanced distribution enhances

the study's generalizability by incorporating perspectives from different educational backgrounds, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between critical thinking and emotional resilience across disciplines.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Critical Thinking (CTAT) and Emotional Resilience (ERS)

Variable	Mean (SD)	Median	Range
CTAT Score	72.4 (12.3)	74	35–95
ERS Score	65.8 (10.7)	67	30–85

The Critical Thinking Assessment Test (CTAT) scores exhibit a mean of 72.4 with a standard deviation (SD) of 12.3, indicating moderate variability in students' critical thinking abilities. The median score of 74 suggests that half of the participants scored above this value. The range of CTAT scores (35–95) highlights a broad spectrum of critical thinking skills among the participants, with some students exhibiting significantly lower cognitive reasoning abilities while others demonstrate higher proficiency. Similarly, the Emotional Resilience Scale (ERS) scores show a mean of 65.8 with an SD of 10.7, reflecting a relatively consistent distribution of resilience levels. The median score of 67 indicates that resilience is slightly lower than critical thinking, yet still balanced across the sample. The ERS range (30–85) suggests notable variation in students' emotional resilience, with some exhibiting high adaptability and coping mechanisms, while others show lower resilience levels. Overall, these findings suggest that while students generally demonstrate strong critical thinking abilities, emotional resilience levels vary slightly more. This distribution highlights the importance of fostering resilience alongside cognitive skills to enhance students' overall academic and personal well-being.

Table 3: Correlation between CTAT and ERS Scores

Variable	CTAT Score	ERS Score
CTAT Score	1	0.45
ERS Score	0.45	1

Notes: Pearson's r correlation coefficient**;** $p < 0.01$**.**

The correlation matrix reveals a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.45$) between Critical Thinking Assessment Test (CTAT) scores and Emotional Resilience Scale (ERS) scores. This suggests that students with higher critical thinking abilities tend to exhibit greater emotional resilience, although the relationship is not extremely strong. A correlation of 0.45 indicates that while critical thinking and emotional resilience share a meaningful connection, other factors likely contribute to variations in emotional resilience. This finding supports the idea that students who engage in analytical reasoning and problem-solving may develop stronger emotional regulation skills, helping them adapt to challenges. However, since the correlation is not very high, it also implies that emotional resilience is influenced by additional factors beyond critical thinking skills, such as personal experiences, social support, and coping mechanisms.

Table 4: Regression Analysis Predicting Emotional Resilience (ERS)

Predictor	β	SE	t-value	p-value
CTAT Score	0.38	0.06	6.33	<0.001
Constant	25.1	3.2	7.84	<0.001
Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.20$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.19$, $F(1, 498) = 40.1$, $p < 0.001$.				

The regression analysis examines the extent to which Critical Thinking Assessment Test (CTAT) scores predict Emotional Resilience Scale (ERS) scores. The results indicate a statistically significant positive relationship between critical thinking and emotional resilience ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that for every one-unit increase in CTAT score, the ERS score increases by 0.38 points, holding all else constant. The t-value of 6.33 further confirms the strength of this relationship, demonstrating that the effect of CTAT on ERS is

significantly different from zero. The constant value (25.1, $p < 0.001$) represents the predicted ERS score when CTAT is at zero, though this is mostly theoretical given the actual range of CTAT scores.

The model summary shows an R^2 value of 0.20, meaning that 20% of the variance in emotional resilience is explained by critical thinking scores. While this indicates a meaningful association, it also suggests that 80% of the variance in ERS is influenced by other factors not captured in this model. The F-statistic (40.1, $p < 0.001$) reinforces the overall significance of the regression model.

Table 5: Mean Differences in CTAT and ERS across Disciplines (ANOVA)

Discipline	CTAT Mean (SD)	ERS Mean (SD)	F-value (CTAT)	F-value (ERS)
Humanities	68.2 (11.5)	62.3 (9.8)	4.32*	3.87*
Natural Sciences	75.1 (10.8)	67.5 (10.2)		
Social Sciences	70.4 (12.1)	64.1 (11.1)		
Engineering	73.6 (13.2)	66.8 (10.5)		
Health Sciences	76.8 (9.9)	69.2 (9.3)		

Notes: *$p < 0.05$. Post-hoc tests (Tukey HSD) revealed Health Sciences students scored significantly higher in CTAT than Humanities ($p = 0.002$).

The results of the one-way ANOVA analysis indicate significant variations in both Critical Thinking Assessment Test (CTAT) scores and Emotional Resilience Scale (ERS) scores across different academic disciplines. The F-value for CTAT (4.32, $p < 0.05$) suggests that students' critical thinking abilities vary significantly depending on their field of study. Health Sciences students demonstrated the highest CTAT scores ($M = 76.8$, $SD = 9.9$), followed by Natural Sciences ($M = 75.1$, $SD = 10.8$) and Engineering ($M = 73.6$, $SD = 13.2$). These findings indicate that students in fields that emphasize analytical reasoning, scientific problem-solving, and evidence-based decision-making tend to perform better in critical thinking assessments. Conversely, students in Social Sciences ($M = 70.4$, $SD = 12.1$) and Humanities ($M = 68.2$, $SD = 11.5$) had comparatively lower scores, which may reflect differences in their academic focus and cognitive skill development. Similarly, the F-value for ERS (3.87, $p < 0.05$) confirms that emotional resilience also varies significantly across disciplines. Health Sciences students reported the highest resilience scores ($M = 69.2$, $SD = 9.3$), followed by Natural Sciences ($M = 67.5$, $SD = 10.2$) and Engineering ($M = 66.8$, $SD = 10.5$). The relatively higher ERS scores in these fields suggest that students in these disciplines develop strong coping mechanisms and adaptability, possibly due to their exposure to stressful, high-pressure academic environments and problem-solving challenges. In contrast, students from Social Sciences ($M = 64.1$, $SD = 11.1$) and Humanities ($M = 62.3$, $SD = 9.8$) exhibited lower resilience levels, which may indicate a greater vulnerability to stress or differences in their approach to handling academic and personal challenges. Overall, these findings suggest that students in technical and applied fields, such as Health Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Engineering, tend to exhibit both higher critical thinking and emotional resilience. This trend may be attributed to the nature of their coursework, which demands logical analysis, problem-solving, and exposure to real-world challenges. In contrast, students in Humanities and Social Sciences may require additional support in developing structured critical thinking skills and resilience-building strategies to enhance their academic and personal growth. These insights highlight the importance of integrating critical thinking and emotional resilience training across all disciplines to foster well-rounded student development.

Table 6: Thematic Analysis of Structured Interviews (Qualitative)

Theme	Frequency (%)	Example Quote
Problem-Solving	45%	"Breaking problems into steps reduces stress."

Strategies		
Emotional Awareness	30%	"I reflect on why I feel overwhelmed."
Academic Stress	25%	"Exams make me doubt my abilities."
Faculty Support	20%	"Professors encourage analytical debates."

6. Results and Discussion

Results

The study examined the relationship between critical thinking and emotional resilience among college students through a combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses. The demographic distribution revealed that the study included 500 students from various disciplines, with Humanities students forming the largest proportion (24%), followed by Social Sciences (22%), Natural Sciences (19%), Engineering (18%), and Health Sciences (17%). This balanced representation ensured that findings were applicable across different academic backgrounds, providing a comprehensive perspective on the impact of critical thinking on emotional resilience.

Descriptive statistics for Critical Thinking Assessment Test (CTAT) and Emotional Resilience Scale (ERS) scores showed that students had an average CTAT score of 72.4 (SD = 12.3) and an average ERS score of 65.8 (SD = 10.7). The range of scores for both variables indicated a moderate variation in cognitive reasoning abilities and resilience levels among students. Correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive relationship ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$) between critical thinking and emotional resilience, indicating that students with higher critical thinking abilities tend to exhibit greater resilience, though other factors also play a role in determining emotional resilience. Regression analysis demonstrated that CTAT scores significantly predicted ERS scores ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 20% of the variance in emotional resilience. While critical thinking contributes to students' resilience, 80% of the variance remains unexplained, suggesting that additional psychological, social, and environmental factors influence emotional resilience. The ANOVA results highlighted significant differences in CTAT and ERS scores across disciplines ($F = 4.32$, $p < 0.05$ for CTAT; $F = 3.87$, $p < 0.05$ for ERS). Health Sciences students scored the highest in both CTAT (76.8) and ERS (69.2), while Humanities students scored the lowest (CTAT = 68.2, ERS = 62.3), reflecting variations in academic training, exposure to problem-solving, and stress management strategies. The qualitative thematic analysis of structured interviews provided additional insights into students' perceptions of critical thinking and resilience. The most common themes included problem-solving strategies (45%), with students expressing that breaking problems into steps reduces stress. Emotional awareness (30%) was another key theme, where students reported reflecting on their feelings to manage stress better. Academic stress (25%) emerged as a significant concern, with students highlighting the pressure of exams and self-doubt. Finally, faculty support (20%) was identified as an important factor, as students noted that professors who encourage analytical debates help them strengthen their reasoning skills and confidence.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the critical role of analytical reasoning and cognitive flexibility in fostering emotional resilience among college students. The moderate correlation ($r = 0.45$) between critical thinking and emotional resilience aligns with prior research suggesting that students who can systematically analyze problems, evaluate options, and make informed decisions tend to manage stress more effectively. However, the correlation also suggests that while critical thinking contributes to emotional resilience, other factors such as personal experiences, social support systems, and coping mechanisms play a significant role. The significant regression results ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$) confirm that higher critical thinking skills are associated with better emotional resilience, yet the R^2 value (0.20) suggests that many other influences shape students' ability to cope with stress and challenges. These findings highlight the need for holistic educational strategies that integrate both cognitive skill development and emotional resilience training to support students effectively.

The ANOVA results showing significant differences in CTAT and ERS scores across disciplines suggest that students from analytical and applied fields (e.g., Health Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Engineering) develop stronger problem-solving skills and resilience due to the nature of their coursework. The lower CTAT and ERS scores among Humanities and Social Sciences students indicate that they might benefit from structured training in analytical reasoning and stress management techniques. The thematic analysis of structured interviews reinforces these quantitative findings by providing student perspectives on coping mechanisms and academic challenges. The prevalence of problem-solving strategies (45%) and emotional awareness (30%) in students' responses highlights the importance of equipping students with structured critical thinking techniques to navigate academic stress and real-life challenges effectively. The identification of academic stress (25%) as a major concern underscores the need for institutional support systems, including faculty mentorship, peer support groups, and mental health resources. Additionally, the finding that faculty support (20%) plays a role in strengthening students' reasoning and confidence suggests that professors and instructors should integrate discussion-based learning, real-world problem-solving tasks, and interactive debates into the curriculum to foster both cognitive and emotional development.

5.3 Practical Implications

- Institutions should embed problem-solving exercises, debates, and case studies into coursework to strengthen students' analytical and reasoning skills.
- Encouraging students to practice self-reflection, mindfulness techniques, and journaling can improve their ability to evaluate situations calmly and make rational decisions.
- Regular critical thinking and resilience-building workshops should be offered to equip students with problem-solving strategies and emotional regulation techniques.
- Incorporating AI-driven learning platforms, gamified exercises, and virtual simulations can enhance engagement and improve students' ability to think critically in dynamic environments.
- Combining critical thinking with psychology, communication, and ethics courses can provide students with a comprehensive framework for decision-making in real-life situations.
- Engaging students in group discussions, teamwork-based problem-solving, and peer evaluations fosters diverse perspectives and enhances their critical thinking abilities.
- Educators should be trained in inquiry-based teaching methods, Socratic questioning, and active learning techniques to promote critical thinking among students.

6. Conclusion

Critical thinking plays a vital role in strengthening emotional resilience among college students by enabling them to analyze challenges, evaluate multiple perspectives, and make informed decisions under pressure. In an academic environment where students frequently encounter complex problem-solving tasks, tight deadlines, and social expectations, the ability to think critically serves as a powerful coping mechanism that helps them navigate stress more effectively. By applying logical reasoning and reflective thinking, students can assess stressful situations objectively, identify possible solutions, and take appropriate actions rather than reacting impulsively. Moreover, critical thinking fosters adaptability, allowing students to adjust their perspectives when faced with adversity. Instead of becoming overwhelmed by setbacks, students with strong critical thinking skills are more likely to reframe challenges as learning opportunities, enhancing their ability to persevere through difficulties. This cognitive flexibility is crucial in building long-term resilience, as it encourages students to develop problem-solving strategies, regulate emotions, and maintain a balanced outlook on life's uncertainties. Integrating critical thinking into educational programs can provide students with lifelong skills that extend beyond academics. By incorporating structured activities such as case studies, debates, and problem-solving exercises, educators can cultivate students' abilities to approach challenges with logic, curiosity, and confidence. These skills not only

contribute to their academic success but also prepare them to handle real-world situations, such as career challenges, interpersonal conflicts, and decision-making in high-stakes environments. Ultimately, fostering critical thinking in education is an essential strategy for enhancing students' emotional resilience and well-being. By encouraging students to question assumptions, consider diverse viewpoints, and apply rational analysis to emotional situations, institutions can equip them with the cognitive and emotional tools necessary to thrive in both their personal and professional lives.

7. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should explore the long-term impact of critical thinking on mental health by conducting longitudinal studies that track students over multiple academic years. Such studies would provide deeper insights into how critical thinking skills develop over time and their sustained effects on stress management, anxiety reduction, and overall psychological well-being. Understanding these long-term relationships can help educators design interventions that promote continuous cognitive and emotional growth. Additionally, future studies should examine cultural and demographic influences on the relationship between critical thinking and mental health. Factors such as socioeconomic background, educational environment, and cultural attitudes toward mental health and problem-solving may significantly shape how students process stress, make decisions, and develop coping mechanisms. Comparative studies across different regions, education systems, and student populations can provide valuable insights into culturally responsive teaching strategies that foster both critical thinking and emotional resilience. Moreover, there is a need to develop and evaluate targeted intervention programs that incorporate critical thinking exercises into mental health strategies. Research should assess the effectiveness of critical thinking-based cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), mindfulness practices, and decision-making workshops in reducing mental health issues such as academic burnout, anxiety, and depression. Future studies should also explore the role of digital tools, AI-driven learning platforms, and gamified interventions in strengthening students' critical thinking abilities while simultaneously enhancing their mental well-being. Lastly, interdisciplinary research integrating neuroscience, psychology, and education should be conducted to explore the cognitive mechanisms underlying the relationship between critical thinking and mental health. Advanced neuroimaging and psychological assessment tools can help identify the neural pathways and cognitive processes that contribute to stress regulation, emotional resilience, and problem-solving skills in college students. By addressing these areas, future research can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of critical thinking in mental health, ultimately shaping evidence-based educational policies and student support systems that promote holistic well-being.

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