
Life on the Page and Mental Health of Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the impact of reading and teaching literature on the mental health of students. Despite existing research that focuses on the cognitive benefits of reading, there is limited data regarding its emotional and mental effects on youth. Literary works serve as a mirror of experience, facilitating emotional expression and understanding. Through a qualitative approach and semi-structured interviews with Bachelor of Secondary Education students majoring in Filipino, three main themes were identified: emotional expression and understanding, inspiration and moral lessons, and the creation of a supportive environment. The results showed that reading literature not only aids in the development of empathy and social skills but also provides inspiration and lessons vital for the resilience of students. Teaching literature becomes a means to create a safe space for emotional expression, contributing to positive mental health. Overall, literature plays an important role in building emotional resilience and moral development among youth, making them better prepared for life's challenges.

KEYWORDS: *literature, health, mental, reading, emotional, resilience*

INTRODUCTION

The life on the pages of every piece of literature is an essential part of culture and society that not only provides entertainment but also serves as a reflection of human experiences. In the context of students, reading and teaching literature have the potential to contribute to their mental health. Literary works contain themes and messages that can transform the perspectives of young people, leading to a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them. However, there is a lack of rigorous study regarding the relationship between literature and students' mental health (Smith, 2020; Johnson & Lee, 2021). Existing research often focuses on the benefits of reading for cognitive development, but data showing how it affects the emotional and mental state of youth are insufficient. This gap hinders a comprehensive understanding of the potential of literature as an effective tool for improving mental health.

Many studies indicate that reading has a positive effect on mental health. According to Green (2019), reading fiction helps improve empathy and social skills, which are crucial for emotional well-being. Additionally, a study by Thompson (2022) showed that regular reading is associated with lower levels of stress and anxiety. Nevertheless, a deeper analysis is still needed to determine how different forms of literature—such as poetry, stories, and plays—specifically affect the mental health of students.

One study found that students with a high level of knowledge about mental health are more willing to seek help when they have problems (Rejas, 2022). Literature can be a means to

expand their knowledge and awareness about these issues. A systematic review also showed that many factors affect students' mental health, such as childhood trauma and lack of support from friends (Areha, 2022). Literary works can help illustrate these experiences and provide support and understanding.

According to a bibliometric study, interest in the mental health of students continues to rise. Entering college presents new challenges for young people, causing stress and anxiety (Gonzaga, 2020). In such situations, reading literature can help them express their feelings and find solutions. Another study also showed that mental health issues directly affect students' learning and performance (Eric, 2017). Reading literature addressing these themes can help them understand their situation and seek support.

A study by Green (2019) found that reading fiction helps improve a person's ability to empathize and connect. Building a deeper emotional connection is important for mental health. Literature provides an avenue for introspection and deeper understanding of one's emotions. However, there are also studies stating that not all literature has beneficial effects. According to Martinez (2020), some works may have negative consequences, especially if they contain heavy or traumatic themes. Choosing and contextualizing literature teaching and reading is essential.

Having a strong support system is also crucial for maintaining good mental health. Literature can serve as a bridge to strengthen relationships and support among peers. A review concerning the themes or contents of literature shows how it affects not only the individual but also society. Through this, it can be better understood how different forms of literature can either help or harm (Thompson, 2022).

Literary works often contain themes such as alienation, love, and struggle, which pertain to common experiences among youth. According to Lopez (2021), recognizing and understanding these themes paves the way for introspection and a deeper understanding of one's feelings. In this context, literature becomes a safe space where students can express and examine their emotions.

Despite the positive aspects, some studies suggest that not all literature provides benefits. According to Martinez (2020), certain works may result in negative effects, particularly if they contain heavy or traumatic themes. Such content may worsen the mental health conditions of some students. This highlights the importance of selection and context in teaching and reading literature.

The use of Resilience Theory is appropriate in this study, as it refers to a person's ability to bounce back from challenges and adversities. Literature can be a way to showcase stories of resilience and hope, inspiring students to face their own challenges (Rejas, 2022). Having positive representation of mental health issues in literature becomes crucial for building resilience.

Based on the aforementioned, the researcher aims in this study to thoroughly examine how reading and teaching literature affect the mental health of students.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

This foundational research aims to determine how reading and teaching literature affect the mental health of students. In conducting this, the researcher will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. How does reading literature affect the mental health of students?
2. How does teaching literature affect the mental health of students?

Scope and Limitations

This research covers students enrolled in the Bachelor of Secondary Education- Major in Filipino at Bukidnon State University for the academic year 2024-2025. It focuses on analyzing how reading and teaching literature affect the mental health of students. Meanwhile, the research is limited to relevant variables and also restricts itself to selected students who are interested or motivated to discuss the topic, which may provide deeper insights, and most importantly, they should have experience in academic reading or discussions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this foundational research, the methodology used focuses on a qualitative approach, specifically through interviews. The aim of the research is to determine how reading and teaching literature affects the mental health of students.

Participants and Other Data Sources

The participants in this study will be college students currently enrolled in the Bachelor of Secondary Education- Major in Filipino in their second and third years at Bukidnon State University, Malaybalay City.

Participants will be selected using purposive sampling to ensure they have sufficient experience and knowledge in reading and teaching literature. As part of the selection process, participants will be provided with information about the purpose of the study and how their data will be used.

Data Collection Method

In this study, the primary means of data collection will be through a semi-structured interview questionnaire designed to gather information on how reading and teaching literature affect the mental health of students.

It is emphasized that all participants will be given the opportunity to provide informed consent before they participate. This step aims to ensure ethical standards and protections for the participants while emphasizing their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Through this process, the researcher expects to gain deeper insights into the relationship between travel frequency, mental health, and teacher satisfaction.

Before conducting the interviews, the researcher will prepare a list of questions which will be validated by experts to help identify insights and experiences of students regarding the impact of literature on their mental health. These questions will be open-ended to allow for in-depth discussions and thorough understanding of their thoughts. Each interview will be recorded

and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns emerging from the responses.

Ethical Considerations

In conducting this research on how reading and teaching literature affects the mental health of students, it is important to consider ethical principles to ensure the protection of participants and the integrity of the study. The main ethical considerations focus on three aspects: informed consent, confidentiality, and harm minimization.

First, informed consent is an important part of the process. Before beginning data collection, participants will be provided with detailed information about the purpose of the study, methods, and how their information will be used. They should understand that their participation is voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty (BERA, 2018). Providing clear information will help ensure that participants give their consent knowledgeably.

Second, confidentiality should be upheld at all stages of the research. Data collected from participants should be anonymized to maintain their identification. It is also important to inform participants how their information will be stored and processed, as well as who will have access to it (Field, 2013). Compliance with data protection and privacy laws is a primary obligation to maintain the trust of the participants.

Third, considerations should be made regarding harm minimization. The research should be designed to avoid any potential harm or negative effects on participants. This includes avoiding sensitive topics or intrusive methods that may cause emotional or psychological stress (Jones, 2015). In the context of this research, it is crucial to examine how travel affects the mental health and satisfaction of teachers to ensure they are not placed at risk.

Additionally, the researcher should also consider their own safety while conducting the study. Any fieldwork or interviews should be conducted in a safe environment and with proper risk assessments to avoid any dangers for the researcher and participants.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data in this research, thematic analysis was used, a qualitative method aimed at identifying and describing the themes and patterns from the collected information. Here are the steps to follow in the data analysis.

First, recording and transcription. The interviews were recorded using an audio recorder and then written down or transcribed. This process is important to ensure that all information from the participants is accurately recorded.

Second, the transcription was read and analyzed. After transcription, the researcher will carefully read the collected data to identify preliminary themes or ideas. At this stage, it is essential to become familiar with the content to grasp the overall context.

Third, coding. The main ideas or themes will be categorized and coded. Coding is a process where specific parts of the data are organized under identified themes.

Fourth, theme analysis. After coding, the researcher will study the codes again to identify broader themes. Here, each theme will be described and how it relates to the research question.

Finally, report writing. The research report will contain the findings, including examples from the interviews to support each theme. The report should provide a clear explanation of how reading and teaching literature affect the mental health of students.

Through this systematic analysis, it is expected to develop a comprehensive understanding and meaningful conclusions regarding the impact of literature on mental health.

RESULT

Two (2) themes emerged from the participants' responses regarding the effects of reading literature on the mental health of students, and two (2) themes also emerged concerning the impact of teaching literature on students' mental health.

The identified themes are based on the transcription of interviews and the coding of participants' responses. Overall, the themes are focused solely on the objectives of the study.

Table 1. Impact of Reading Literature on the Mental Health of Students

Theme	Key Ideas
<i>Emotional Expression and Understanding</i>	<i>Experiencing Different Emotions</i> Reading literature evokes a range of emotions in readers, from joy to sadness. Stories have the ability to stir feelings and provide new perspectives on human experiences, idi1 and idi3
	<i>Understanding One's Own Emotions</i> Reading literature helps readers gain a deeper understanding of their own emotions. The lessons and themes in literary works serve as a mirror reflecting their feelings and experiences, idi1 and idi5
	<i>Expressing Hidden Feelings</i> Literature serves as an outlet for readers to express their feelings and thoughts. Writing and reading become ways to release emotions that they may not be able to articulate otherwise, idi5
	<i>Reducing Stress and Anxiety</i> Reading literature helps reduce stress and anxiety. Stories offer an opportunity to forget worries and find comfort in the experiences of characters, idi2 and idi 4
	<i>Importance of Discussion and Analysis</i> Discussions and analyses of literary works become an essential part of the process of understanding emotions. Sharing opinions and feelings within the classroom provides a pathway for deeper self-understanding and understanding of others, idi5

Inspiration and Moral Lessons

Love for the Country and Education

The work "Noli Me Tangere" by Jose Rizal is mentioned as an inspiration that not only presents the problems of society but also provides profound lessons about love for the country and the importance of education, **idi4**

Understanding Oneself and Others

Reading literature becomes a pathway to better understand the feelings of others and one's own emotions. Stories and poems provide inspiration and strength, especially when characters face challenges similar to those of the readers, **idi1** and **idi3**

Representation of Social Themes

Works like "Florante at Laura" are not just love stories; they also contain messages about sacrifice, compassion, and justice, which inspire readers, **idi4** and **idi3**

Expression of Emotions

Reading and teaching literature serve as an outlet for readers to express their feelings and stress. The lessons from literature become guides in facing life's challenges, **idi2** and **idi7**

Importance of a Supportive Environment

Having a safe and supportive environment in the classroom is essential for students to express their feelings and draw inspiration from literary works, **idi2**

The results show that reading literature plays a significant role in the emotional expression and understanding of students. Many respondents reported that literary works provide an opportunity to express their feelings, serving as an outlet for emotions they may not be able to convey in other ways. Stories and poems reflect their experiences, helping them gain a better understanding of their own emotions. According to Green (2019), reading fiction aids in developing empathy and social skills, which are crucial for the emotional health of young people. Discussions and analyses of literary works within the classroom become an essential part of the process of understanding emotions. Respondents emphasized the importance of class discussions, which provide opportunities to express their thoughts and connect with others. Such interactions contribute to their mental health, supported by studies showing that social interaction has a positive effect on the emotional state of young people (Thompson, 2022). Reading literature not only serves as a means to recognize feelings but also paves the way for deeper connections with fellow students. The lessons and themes in these works guide students in understanding themselves and their experiences, contributing to their overall mental well-being.

Literary works provide inspiration and lessons that are vital for building resilience among students. The findings indicate that stories and poems serve as primary sources of strength and hope, helping them face life's challenges. Characters in these works who experience trials

become symbols that they are not alone in their struggles. The lessons from works like "Noli Me Tangere" by Jose Rizal convey deep messages about love for the country and the importance of education, inspiring students to become more active in their communities. Based on the study's results, it shows that reading literature contributes not only to emotional health but also to the moral development of students. Literary works contain messages about sacrifice, compassion, and justice, inspiring students to be more critical and responsible in their decisions. According to Lopez (2021), recognizing and understanding these themes leads to introspection and a deeper understanding of one's feelings, contributing to their moral growth. The lessons from literature guide students in facing life's challenges, making them more resilient and prepared for future trials. Stories and poems serve as sources of inspiration that provide strength and hope, which are essential for their mental health.

Table 2. Impact of Reading Literature on the Mental Health of Students

Theme	Key Ideas
<p><i>Creating a Supportive Environmen</i></p>	<p><i>Importance of a Supportive Environment</i> Having a supportive environment in the classroom is essential for students to express their feelings and opinions without fear. Such an environment encourages students to be open about their emotions, idi4 and idi5</p> <p><i>Open Communication</i> Teachers should provide space for open discussions about the feelings and issues found in literary works. These discussions create opportunities for students to express their thoughts and find support from their classmates and teachers. idi5</p> <p><i>Incorporating Activities that Promote Introspection</i> Activities such as writing essays or journals related to literary themes can help students better understand themselves and their emotions, idi4</p> <p><i>Role-Playing and Discussions</i> Using role-playing and discussions focused on the emotions of characters in literary works helps students recognize and accept their own emotions. These activities become effective means of expressing feelings in a safe space, idi4 and idi5</p> <p><i>Teacher Support</i> Active support from teachers during discussions and conversations about emotions is a crucial part of creating a positive environment. Teachers play an important role in establishing a safe space where students can share their thoughts, idi5</p>
<p><i>Critical Analysis</i></p>	<p><i>Analysis of Story Elements</i> Students learn how to analyze the key elements of a story, such as character, plot, and setting, which allows for a deeper understanding of the work, idi1</p>

Developing Personal Opinions

Class discussions encourage students to develop and express their own opinions about the themes and messages of the work, boosting their self-confidence, **idi2**

Understanding Cultural and Social Context

The study of literature provides students with opportunities to understand different cultures and societies, leading to a deeper understanding of their own context, **idi3**

Analyzing Symbolism and Themes

Students learn how to identify and analyze symbols and themes in literary works, expanding their ability to think critically and seek deeper meanings, **idi3**

Strengthening Analytical Skills

Literary analysis activities encourage students to become more critical and analytical, which is essential for their academic development and everyday life, **idi5**

Teaching literature serves as a pathway to establish a supportive environment within the classroom. Based on the results, having a safe and supportive environment is crucial for students to express their feelings and opinions without fear. Teachers play an important role in creating a space where students feel free and comfortable to share their thoughts. Activities that promote introspection and discussion help students better understand themselves and their mental health. Teachers should provide space for open conversations about the feelings and issues found in literary works. Such discussions create opportunities for students to express their thoughts and find support from their classmates and teachers. According to a study by Areha (2022), having support from friends and teachers is vital for developing positive mental health, highlighting the importance of social support systems in students' lives. Active teacher support during discussions and conversations about emotions becomes an essential part of creating a positive environment, encouraging students to be more open and willing to engage with others.

The theme of critical thinking and analysis in teaching literature is essential for developing students' ability to be discerning and analytical. By analyzing story elements, students learn how to assess character, plot, and setting, leading to a deeper understanding of the work (Martinez, 2020). Class discussions encourage them to formulate and express their own opinions about the themes and messages of the work, boosting their self-confidence (Smith, 2020). Furthermore, studying literature provides opportunities to understand different cultures and societies, facilitating a deeper comprehension of their own context (Johnson & Lee, 2021). The ability to identify and analyze symbols and themes in literary works expands their capacity for critical thinking and seeking deeper meanings (Martinez, 2020). Ultimately, literary analysis activities motivate students to become more critical and analytical, which is important not only in academic contexts but also in their everyday lives (Smith, 2020). Overall, this theme provides an essential foundation for student development and their deeper understanding of literature and their own experiences.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The reading and teaching of literature have profound effects on the mental health of students. Literary works serve not only as entertainment but also as essential tools for emotional expression and understanding. Responses indicate that reading literature provides opportunities to express feelings and recognize their experiences, leading to deeper introspection and self-understanding.

The inspiration and moral lessons derived from literary works are significant. Stories and poems become symbols of hope and strength, teaching students to face life's challenges. The lessons embedded in these works contribute to building resilience and a positive outlook, which are vital for their mental health.

Furthermore, teaching literature fosters the creation of a supportive environment within the classroom. Having a safe space for open discussions about emotions and experiences strengthens the relationship between students and teachers, making students more willing to seek support. Activities that promote introspection and discussion help in building positive mental health, highlighting the importance of social support systems in students' lives.

Overall, this study emphasizes the critical role of literature in developing emotional resilience and mental health among students. Literary works contribute not only to their academic growth but also to their personal development and ability to recover from challenges. The findings suggest that a deeper integration of literature into the curriculum could positively impact the mental health of youth, making them more resilient and prepared for life's challenges.

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