

Improving Students Mental Health and Psychological Well-Being In The Midst of Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The advent of COVID-19 has given rise to fear and stress leading to emotional and psychological problems due to social and physical distancing and economic meltdown. Emotional and psychological problems are likely to be more among people because of breakdown in relationship and human interaction, suppression of emotions and loss of jobs. As such there is increasing rate of discouragement, depression and in some case death. Reading of books could come handy to fill the gaps that distancing from friends and families might have caused. At a time like this, that physical connections are not possible, bibliotherapy becomes an essential tool to assure the students that they are not alone. Bibliotherapy has the ability to improve mental health and psychological well-being through the use of imaginative and self-help books. This paper gives the evidences that use of books as therapy could help to heal the wounds of emotional and psychological problems

Keywords; *Bibliotherapy, Emotional problems, psychological problems, Mental health, Covid-19*

Introduction

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic. The outbreak of the novel virus presents an alarming effect on health, education, economic and social life of individuals, communities and the world generally. According to WHO, COVID 19 is more than health crises, it is an attack on the core of the societies and affects all segments of the society. Measures at reducing the spread of this pandemic virus include, lockdown of societies, social distancing, regular washing of hands, use of face masks among others. However, some of these measures such as lockdown and social distancing have been found to have implications on the people. Some of the negative implications of the measures at combating the spread of the virus include loss of job, cut in salary, depletion of savings and fear of the unknown about the cure for the virus which resulted into increase in the rate of anxiety, stress, domestic violence, sicknesses, diseases and death in most cases.

To curtail the spread of the virus, communities, societies, cities, towns, countries, organisations sectors had to close down, people have to stay indoors and schools have to shut down. This started the era of social distancing and lockdown for many countries including Nigeria. Both the federal and state governments had schools closed down leaving the students out of school for long period, a situation which the students have not experienced before the pandemic. Consequently, the closure of schools affected the students negatively with profound effect on their emotional and psychological as well as their state of mental health and general well-being. In other words, lockdown of people in their homes could result to mental health issues and have impact on their psychological well-being especially with students from abusive homes that has loss social connections.

Apart from endangering human health which sometimes result to death of thousands of people all over the world, COVID 19 psychological effect on the society which the students live in was profound. According to Rubin and Wessely (2020), circulation of fake news in social media, linking of the virus to 5G network and the coming of the end of the world in some quarters provoked serious distress in societies. Closure of schools led to emergence of online teaching as against face-to-face teaching and learning which came with the tendency to increase academic

stress among the students due to increased pressure to learn independently, loss of daily routine and lack of motivation (Grubic, Badovineic, Shayeac, Johri, 2020). The virus, according to Ozili and Arun (2020), got most industries to close down, some downsize while some relieved people of their duties because of the lockdown due to COVID 19 pandemic. The outbreak has triggered the global recession and many countries put up policies that had both positive and negative effect on the economy. It is an obvious fact that whatever affects the parent will have ripple effects on the students

Loss of parents, loss of jobs by parents and lockdown of communities seems to have put children and young adults under intense pressures resulting in the disruption of their psychological and emotional balance. This imbalance needs to be addressed to save the children and young adults from a more dangerous occurrence. Systemic use of books has been found to be useful in correcting and healing people with behavioural disorders. The systemic reading of books (storybooks or self-help books) could help in ameliorating the stress and anxiety prevailing in this era of COVID 19. Reading add to the quality of life, empowers and emancipates individuals since individuals, through reading, could penetrate into the existence and experiences of the other people and broaden their comprehension, extent of experience and gratification.

Meanwhile books have other purposes aside from educational, a well written literature books for young adults can reveal new information to the reader, meet recreational and entertainment needs and likewise help an individual to pick up knowledge of into what he is dealing with. From time memorial, books have been instruments of progress, improvement, basic leadership skills development and are relevant from generation to generation (Akinola, 2014). Books as tools help in comparing behaviour/characters in the book and the reader and also help readers with learning and growing. It helps to open ways to considerations, feelings and emotions. Use of books to achieve the foregoing purposes can only be found in a bibliotherapeutic process. Books are powerful educational tools that allow juveniles to experience emotions and perspective of others and could be used to bring about change in others (Adeyeye and Oyewusi 2019).

Bibliotherapy is reading to heal and it involves the selection of reading materials which includes fiction and non-fiction books that can be used to guide readers to realise greater self-understanding, self- reflection and comfort when faced with problems, loss, disabilities, illness and other challenges. Bibliotherapy is a combination of two Greek words “biblio” meaning book and “therapeia” meaning healing (Strurm, 2003). It involves the reading of books, stories and poems creatively to make people feel better in themselves and about themselves. Although Tukhareli (2011) opined that books cannot protect students from the reality of consequences of stress and anxiety facing them, it could help students build the coping skills needed to survive the reality. Through bibliotherapy the passion, enthusiasm and delight for reading is shared with another individual or group of people to create affective modification and to advance personality growth and development.

Students at this COVID-19 period may become increasingly burdened with divers’ issues that are related to mental health which could affect them psychologically and emotionally, hence bibliotherapy is a strategy which can be adopted to help students deal with mental health and ensuring that they are psychologically and emotionally stable during and after COVID-19 pandemic. The process of bibliotherapy when followed technically and completely could help students comprehend the sentiments they have, discover arrangements that will work and improve their perception and feelings about themselves which could ultimately increase their personal success (Dirks, 2010). Bibliotherapy is used to convey information, give understanding, empower discourses about issues, communicating new states of mind and values, encourage new answers for challenges and improve self-regulation to furnish recreation and redirection. The uniqueness of bibliotherapy is that it starts in an indirect manner by focusing on the reading of the storybook,

to the knowledge that others are also passing through the problem (identification), and later to discovery of self (catharsis), emotional release (insight) and end with how to solve the problem.

Concept of bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy precisely means healing through books. The term came from its Greek etymology of *biblion* (book) and *therapeia* (healing) (Sectman, 2009). According to McMillen (2014) bibliotherapy is known by many names such as *biblio counseling*, *book matching*, *literatherapy*, *library therapeutics*, *reading therapy*, *literapeutics* and so on just as it holds a number of different definitions depending on the setting and how the professional using it decide to apply it. Some definitions include therapeutic aspect of bibliotherapy while some include an element of problem solving. In other words, bibliotherapy refers to healing through literature, it is the process of reading books with a therapeutic intent. Adeyeye and Oyewusi (2019) also defined bibliotherapy as a process of helping young adults modify behaviour, emotions and thoughts. Bibliotherapy has many aspects of intervention including, helping students to develop self-confidence, increase understanding of behaviour and broaden their reading interest. In other words, readers are encouraged to identify themselves with persons or characters in the story read which can lead to changes in the character of the reader through the use of books (Okwilagwe and Muboyin, 2011). Books can be used in intervention programmes to help individual to gain enhanced knowledge, learn from others, find solutions to problems and ultimately enhance the quality of human existence.

Bibliotherapy was initially utilised as a treatment intercession for grown-up mental patients in mental health homes and organisations. In Library Science, the antiquated Greeks kept up that writing was mentally and profoundly essential, posting a sign over the library entryway at Thebes depicting itself as a "healing place for the soul" (Sullivan, and Strang, 2002). Books were used in America as teaching tools and also as instruments to build and modify character. Also, organised hospital libraries started in the 1900's and eventually spread to other state institutions. With this model in place American Library Association was able to sponsor highly successful library programmes to the military at war front during the World wars. Bibliotherapy was employed to help soldiers cope with war time traumas and was extended to the disable veterans. Bibliotherapy is now widely used by various professionals, for example, physicians, librarians, teachers, counselors, psychologists, social workers and parents.

Mental health of students and the use of bibliotherapy

According to Alliant International University (2020) the physical and social environment that a student lives may likely affect the coping skills that has direct link to mental illness. In the course of COVID-19, lockdown of the society and social distancing of individuals, students were forced to stay at home, this have adverse effect on their mental health and series of issues like anxiety, stress, eating disorder, depression, bipolar disorder, suicide and so on arise especially when they do not have access to any support system. Factors like loss of parent(s) due to COVID-19, loss of jobs (parents), lack of self-care, poverty, abuse (emotional and sexual), inability to visit friends could lead to mental illness. Students' mental health is important in every stage of life because it comprises emotional, psychological and social well-being which determines how they cope with stress, how they relate with others and decision making. The measures put together by the government and health practitioners in combating the spread of the virus may likely have negative implication on the mental health of students at this time. There are several interventions that could be used to help the distressed students, bibliotherapy is one of them. This intervention as a process could help the students to identify what is happening to them, adapt to it and see how others have been able to overcome similar situations, thereby helping their coping skills and problem-solving skills.

the deployment of parents. Deployment in military has effect on the coping skills of some children especially their development. It was recorded in the study that change in behaviour of children most times is a reflection of their emotions because some find it difficult to express how they feel, hence, children in deployed homes may develop emotional problem and coping problem which may in turn affect their progress in school. Bibliotherapy is useful in helping the children cope with the anxiety and depression experienced with the deployment of loved ones by the military. Students' mental health issues could be helped through the reading of literature since books have universal appeal to engage readers. Through reading, readers are able to relate/identify with what they are going through and relate with the character in the story because readers find it easier to translate their experiences into those of the character that they have identified. According to Brewster (2008), the reading of literatures (books) has positive impact on the reader, addresses the emotional problem and has power to change how the reader feels if given the right book at the right time. Also, a study in the United Kingdom concluded that most depressed people could benefit from bibliotherapy and that the infrastructure needed to supply reading materials was in place through the public libraries.

Adeyeye and Oyewusi (2019) carried out a study in a correctional facility setting to investigate whether bibliotherapy would assist juveniles with non-conforming behaviour to regulate their emotions, behaviours and thought pattern. Thirty-six girls aged 10-18 from correctional homes were subjected to reading storybooks and taking part in activities for 18 weeks. The study established that Bibliotherapy could help to create awareness that young adults could learn from to make informed decisions to guide them in behaving in healthy ways that are not harmful, develop coping skills and ability to take responsibility for their actions. The study called attention to that fact that reading of fiction could help young people to open up about their own emotions and experiences. Findings from the study further revealed that the greater part of the girls in the end were able to regulate their emotions, behaviour and thought through bibliotherapy.

In the study carried out by Hipsky in (2007) on using bibliotherapy to help students with emotional behavioural needs, it was reported that juveniles who participated in the research were able to express themselves. The young adults were able to relate and discussed the character in the story. The character was analysed, in the process they improved their communication skills and were able to evaluate their needs as students with emotional and behavioural disability. Bibliotherapy provided the students a safe place for individual assertion as well as insights into how teacher can help juveniles who have emotional and behavioural disabilities to find reason to understand the challenge they are facing and see how it could be resolved through communication. Kang (2010) reported that the effect of bibliotherapy on self-regulation strategy improve student's ability to regulate emotions, behaviour and thoughts. After participating in the intervention, all participants (40 males, 22 females) with special needs improved in their value of self-regulatory strategies and attributed their performance to effort and strategy.

A study by Tukhareli 2011 used bibliotherapy intervention on 59 children aged 6 years to 19 years for 3 months. The participants were children and young adults affected by HIV/AIDS at the Nkosi's Haven library in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2010 resulting in psychological and social issues that affect the targeted group within the African environment. In the study, bibliotherapy was seen as an effective way of reaching out and breaking the isolation of children living with HIV/AIDS. According to study, stigma associated with HIV infection can unfavourably affect the lives and behaviour of people living with HIV/AIDS and the family. Reading selected books, carrying out reading aloud, story-telling and follow up discussion helped in increased knowledge about HIV/AIDS and related issues as well as understanding of the universality of the difficulties they are experiencing, decrease in the level of fear about HIV/AIDS, increase in the comfort level of thinking and taking about HIV/AIDS, decrease in the level of isolation, mental and psychological pressure, improved self-esteem, enhanced positive thinking as attitudes are

strengthened by coping skills. The recommended books helped the children to escape and expand their world which was beneficial to their trapped emotional and physical problems.

Bibliotherapy and psychological well being

During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, students were faced with a growing number of emotional and psychological challenges which could be traumatic and distressing to the students. These issues put them at risks. These challenges developed into psychological problems which affected the students in their day-to-day activities including academic performance and overall health. Kaufman and Landrum (2009) reported that students experiencing multiple challenges could be at risk with psychological well-being and other undesirable consequences. Coping ability of individual depends greatly on individual personal character, experiences, background and ability that are uniquely put together to solve problems (Camp 2015). Thus, bibliotherapy has a unique way of helping students cope with psychological challenges through the development of better understanding of themselves, expression of feelings through systematic reading of literature (book) through story time, read aloud and guided reading. Literature (books) when used to help students cope with personal problems helps them to acquire skills needed to solve the problem as well as give them supports needed to enhance reading. Implementation of bibliotherapy shows the students that they are not the only one having or passing through that particular problem, teach them that there are more approaches to solving a problem, encourage the students to be open for discussion, assist the students in looking for solution (problem solving skill), help the students in establishing their identity, building their self-esteem and self-efficacy, help to release emotions and promote greater understanding of others.

In the study of Bolitho, (2011), value was placed on reading good literature to improve well-being and social connection. The study was carried out at a local aged care hostel for 12 weeks. Therapeutic reading with an emphasis on improved well-being, confidence, concentration and engagement was done. The study was made up of the resilience who are consider appropriate for the pilot study based on need, physical and mental ability. The reading group met for an hour and half session reading aloud from carefully selected piece of prose and discussion activities were deployed with no academic analysis expected. After two evaluations, position feedbacks were gotten from the participants. According to the study, participants looked forward to the group because it made them think of themselves and gave them something to think about aside from their ailments and the monotony of the day. Harper (2017) carried out a study on how to help students who hurt or experience difficult situations.

Bibliotherapy is a strategy for library to help young adults identify, work through, and ultimately found resolution to stressful situations. Libraries can share specific literature with the intention of assisting juveniles who are experiencing emotional distress cope and the commencement of healing process. According to Madsen 2012, engaging the children with picture books could be used as a critical tool for engaging children in powerful conversations that could help in appropriate development, addressing of issues of equity and social justice. Although bibliotherapy is not a tool to replace clinical or psychological therapy, it could help to raise awareness concerns, reassure students that they are not alone and increase the perception that others experience challenges and are able to cope, solve, seek assistance and eventually find solution. In Chasin (2007) bibliotherapy intervention was highly effective in the treatment of depression. The findings show substantial support for the use of bibliotherapy with adolescents.

Conclusion

Students should be helped as regards their psychological, emotional and mental health well-being to them through bibliotherapy intervention by building their emotional competence for better cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains development. Bibliotherapy has the potentials to help students who suffers from mental health and psychological well-being by making them

comfortable through stress management. Students that are well emotionally and psychologically will be able to attain full potentials, have ability to cope with stress, high productivity, make good decisions and contribute meaningfully to the community they belong. In order to develop the coping skills needed for good mental health and psychological well-being in children and young adults, they must be exposed to books that could help to identify the problem, experience an emotional release and key into how the problem was resolved. Bibliotherapy is healing of the soul and it is an effective intervention in helping individuals to cope with issues ranging from emotional to psychological problems

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