

The effects of integrated communication approaches on the academic performance and well-being of rehabilitated pupils of Ntinda Primary School Nakawa Division, Kampala, post - Covid 19 lockdown: A comparative study.

Frida Nakkazi, Ndejje University, fridarida90@gmail.com
Martha Kibukamusoke, Ndejje University, marthakibumo24@gmail.com

Abstract

Integrated communication approaches have been known to be used as rehabilitation techniques for people in communities. The extent of their effect varies from communities to individuals for which based the foundation for this research. The study aimed at identifying the integrated communication approaches used to rehabilitate pupils' post the COVID 19 school lockdown and to determine the effects of communication approaches on the academic performance of pupils and their mental health (psycho-social behaviour). A qualitative research design of narratives with phenomenological techniques was utilized to explore how participants perceived their experiences through storytelling and described changes they underwent after being counselled, mentored, and engaging with educative literature post-lockdown. Results revealed that counseling boosted morale for studying and reduced absenteeism, mentorship improved social behavior and discipline among children whilst educative literature reduced mental health concerns and fostered better academic performance. The study concluded that integrated communication approaches used in rehabilitation of pupils were effective in fostering positive relationships among children, peers, teachers, parents, and guardians, ultimately enhancing the well-being of pupils and improving their mental health. Policy makers, government, civil society and academic institutions should incorporate these approaches to contribute to the well-being of pupils and in extra co-curriculum school activities.

Key words: Communication approaches, Rehabilitation, Academic performance, Counselling and mentorship, Educative literature

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Introduction and background

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected education worldwide, impacting around 1.6 billion learners due to school closures (UNESCO 2022). Various researchers stress the importance of studying the pandemic's effects on students' psychological and behavioral health globally. By April 2020, school closures affected 74% of learners worldwide. The initial lockdown which began in China and South Korea, had spread globally, to include Uganda. Uganda had the longest school closure globally, with 66 weeks of full closure and 23 weeks of partial closure. From 2020 to 2023, there were increasing concerns about the pandemic's impact on children's behavior and mental health in Uganda and worldwide, which had also led to declines in academic performance and increased issues such as loss of interest in studies. The prolonged closures disrupted education and learning processes, negatively affecting academic achievements and emotional wellbeing. Pupils at Ntinda Primary School in Kampala experienced challenges adapting to reduced social interactions, leading to stress and depression. Despite efforts to address the impact of school closures, there was a clear need for rehabilitation programs to support children's recovery post the school lockdown.

Acknowledging the mental health challenges stemming from COVID-19, there was a need for longitudinal studies and effective action plans providing mental health support for vulnerable children. To help children adjust after lockdowns, schools needed to implement rehabilitation programs, offering support through using integrated approaches like counseling, mentorship, and educative literature. Upon reopening in January 2022, conflicts arose in Ugandan schools, with pupils displaying emotional and behavioral disorders. Their academic performance declined compared to pre-lockdown levels. Rehabilitation programs were necessary to support pupils' adjustment in their mental wellbeing, behavior, and academic performance. The rehabilitation processes of pupils involved utilizing integrated communication approaches to assist pupils, allowing them to express their feelings and needs effectively. However, there was a lack of documented evidence on the outcomes of these approaches. Consequently, the study examined the experiences of rehabilitated pupils at Ntinda Primary School, focusing on their emotional and academic experiences post-rehabilitation and evaluating the effectiveness of integrated communication strategies in supporting their psychological and academic performance.

Literature review

Counselling helps individuals become aware of themselves and understand their responses to their environment Akinade (2012). It supports children in finding meaning in their behavior and setting personal goals for the future. Heyden (2011) states that guidance and counselling services in schools help students meet their basic needs, understand themselves, build peer relationships, balance school rules, achievement, and gain independence. The aim of counselling in schools is to strengthen educational programs (Gibson, 2009). Through listening and empathy, counselors help children understand their challenges and develop coping strategies. Mentorship involves a relationship between an experienced mentor and a less experienced mentee, focusing on mutual trust and support for the mentee's development (Grassinger et al., 2010). Mentorship enhances all-around learning and development (Saranya et al., 2024). Children's literature, according to Fadiman (2017), includes all texts written for children, like picture books. It promotes development as children enjoy stories and engage their imagination (Ninivaggi, 2013). Hovland (1961) defines communication as a process where a communicator influences others' behavior. Rehabilitation plays a role in helping children with mental and cognitive challenges, often caused by various disorders, by improving their memory and attention through engaging activities, such as education and providing necessary aids (WHO 2024). Emotional disorders, like anxiety and depression, can impact daily functioning, and their treatment can be complicated, involving medical intervention, education, counseling, and stress management techniques is paramount (Kim et al., 2024). Rehabilitation offers support and guidance to individuals facing challenges, including health issues and traumatic experiences. It assists all species of life in recovering from negative situations. Available literature shows that integrated communication approaches that include counselling, mentorship and educative literature are effective in rehabilitating students but do not depict their exact effect on student's well-being that culminates into improved academic performance. The study filled this gap in existing literature by examining how academic performance and wellbeing of rehabilitated pupils was enhanced.

Communication is the transfer of information from one person or group to another through writing, speaking, or other means (Ntara 2024). It involves a sender, a receiver, and a message, and is influenced by factors like the medium used, the approach taken, communication style, and how the message is presented. Integrated communication approaches encompass a range of strategies aimed at supporting the holistic well-being of pupils under rehabilitation which include counselling, mentorship and using educative literature. Counselling is used to foster emotional support, mentorship for guidance, and educative literature for learning. While research highlights mental health issues related to school closures, there is little evidence from Africa, particularly Uganda. The study emphasized using integrated communication strategies to help students manage anxiety and improve academic performance and mental health challenges. Whilst there is existing research on career mentorship at the university level, there is limited information on mentorship's effects on social behavior in younger students in primary schools. The study bridged this gap.

This study aimed to address this gap by examining the observed effects of educative literature on the academic performance and well-being of pupils, post rehabilitation. There is limited research on how counselling affects the academic performance and well-being of children in the context of COVID-19. Prime et al. (2020) proposed a model showing how COVID-19 could impact children's well-being but did not suggest ways to improve their well-being or academic performance. This study aimed to confirm the impact of COVID-19 on child well-being and highlight rehabilitation approaches to mitigate these negative effects.

Mentoring children involves engaging them in talks, conversations and inspiration practices that persuade them to voluntarily attain a desired behavior, pursue a needed dream or vision and also change for the better and excel. The person responsible for conducting the mentorship is referred to as a mentor who serves as the role model while the child being mentored is referred to as a mentee.

According to the International journal of Education and research (2018), formal mentoring of students translates into significant reduction in student indiscipline in universities and university managers are strongly advised to design and encourage formal mentoring programmes in their institutions. This however does not take into consideration that also children at lower levels such as primary and secondary schools require mentoring for reduction of indiscipline cases and improvement of academic performance plus the need for incorporating mentoring programmes in primary schools thus this study filled this gap.

DuBois et al. (2005) affirm that mentoring relationships may alleviate the obstacles in everyday interactions for youth by promoting improved communication and emotional regulation. Rhodes (2002) highlights that those mentoring relationships may influence the cognitive development processes of youth through several mechanisms, including being introduced to new opportunities for learning, establishment of scholarly challenge and guidance, and advancement of academic success. Mentors may give mentee motivation to broaden their intellectual capability by assisting them in extending their thoughts. In addition to the scaffolding provided by the mentor, the relational qualities of the mentoring relationship may also contribute to the youths' cognitive abilities (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). Research from the educational literature accentuates the social nature of learning, illustrating that positive perceptions of mentor-mentee relationships are directly related to increases in motivation academic proficiency and achievement, school value, level of engagement, and behavioral adjustment (Reddy et al, 2003). All the previous studies depict those positive outcomes of mentorship of students in secondary and tertiary institutions but none of them take into consideration the effect of mentorship on primary school pupils.

Mentorship plays a significant role in the growth and development of children. It provides them with guidance, support, and wisdom that can shape their experiences and ultimately influence their future. A good mentor is someone who is patient, compassionate, and willing to listen. Mentors should be able to offer guidance and support without judgment, and be willing to share their own experiences and insights. Mentors should also be reliable, trustworthy, and committed to the growth and development of the child especially in the academic setting. Rhodes (2005) mentions that mentorship is crucial in reshaping the way undergraduate students perceive various issues, dispelling stigmas that they may hold, and enhancing their overall university experience, Rhodes limits his study to only university student and doesn't elaborate how academic experiences of young pupils are enhanced through mentorship. This study explored how the experiences of young pupils in the primary school setting are improved through mentorship. The current study concurs with the findings of DuBois et al. (2005) that mentoring relationships can help young people overcome challenges in their daily interactions by enhancing communication skills and emotional control. Mentorship has the power to transform students' perspectives and pave the way for a more positive and fulfilling academic journey. Students who have a positive mentor-mentee relationship perform better academically and this can be attributed to the fact that a mentor can provide personalized support and advice tailored to the student's unique strengths and weaknesses. Mentors can help students set realistic academic goals, develop effective study habits, and provide feedback on their progress. As a result, students are more likely to excel in their coursework and achieve higher levels of academic proficiency. In addition to academic success, mentor-mentee relationships can also have a positive impact on a student's behavior.

A mentor can serve as a role model and provide guidance on how to make responsible decisions, handle conflicts, and manage stress. By building a trusting and supportive relationship with their mentor, students are more likely to exhibit positive behaviors, such as improved attendance, reduced disciplinary issues, and better overall adjustment to the school environment.

Aiex (1993) defines Educative literature which is also referred to as Biblio-therapy as a modality of expressive arts-therapies that involves the planned use of reading material (prose, poetry, fairy tales, myths, legends) and literary devices (metaphors, comparisons, allegories, rhymes, rhythms) in therapy in order to encourage awareness and processing of various emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal problems in individuals with different types of psychosocial distress.

Silverberg (2023) highlights that when Educative literature is conducted in a group or in the classroom, it motivates other students to understand and empathise with those who are going through trauma and suffering and it is a useful preventive method because it promotes critical thinking, problem solving abilities, and awareness of possible consequences. All the studies conducted show the relevance of Educative literature in rehabilitation of school children but there is no documented evidence on the effects of using educative literature on the academic performance and well-being of children. Educative literature encompasses a range of creative and non-creative content curated for the purpose of learning and self-improvement. This content can take various forms, such as books, music, poetry recitals, and drama productions. It serves as a cornerstone in the realm of education and self-improvement, providing readers or those engaging with it a wealth of information to enhance their understanding and critical thinking skills. Students who delve into educative literature can broaden their horizons, challenge their beliefs, and gain a deeper understanding of the world around them. Professionals across different fields can benefit tremendously from engaging with educative literature, as it offers a solid foundation for continuous learning and growth. In an academic setting, incorporating educative literature can foster innovation, creativity, and problem-solving skills, ultimately leading to the well-being of pupils, their development and improved academic performance.

Methodology

A descriptive design was chosen, allowing pupils to share their experiences post-rehabilitation, which helped assess the effectiveness of integrated approaches on their academic performance and well-being. The mixed research method was used in the study, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative approach focused on pupil narratives, offering deeper insights into the effectiveness of the approaches while the quantitative approach measured responses from pupils regarding their experiences, such as changes in stress levels post-rehabilitation, with data presented in tables.

From an enrolled school population of 638 the study sample size was 246 pupils which was, determined using the Yamane formula. Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants based on specific experiences related to the study's aim. Primary data was collected via interviews and surveys, with consent obtained from the school administration. Ethical considerations involved obtaining consent from school authorities for children under 18, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality for participants. Participation was voluntary, with clear communication about the study's purpose.

Findings and analysis

Out of the targeted 638 respondents, a sample of 246 pupils were selected to partake in the study, all of whom participated thereby achieving a remarkable 100% response rate. The gender distribution of participants was balanced with 123 girls and 123 boys contributing to the study's demographic richness. The participants' age ranged from 11 to 16 years, divided across three distinct classes, primary 5, primary 6, and primary 7.

Table 1: Showing participants per class and the total number of the study community

Class	Primary 5 (P5)	Primary 6 (P6)	Primary 7 (P7)	Total
Number of Participants per class	82	82	82	246

Source: Field Data (2024)

Table 2 showing gender and ages of participants

Gender	Number of Girls who participated in the study	Number of Boys who participated in the study
	123	123
Age	Girls aged 11 to 12	Boys aged 11 to 12
	41	41
	Girls aged 13 to 14	Boys aged 13 to 14
	41	41
	Girls aged 15 to 16	Boys aged 15 to 16
	41	41

Source: Field Data (2024)

The study found three approaches, including counseling, mentorship, and educative literature, helped 246 pupils at Ntinda Primary School. Participants agreed that these approaches effectively aided their rehabilitation. Pupils reported that counseling improved their academic performance and well-being by addressing emotional issues and helping develop coping mechanisms.

According to the 123 male pupils who participated in the study, they all narrated that mentorship helped them develop positive social behaviour, fostered a sense of responsibility, and encouraged healthy relationships with peers and teachers. This also concurred with what their female counterparts who were 123 in total reported as positive effects of mentorship. The narration below is among the testimonials recorded from pupils' narratives about how mentorship contributed to behaviour change.

'I had a bad nickname at school, every one called me the 'bull dozer', but me I didn't know that what I was doing is called bullying, my big sister told us stories in the lockdown of how their class teases new students in S1 by calling them 'nyongo'. but for her she is in secondary school. When we came back to school after the lockdown, I thought that it was a cool thing to also do at my school and I would go to children in P3 and command them to line up for food and bring it for me when I don't have a meal card. This would make me feel like the boss but one day they reported me and I was punished. After that I also waited for those young children who reported me out of the school gate. I tied a black 'kavera' on my face and I came from behind and punched one of them, to punish him for reporting me. The thing is because the kavera was on my face, he didn't see my face and couldn't report me. I kept on doing that every time I missed food. But after mentorship, I even went and I apologised to those children. I even told the teachers that I had been beating children out of the school gate on their way back home but I was going to change, and the teacher didn't even punish me but was happy that I was willing to change. My mentor told me that I have to also become a good role model, I don't fight any more. My mentor said that fighting is a crime before the law, and a sin to God.'

Narrated a 15-year-old male pupil of P7.

The use of educative literature was also found to be instrumental in improving mental well-being of participants in the study. Pupils reported that engaging with literature that resonated with their experiences and emotions, resulted in decrease in stress, fear, anxiety, and depression.

The findings of the study further revealed that counselling was effective in improving pupil's academic performance and psychosocial behaviour. Pupils reported establishing rapport with their counsellors and opening up to them about their fears which the counsellors effectively addressed as shared in the pupil's quoted narratives below. The findings from the study revealed that cases of indiscipline contributed to poor academic performance among some pupils at Ntinda Primary School.

The findings from the study indicated that mentorship improved pupil's discipline and reduced incidents of fighting, bullying, ultimately leading to the wellbeing of pupils. All the 246 pupils who participated in the study agreed to improving in their behaviour after being mentored. The findings from the study further revealed that mentorship inspired pupils to emulate the achievements of their mentors thereby contributing to the pupils' academic excellence. The study also found that educative literature contributed to a decrease in stress, fear, anxiety and depression.

Discussion

The first objective was to identify the integrated communication approaches used to rehabilitate pupils' post the COVID 19 school lockdown. From the findings of this study, three approaches were integrated to rehabilitate pupils and these were counselling, mentorship and using educative literature. The Cambridge dictionary (2000) defines integration as the action or process of combining two or more things in an effective way and from the study findings, counselling, mentorship and using educative literature were combined to effectively rehabilitate pupils of Ntinda Primary School and this was discovered through pupils confirming that the three approaches were used by ticking on the questionnaire the approaches that were used.

Hoque (2016) defines an approach as a method used to provide an opportunity for the students to develop skills and knowledge by linking their past experiences with future uses. The findings from the study concurred with Hoques definition as pupils reported developing skills to counter psycho-social issues that affected their wellbeing including stress, fear and anxiety. From the study, it was discovered that issues such as fear were addressed through counselling, pupils acquired courage to overcome fear and being open to their teachers about issues they would not open up about before. This openness resulted into improved pupil- teacher relationships and it was easier for pupils to ask for academic support from their teachers on concepts that they could not comprehend in class. The findings from the study implied that integrating communication approaches were paramount in rehabilitation of pupils facing challenges that affected their academic performance and well-being.

UNICEF (2021) stresses the possibility of Children and young people feeling the impact of COVID-19 on their mental health and well-being for many years to come, UNICEF warned that globally at least 1 in 7 children was directly affected by school lockdowns, and more than 1.6 billion children suffered some loss of education, emphasizing that the disruption to routines, education, recreation, as well as concern for family income and health, left many young people feeling afraid, angry, and concerned for their future. This to a great extent relates to the narration of a pupil during the study who mentioned that the father lost his job and this resulted into him stressing for fear of school continuation as narrated below.

"I used to worry all the time that I would be forced to leave school because of unpaid school fees. My father stopped working during the lockdown, and he has not yet found a new job. When I asked him why his company laid off some workers during the lockdown, he told me that it was due to the pandemic. Despite this, I remembered a poem about staying positive and hopeful. Since then, I have hope that one day my father will find a new job. I am not worried or stressed anymore."

Narrated a 12-year-old female pupil of P6.

The second objective was to determine the effects of integrated communication approaches on the academic performance of pupils and their mental health (psycho-social behaviour).

An effect is a change that is caused in a person or thing by another person or thing as explained by the Collins Cobuild Dictionary, (1990). According to the research findings of this study, three integrated communication approaches were assessed to determine their effects on the academic performance of pupils and their wellbeing. The findings from the study revealed that counselling was effective in contributing to improved academic performance of pupils and their wellbeing as it shaped pupils' behaviour of class attendance and fostered discipline. Scheel, et al (2018) mentioned that counseling is an important part of contemporary academic programmes.

Hisryov, et al. (2022) highlighted that success in school is gauged by the level of the learners' academic performance, Wachtel (2011) affirmed that positive outcomes from counselling relied on the strength of the relationship between the mental health professional and the client and such connections were built on effective communication which is in the form of what is expressed and how it is expressed. Findings from the current study showed that counsellors established rapport with pupils by expressing their academic challenges and counsellors offering support and guidance in return. Wachtel's affirmations depict exactly what was done at Ntinda Primary school as pupils expressed their predicaments that were affecting their academic performance and well-being to counsellors and mentors and this was expressed through communication that allowed for feedback from counsellors and mentors to resolve the pupils' expressed concerns. These pupil narratives further testify to the findings of the study.

"I was very scared as I didn't know how to tell my teacher about the reason why I was dodging classes and that is why my academic performance was not good because I was missing lessons and I would fail my class work and tests because I was absent when they taught the things, they ask in the test. I was fearing that I can still get COVID even if I was wearing a mask at school, but because other children were coming to class, I knew that the teacher will think am stubborn and I don't want to study but the counsellor told me not to fear to tell her everything that I was worried of and when I told her, she told me more about covid and assured me that if I put on my mask, seat in the social distancing in class, and practice hygiene, I would not get COVID, and I listened to her and that's when I stopped dodging classes and after that I started passing my classwork and tests because I knew the answers to the questions because the teacher had taught them to us in class."

Said a 12-year-old female pupil of primary 5.

"When a counselor talked to me and encouraged me to attend classes and also told me that I should not fear COVID because I had a mask and we used to space our seating in class, I stopped hiding in the toilet and attended all my classes because my fear had reduced. So for the first week, after counselling me I would attend class but put on two masks. I noticed that even other children who were putting on one mask were not getting COVID, so I stopped putting on two masks and I even did not hide in the toilet again. The teacher did not punish me again for dodging classes."

Narrated a 11-year-old male pupil in primary 5.

Musaazi (1982) emphasizes the need for discipline to achieve good academic performance and explains that it is a collective responsibility and a prerequisite for success in school. According to Mafabi (1995), discipline is the key to success in any school setting as without it, chaos can ensue, making it difficult to reach academic goals. Bawalsah, et al (2020) emphasized the importance of counseling programs in addressing educational, social, psychological, and emotional issues. They noted that many students face academic difficulties exacerbated by factors such as lack of discipline, substance abuse, poverty, and apathy towards learning. They suggested that specialized school counselors could help alleviate these issues and provide crucial support for students' well-being and academic success. The current study revealed that cases of indiscipline contributed to poor academic performance among some pupils at Ntinda Primary School. However, through counseling, the pupils were able to improve their academic performance. This aligns with Bawalsah's argument about the relationship between discipline, counseling, and academic success. The narrative below from a counseled pupil at Ntinda Primary School captured during the study testified to the positive impact of counseling on students' discipline, leading to improved academic outcomes.

"After being counselled, I stopped putting mirrors under girl's chairs. I used to peep on them because in the lockdown my friends our neighbours told me they did it to girls at their school. When I tried to tell my friends at school to also peep, they reported me to the teacher and when I was punished, the next day I didn't come to school and lied to mama that I was sick so she said I can stay at home until I was fine. The next week she told me to go school but I was feeling shy in class now and even when the teacher would ask a question that I know the answer to, I would not put up my hand up to answer because I was shy and I would not pay attention in class and this made me fail all the work they would give us. When they took our class to the counsellor the counsellor told me that all people make mistakes but good people don't repeat mistakes and she talked to me alone when people were not hearing, I felt confident and told her everything that had happened and she said she will not tell anyone about it and said that I was a good child and I also promised her that I will never repeat putting mirrors under girl's chairs. After that, I came to school every day, am well now because I don't feel shy anymore and when the teacher asks questions in class I respond, I also don't fear to ask the teacher questions on a topic I don't understand in class because I know that the teacher will not think about the mirrors I used to put under the girl's chairs."

Narrated a 16-year-old boy in primary 7.

The findings from the study indicated that mentorship improved pupil's discipline and reduced incidents of fighting, bullying, ultimately leading to the wellbeing of pupils. Children who were mentored encountered social behaviour change. The study indicated that implementing mentorship as an integrated communication approach in rehabilitating pupils post the school lockdown in the COVID-19 Pandemic significantly enhanced their social conduct. Those who received mentorship and guidance on positive social behavior demonstrated noticeable progress in refraining from conflicts, bullying, and fighting. This positive change in behavior and discipline further fostered improved relationships among children, educators, parents, and caregivers, ultimately contributing to the overall happiness and enhanced social interactions of pupils. Ersin & Atay (2021) define mentorship as a collaborative connection that individuals can establish to exchange knowledge, skills, and experiences and further explain that the mentor-mentee relationship can occur between various pairs, such as student-student, staff-student, or faculty-student just to mention but a few. Law & Busenbark (2020) highlight that mentor nurture the academic, professional, or personal growth of their mentees to address complex challenges and changing environments. Bonifacino et al (2021) mention that students are matched with mentors to provide supportive guidance and companionship to enhance their performance.

According to Masehela and Mabika (2017), mentorship is the process by which trained individuals offer guidance and advice to selected people who become mentees and the main goal of mentorship is to prepare individuals to improve their performance and achieve better performance. Guhan et al, (2020) indicate that mentorship plays a crucial role in the student's performance whereby students who receive mentorship can perform better than their peers.

Fallatah et al. (2018) explored academic mentoring and its impact on academic performance, and overall satisfaction of students. The study highlighted mentor characteristics such as seniority and motivation significantly influencing the likelihood of students needing specialized support, particularly psychological assistance and the findings of the study underscored the pivotal role of mentor and mentee motivation in fostering a successful academic environment. Fallatah's findings are in concurrence with the findings of the current study as pupils narrated that they were motivated to study hard and excel by mentors who shared their own individual experiences as shared in a pupil's captured narrative below.

'I was assigned a mentor who is older than me and who has a Masters degree.

When she told me that she also struggled with passing subjects such as mathematics, but when she concentrated in class and stopped having a bad perception about math, her grades improved, I picked that as a lesson and stopped hating math but instead ask my math teacher what is had and also attended the remedial math lessons yet before I would be in the field playing during remedial time. Can you believe I got a 60% in the promotional exam yet before I used to score below 20% in math? Math is not a hard subject'. Narrated a 13-year-old male pupil in primary 7.

The pupil's narration above is a confirmation to Jekielek & Moore (2002) study which gives the view that mentoring as a special social support helps students to develop into more confident learners. The pupil's utterance of the statement that 'math is not a hard subject' is a depiction of the confidence the pupil picked in the subject post mentorship.

The findings from the study revealed that the use of educative literature contributed to improved mental well-being of pupils as there was a decrease in stress, fear, anxiety and depression amongst pupils. Wartono (2017) mentions that stress can impact an individual's emotions, cognitive processes, and overall well-being. He recommends that counselors should incorporate innovative techniques, such as utilizing literature and writing exercises, to aid clients in achieving emotional catharsis during times of stress. Wartono underscores the therapeutic benefits of reading and writing, which can facilitate self-healing for clients. Drawing upon Wright's (2002) insights, he emphasizes that counseling strategies involving writing can effectively support the therapeutic goals of counseling, fostering positive changes in clients' behaviors and attitudes. Wright explains that various forms of literature, including dramas, poems, novels, and diaries, have long been associated with emotional expression, self-disclosure, and promoting mental well-being. The findings from the current study do tally with Wartono and Wrights' findings on Educative literature as it was used to rehabilitate pupils at Ntinda Primary schools whereby pupils were exposed to bibliotherapies such as poems and dramas, and in these sessions of literature sensitization, messages about dealing with stress, anxiety, fear and depression were shared and strategies were given to pupils on how to counter mental health concerns such as opening up to elders when they are under stress and tension. Pupils were also tasked to replicate the knowledge exchanged through educative literature to their peers to foster a better understanding on how to counter mental health concerns that included stress, fear, anxiety and depression. Pupils orally narrated their experiences post engaging with educative literature where experiences such as this below were captured.

'I used to worry all the time that I would be forced to leave school because of unpaid school fees. My father stopped working during the lockdown, and he has not yet found a new job. When I asked him why his company laid off some workers during the lockdown, he told me that it was due to the pandemic. Despite this, I remembered a poem about staying positive and hopeful. Since then, I have hope that one day my father will find a new job. I am not worried or stressed anymore'.

Narrated a 12-year-old female pupil of P.6.

Naylor et al., (2010) mention that educative literature in form of bibliotherapy can effectively reduce symptoms of depression. According to Pardeck (1994), bibliotherapy is the practice of utilizing educative literature, drama and poetry as a means of therapy for individuals experiencing emotional issues or mental health challenges. Gladding (1992), Watson (1980), and Yauman (1991) all conclude that literature is employed in various ways in rehabilitation, benefiting a wide range of client populations. Pardeck (1994) explains that literature can help individuals achieve self-awareness and effectively process their emotions when it's administered effectively, and it serves as a valuable tool in providing guidance for individuals of all ages.

Pardeck further highlights that school counselors should frequently utilize bibliotherapy/educative literature to assist students in coping with life changes and difficulties. The findings from the current study showed that educative literature was used to counter mental challenges which included stress, fear and depression and also help children cope with academic challenges. All children who engaged with the use of educative literature up to five times reported a significant reduction in stress, they mentioned that every time they would feel anxious, they would refer to messages shared in biliotherapies in drama skits, books and poetry which well aligns with Naylor, Pardeck and Watson and Yaumans sentiments about the use of educative literature in rehabilitation. The implication of this study finding was that there is a need to continuously incorporate the use of educative literature in rehabilitation programs of primary school pupils as it proved to be effective in reducing incidents of stress, anxiety, depression thus resulting into reduced mental health challenges of pupils.

Table 3 showing participants who responded to questions about Educative literature

Did EDUCATIVE LITERATURE improve on your mental well-being?	number of children who responded with a 'YES' in P5	number of children who responded with a 'YES' in P6	number of children who responded with a 'YES' in P7
	82	82	82
	number of children who responded with a 'NO' in P5	number of children who responded with a 'NO' in P6	number of children who responded with a 'NO' in P7
	0	0	0

Source: Field Data (2024)

The third objective of the study was to recommend ways of utilizing integrated communication approaches. The research findings indicated that integrated communication approaches such as counselling should be employed in confidential settings, while open areas such as the school compound were utilized for personal one-on-one sessions at Ntinda primary school where a single pupil would meet a single counsellor without the presence of other pupils but in the open space of the school compound, pupils who participated in the study highlighted the importance of having designated counseling rooms within the school premises to allow for private emotional expression during sessions. The pupils deemed this essential as emotions, including tears, could not always be concealed during counseling, and onlookers could discern the nature of the emotions from afar even without hearing the nature of the conversation the pupil was having with the counsellor as narrated by a pupil below.

'I used to have my counselling session in the compound and of course we were far from classes so no one would hear what I would be telling the counsellor and what she would be telling me but one day I felt touched by the words of the counsellor and I started crying while telling her my problems and I saw other children looking at me from far. They could not tell why I was crying but they seemed to be staring at me from far and this made me a bit uncomfortable and I had to force the tears to stop yet the counsellor I had said that it is not good to bottle up emotions and crying is not bad because it relieves of the heavy emotions. I am begging that next time, they create rooms were no one will see children crying' explained a 13-year-old female P7 pupil, Ntinda primary school.

Conclusions and recommendations

The study concluded that integrated communication approaches used to rehabilitate pupils during the COVID-19 pandemic post the school lockdown had positive effects that contributed to the wellbeing of children, improved academic performance, and better psycho-social behaviour of pupils in primary school. The study findings highlight that pupils who are counselled, mentored and engage with educative literature exhibit pro-social behavior, such as cooperation, empathy, discipline, academic focus and respect for others. They also develop better conflict resolution skills and learn how to navigate social situations effectively with the ability to build resilience and cope with the challenges they may face, and have better morale for studying expressed through not dodging classes.

In light to the study conclusions, several recommendations were made;

- Policy makers, academic institutions and civil society should prioritize incorporating integrated communication approaches in their programs that are aimed at the wellbeing of children who are experiencing crisis. The significant findings of the study showed that these approaches improved the wellbeing of pupils who encountered psycho-social challenges.
- Designers of academic instructional materials and syllabi should consider incorporating integrated communication approaches in the syllabus content as they could enhance the morale of learners for studying. From the findings of this study, pupils who were rehabilitated with integrated communication approaches such as educative literature exhibited improved morale for studying and enhanced study focus.
- School teachers and educators should use the findings to enhance their teaching methods and support mechanisms for children. By incorporating integrated communication approaches into the academic curriculum, teachers will be able to create a more supportive and inclusive learning environment for children.
- While the study revealed that integrated communication approaches were effective in rehabilitating pupils, it did not address certain limitations that could impede rehabilitation efforts.

For example, one pupil never experienced an improvement in school interest after being counselled and attribute it to their parents telling them to stay at home as they too feared COVID thus their interest for school was affected. Future studies should compare children who received counseling with their parents to those who did not, to better comprehend the effects of excluding parents from counseling sessions on the progress and wellbeing of children undergoing rehabilitation.

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