# The Impact of Pandemic Writing on EFL Students' Critical Thinking Skills: An Exploratory Study

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#### Abstrak

Pandemic writing contributes significantly to online writing activities in which EFL students build a solid foundation of critical thinking skills, not to mention their massive impact. This study aims to describe (1) aspects of pandemic writing that influence students' critical thinking skills during the COVID-19 period and (2) the contributions of pandemic writing to EFL students' writing skills. This exploratory research involved thirty participants who were interviewed in-depth to obtain more meaningful information and insights using a purposive sample technique. During the analytical steps of sorting and comparing data, principles, and types and considering their relationships by composing notes from interview transcriptions, the data were reorganized and analyzed to elicit codes, data, categories, or narratives. Results show that the impact of pandemic writing on EFL students' critical thinking skills is mainly based on learning autonomy (30%), critical inquiries (6.7%), synchronous platforms (10%), rhetorical functions (16.7%), critical mindsets (13.3%) and cognitive framework (23.3%). In addition, pandemic writing and its componential parts determine the development of EFL students' critical thinking skills, ranging from the impact of brainstorming ideas to refined steps of revising paragraphs and the essay.

**Keywords:** Pandemic Writing, Critical Thinking Skills, Cognitive Framework; Rhetorical Functions; Critical Mindsets, Problem-Solving

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Pandemic writing outlines the importance of networked communities whose online writing activities produce the desired essays. The fundamental purpose of pandemic writing is to see if critical reflection skills improve the likelihood of writing in an online platform dedicated to enlightening the digital society. To that end, lecturers and students took a significant step further during the COVID-19 pandemic by creating online networks in which they could share written thoughts, give online mentoring and consulting sessions, and learn how to establish a sense of community, neighborhood, or relational solidarity (Vieten et al., 2020; Mandalaki & Daou, 2021; Ho & Dascalu, 2021). Pandemic writing aims to raise students' awareness of COVID-19 literacy and willingness to work together to address the problem. As one of the most valuable digital information sources, the online writing platform is critical in connecting students to information channels, consultations, mentoring, and feedback that can help them enhance their writing abilities, skills, and talents. In

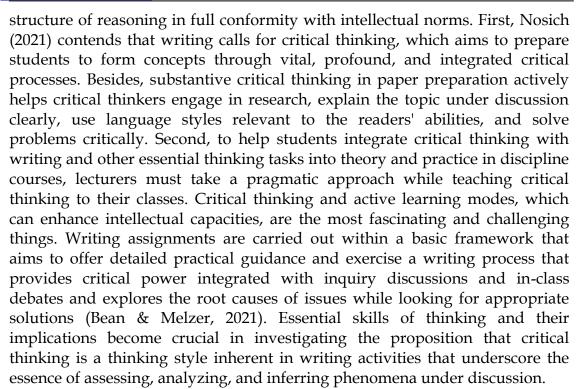
addition, pandemic writing is critical for promoting community and faculty growth and furthering high-quality online teaching and educational justice.

An online writing platform allows students to emotionally convey the different experiences related to COVID-19 vulnerability through such contextual virtual interconnections. They can use the online writing platform to express, accept, and connect other points of view meaningfully, even if they are physically separated. They can, however, re-connect online with the primary purpose of having a meaningful exchange of ideas to provide feedback, care, and support to vulnerable people (Mandalaki & Daou, 2021). Pandemic writing emphasizes students' involvement, well-shared knowledge, and intellectual activities that promote the greater community to develop ideas that permeate time and space, transforming understanding and expertise. A pandemic writing model is performed expressively because it effectively decreases emotional pain, which is beneficial for various conditions, such as suicidal thoughts, depression, and trauma healing (Marković et al., 2020). The pandemic writing and the adoption of writing technologies in the contemporary paradigm of distance learning and instruction have been a panacea for dealing with the therapeutic writing process and the adoption of writing technologies. Therefore, the writers are dedicated to chronicling practices from some perspectives to conceptualize the effects of abrupt changes on professional and technical communication (Workman et al., 2021).

The devastating impact of the COVID-19 outbreak is the primary concern of pandemic writing. The ensuing human suffering may result in a void that feels like words have vanished. Unspoken remarks can build up inside students and eventually explode like a full dam, ripping the weave of their lives apart. Releasing can feel like a crushing defeat that transforms into an opportunity. The use of pandemic-related words has made writing even more challenging (Yoo, 2021). In complex situations, however, students can demonstrate their problem-solving abilities through pandemic writing, which is essential for pursuing knowledge and completing review activities (Argelagós et al., 2022).

Pandemic writing in online writing is undoubtedly a transformative practice because it addresses how students and tutors foster rhetorical functions, creativity, engagement, inquiries, and questions based on several ways of thinking (Price, 2020). This practice is also known as transformative learning, which encompasses creativity and narrative essays created through writing processes (Cake, 2018), a transformative framework for developing academic writing (Wilmot & McKenna, 2018), and pedagogical interventions operating in a broader context (Coleman & Tuck, 2021).

Pandemic writing significantly contributes to the development of students' critical thinking skills that provide a specific picture of how critical they are in conducting investigations and test propositions in instilling scientific views and determining that such arguments must follow facts. As a result of critical thinking, they can solve problems appropriately while attempting to improve the quality of their thinking and skillfully master the



Güven et al. (2020) contend that critical elements in writing reflect critical thinking. For example, a critical essay on pandemic circumstances enables critical thinkers to gain insight into facts, provide context, and interpret higher-order thinking patterns. In this sense, academic writing contributes significantly to improving students' critical thinking skills, as evidenced by their improvements in critical thinking. Furthermore, class writing activities impact their ability to integrate thinking and writing as two communication domains. Therefore, mentoring sessions on writing papers can be used to develop necessary thinking skills. This concept ensures that writing and critical thinking skills are interconnected regarding how writing processes affect students' critical thinking when solving problems. In this way, students become entangled between the content and strategies of writing, decisionmaking, and language proficiency (Diamond et al., 2020). In addition, writing is crucial in encouraging students to think critically, explore complicated issues, and answer questions using higher-level thinking abilities. For example, the students' mean scores of critical thinking skills are not at the desired level; however, keeping written patient care logs can help develop critical thinking skills (Coleman & Tuck, 2021).

From this standpoint, pandemic writing is vital for students to develop critical thinking skills. As a result, they must consistently develop their writing skills by solving complex problems and keeping written logs. However, there are several issues with teaching students to think critically in the framework of scientific writing. First, because critical thinking abilities are underdeveloped in scientific inquiry, there is little research on the relationship between EFL writing and critical thinking in classroom settings. Second, students will likely

focus on argument development, writing, reviewing, and editing. Third, decreased student participation in class may result in fewer opportunities for judgment, critical thinking, problem-solving, and evaluative action (Barroga & Mitoma, 2019). In contrast, Price (2020) states that critical thinking skills (i.e., induction and deduction, inference, evaluation, and analysis) contribute significantly to academic writing outperformance (i.e., lexical resource, grammatical range, task achievement, cohesion and coherence, and accuracy).

In contrast, no prior studies have examined to what extent pandemic writing affects EFL students' attempts to develop and enhance their critical thinking skills throughout COVID-19. This situation presents a research gap because it is difficult to determine the connections between pandemic writing and EFL students' critical thinking skills. In this way, pandemic writing reinforces a sense of urgency in articulating thoughts to fill the void and get insights into critical thinking, expressive ideas, collaborative tasks, and task completion. Therefore, this study addresses two research questions: RQ 1: What are the impacts of pandemic writing on students' critical thinking skills during COVID-19? RQ 2: What are the contributions of pandemic writing to EFL students' critical thinking skills?

The current study contributes significantly to EFL students' critical thinking skills due to pandemic writing, ensuring that they can develop writing skills, think critically, creatively, and exploratively, and solve problems. Therefore, specific aspects such as critical inquiries, synchronous platforms, learning autonomy, rhetorical functions and contexts (Taraban & Khaleel, 2019), and critical thinking skills should be re-considered to make room for developing the students' writing skills.

#### 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Research Design

This exploratory study used a mediated approach in which in-depth interviews were conducted to obtain more meaningful information and insights from thirty participants. The researchers conducted this interview because it allowed them to connect with such participants. This technique can foster participation and idea-sharing (Tracy, 2020). In addition, this in-depth interview aims to learn more about the participants' life experiences and knowledge (Seidman, 2006). In essence, the participants are EFL students who shared their perspectives on the practice of pandemic writing using different technological devices and reconstructed their reality while compromising their anonymity (Tracy, 2020). The qualitative interviews were prepared, conducted, analyzed, and reported. The research design called for a well-structured research process and considered flexibility, negotiations, and knowledge production (Brinkmann, 2013). The focus of the interview switched from the researchers who assess what would be significant to the introspecting subjects

to what should be planned, coordinated, interpreted, and investigated to extract insightful information from the participants.

An in-depth interview aims to give participants a framework to report and reflect on their experiences, establish factual models and realities, and assess a developed model to see if facts lead to confirmation or falsification. Instead, the participants talked about their own stories and reflected on them. The interviewer's role is to identify and explore current progress within the field (Hitchings & Latham, 2020) of the praxis of pandemic writing and allow participants to contribute directly to the production of ideas, the investigation of writing problems during the outbreak of the COVID-19, and the formulation of conclusions.

#### Participants and Selection Criteria

Before conducting research in a higher education institution, the number of participants (N=30) from a total population of 100 was specified to make the data more representative. They have a background in English as a foreign language, linguistics, and literature. Using purposive sampling, they were chosen from a carefully selected group of students from the same English Education department at a higher education institution. The selection decision is critical in ensuring they can supply the information required to answer the research question based on their background, knowledge, and writing experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In qualitative research, participants or research subjects are referred to as informants or individuals who supply information about the data that the researcher requires concerning the study being conducted. Purposive sampling is the technique used to collect these research subjects, in which the researcher selects the sample based on the research objectives. The parameters for sample selection are both inclusive and exclusive.

#### **Research Instrument**

The researchers' observation and data retrieval are the primary datagathering tools in this qualitative study. The only reason is that qualitative research is flexible and has uncertainties. In addition, the instruments of this research include interviews and pandemic writing in the form of essays and questionnaires.

#### **Data Collection Procedures**

The 60-minute online interviews (Salmons, 2015) would be conducted directly at a geographical location. The in-depth interview technique was designed to minimize the researchers' influence on what interviewees stated while still offering a mechanism to preserve some critical areas identified in preliminary studies. More complex components of attitudes, difficulties, and solutions are categorized in the context of online interviews (Salmons, 2015). The interview questions were designed in such a way that responses were solicited. Another essential aspect is that the longer interviewees responded,

the better, and that the interviewer had a variety of topics to cover regarding pandemic writing and its contributions to the development of critical thinking skills. They could provide details or alternate interpretations as needed to generate data accuracy. The interviewees had the option of modifying something if what they had stated during the interview needed to be correctly identified by the researchers, who transcribed each interview and returned the copies.

#### **Data Analysis**

This exploratory study framework enables researchers to save, select, categorize, and analyze large amounts of data, such as interview transcripts and memos. This information can then be sorted and retrieved using the categories that have been created. In the data analysis of in-depth individual interviews, researchers can apply triangulation. The goal is to sort and categorize the data while considering both the individuals' similarities and differences. Opportunities to contact participants for clarification of comments, further explanation of statements, and new data were taken throughout the research.

Researchers reorganized and rearranged codes, data, categories, codes, or narratives during this analytical step. Findings were gathered by sorting and comparing data, principles, and types and considering their relationships by composing notes from the interview transcriptions. In addition, they identified essential concepts regarding the research topic, reflected on prior understanding and first remarks, and regularly searched the data set to evaluate, re-examine, and update ideas (Roulston, 2014).

In this sense, qualitative analysis was used to comprehend the data better, which began with the creation of theme development-based coding. Its goal is to find red threads running through data that have been arbitrarily split and designated as a code. It was generally guided by a specific framework, such as inductive or deductive theories for development, which takes place in team meetings when researchers consider the code, review portions of transcripts, and summarize, characterize, or interpret themes in the text. The phenomena in pandemic writing were explored, including its distinctiveness and specifications of tasks that encourage students to develop their critical thinking skills while writing essays during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### Result

#### The Impact of Pandemic Writing on Students' Critical Thinking Skills

Regarding concerns of a more practical nature, research on the effects of pandemic writing among thirty EFL students reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic's writing activities promoted the development of critical thinking abilities such as problem-solving and research skills. They learn to solve problems to test propositions that correspond to the reality they face. They also

try to improve their critical thinking skills by mastering the issues and discussing them with friends or lecturers, including the structure inherent in thinking and intellectual norms.

Writing during a pandemic forced me to think more critically. For example, I need to learn how to solve problems and feel isolated. My friends live in a different geographical area than I do (P07).

The geographical location from which they participate in online writing courses does not directly affect their ability to think critically. Aside from being alone, critical thinking helps EFL students to see COVID-19-related facts with critical eyes. They solve problems by generating ideas and organizing them systematically. In fact, they could think critically before the pandemic. However, many other factors influenced their ability to maintain their point of view, particularly in the absence of face-to-face lectures and under daunting COVID-19 circumstances.

I'm having trouble making comparisons. I still have difficulty solving my problems at times. This is a unique condition (P15)

In these conditions, EFL students construct writing comparisons, but they are constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic's impacts, particularly in terms of learning to think critically. They can conclude part of the essential activities of thinking quickly. However, evaluating arguments and solving problems are part of the academic complexity. They can think well because it is a skill, but they still need to understand how the elements of intact thinking represent competencies and fundamental thinking links. In addition, they need to express their thoughts when dealing with peer correction, possibly because their background knowledge is limited.

Individual or group writing correction activities were complex. I still need assistance from the instructor. While he only provides instructions online (P06).

Students with strong critical thinking skills can apply open, analytical, orderly, and logical thinking. However, judging is difficult because writing online during the COVID-19 pandemic is rife with assistance and mentoring, which directly impacts thinking sophistication and logical thinking. The bright side of this reality is that EFL students have a wide range of ideas that they express clearly through writing. In this way, the pedagogy of writing pandemics leads them to become transformative thinkers who prioritize rhetorical aspects in conceptualization, development of creativity, exploration, and participation in problem-solving. Writing under challenging times is a transformative learning experience emphasizing independent and group writing processes despite receiving the slight face-to-face pedagogical intervention. However, this does not negate the significance of writing as a productive academic activity. In a broader sense, writing during a pandemic is a global expression of concern that everyone is on high alert. As a result of the

lack of direct assistance, collaboration, and direction, critical thinking can be influenced by a turbulent psychological environment and necessitates a shift in thinking. As a result, EFL students' writing abilities have deteriorated, as evidenced by the testimony below.

My language skills, particularly my writing skills, have significantly declined. This has been the case since the COVID-19 pandemic (P12).

Because valid evidence of students' work results has shown the weak side of literary writing and creativity in writing during the COVID-19 pandemic, this concern over a decline in competence is described as a mindfulness writing pandemic related to pedagogical issues. Some EFL students are deeply traumatized by the deaths of family members and friends, and they write to express the depths of their psychological trauma. This fact is an essential component of pandemic writing, which has previously been associated with fact-based critical thinking and an academic or cognitive framework of EFL writing.

COVID-19 killed one of my family members. It was heartbreaking after what had occurred. That's why I said I'd write all this if I had good writing skills (P9).

How can EFL students believe that they cannot write during challenging times? Of course, everyone can be immersed in the bottom of an increasingly critical psychological condition. Still, there is a bright light in another dark alley where writing finds its grip even more in an unusual emergency. For example, critical thinking is triggered by difficult circumstances such as internet network problems, power outages, and poor internet connections.

I continue to write in an emergency since that's the only way to develop my critical thinking skills. I don't need modern tools like electricity, computers, or internet networks to write. However, I had to attend online classes, and that's when I encountered difficulties (P02).

## Pandemic Writing and Its Contributions to EFL Students' Critical Thinking Skills

In addition to resolving this issue, interviews with 30 interviewees demonstrated that acquiring digital skills, which ostensibly require digital learning resources support to complete online assignments and collaborate with peers, can help students with critical thinking. The COVID-19 pandemic manifests itself suddenly, which is a serious concern. Educational institutions are not facing a global disaster, but most importantly, EFL students continue to work hard to uphold online academic integrity by participating in formal online instruction. Consequently, pandemic writing impacts EFL students' abilities to develop critical thinking skills, as shown in the following table.



Table 1. Pandemic Writing and its Contributions to EFL Students' critical thinking skills

No	Pandemic	Critical Thinking Skills	Participants	Percentage
	Writing			
	Skills			
1	Learning/	Analyzing and	P07, P15, P30	30%
	Personal	defending viewpoints	P01, P03, P16	
	autonomy		P20, P17, P19	
2	Inquiries	Making comparisons	P13, P10	6.7%
3	Synchronou	Assessing online	P06, P11, P25	10%
	s platforms	essays, Evaluating		
		arguments		
4	Rhetorical	Producing and	P08, P14, P21,	16.7%
	functions	organizing ideas	P27, P24	
5	Critical	Drawing inferences	P12, P09, P23,	13.3%
	mindset/me		P29	
	ntality			
6	Cognitive	Problem-solving	P05, P02, P04,	23.3%
	Framework		P26, P18, P22,	
			P28	
Total				100%

Table 1 designates that learning/personal autonomy (P07, P01, P03, P30, P16, P20, P17, P19, and P15) is an essential factor in honing the analytical skills of EFL students because it is connected to a crucial step in identifying the source of the issue and maintaining the mind, which gradually necessitates training and discipline of the mind. Learning autonomy is complete with inquiries (P13 and P10) as the foundation for involvement and investigation. Making comparisons is hence directly tied to problem-solving skills. Aspects of synchronous platforms (P06, P25, and P11) can help EFL students develop critical thinking skills when evaluating online writings and convincing arguments. The growth of rhetorical functions (P08, P21, P27, P24, and P14) significantly can affect students' capacity to generate and arrange ideas. While this is happening, the cognitive framework (P05, P02, P26, P18, P22, P28, and P04) and components of the critical mentality (P12, P23, P29, and P09) are strongly tied to the critical thinking process as an essential component of making inferences and solving problems in all writing activities.

EFL students are encouraged to study online through the praxis of pandemic writing. They exhibit fewer positive attitudes, an inevitable part of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, their writing skills also evolve. Pandemic writing is a way of establishing rhetorical and cognitive skills in critical thinking domains. Students use online writing activities to analyze problems and find practical solutions effectively. Because of these aspects of pandemic writing, EFL students struggle to practice critical thinking.

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#### **Discussion**

This study investigates the impact of pandemic writing on EFL students' critical thinking skills, focusing on the ability to generate ideas, solve problems, and conduct research concerning the COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, the current study examines the impact of pandemic writing on EFL students' critical thinking skills - analyzing and defending points of view, comparing and assessing arguments, producing and organizing ideas, problem-solving, and drawing inferences.

In the context of two main emphases, the findings of this study are related to those of Markowitz's (2022) study. First, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted students' writing abilities, particularly when connected to significant events that have the potential to cause trauma and emotional distress and are a crucial component of writing activities within academic frameworks. Second, the cognitive domain and analytical thinking have strong indications that they are lower than before the pandemic, which has led to inconsistencies in the students' performance. However, Markowitz's research emphasizes how, in challenging circumstances, written language reflects emotions and trauma as repercussions of a reality they were facing rather than revealing the impact of COVID-19 on students' critical thinking skills in a full-scale struggle to develop academic writing.

The language used by EFL students in pandemic writing tends to link to their emotions and trauma but does not ignore their critical thinking, which is an inevitable and crucial fact. They use expressive language consistent with Nosich's (2021) findings that writing requires critical thinking and encourages students to develop cognitive, deep, and integrated patterns in their thought processes. Marković et al.'s (2020) study findings highlight the significant effect of expressive writing on reducing the adverse effects of psychological distress and stress symptoms in the context of the daunting COVID-19. The findings are surprising in that expressive writing can increase the stress level of intervention group participants. However, participating members' engagement has no longterm impact. The results of Markovi et al.'s study differ from that of the current study, which specifically investigates the impact of pandemic writing on students afflicted with COVID-19 and links it to critical thinking skills. The pandemic situation can serve as a starting point for students to write essays that demonstrate a more structured way of thinking. Due to strict social restraint regulations, EFL students must attend synchronous lectures amid a pandemic. This circumstance explains how writing about a pandemic sharpens critical thinking abilities for essay writing and how critical thinking can be developed in writing a work that is highly relevant to actual experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately, pandemic writing enables EFL students to express critical ideas based on their COVID-19-related experiences, but the focus is more on expressive writing (Marković et al., 2020). More importantly, viewpoints are a frame of mind that requires interpretation sharpening and a critical attitude.

Students write to accommodate personal autonomy (30%) in pandemic writing, incorporating critical thinking through pertinent activities to analyze and defend personal views. This insight is particularly intriguing because writing is a skill that necessitates language proficiency. This activity requires students' abilities to actualize problem analysis aspects, identify the roots of problems, and solve them. The students will argue logically based on the evidence and the level of evidence to show the accuracy of writing and the data used when they are confident in their viewpoints as a result of extensive research. Hence, pandemic writing is an excellent choice for writing in an emergency, using online platforms, and interacting without meeting in person. The unique aspect of this fact is that the critical component of pandemic writing is closely related to language skills combined with material mastery and even the most demanding critical thinking. Students attempt to express their intent or meaning in writing, but the clarity and accuracy of the message conveyed affect whether the readers understand the communication in pandemic writing.

Pandemic writing and critical thinking are two crucial aspects of verbal communication that are closely related. Students can exchange ideas critically through pandemic writing activities, and this critical thinking activity can help them improve their writing skills. However, they dislike online essay assessment activities on synchronous platforms (10%) because evaluating arguments can be complicated with assessment standards that strategically influence assessments' accuracy and validity. Writing a pandemic relies heavily on collaboration and peer correction, necessitating lecturers' guidance and direction. Pandemic writing is a crystallization of the values underlying critical mindset/mentality (13.3%). Students believe critical values help them become critical and intelligent individuals because pandemic writing is based on human values and societal socio-cultural phenomena. Students learn to express their values as members of society through pandemic writing. Critical reflection on other people's points of view heavily relies on how students use rhetorical language (16.7%), which influences, informs, and encourages students to create written works.

Pandemic writing activities (6.7%) mainly involve researching, asking questions, and doing checks. This low percentage shows that students must excel when comparing items in writing assignments. Comparing is one of the best writing techniques for helping students develop a critical perspective on the social realities of life. Making comparisons seeks to identify the proper justifications and insights into how phenomena differ and are distinctive for critical thinking activities. Accordingly, critical thinking involves contrasting, analyzing a situation, and jotting down important messages.

The use of pandemic writing can directly influence the growth of critical thinking, particularly when overcoming the gap created between online learning meetings. First, EFL students show learning autonomy by delving into the sources of problems and developing solutions to their worries. Personal autonomy influences how people describe ideas, and the capacity to judge or

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assess is a component of online writing evaluation, including arguments that call for online comments. The organization of thought, supported by the ability to process a critical mentality to form conclusions objectively based on scientific data, is strongly related to the rhetorical contexts (Taraban & Khaleel, 2019) of reflection in writing. Second, pandemic writing helps to solve writing problems by emphasizing logical thinking, systematic data presentation, and the accuracy of discussions, all of which encourage readers to enjoy reading and writing.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Pandemic writing strongly emphasizes individual autonomy, which motivates students to explore ideas for essays and uphold differing viewpoints. In addition, critical thinking is a benchmark for conducting inquiries to compare different aspects of life during COVID-19, including products in the form of scientific works assessed through synchronous platforms. Another fascinating aspect of pandemic writing is the rhetorical functions, which are crucial in determining how ideas are generated, highlighted, and organized to create a transformation or shift in perspective depending on circumstances. This necessitates supporting the critical mindset by prioritizing problem-solving, bolstering inferences, and enhancing cognitive ability.

Pandemic writing seizes the opportunity to continue writing for positive impacts and a problem-solving mindset. Despite this, it has significant implications for pedagogy in the inquiry, which focuses on the learning and teaching of writing in an EFL context and the representation of diversity and inclusion in higher education. Similarly, the use of pandemic writing is linked to critical thinking abilities, which, in turn, take into account many exercises and exposures to pertinent daily life topics. Future researchers should therefore involve many participants in their studies using quantitative or mixed-method approaches, demonstrating how a similar research topic is investigated using different methods and research settings.

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#### **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT**

All authors assume responsibility in completing the content of the current article submitted for peer-review sessions. In addition, the authors significantly contributed to the article's completion as follows: study conception and design: TMA. Author; data collection: AVG. Author and RK. Author; analysis and interpretation of results: AS. Author; draft manuscript preparation: HM. Author.



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