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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF
RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE EDUCATION 2023

**EMBRACING CHANGE:
EMANCIPATING THE LANDSCAPE
OF RESEARCH IN LINGUISTIC,
LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

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**“Embracing Change: Emancipating the Landscape of
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Table of Contents

No.	Title	Page Number
1.	Galaxy Tense A+: The Effectiveness of English Tenses Board Game Among Tertiary Students	6
2.	Graphic Design Website: Exploring Market Needs for Services	14
3.	Beyond What Eye Saw	21
4.	Creative Writing: Through Her Eyes - Tales of The Heart	28
5.	Let's Play Phonetic Charades	34
6.	A Visual Novel Game on Social Anxiety	40
7.	Skin Care with Fisha: New Media Content Creation for Basic Skincare Education	48
8.	e-Book of Poem Collections	55
9.	Toodles: Flashcards for Children	61
10.	Digital Flashcards (Tenses)	68
11.	Investigating Students' Concerns on The Development of Masterly!	74
12.	Googly Eyes: A Game to Improve English Usage Among Teenagers	80
13.	Providing Subtitles for Malaysian YouTuber	86
14.	Read and Play: Improving Adolescent's Reading Skills Through Video Games	91
15.	Thoughts by Her Soul Bookmark	99
16.	The Comedy of Errors Simplified: "Egeon's 18Th Reasons Why"	105
17.	Oliver Green: Improving Homonyms Understanding Through Comics	112
18.	PWSP: Phonetic Word Search Puzzle Book	117
19.	Floriography	121
20.	A Preliminary Study on The Young Adult's Perception of Learning English Using the Website: Swifties Read	126
21.	A Place for Poets: An Online Poetry Recitation Series	133
22.	Say It Right with Ya	140
23.	Don't Touch My No-No Square	150
24.	Templatify: An E-Book Collection of Ecards Templates	158
25.	Short Story: Disease Takes Happiness Away	164
26.	Dusted Lines: A Compilation of Self-Written Poems	170
27.	'What's Your Philosophy?' An Edutaining Card Game	177
28.	Be Cool, Not Cruel	185
29.	Grammar Made Fun with TikTok	192
30.	Interactive Journaling as A Mental Health Coping Strategy for Youths	201
31.	Learned – Spoken: Manglish	212
32.	Lost in the Labyrinth of My Mind	218
33.	Translation of Abqorie's Fardhu Ain Module for Smart Tahfiz & Transit Abqorie	225
34.	Poetry for Us: Expressing Feelings Through Creative Writing	231
35.	Lyacomms' Proofreading and Editing Service	238



No.	Title	Page Number
36.	The Effectiveness Of ‘Master the Verbs’ Instagram Flashcards Among Year Six Low Proficiency Level Students	244
37.	My Malay Fables	252
38.	Talking Story: eBooks to Improve Reading Comprehension Skills	259
39.	Exploring Creative Writing as A Tool to Enhance Mental Health	272
40.	Movie Moo	281
41.	English Pitstop	288
42.	Upin Ipin Reding Kit	294
43.	Seventy-Two Beats a Second	301
44.	Knowing Kristang	308
45.	Creatorslation: The Role of Technology in Translation Service	313
46.	Travel Guide as a Medium to Improve English Comprehensiveness	319
47.	Posterlance	328
48.	Crossfunetics	336
49.	The Effectiveness of Board Games to Promote Student Attention and Enjoyment in English Subject	342
50.	The Use of e-Books and Social Media in Introducing Malaysian Folklores Among Children	352
51.	Creepypodcast YouTube Channel	357
52.	Mastermind’: English Board Game	363
53.	한국어 In Melayu!	369
54.	Triple P with Sang Kancil: Pronunciation, Phonetics, and Playbook	376
55.	"So, She Reads" Book Blog	383
56.	Abbyfication: A Grammar-Based Word Game	389
57.	Klick! A Content Writing Service	396
58.	The Love Levanter Podcast	403
59.	Let’s Talk Feelings Podcast	409
60.	Grafixmoon: Poster Designing Service	415
61.	The Circle of Life	422
62.	Hops the Dwarf	430
63.	Malay Corner: Learning Malay Through Discord	435
64.	Movie: This and That	441
65.	Phone the Phonetics: Phonetic Flashcards	449
66.	And What If?	455
67.	Interrupted: Life in A Podcast	458
68.	@Phoneticisfun	463
69.	Culinary and Creative Writing: When Two Worlds Collide	468
70.	Talk in Senses	473
71.	Piano Pleasure Course	480
72.	Step by Step: A Motivational Instagram Account	486
73.	Figurative Language! An Educational Autobiography	492
74.	Of Power, Devotion and Betrayal: A Collection of Malaysian Princesses’ Folklores	499
75.	Tell Me, How’s Everything? An Anthology of Poems to Increase the Understanding of Figurative Language	505



No.	Title	Page Number
76.	Oh, Lendu Youth	513
77.	Living the Hard Life	520
78.	Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall, Who Is the Best of Us All?	528
79.	Beyond the Crowded Space: The Use of Podcast in Improving Psychological Well-Being	535
80.	Samdil: Same Music, Different Language	541
81.	Bejalai: A YouTube Journey	547
82.	Mind Your Language	552
83.	Pop Music Podcast: A Bop or A Flop?	560
84.	Exploring The English Language Teachers' Beliefs And Practices In Implementing CEFR-Aligned Formative Assessment In Malaysian Primary Schools	570
85.	Pencapaian Ucapan Bayi Sejak Lahir Hingga Dua Belas Bulan	575
86.	Mengkaji Makna Bahasa Lukisan Kanak - Kanak Muda Usia 0-3 Tahun	585
87.	Penelitian Terhadap Kesiapan, Motivasi Dan Faktor Persekitaran Murid Bukan Penutur Natif Terhadap Pembelajaran Dan Pemudahcaraan Karangan Respon Terbuka Di Sekolah Antarabangsa Kuala Lumpur	599
88.	Pengaruh Bahasa Ibunda Dalam Kalangan Murid Bukan Melayu Tahun 5 Semasa Menulis Karangan: Satu Kajian Kes	610
89.	Meningkatkan Penguasaan Penulisan Karangan Naratif Murid Tahun 6 Menggunakan Kit Ikan Karang	619
90.	Pengaruh Dialek Kedah Terhadap Fonetik Dan Leksikal Kata Soal Pelajar Pispmp: Satu Kajian Kes	633
91.	Tahap Pengetahuan Guru Pelatih Mempengaruhi Kekekapan Pelaksanaan Kemahiran Berfikir Aras Tinggi (Kbat) Dalam Pengajaran Dan Pembelajaran Subjek Bahasa Melayu	643

EXPLORING CREATIVE WRITING AS A TOOL TO ENHANCE MENTAL HEALTH

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ABSTRACT:

This paper aims to promote and discuss creative writing as a tool to enhance mental health and wellbeing. Creative writing is seen as a means to convey emotions and ideas through an artistic approach and can be guided by experienced writers with or without the involvement of healthcare providers (King et al, 2013). Based on that premise, we have published an e-magazine which revolves around the theme of mental health to reach out to those struggling with mental health. This e-magazine attempts to function as a bibliotherapy through which the target audience can understand that they are not alone and possibly to support their recovery from mental illness too. Bibliotherapy has grown in popularity as a type of therapy in recent years. People experiencing mild to severe depression and anxiety may benefit from bibliotherapy strategies to improve their attitude and thinking (Spruce, 2016). The objectives of this project: (i) to raise the awareness of mental health amongst the public (ii) to explore the effectiveness of creative writing in managing mental. A mini survey was also conducted to learn about the awareness of general public on mental health and their interest in creative writing. Out of thirty-four respondents, it was discovered that most of the respondents had experienced mental illness in one form or another, the percentage of which stands at 73.5%. Furthermore, a huge percentage of the respondents (88.2%) also claimed that they enjoy creating writing. However, due to limited audience, we are unable to gauge how much of a success the project has been in enhancing mental health.

Keywords: literature; mental health; e-magazine; creative writing; bibliotherapy

1. INTRODUCTION

Our emotional, psychological, and social well-being all contribute to our mental health. It has an impact on how we think, feel, and act. It also influences how we deal with stress, interact with people, and make decisions. Mental health is essential throughout life, from childhood and adolescence to maturity. But as we are now facing an endemic environment, life has not been the same as before and it has shown drastic changes to our lifestyle which includes occupation and education moreover to the young adults and adolescence. They are the most affected and are highly at risk with mental illness. According to an article from The Star newspaper (2021), between January 2019 and May 2021, 872 adolescents aged 15 to 18 committed suicides, according to police data. This accounts for 51% of the 1,708 suicides that occurred during that time period. The rise in mental health problems amongst the youth (defined by the United Nations as those aged 15 to 24 years) is especially concerning given Malaysia's national average of just 1.27 psychiatrists per 100,000 people. This is far lower than the WHO's recommended ratio of one psychiatrist per 10,000 people.

The World Health Organization's global burden of disease survey data from 1990 to 2010 revealed that the disability-adjusted life years represented by severe physical illness had decreased, but practically every mental health condition had increased its burden of disease in absolute terms (Murray CJL, Richards MA, Newton JN).

In recent times, there has been a growing trend in using books for therapeutic purposes. Initially based on psychodynamic theory, current models highlight the connection between the reader's personality and the cognitive and emotional experiences provided by literature (Jack & Ronan, 2008). Bibliotherapy, also known as biblioeducation, bibliocounseling, bibliopsychology, library therapeutics, biblioprophylaxis, or literatherapy, involves treating individuals through books. Its primary objectives, according to Baruth and Burggraf (1984), include providing information on problems, offering insights into problems, promoting discussions about problems, conveying new values and attitudes, creating an awareness that others have faced similar problems, and providing solutions to problems. A vast range of books can be used to achieve these bibliotherapy goals, such as those addressing childhood fears or blended families (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1993). In other words, bibliotherapy is the use of literature to enhance one's life by offering information, support, and advice via the reading of books and tales (Lindberg, 2021). Reading as a means of facilitating the healing process and meeting therapeutic goals is a popular practice in many therapy modalities. It is suitable for both individual and group situations, as well as for persons of all ages. In this paper, our objective is to know how much the impact of bibliotherapy is towards young adults and adolescents.

Creative writing as a therapeutic practice has its origins in Western biblio-therapy. James W. Pennebaker, a psychologist who specializes in language and cognition, is one of the most prominent experts in this field. Pennebaker's controlled clinical research on the effectiveness of reading and writing with traumatized children and youth led to the development of his expressive emotions therapy (EET) (Pennebaker, 1997). According to Pennebaker's definition, EET allows individuals to confront deep, personal issues, promoting both physical health and subjective well-being. The method is based on the use of expressive writing, which allows individuals to translate their traumatic or disturbing emotional experiences into language. Pennebaker worked with emotionally disturbed young people, who read a powerful text aloud together before discussing it with a facilitator and trusted community members. The group then wrote about characters and subjects that were relevant to their own lives. Pennebaker noted that this process of reading and writing could transform young people's self-concept and their outlook on the future. The use of expressive therapy helped these individuals externalize their sense of self, making it easier for them to exist comfortably in the world while feeling connected to the outside world through books (Pennebaker, 1997).

1.1. Problem Statement

As worries about adolescent mental health rise, experts are looking to prevention as a tool for tackling rising incidence of depression amongst young people (Sohn, 2022). Based on data obtained from June to early July 2021, 48% of young adults had mental health symptoms, and 39% of those with symptoms utilised prescription drugs and/or attended therapy, while 36% expressed unmet counselling need (Berthold, 2022). Literature may help teenagers and young people through the turmoil of early identity discovery. They might tentatively try out different facets of their emerging personalities by responding to characters or circumstances in a tale. It so gives a safe outlet for suppressed emotions and hardships, as well as the celebration of life's early milestones



1.2. Research Objectives

- i. To raise awareness of mental health amongst the public
- ii. To explore the effectiveness of creative writing in managing mental

1.3. Research Methodology

Data for this study was collected using a survey questionnaire which was distributed through social media such as WhatsApp and Instagram with a total of thirty-four respondents. Majority of the respondents are categorised from young adults and adolescence. To facilitate data processing, the questionnaire was created using the Google Form app. The next section discusses the study's findings. Respondents have given their opinion and self-review about literature and mental health.

1.3.1. Knowledge Impact

We designed and published my e-magazine using current information and research on mental health and literature.

1.3.2. Contribution To Society and Country

This product is especially useful and efficient to all readers from different age groups, as it acts as a self-help book by giving supportive poetry and short stories for those who are having mental illness. It might also decrease the number of depressions that is faced by young adults and adolescents.

1.3.3. Cost Impact

We have estimated that the total range cost for the purchase of the e-magazine will be RM8.

1.3.4. Commercialisation Potential

This idea has the potential to generate a profit by selling an e-magazine containing all poetry, short stories, and drawings for all age groups, particularly young adults, and adolescents. The customers are able to purchase the book through a Google Form provided that has been promoted through social media and fill in the details of their payment via online banking through there. They may let the seller know they made their payment by contacting them by WhatsApp app or through e-mail. The e-magazine will be given to the buyers in a PDF form.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Arts-based interventions explicitly linked to health and wellbeing are gaining global attention, with various writing methods being used in healthcare such as expressive writing, poetry writing, narrative therapy, and creative writing (Bolton, 2011; Fancourt & Finn, 2019). Although creative writing has long been utilized in art academies, it has only recently emerged as a distinct practice for promoting health and wellbeing, differentiating it from personal development and therapy (Bolton, 2011; Gardner, 1983). Professional writers can facilitate creative writing, either with or without the involvement of healthcare providers, as it provides a medium for expressing emotions and thoughts with a focus on artistic form (King et al., 2013). Researchers have been interested in the potential benefits of creative writing for mental health



for a long time, as it may help those with mental illness regain a sense of competency. Numerous publications have explored how writing, both as an activity and an intervention, can support recovery from mental illness (Atkinson, 2011; Bundesen et al., 2020; Holm-Hadulla, 2013; Iszaj & Demetrovics, 2011; Jess-Cooke, 2015; Kaufman, 2001; Malyn et al., 2020).

Young individuals on medical wards are becoming increasingly rare in an ageing community, with just 12% of young adults reporting a long-term disease or disability. However, mental health issues continue to be prominent amongst the younger population (Jurewicz, 2015). Lead author of the book “iGen”, Jean Twenge, mentioned that more U.S. adolescents and young adults experienced serious psychological distress, major depression, or suicidal thoughts in the late 2010s versus the mid-2000s, and more attempted suicide. Scientists are looking to prevention as a technique for managing increased incidence of depression amongst young people as mental-health problems grow (Sohn, 2022). Researchers believe it is both possible and necessary to prevent mental-health problems in adolescence.

This research strives to bridge this gap by utilising literature to help you improve your life through the provision of knowledge, support, and direction in the form of books and tales. Reading as a means of facilitating the healing process and meeting therapeutic goals is a popular practice in many therapy modalities (Lindberg, 2022). There is evidence to suggest that creative writing plays a significant role in the recovery journey of individuals impacted by severe mental illness (King et al., 2013). A study by Béres (2015) demonstrated that the therapeutic work that they administered would not have been successful if they did not utilise creative writing. Literature provides insight into modern challenges and realities in a way that is not only understandable but also relevant to young readers. Although many classic writings contain pertinent themes that generate links to current issues, students frequently struggle to understand these themes through a modern perspective when they do not perceive themselves reflected in the text (Hendrickson, 2018). It is simpler for pupils to bridge this gap when they read about situations that are related to their own and their classmates' lives (Hendrickson, 2018).

3. METHODOLOGY

The flowchart below was applied to develop the e-magazine. The flowchart describes the entire process of creating the e-magazine. A pre-questionnaire was sent via social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram before we began creating the e-magazine. The findings have been presented in the Results and Discussion section. From the results, we had started designing a suitable content for my e-magazine. The e-magazine has two sections for its content which are the poems and short stories. There are also interesting illustrations which are synonyms to the context of the anthologies. Figure 1 shows the design of the cover page and the content for the book.

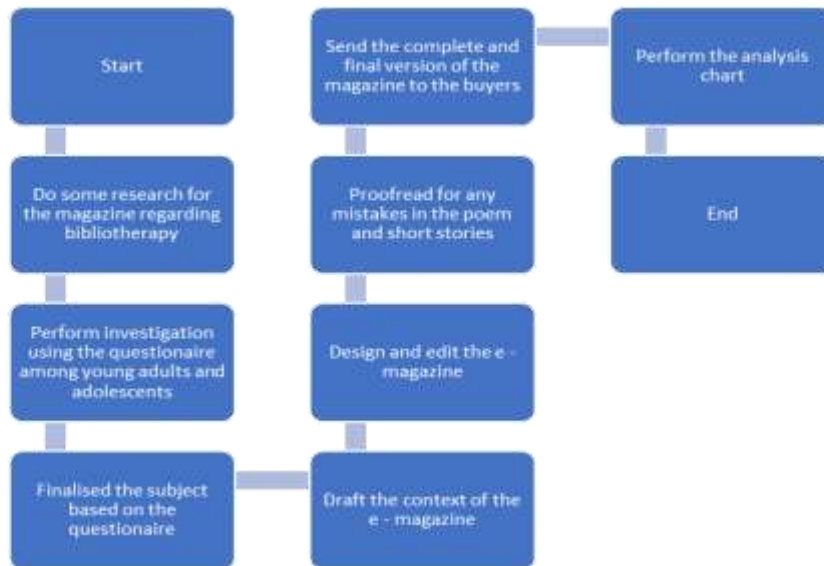


Figure 2: Project's Flow Chart

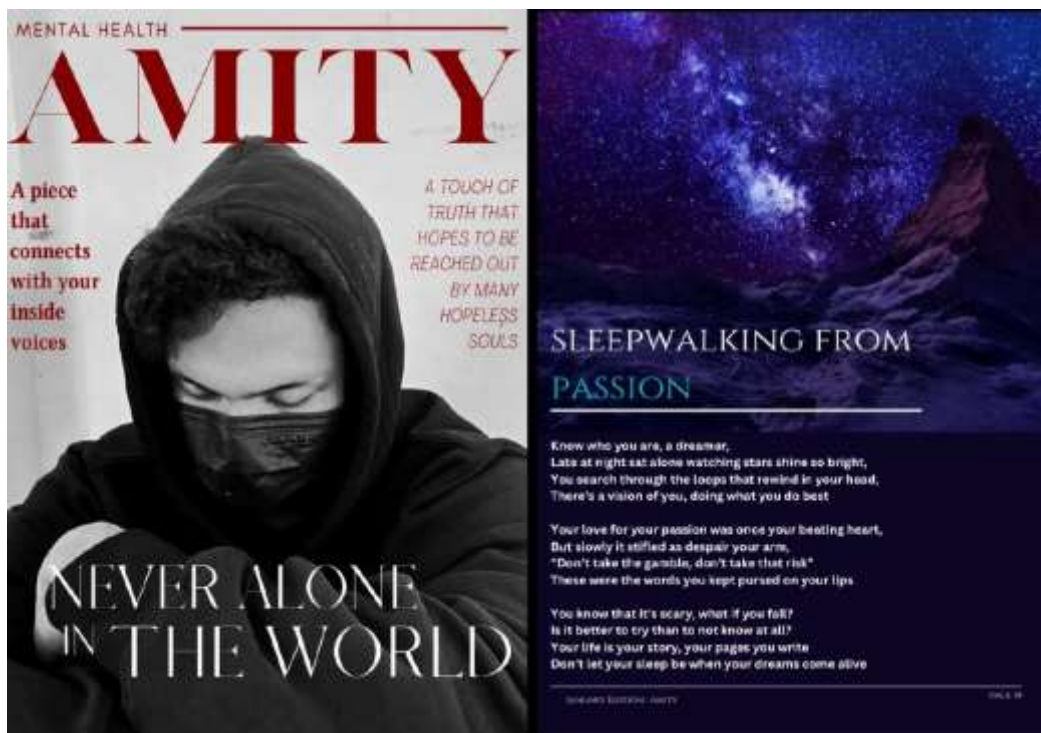


Figure 3: Cover Page (Left) and Selected Content (Right)

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

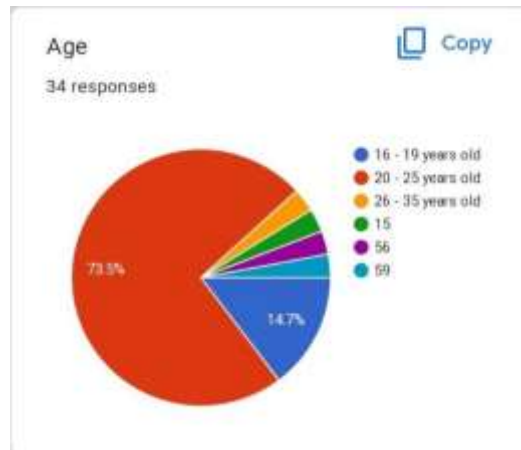


Figure 4: Age Group of Respondents

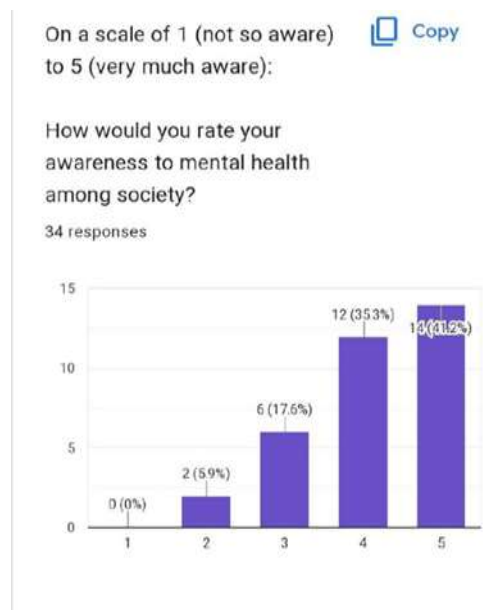


Figure 5: Awareness on Mental Health Issue

Results obtained from the needs analysis showed that the majority of the respondents came from the young adult's category which is 20 - 25 years old at about 73.5 % as illustrated in Figure 3.

Respondents were asked whether they were aware of mental health issues happening amongst the society which includes depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, insecurities etc. Approximately 14 respondents are very much aware of this issue with a percentage of 41.2%.

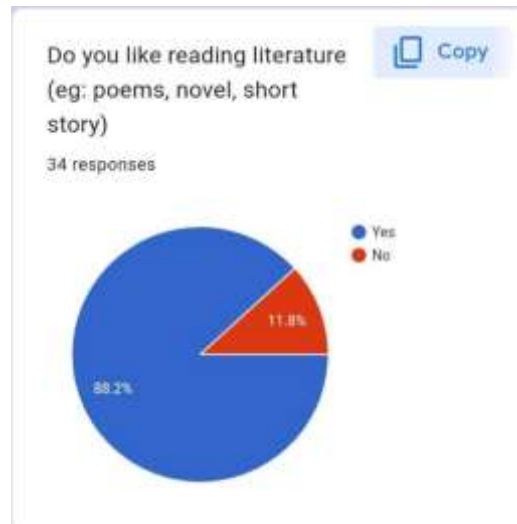


Figure 6: Interest in Literature

In this question, respondents are given an option if they really do have an interest with literature, especially the young adults; due to the Washington Post in 2017, average reading time per person has decreased considerably. Based on the survey, thirty respondents still have an interest in literature with a total percentage of 88.2%.

4.1. Limitations

This project has the potential to help everyone who is experiencing mental health issues and for those who do not have anyone to talk to, but there are a few drawbacks. One disadvantage is that this e-magazine is in digital form, so the method of sale is business-to-consumer (B2C). Due to the platform being digital, the digital book can be shared and duplicated to many people even if they did not purchase the book. Other than that, there were no suitable platforms, so the e-magazine is sent by e-mail or WhatsApp upon purchase, and the same repercussions may occur, which could be shared with many people.

5. CONCLUSION

Literature has played a vital part in helping the society, especially young adults, and adolescents in coping with their mental illness. People might see literature as a body of written works that are published in books or writings, yet literature is something more if we understand the idea and implied meanings of each poem and short story. Literature can be a type of therapy where readers can connect with themselves with the poems and short stories which are full of the charisma of mental illness, and we can strive to be better thus there is always someone who will be looking out for us.

According to Brewster and McNicol (2021), the focus of bibliotherapy used to be on self-help books relevant to mental health, but today fiction, poetry, and other genres of literature are also employed to assist enhance a patient's wellbeing. The contents of the e-magazine gives some touching elements to the readers which is set to the goal of the magazine and information that is gathered from the survey given. Literature is able to improve a person's mindset based on the relationship between the content of the story and the issue they are currently facing. An e-magazine about mental health can spread knowledge to society that our mental health is vital and illness that are faced by other people amongst us is real.

There is certainly potential for development in terms of marketing my e-magazine and expanding my business. One of the improvements that we might be able to do is creating an Instagram account so that we can easily promote my e-magazine so that viewers can be given an update for the process of the magazine rather than promoting it on my personal account. Having a social media account is beneficial for my service as many young adults and adolescents are using social media. Secondly, we should create a QR code at the end of the e-magazine so that we will receive the reader's opinion about the magazine as well as read the comments for any improvements. These are some of the improvements suggested for the future of this project.

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