

Cultivating Psychological Resilience in University Students: Strategies from a Positive Psychology Perspective

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Abstract: As higher education continues to expand and diversify, cultivating psychological resilience has become a core component of university mental health education. Psychological resilience refers not only to students' capacity to recover from stress and setbacks, but also to their ability to regulate cognition, mobilise resources, and sustain growth in adversity. Although universities have increasingly recognised the value of resilience education, current practice often remains fragmented, overly focused on knowledge transmission, and insufficiently supported by systematic relational networks. From the perspective of positive psychology, universities should strengthen students' coping capacity through positive emotional experiences, develop self-efficacy through the cultivation of personal strengths, improve support systems through positive relationships, guide students to reconstruct the meaning of setbacks, and consolidate confidence through incremental experiences of achievement. These pathways can shift mental health education in higher education from a predominantly problem-prevention model towards a positive-development model, thereby promoting students' mental health, adaptive capacity, and overall development.

Keywords: Positive psychology; University students; Psychological resilience; Mental health education; Resilience-building strategies

1. Introduction

In recent years, as higher education reform has deepened, university students have faced increasingly complex developmental tasks in academic learning, interpersonal relationships, career planning, and self-understanding. Many students still lack systematic psychological coping skills, making it difficult for them to recover promptly from stress or to continue pursuing goals after setbacks. Enhancing students' psychological resilience has therefore become an important task for university mental health education.

Psychological resilience is a key psychological quality that enables individuals to regulate their state, integrate internal and external resources, and achieve recovery, adaptation, and growth when confronted with stress, adversity, or major change [1]. For university students, resilience is reflected not only in emotional recovery after difficult experiences, but also in the capacity to reflect on setbacks, adjust goals, and resume purposeful action [2].

Traditional university mental health education has often focused on the identification, prevention, and intervention of psychological problems. Although this approach helps protect students' psychological wellbeing, it can also lead educators to overlook the systematic cultivation of positive psychological qualities. Positive psychology, with its emphasis on positive emotions, meaning, hope, strengths, and self-actualization, provides a constructive lens through which to design resilience education.

Against this background, this paper analyses the practical significance and current challenges of cultivating psychological resilience among university students from the perspective of positive psychology. It then proposes strategies designed to move university mental health education from problem prevention towards strengths-based development, with the aim of improving students' mental health and overall development.

2. Current Practice in Cultivating Psychological Resilience among University Students

Current practice in university mental health education shows that resilience training has begun to receive more attention, but implementation remains uneven. Some institutions have incorporated resilience training, stress management, and life education into mental health courses and themed activities. However, these components are often dispersed across isolated sessions and have not yet developed into a systematic and continuous mechanism for student development.

In addition, some activities remain at the level of knowledge delivery and experience sharing. Although students may understand the importance of resilience, they are given limited opportunities to practice emotional regulation, problem solving, resource seeking, and self-reflection in concrete situations. As a result, resilience education may be difficult to translate into actual coping behavior when students encounter pressure.

A further limitation is that resilience is sometimes reduced to an individualized "ability to withstand pressure". In practice, this can produce an excessive emphasis on encouraging students to be strong, face challenges positively, and regulate themselves, while insufficient attention is paid to the external environment in which resilience develops. Psychological resilience does not mean bearing pressure alone, nor does it require students simply to endure difficulty.

Whether students can recover effectively from setbacks is closely related to the support available around them. Understanding from lecturers and peers, supportive relationships, and an inclusive campus environment all shape students' capacity to regain stability and continue developing. If students lack spaces in which to express distress, seek help, and receive support, the development of resilience will inevitably be constrained.

These practical problems indicate that resilience education requires a more positive, sustained, and systematic theoretical perspective. Positive psychology is valuable because it neither demands superficial optimism nor denies the reality of stress and suffering. Instead, it focuses on how individuals can develop positive psychological resources, restore strength in adversity, and achieve growth through setbacks.

From this perspective, positive emotions can buffer the effects of stress; personal strengths can strengthen students' sense of self-efficacy; positive relationships can provide emotional support and practical assistance; meaning-making can help students reinterpret difficult experiences; and achievement experiences can reinforce confidence in sustained action [3].

Cultivating psychological resilience therefore requires systematic educational design rather than fragmented lectures or occasional activities. Resilience is a dynamic adaptive capacity that develops

in real situations of stress. If education remains limited to the transmission of knowledge, students are unlikely to transfer resilience strategies to actual contexts of adversity.

Universities should integrate resilience education into the broader framework of students' holistic development. A three-dimensional mechanism can be established in which classroom teaching consolidates cognitive understanding, psychological counselling provides experiential feedback, and campus culture creates a collaborative support system.

3. Pathways for Cultivating Psychological Resilience from a Positive Psychology Perspective

From the perspective of positive psychology, the cultivation of psychological resilience should be coordinated by higher education institutions through mental health courses, group counselling, student affairs, peer support, and campus culture. Resilience is not a single ability, but a comprehensive process through which students regulate emotions, rebuild beliefs, integrate support, reconstruct cognition, and resume action under stress and adversity.

Correspondingly, positive emotions, personal strengths, positive relationships, meaning-making, and achievement experiences provide resources for resilience across five dimensions: emotion, self, relationship, cognition, and action. These pathways are interrelated. Together, they help students integrate internal resources with external support, recover emotional stability after setbacks, adjust goals, and recommit to constructive action.

3.1 Strengthening Psychological Resilience through Emotional Regulation

Among the many components of psychological resilience, restoration of emotional stability is a prerequisite for renewed coping. Positive emotions are not merely brief pleasurable experiences; they are restorative resources that help individuals detach from states such as tension and frustration and create psychological space for subsequent coping [4].

Research indicates that when university students experience examination failure, interpersonal conflict, or employment-related setbacks, a lack of effective emotional regulation strategies can prevent them from regaining stability in time. This, in turn, may impair their judgement of the situation and their subsequent behavior [5].

Universities can integrate emotional regulation training into mental health courses, group counselling, and routine educational activities. Students may be guided to record positive events, recognize emotional changes, and practice relaxation techniques so that they gradually learn to mobilize their own psychological resources.

The purpose of such training is not to encourage avoidance of problems. Rather, it helps students temporarily detach from persistent negative emotions in stressful situations, creating the conditions for them to reassess the problem, seek support, and choose more constructive responses.

Emotional regulation should also be combined with coping-skills training. Universities can help students distinguish the outcome of a single event from their overall self-evaluation, thereby reducing the tendency to deny their self-worth after one failure. The more objectively students interpret stressful events, the more quickly they can return to emotional stability and establish a foundation for other components of resilience.

3.2 Developing Students' Self-Efficacy through Personal Strengths

Once emotions have become more stable, students' belief in their capacity to change their circumstances directly affects their willingness to act again. Students with strong resilience are not

immune to failure; rather, they can still perceive the possibility of adjustment and improvement after setbacks [3].

However, some students tend to focus on their shortcomings when facing setbacks, while overlooking the abilities, experiences, and resources they already possess. This pattern can lead them to underestimate the possibility of solving problems and weaken their motivation to take further action.

Positive psychology emphasizes the identification and use of individual strengths, which provides an effective pathway for enhancing students' self-efficacy. Through mental health courses, group counselling, and student development guidance, universities can encourage students to reflect on past experiences of overcoming difficulties, completing tasks, and achieving personal growth.

Such reflection can help students identify strengths such as perseverance, responsibility, collaboration, empathy, and problem-solving ability. Peer feedback, growth journals, and structured self-reflection can also help students re-evaluate themselves from multiple perspectives. Many students do not lack strengths; they lack opportunities to recognize and use them.

The development of strengths should not stop at self-awareness. Universities should guide students to apply their strengths to specific contexts, including academic adaptation, interpersonal communication, goal management, and stress management. Only when strengths are converted into repeatable practical experiences can self-efficacy become an internal foundation for renewed action after setbacks.

3.3 Strengthening Support Systems through Positive Relationships

Psychological resilience depends not only on students' internal resources but also on external relational support. University students are moving from family-centered life towards wider social participation; while they seek independence, they still require understanding and assistance from others.

When students encounter difficulties, stable emotional support and practical assistance can make recovery from setbacks more likely. Conversely, if students remain isolated and unsupported for long periods, even relatively minor problems may become amplified [6]. For this reason, resilience education should enhance both individual coping capacity and relational support networks.

In student affairs, universities should establish support teams involving counsellors, class advisers, course lecturers, and mental health professionals, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. This approach can shift support from reactive intervention after problems emerge towards routine teacher-student connections through classroom interaction, individual conversations, academic guidance, and developmental feedback.

Students facing academic difficulties, limited family support, or interpersonal problems should receive sustained and targeted attention. Such support should not be limited to crisis response, but should become part of everyday educational management and student development.

Peer support is also indispensable. Compared with staff, students interact with one another more frequently and may be better placed to notice subtle changes in their peers' emotions and behavior. Universities can build everyday support networks through class mental health representatives, dormitory leaders, student officers, and peer counsellors.

It is important, however, not to reduce peer support to the identification and reporting of problems. It should also involve daily companionship, emotional understanding, and guidance towards appropriate resources. When students live and study in an atmosphere marked by listening, respect, and mutual assistance, they are more likely to express difficulties and seek help under

pressure. This provides a stable external buffer alongside individual coping mechanisms.

3.4 Guiding Students to Understand the Developmental Value of Setbacks through Meaning-Making

Psychological resilience involves more than recovery; it also includes the way individuals interpret setbacks cognitively. Faced with the same failure, some students may attribute it to a lack of ability, while others may treat it as an opportunity to adjust direction and accumulate experience. The difference often lies in how the meaning of the setback is interpreted.

Without a constructive sense of meaning, students may remain in a state of passive endurance even when emotional support and external assistance are available. In such cases, it is difficult for them to transform setbacks into opportunities for growth.

Positive psychology highlights the role of meaning in individual growth. In implementing resilience education, universities should focus on guiding students to engage in self-reflection, integrate their experiences, and redefine their goals through specific events, rather than offering only general emotional comfort.

In everyday teaching and psychological counselling, methods such as growth narratives, reflective journals, and experience sharing can help students reinterpret past experiences. By revisiting setbacks, reviewing coping strategies, and analysing changes in their own experiences, students may gradually recognize that setbacks, although distressing, do not necessarily lead to failure or stagnation.

Instead, setbacks can become opportunities to clarify personal needs, recognize the limits of current abilities, and consider future directions. This process allows students to move from passive tolerance of difficulty towards active adjustment and self-development.

Meaning-making can also be integrated with career guidance, voluntary service, and social practice. The pressures experienced by university students are often connected with uncertainty about future development. If students cannot perceive a link between present effort and long-term growth, they may easily feel lost.

Universities can use practical learning contexts to help students connect academic study, personal growth, and social needs. When students align their present efforts with long-term goals, their interpretation of setbacks shifts from passive endurance to active adjustment, giving resilience a clearer direction and greater sustainability.

3.5 Reinforcing Confidence in Sustained Action through Achievement Experiences

Psychological resilience ultimately becomes visible in the ability to act again. Whether students can move out of a period of stress depends not only on emotions, cognition, and external support, but also on whether they can recommit to action and observe tangible progress.

Some students remain stagnant after setbacks not because they lack goals entirely, but because their goals are too broad, their paths are unclear, and they receive insufficient feedback. When short-term progress is difficult to see, confidence in action may decline.

Universities should therefore attach importance to the accumulation of achievement experiences, helping students rebuild confidence through attainable and small-scale goals. In teaching and student management, mechanisms for goal breakdown and phased feedback can guide students to divide broader developmental goals into manageable tasks and gradually gain a sense of control and achievement.

For students experiencing academic maladjustment, social withdrawal, or employment anxiety,

vague demands are unlikely to be helpful. Instead, academic guidance and psychological counselling should help them identify specific and actionable steps for the next stage.

Universities can also help students become aware of their own progress through growth portfolios, formative assessment, and periodic feedback. Many students are not failing to make progress; rather, they lack awareness of the progress they have already made.

When lecturers and counsellors provide timely feedback on subtle improvements in emotional regulation, task persistence, interpersonal communication, and self-management, students' positive self-perception can be strengthened. Each small achievement supports continued action, allowing resilience to be reinforced through a cycle of sustained effort and constructive feedback.

4. Conclusion

The cultivation of psychological resilience among university students is an essential component of mental health education in higher education. It responds to the real pressures students face and supports their long-term growth and development. Resilience is not simply the ability to withstand pressure, nor does it require students merely to endure difficulty. Rather, it is a process through which individuals achieve recovery, adaptation, and growth through the interaction of positive psychological resources and external support.

Positive psychology provides important insights for resilience education in universities. Mental health education should not only prevent and intervene in psychological problems, but also cultivate positive emotions, personal strengths, positive relationships, meaning, and achievement experiences. These resources help students acquire the inner strength and external support needed to face stress and setbacks in authentic developmental contexts.

Accordingly, universities should further promote the transformation of mental health education from problem prevention towards positive development. The cultivation of psychological resilience should be integrated into the curriculum, group counselling, peer support, student management, and campus culture. This will help students maintain stability under pressure, resume action after setbacks, and continuously improve their mental health and overall quality as they grow.

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