

Conference e-Proceedings

eISBN 978-967-2072-43-0

Physical & Online



I-RoLE 2023

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF
RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE EDUCATION 2023

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

13 - 14 MARCH 2023

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e ISBN 978-967-2072-43-0



Publisher:
Zes Rokman Resources (2131022-P)
Bandar Baru Bangi, Selangor Darul Ehsan

Conference e-Proceedings
 International Conference of Research on Language Education 2023
 e-ISBN: 978-967-2072-43-0

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INTERACTIVE JOURNALING AS A MENTAL HEALTH COPING STRATEGY FOR YOUTHS

Nur Shahmina Dayini Kasman¹, *Sheik Badrul Hisham Jamil Azhar²

^{1,2} Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Melaka, Kampus Alor Gajah, Malaysia

¹ 2020613608@uitm.edu.my

² sheik835@uitm.edu.my

* Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT:

Since 2017, the prevalence of mental health disorders among youths and young adults in Malaysia appears to be growing in frequency and severity. The cause of this matter may vary depending on one's circumstances; however, studies show that most suffering people dislike sharing their side of the story, and this may be the grounds for the issue they face. Due to self-consciousness, many are reluctant to disclose their problems due to scared of being judged, and as a result, they pent up their emotions. In consideration of this matter, nurturing this habit will gradually lead to poor mental well-being. Thus, the purpose of this project 'A Book You Never Knew You Needed' is to assist youths in finding an appropriate outlet for expressing their problems through journaling. In order to gather youths' perspectives on journaling, a google form survey was conducted. The findings then revealed that the respondents between the age of 18 to 22 find writing and art help in expressing their thoughts, and writing is the most preferable medium to vent.

Keywords: Art; Journaling; Mental Health; Prevalence; Youths.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to research, Malaysia's mental illness rate in 2022 was significantly higher than in prior years. WHO reports that mental health concerns are the seventh leading cause of disability in 10-19 years old, accounting for 13% of the global illness burden (Raaj et al., 2021). They also observed that mental illness is pervasive at these ages and often undiagnosed and untreated. According to Kessler et al. (2012), a time of increased vulnerability to mental health disorders also occurs during adolescence, and 75% of individuals who have ever been diagnosed with a mental health illness indicate that they first had symptoms before the age of 24. Moreover, these young adults dislike sharing their problems for various reasons, one of which is stigma. Stigma towards a person with a mental health problem can exacerbate their symptoms and make a recovery difficult.

Considering the difficulties faced by youths in finding a support system or an appropriate medium to vent their problems, researchers believe that venting through journaling may be a good medium to vent as it helps in understanding one's own feelings and improves one's mood. According to Ullrich, P. M., & Lutgendorf, S. K. (2002), those who journal about their emotions and stressful situations experience more positive growth and less physical illness. This describes that journaling can be a healing tool for mental health. A study conducted using journaling as a treatment for mental health discovered that structured writing reduced the symptoms of severe stress (Largo-Marsh & Spates, 2002). Therefore, producing an interactive journal for the ELS304

Project is done with the intention of increasing awareness of journal writing as a coping method for better mental stability.

In producing the project, 'A Book You Never Knew You Needed' consists of art activities, original poems, quotes from well-known people, and factual paragraphs about plants. These contents focus on providing motivation for the targeted groups by using encouraging words through poems; self-acceptance, self-belief, self-prioritization, self-worth, and taking things slow. The theme decided for the journal is nature themed. The purpose of the chosen theme is to encourage the targeted groups to engage themselves in nature. Researchers discovered that interaction with nature positively affects the mind. Berman et al. (2012) stated that individuals suffering from mental illness may benefit from increased cognitive and affective gains from nature interactions. Additionally, art activities are included to distract one from their worries. According to Raypole (2021), drawing and colouring can serve as a distraction from anxiety-related unwanted thoughts.

1.1 Project Objective/Purpose

1. To encourage youths to share their thoughts freely.
2. To assist young people in finding an appropriate outlet for their emotions.
3. To allow youths to be able to recognise their emotions as they read and write.

1.2 Entrepreneurial Opportunities (Potential project/Business opportunity)

As the interactive journal consists of various designs, activities, and poems in every chapter, 'A Book You Never Knew You Needed' has the potential to grow its network. Firstly, publishing and selling the project in PDF form through social media platforms can reach a diverse audience due to its accessibility. Interactive journals are generally colourful, full of patterns, and contain interesting contents that are popular among youths. Online shopping platforms and online books are also widely available and used. Therefore, the notion of publishing and selling the product through online marketplaces such as eBay and Amazon provides an excellent opportunity to raise profit and conveniently reach the targeted audience. Besides, 'A Book You Never Knew You Needed' also has the potential to be an officially published physical book in bookstores like Popular or MPH. Since there are activities involved in the project, it will be simpler for the audience to carry them out. Additionally, having the book in a physical form would broaden the opportunity for the writer to the customer. Although online books are more convenient, physical books always provide more interactivity between the readers and the book. As mentioned above, this demonstrates some possibilities and opportunities this project can achieve.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research takes qualitative and quantitative approaches. A survey that was carried out through Google Forms consisted of three open-ended questions and three multiple-choice questions. This survey is to gather information about youths' perceptions of journaling. The survey is also to investigate the benefits of journaling on youth's mental health.

Table 1: Project Planning Gantt Chart

Weekly Tasks	October				November				December				January			
	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6	W7	W8	W9	W10	W11	W12	W13	W14	W15	W16
Idea Preparation	█	█	█													
Research Ideas	█	█	█													
Idea Pitching with Supervisor	█	█	█													
Writing and editing				█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█					
Promoting the book									█	█	█					
Finalising portfolio and poster presentation										█	█	█	█	█		
Finalising remaining tasks												█	█	█		

There are numerous steps involved in the production "A Book You Never Knew You Needed." The Gantt Chart above shows the project development process. To begin with, the brainstorming project idea took place in the first week of the semester. After the idea was approved by the supervisor, a survey was conducted and distributed to young people. The distribution was sent via WhatsApp groups that consists of college students and high school students. The results of the survey have been discussed in the results and discussion section.

In producing the interactive journal, the writing process was the first step taken. The writing process includes brainstorming the design of the book, as well as drafting the contents: poems, factual and motivational paragraphs, and activities. After considering the duration given to accomplish the project, the writer decided to have 10 chapters. Every chapter contains an original poem, a factual and motivational passage, a quote from a celebrity, and an art exercise. The writer took approximately one week to complete a chapter before going to another chapter. The process of writing was then sent to be checked and approved by the writer's supervisor. After obtaining the approval, the writer proceeded with the completion of the journal. Apart from writing, the design of each chapter's contents is just as important to pique the interest of the targeted groups. Having to undergo this process was rather difficult for the writer considering that she is not well-versed in designing, and illustrating would not be a good option to choose. Due to that, the writer inquired about opinions from peers and used Pinterest for references in the design-making process. The elements used in the design making were obtained from Canva. Moreover, the writing and designing in every chapter were done at once to ensure the theme of the chapters and design correlate. All chapter's designs were sent to the writer's supervisor to be approved and proceeded in the completion of the whole journal was. After the journal has been finalised and received supervisor approval, the final step is to assemble all of the contents, divide them into chapters, and make them into a book. The printing and binding of the interactive journal were outsourced to Shopee's online printing service so that it could be printed as a tangible book. The total of the printing and binding for one cost RM 26. Therefore, it is estimated that the journal will be sold at RM35.



3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Respondent’s Feedback on Write to Heal Survey (Multiple-choice questionnaire)

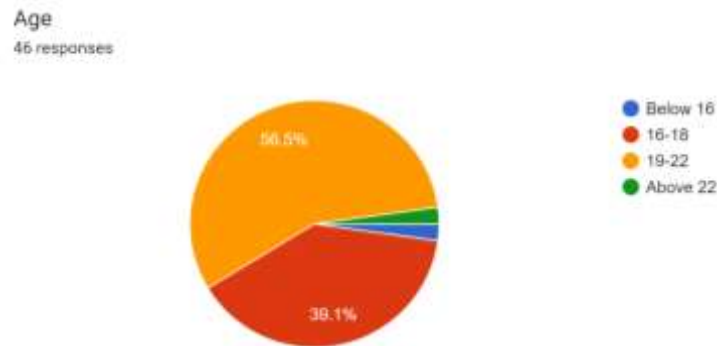


Figure 1: Respondents' Age Group

As shown in Figure 1, 56.5% of respondents between the ages of 19 and 22 comprised the largest proportion of survey respondents. There were 39.1% of respondents between the ages of 16 and 18, 2.2% below 16, and 2.2% responded the age below 22.

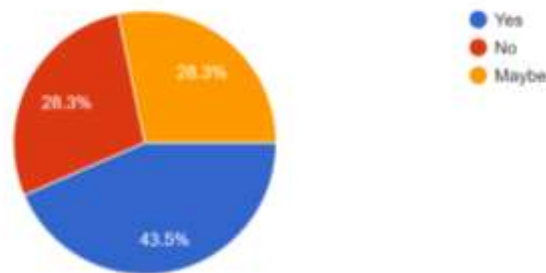


Figure 2: Responses to: Do you write down how you feel or what you're going through?

Figure 2 above shows that 28.3% of respondents responded that they do not share their feelings through writing, meanwhile 28.3% answered that they are unsure whether they have or prefer to write to dump their feelings. However, 43.5% of respondents agree that they write as a way to express themselves.

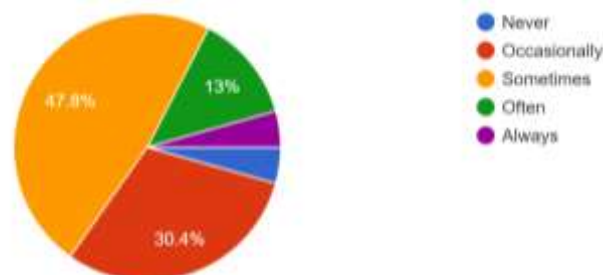


Figure 3: Responses to: How frequently do you put your feelings into words?

Respondents were asked about their habits in expressing themselves through writing. It is found that 4.3% of respondents answered that they never use the technique to pour their hearts out and 13% answered that they often use it. 30.4% of respondents responded that they occasionally write their feelings, while the largest percentage of respondents answered that they write from time to time. However, 4.3% of respondents consistently use the technique to express themselves.

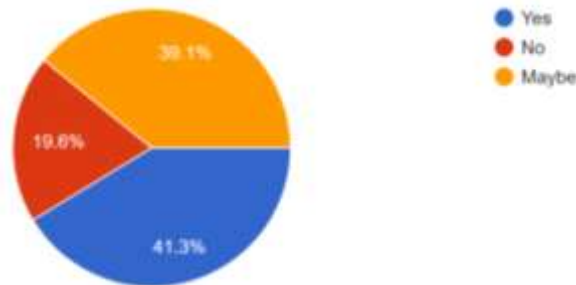


Figure 4: Responses to: Do you feel a sense of peacefulness after you write?

Figure 1.4 shows that 19.6% of respondents do not feel peaceful even after expressing themselves through writing. 39.1% of respondents think that they somewhat feel peacefulness after they write, meanwhile 41.3% agree that writing does give them a sense of peacefulness.

3.2 Respondent's Feedback on Write to Heal Survey (Open-ended questionnaire)

There are three open-ended questions. The questionnaire is analysed in light of the respondents' responses.

4. Based on your answers above, why do you write your emotions instead of expressing them verbally to someone? (You can either write short or long answer)

46 responses

Figure 5: Question 4

Based on the questionnaire above, many of the respondents (youths) prefer to express their emotions through writing instead of verbally to someone because they are embarrassed. They expressed that due to scared of judgment and stigma from others, some may not understand their feelings. They also mentioned that they are shy to show people their vulnerable side. Some responded that they have trouble expressing themselves, causing them to write more. They said that whenever they express their problems verbally, it never comes out right. This shows that they find it hard to recognise their own emotions. Besides, few respondents prefer to write than expressing verbally as they claimed that people have their own problems to deal with. They also mentioned that by writing, they are more aware of their emotions, which made them prefer this technique. Overall, this question proves due to stigma, youths prefer to restrain themselves from speaking up.

5. Do you ever use art to convey your emotions? If so why?
(You can either write short or long answer)
46 responses

Figure 6: Question 5

Image above shows a question about art therapy as a way to express oneself. Based on the question, majority of the respondents answered they use art therapy to convey their emotions. From the responses gathered, art therapy is used when they are having a hard time identifying words to express themselves orally or in writing, and the type of art preferred is abstract as it is more indirect. Apart from that, art therapy is used to distract them from their worries. They also stated art gives them a sense of relief. However, some respondents also responded that they never use art because they are not accustomed to it as compared to writing.

6. How do you feel right now?
46 responses

Figure 7: Question 6

Based on the question above, respondents answered that they feel happy, relieved, and peaceful after answering the survey. On the other hand, some experience 'feeling' stuck, and have mixed emotions even after answering the survey. However, a few respondents expressed that they felt depressed and gloomy.

According to the results of the survey, the majority of young people do write about their emotions. Although there are not many respondents who record their emotions on a daily basis, it appears that they only do so when they are through difficult times. Aside from writing, most respondents are unfamiliar with art as a coping mechanism. They explained that this is because they do not know how. Overall, performing the survey has benefited the writer in understanding the cause of emotional repression and the benefits of expressing feelings through writing. Based on these answers, the author was more determined with the contents of 'A Book You Never Knew You Needed' because the respondents' worries can be helped through this interactive journal.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the creator of 'A Book You Never Knew You Needed' wishes that this interactive journal can assist many in understanding their own emotions and finding a more appropriate channelling and venting of their emotions. As this project was designed specifically for youths, the author also hopes that it inspires youths to live a more inspiring life in addition to motivational poems and passages. After examining the outcome of the project, the writer infers that this project has met its objectives. With great expectations, the author hopes that 'A Book You Never Knew You Needed' can assist young people in as many ways as possible in overcoming their negative feelings and living a joyful life.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

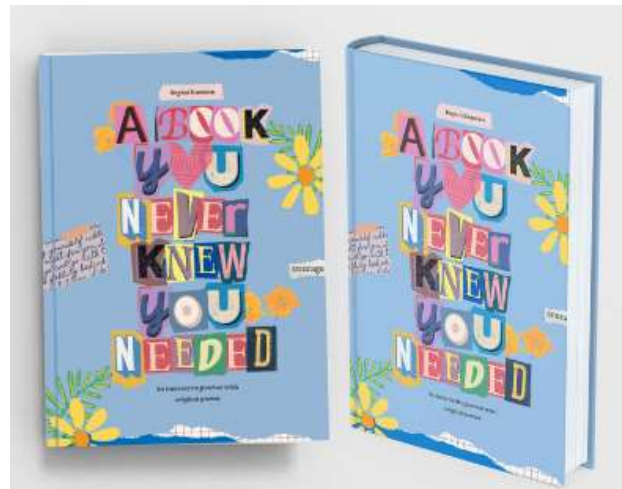
The authors would like to express appreciation for the support of the lecturers from Akademi Pengajian Bahasa UiTM Cawangan Melaka for the assist and support given in completing this project. Special thanks too to the I-ROLE 2023 International Conference of Research on Language Education committee for providing this platform for the work to be published.

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APPENDIX



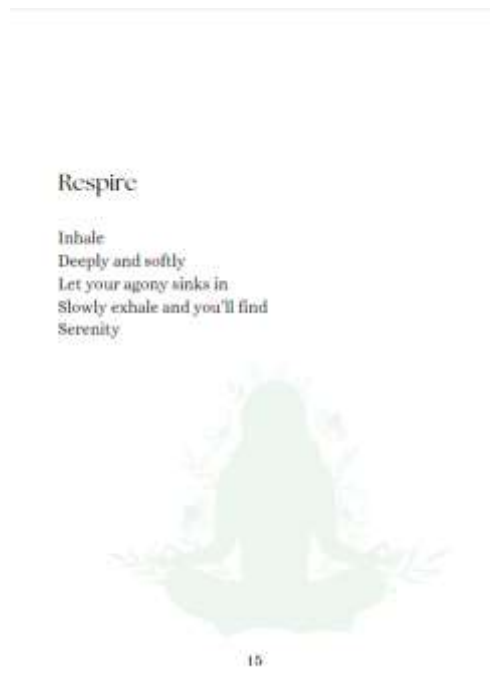
Cover Page of “A Book You Never Knew You Needed”

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3 Pause and photosynthesis	14-18
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5 Let's do some recollection	24-28
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Content Page



Chapter Opening Page



Poem



Factual Paragraphs



Art Activity



Motivational Quote by A Well-Known Person

