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THE INFLUENCE OF CRITICAL THINKING ON ACADEMIC RESILIENCE AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN CHINA

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Abstract: *Among Chinese college students, this study looks at the correlation between two important factors: critical thinking abilities and academic resilience. It is crucial to comprehend the role of critical thinking in helping Chinese college students manage the rigorous academic environment. Finding out if there is a strong relationship between academic resilience and critical thinking skills is the primary goal of this study. Five hundred Chinese undergraduates from a variety of universities in different regions participated in a cross-sectional study that used a quantitative methodology. Students' critical thinking abilities were measured by administering the Critical Thinking Disposition Scale (CTDS) and their academic resilience by administering the Academic Resilience Scale (ARS). By using stratified random sampling, we were able to collect data from a large and diverse pool of respondents, which allowed us to examine all of these factors in the context of China's higher education system. Subjects assessed their critical thinking propensity and academic resilience with self-administered questionnaires. Critical thinking was moderate and academic resilience was relatively, according to descriptive statistics. Students who demonstrated higher levels of critical thinking were more likely to show resilience when confronted with academic difficulties, according to correlation analysis, which revealed a strong positive relationship between the two concepts. Independent of demographic characteristics, multiple regression analysis further showed that academic resilience was predicted by critical thinking skills. These results highlight the significance of teaching kids to think critically in order to help them succeed academically and overcome challenges.*

Keywords: *China, University Students, Academic Resilience, Critical Thinking*

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Introduction

The relationship between critical thinking and academic resilience represents a significant area of inquiry, particularly within the context of Chinese higher education. This study aims to explore how critical thinking skills contribute to the development of academic resilience among university students in China, where distinct educational features such as rigorous academic expectations, stringent adherence to standards, and intense competition among institutions shape the learning environment. The highly competitive nature of exams, coupled with societal and familial expectations, places considerable pressure on students, often affecting their motivation, self-confidence, and well-being (Falabella, 2020). Resilience thus emerges as a critical factor for students to navigate these academic demands effectively, enabling them to sustain their academic engagement and progress in the face of adversity (Schivinski et al., 2020).

Academic resilience involves the capacity to persevere through challenges, adapt to shifting demands, and maintain commitment despite academic setbacks (Skinner et al., 2020). Psychological resilience in educational contexts encompasses emotional regulation, stress management, and maintaining a positive outlook—qualities essential for students to continue their academic pursuits amid difficulties (Thukral, 2021). Critical thinking, in this context, refers to the ability to critically evaluate, synthesize, and reason through complex ideas, arguments, and data. The process involves questioning assumptions, scrutinizing evidence, considering diverse perspectives, and formulating well-grounded conclusions (Mascarenhas et al., 2023). Such skills are crucial to academic success, as they enable students to engage meaningfully with course material, tackle complex problems, and construct sound arguments, ultimately enhancing their learning outcomes (El-Sofany & El-Haggar, 2020).

Although both critical thinking and academic resilience are recognized as key competencies, limited research has examined the interrelation of these constructs within Chinese university settings (Fullerton et al., 2021). A clearer understanding of how critical thinking contributes to resilience among university students is essential for fostering educational practices that support holistic student development and academic success in this context (Liu & Han, 2022). This study, therefore, seeks to elucidate the link between critical thinking and academic resilience, providing insights that can inform educational strategies aimed at cultivating resilience and critical engagement among Chinese university students.

Literature Review

Critical thinking, defined as the ability to examine, evaluate, and synthesize knowledge in a logical and reflective manner, is a fundamental skill for university students (Karanja, 2021). This essential ability engages various cognitive processes, including reasoning, problem-solving, and decision-making, which enable students to approach complex ideas and arguments effectively. Students who cultivate critical thinking skills are better equipped to analyze issues from multiple perspectives, draw valid conclusions, and construct well-supported arguments (Mpofu, 2021). These attributes are critical not only for academic success but also for personal and professional development.

In academic settings, critical thinking manifests through activities such as evaluating research findings, discussing ideas with peers and faculty, and scrutinizing academic materials. This skill enhances students' comprehension of course content, helps them assess the reliability of sources, and enables the practical application of theoretical concepts (Mogea, 2022). Beyond academic benefits, developing critical thinking fosters creativity, intellectual curiosity, and a lifelong love of learning, preparing students to navigate an ever-changing world (Trevallion & Nischang,

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2021). These outcomes highlight the interconnectedness of cognitive and emotional growth in educational settings.

Complementing critical thinking is academic resilience, which is defined as the ability to endure and even thrive in the face of academic challenges, setbacks, and adversity (Liu & Han, 2022). Academic resilience encompasses psychological resilience—such as managing stress and maintaining a positive outlook—and specific academic behaviors like overcoming setbacks, adapting to new environments, and persisting until goals are achieved (Weaven et al., 2021). Resilient students not only recover quickly from criticism or time pressures but also view failures as opportunities for growth (Shay & Pohan, 2021). Their proactive approach to challenges often involves seeking support from peers, mentors, and institutional resources to enrich their academic journey (Martinot et al., 2022).

The relationship between academic resilience and critical thinking is deeply intertwined, with each skill reinforcing the development of the other. Critical thinking provides students with cognitive tools for effective problem-solving, which is a core component of resilience (Fullerton et al., 2021). In turn, resilience enables students to approach academic tasks with confidence and persistence, applying their critical thinking skills to devise innovative solutions (Mahmood et al., 2020). Together, these skills form a dynamic interplay that equips students to navigate the complexities of academic life.

This interplay has profound implications for academic success and personal well-being (Karris Bachik et al., 2021). Teaching students to think critically equips them with the resources needed to address academic challenges thoughtfully, fostering resilience in the process. Educators can amplify this effect by creating environments that prioritize critical inquiry and reflective engagement. Such environments encourage students to embrace learning as a process of exploration and adaptation, strengthening both their cognitive abilities and their psychological resilience (Walsh et al., 2020).

Recent studies provide additional insights into critical thinking and resilience among university students. Hapsari et al. (2021) identified subtle gender differences in critical thinking, with male students excelling slightly in problem-solving and logical reasoning. However, resilience levels appeared unaffected by gender, suggesting individual circumstances play a more significant role in shaping resilience. Ziegenfuss and Law (2022) highlighted age differences, noting that older students often demonstrate stronger critical thinking due to greater life experience and cognitive maturity. Interestingly, resilience levels remained consistent across age groups. Lofley et al. (2023) found that humanities students exhibited higher levels of critical thinking than those in technical fields, likely due to the humanities' emphasis on subjective analysis, though resilience levels again showed no significant variation by major.

Albert Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) offers a robust framework for understanding the interaction between critical thinking and academic resilience in university students. SCT posits that learning is shaped by the interplay of personal, social, and environmental factors (Chuang, 2021). Through mechanisms such as observation, modeling, and reinforcement, students acquire and refine their skills (Ilmiani et al., 2021). This framework provides valuable insights into how critical thinking and resilience can be developed synergistically.

According to SCT, the development of critical thinking and resilience is influenced by personal beliefs, social interactions, and situational contexts (Almulla & Al-Rahmi, 2023). For instance,

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students enhance their critical thinking by emulating professors, peers, and mentors, while institutional support and access to educational resources further facilitate this growth (Permatasari et al., 2021). SCT also highlights the importance of self-efficacy—students who believe in their critical thinking abilities are more likely to display resilience, approaching challenges with determination and resourcefulness (Fullerton et al., 2021). Thus, incorporating SCT principles into educational practices can foster both critical thinking and resilience, ultimately enhancing academic outcomes (Chuang, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

The Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) Theory provides a robust framework for understanding the relationship between critical thinking and academic resilience in university students. This theory posits that students actively regulate their learning processes through goal setting, strategic planning, self-monitoring, and self-reflection (Zimmerman, 2002). Critical thinking plays a central role within SRL, as it enables students to evaluate their progress, analyze challenges, and make informed decisions about how to adjust their strategies to achieve academic goals. By fostering critical thinking, students develop the cognitive flexibility and problem-solving abilities needed to overcome academic challenges, adapt to varying contexts, and maintain their motivation and engagement. Through the application of SRL principles, students can cultivate resilience by learning to view obstacles as opportunities for growth and refining their academic approaches in response to setbacks.

The iterative process of self-regulated learning also reinforces academic resilience by promoting self-efficacy and emotional regulation. Students who engage in critical self-reflection and adaptive planning are better equipped to manage stress and persist through adversity, hallmarks of resilient behavior. For example, a student who experiences academic failure can apply SRL strategies to analyze the reasons for the setback, identify areas for improvement, and implement corrective measures. This process not only enhances their ability to recover from challenges but also strengthens their capacity for critical thinking and reflective practice over time. Thus, the SRL theory underscores the symbiotic relationship between critical thinking and academic resilience, highlighting how these skills can be nurtured through intentional and iterative learning practices.

Methodology

A cross-sectional survey design was employed to collect data from a sample of 500 undergraduates selected from universities across multiple provinces in China using random sampling. This sampling approach was chosen to ensure diverse representation, capturing students from various academic disciplines, cultural backgrounds, and regional contexts. The sample size of 500 was calculated to achieve sufficient statistical power for reliable inferential analyses, including multiple regression and subgroup comparisons, while accounting for potential non-responses or incomplete data. This size aligns with established guidelines for survey research and allows the detection of small-to-moderate effect sizes, ensuring robust findings.

Data collection was conducted using validated electronic questionnaires distributed to participants through university email systems, social media platforms, and student group networks. On-campus recruitment was also facilitated with the support of faculty and student organizations to increase participation rates. These efforts ensured broad outreach to students across academic years and institutions. Each participant was given two weeks to complete the survey, with reminders sent after one week to encourage timely responses. The survey was

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designed to take approximately 10–15 minutes, balancing the need for comprehensive data collection with students' time constraints.

The study employed two standardized instruments: the Academic Resilience Scale (ARS) and the Critical Thinking Disposition Scale (CTDS). The ARS assessed students' ability to overcome academic challenges and setbacks, focusing on dimensions such as adaptability, persistence, and coping strategies. The CTDS measured students' disposition toward critical thinking, including traits like openness, analytical thinking, and reflective judgment. Both instruments were chosen for their reliability and validity in assessing the core constructs of the study.

Data analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistical methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the variables. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were used to summarize demographic data and the distribution of scores on the ARS and CTDS. Inferential analyses, such as multiple regression and correlation analysis, examined the relationship between critical thinking and academic resilience, with adjustments for demographic variables. Subgroup analyses explored potential differences across gender, age, academic major, and year of study. All analyses were conducted using SPSS, with a significance threshold set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

The sample included 500 first-year students from a variety of Chinese universities, representing a wide range of ages, genders, academic majors, and years in school.

Table 1: Demography

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Age Group: 18–20 years	160	16.0%
Age Group: 21–23 years	210	21.0%
Age Group: 24–26 years	130	13.0%
Academic Major: Humanities	120	12.0%
Academic Major: Social Sciences	140	14.0%
Academic Major: Natural Sciences	150	15.0%
Academic Major: Engineering	90	9.0%

Table 1 highlights a diverse representation across age groups and academic majors. Among the age groups, the largest proportion of respondents (21.0%) were aged 21–23 years, followed by those aged 18–20 years (16.0%) and 24–26 years (13.0%). In terms of academic majors, students from the natural sciences (15.0%) and social sciences (14.0%) were the most represented, while students from humanities and engineering comprised 12.0% and 9.0% of the sample, respectively. This diversity ensures that the study captures a broad range of perspectives on critical thinking and academic resilience.

A mean score of 3.78 (SD = 0.56) on the Critical Thinking Disposition Scale (CTDS) suggested a moderate level of dispositional qualities related to critical thinking among the respondents, according to descriptive statistics. Perceived ability to overcome academic problems and setbacks was relatively strong, with a mean score of 4.15 (SD = 0.62) on the Academic Resilience Scale (ARS). The descriptive statistics for the academic resilience and critical thinking scales are shown in Table 2.

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Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Critical Thinking and Academic Resilience Scales

Scale	Mean	Standard Deviation
Critical Thinking (CTDS)	3.78	0.56
Academic Resilience (ARS)	4.15	0.62

Additional subgroup analysis was carried out to investigate disparities according to demographic factors as gender, age, and academic major. The average critical thinking and academic resilience scores of male and female students were compared using an independent t-test. There was a statistically significant difference by gender, with the mean critical thinking score for male students being 3.82 (standard deviation = 0.55) and the mean score for female students being 3.74 (standard deviation = 0.57). Nevertheless, academic resilience ratings did not show a significant difference by gender.

Table 3: Mean Scores of Critical Thinking and Academic Resilience Based on Gender

Gender	Critical Thinking Mean (SD)	Academic Resilience Mean (SD)
Male	3.82 (0.55)	4.17 (0.61)
Female	3.74 (0.57)	4.13 (0.63)
t-value	2.35	1.08
p-value	0.019*	0.28

*Note: *p < 0.05 indicates significance.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to look for variations in academic resilience and critical thinking between three age groups: 18–20, 21–23, and 24-26 years old. Table 4 shows that students' critical thinking scores varied significantly across age groups, with greater scores shown by older students. presents the mean scores of critical thinking and academic resilience across three age groups: 18–20 years, 21–23 years, and 24–26 years. Critical thinking scores show a statistically significant difference among the age groups (F=4.12,p=0.017), with older students (24–26 years) scoring the highest (Mean = 3.88, SD = 0.53), followed by the 21–23 years group (Mean = 3.81, SD = 0.58) and the 18–20 years group (Mean = 3.68, SD = 0.54). However, academic resilience scores do not differ significantly (F=2.01, p=0.14), although a slight upward trend is observed with increasing age, where the 24–26 years group again scored highest (Mean = 4.20, SD = 0.63). These results suggest that critical thinking may develop more significantly with age, while academic resilience remains relatively consistent.

Table 4: Mean Scores of Critical Thinking and Academic Resilience Based on Age Groups

Age Group	N	Critical Thinking Mean (SD)	Academic Resilience Mean (SD)
18-20 years	160	3.68 (0.54)	4.09 (0.60)
21-23 years	210	3.81 (0.58)	4.14 (0.64)
24-26 years	130	3.88 (0.53)	4.20 (0.63)
F-value		4.12	2.01
p-value		0.017*	0.14

*Note: *p < 0.05 indicates significance.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to ascertain if there were any differences in critical thinking and resilience among students from various academic disciplines. Table 5 shows that students majoring in the hard sciences and engineering reported lower levels of critical thinking compared to those majoring in the arts and social sciences, where there were statistically

Volume: 10 Issues: 69 Special Issue [January, 2025] pp. 452 - 462
Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)
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Journal website: www.academicinspired.com/jised
DOI: 10.55573/JISED.106933

significant disparities. A significant difference was found in critical thinking scores among the majors (F=3.87,p=0.009), with students in the humanities achieving the highest mean score (Mean = 3.92, SD = 0.51), followed closely by those in social sciences (Mean = 3.85, SD = 0.54). In contrast, students in natural sciences (Mean = 3.72, SD = 0.58) and engineering (Mean = 3.68, SD = 0.59) reported lower scores. However, there was no significant difference in academic resilience scores (F=0.98,p=0.39), with resilience levels being relatively consistent across majors, ranging from 4.10 to 4.18. These findings suggest that academic discipline may influence critical thinking development, but it has less impact on resilience.

Table 5: Mean Scores of Critical Thinking and Academic Resilience Based on Academic Major

Academic Major	N	Critical Thinking Mean (SD)	Academic Resilience Mean (SD)
Humanities	120	3.92 (0.51)	4.18 (0.61)
Social Sciences	140	3.85 (0.54)	4.16 (0.60)
Natural Sciences	150	3.72 (0.58)	4.12 (0.63)
Engineering	90	3.68 (0.59)	4.10 (0.64)
F-value		3.87	0.98
p-value		0.009*	0.39

*Note: *p < 0.05 indicates significance.

To investigate the influence of critical thinking on academic resilience, multivariate regression analysis was conducted. Even after accounting for other characteristics, critical thinking remains a strong predictor of academic resilience, as the model accounted for 30% of the variation in this trait ($R^2 = 0.30$, $F(4, 495) = 53.47$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 6: Multiple Regression Analysis of Academic Resilience

Predictor	Beta (β)	Standard Error (SE)	t-value	p-value
Critical Thinking (CTDS)	0.42	0.05	8.34	< 0.001*

*Note: *p < 0.05 indicates significance.

The multiple regression analysis indicates that critical thinking, as measured by the Critical Thinking Disposition Scale (CTDS), is a significant predictor of academic resilience. The standardized beta coefficient (β=0.42) demonstrates a moderate positive relationship, suggesting that higher levels of critical thinking are associated with greater academic resilience. This relationship is statistically significant (t=8.34, p<0.001), with a small standard error (SE=0.05) indicating the precision of the estimate. These results underscore the importance of fostering critical thinking skills to enhance students' ability to adapt and thrive in academic challenges.

Discussion

The study's findings strongly suggest that Chinese college students' critical thinking skills correlate positively with their academic resilience. The results support the idea that teaching students to think critically can help them deal with academic difficulties, which is in line with other recent research in this area (Kiuru et al., 2020; Mahmood et al., 2020). According to Trevallion and Nischang (2021), students are better prepared to handle difficult academic problems when they have the skills to think critically and solve problems. This finding is in line with their argument. It stands to reason that developing one's critical thinking abilities increases

Volume: 10 Issues: 69 Special Issue [January, 2025] pp. 452 - 462
Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)
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Journal website: www.academicinspired.com/jised
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one's self-confidence and belief in one's ability to overcome academic challenges, which in turn boosts resilience.

Mpofu (2021) argues that students can build academic resilience by cultivating a growth mindset through critical thinking. With a growth mindset, students are taught to see failures not as fatal flaws but as chances to grow and improve, which helps them to keep going when things become tough. The findings are in line with those of Mahmood et al. (2020), who postulated that students can benefit from critical thinking as a cognitive resource since it allows them to reevaluate problems and consider different solutions.

Subgroup analysis of the study showed that male students had somewhat better critical thinking scores than female students, but there were no significant differences in academic resilience. Kiuru et al. (2020) found that female students tend to seek social support when encountering obstacles, which makes them more resilient in educational environments. This result contradicts that finding. The current study did not find any statistically significant differences between the gender when it came to academic resilience, which could mean that students in China, regardless of gender, are just as capable of handling academic challenges as each other.

Discrepancies in learning styles or societal expectations might explain the marginal advantage in critical thinking scores seen in male students (Almusaed et al., 2023). As an example, male students might have an inherent advantage when it comes to critical thinking skills like analysis and logical reasoning. Regardless, these results show how important it is to use gender-neutral methods of instruction that help all students become better thinkers.

Students' critical thinking skills were better in the older age group (24–26 years old) compared to the younger age group. This development is in line with earlier studies that found an aging effect on critical thinking abilities (Chuang, 2021). Students' critical thinking skills are expected to improve as they move through their academic careers since they are exposed to increasingly complicated and varied learning experiences. Furthermore, older kids may have faced greater academic obstacles, which has allowed them to build resilience and more complex problem-solving techniques as time goes on.

Because kids who start honing their critical thinking abilities at a young age are better prepared to face the problems of the future, our results highlight the need to promote critical thinking across all grade levels (Trevallion & Nischang, 2021). To make sure that children of all ages can practice these vital abilities, teachers should think about incorporating age-appropriate critical thinking activities into their lessons.

Those majoring in the hard sciences and engineering had lower critical thinking scores than their humanities and social science counterparts, according to the study. This conclusion is corroborated by Ilmiani et al. (2021), who state that programs in the social and human sciences frequently place an emphasis on the three pillars of critical thinking: analysis, reflection, and argumentation. Students majoring in engineering and the natural sciences, on the other hand, might not get nearly as much practice in critical thinking due to their emphasis on technical abilities and memorization.

These findings point to the importance of course content and teaching methods in molding students' critical thinking skills across many academic fields. One way to address this disparity

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Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)
eISSN: 0128-1755
Journal website: www.academicinspired.com/jised
DOI: 10.55573/JISED.106933

and promote a more well-rounded education is to include problem-based learning and critical thinking in all subject areas (Permatasari et al., 2021).

Critical thinking remained a strong predictor of academic resilience according to the multiple regression study. This confirms what Kim and Kim (2021) found: that students' ability to think critically is a key component in their ability to adjust to and triumph over academic obstacles. The ability to assess challenges, think critically, and make well-informed judgments equips students to overcome obstacles and show resilience.

Alkhalil et al. (2021) notes that the study's findings are in line with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) paradigm, which posits that cognitive variables, such critical thinking, are crucial in molding people's motivation, behavior, and resilience. So, encouraging kids to think critically can be seen as a good way to make them more resilient in the face of academic challenges.

Several aspects of educational practice can be affected by the results of this study. To begin, teaching students to think critically is an excellent way to equip them to deal with the inevitable challenges they will face in school. To foster academic resilience and critical thinking abilities, Walsh et al. (2020) found that inquiry-based teaching methods and problem-based learning were the most successful tactics. Teachers need to make sure their classrooms encourage students to think critically, challenge preconceived notions, and consider alternative points of view.

It is the responsibility of educational institutions to equip their students with tools and services that will help them persevere when faced with academic difficulties. One way to assist students develop the mental tools they need to overcome academic challenges is to provide them with workshops on topics like stress management, problem-solving, and self-reflection (Weaven et al., 2021). Teachers may help students grow in all areas of their being by including tactics for critical thinking and resilience into their lessons.

Conclusion

Students in China who demonstrate higher levels of critical thinking are better able to handle academic difficulties, according to this study, which found a strong positive correlation between critical thinking and academic resilience. Incorporating critical thinking exercises into university curricula might help students become more resilient and better able to handle the challenges of higher education, according to the research. Educators may help students succeed academically and personally by creating a classroom climate that values critical thinking, practical problem-solving, and versatility.

The study does, however, provide up avenues for further investigation in the future. It would be helpful to do longitudinal studies to better understand the relationship between academic resilience and critical thinking as well as their temporal evolution, since the current research is cross-sectional in nature. Interviews, focus groups, and other qualitative methodologies could provide a richer picture of the complex interplay between students' personal histories, worldviews, and cultural contexts in shaping their capacity for critical thinking and resilience.
It would be beneficial for future studies to investigate how well different interventions and pedagogical approaches foster resilience and critical thinking in diverse cultural and academic settings.

Volume: 10 Issues: 69 Special Issue [January, 2025] pp. 452 - 462
Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)
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Journal website: www.academicinspired.com/jised
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Volume: 10 Issues: 69 Special Issue [January, 2025] pp. 452 - 462
Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)
eISSN: 0128-1755
Journal website: www.academicinspired.com/jised
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