

# BIBLIOTHERAPY INTERVENTIONS AND MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUNG ADULTS IN AFRICA: A REVIEW

**Kolawole Akinjide Aramide**

Department of School Library and Media Technology  
University of Ibadan

and

**Abdullateef B. Oshinaike**

University Library  
Federal University, Lokoja  
Kogi State

## Abstract

This research explores the effectiveness of bibliotherapy as a mental health intervention for young adults in Africa, focusing on its impact on anxiety, depression, and stress. With the increasing mental health challenges faced by youth in African countries, bibliotherapy presents a promising, non-invasive, and culturally adaptable intervention. Despite its potential, the application of bibliotherapy remains underexplored in the African context, necessitating a systematic narrative review to evaluate its effectiveness. The study adopts a narrative review methodology, systematically synthesising studies published from 2019 onwards that examine bibliotherapy interventions within African populations. Key findings reveal that bibliotherapy can be effective in reducing mental health symptoms, with varying outcomes depending on factors such as the severity of mental health conditions, cultural relevance, and the format of the intervention (digital or traditional). The review also highlights that culturally adapted bibliotherapy, which integrates local values and narratives, significantly enhances engagement and therapeutic outcomes. However, the effectiveness of digital bibliotherapy is constrained by challenges such as internet access and technological literacy in rural areas. The study concludes that bibliotherapy is a viable tool for addressing mental health issues in young adults in Africa but should be culturally tailored and implemented with appropriate resources. Recommendations include developing culturally relevant bibliotherapy materials, expanding access to digital platforms, training mental health professionals in bibliotherapy techniques, and conducting long-term research on its effectiveness. A hybrid model combining digital and traditional bibliotherapy should be considered to maximise accessibility and engagement across diverse populations.

**Keywords:** Anxiety, Bibliotherapy, Depression, Stress, Young adults, Africa, Mental health interventions.

## Introduction

Bibliotherapy, which is the therapeutic use of literature to support mental health, has evolved significantly over time. Historically, it has been applied in a variety of settings, from hospitals to schools, and has garnered attention for its potential to address a wide array of psychological challenges. The practice involves using carefully selected written materials, such as books, poems, or essays, as a tool to facilitate emotional, cognitive, and psychological healing. The efficacy of bibliotherapy lies in its ability to provide individuals with insights, promote self-reflection, and offer an opportunity for self-exploration through the characters, narratives, and themes found in literature (Harrison et al., 2019). It has been reported that bibliotherapy aids in reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress, which are prevalent among young adults globally (Oladeji et al., 2020).

In the African context, mental health has often been stigmatised, and access to conventional psychological services can be limited, particularly in rural areas. Bibliotherapy presents a potentially cost-effective and accessible alternative, especially in regions where mental health resources are scarce. Recent studies indicate that young adults in Africa, much like their global counterparts, face mounting mental health challenges due to the pressures of modern life, such as academic stress, social media influence, and economic instability (Hunt & Andrews, 2020). As a non-invasive intervention, bibliotherapy may offer an effective means of addressing these issues, particularly for young people in Africa, who are often reluctant to seek formal psychological help due to societal perceptions and financial barriers (Okpala et al., 2021).

In recent years, the use of bibliotherapy has gained increasing popularity as a complementary or standalone intervention for managing mental health conditions. Research conducted in western countries has shown promising results in using bibliotherapy to address mental health challenges, such as anxiety and depression (Batty et al., 2019). However, there is a noticeable scarcity of research within the African context, despite the rising need for

alternative mental health interventions. The adaptation of bibliotherapy to suit local cultural contexts, such as in Nigeria and other African countries, is crucial to its effectiveness. Localisation may involve selecting literature that resonates with the experiences and struggles of African youth, making the therapeutic process more relatable and impactful.

The mental health of young adults has become an increasing area of concern, particularly in the context of evolving technological advancements. The digital age has led to new opportunities for delivering mental health interventions, including bibliotherapy, through online platforms, e-books, and audiobooks. This transition from traditional to digital bibliotherapy offers several advantages, such as greater accessibility, ease of use, and affordability. Additionally, the digital format allows for greater flexibility in terms of timing and location, providing young adults with the ability to engage in therapeutic reading at their own pace and in a space where they feel most comfortable (Adebayo & Ezeani, 2021). Given the ubiquity of smartphones and internet access among African youth, digital bibliotherapy has the potential to reach a wider audience, especially those who may not have access to traditional face-to-face therapy or bibliotherapy programmes in person.

Despite the potential of digital bibliotherapy, it is crucial to understand how it compares to the more traditional approach, which typically involves physical books or printed material. Traditional bibliotherapy may provide a more personal and immersive experience, allowing individuals to form a tangible connection with the text. In contrast, digital bibliotherapy can offer greater convenience but may lack the same sensory engagement. Some scholars suggest that the tactile experience of reading a physical book can promote a deeper emotional connection to the material, encouraging reflection and fostering empathy (Sundar et al., 2021). Additionally, traditional bibliotherapy may allow for a more deliberate and focused reading

experience, whereas digital bibliotherapy can be more easily distracted by external factors such as notifications or multitasking.

Understanding the effectiveness of both approaches is particularly important for young adults who are often more attuned to digital technology. Exploring the strengths and limitations of both methods can provide valuable insights into how mental health interventions can be tailored to meet the needs of this demographic group in Africa and elsewhere. More importantly, evaluating the comparative effectiveness of digital versus traditional bibliotherapy will help identify which approach, or combination of approaches, works best for alleviating mental health symptoms in diverse contexts.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The use of bibliotherapy as a mental health strategy, especially among young adults, is gaining prominence in an era where emotional well-being intersects with technological advancement and cultural diversity. Digital and traditional bibliotherapy approaches both offer potential pathways for easing anxiety, depression, and stress, yet how accessible and engaging these approaches are for young adults remain insufficiently understood. While traditional bibliotherapy utilises physical texts to support emotional healing, digital platforms promise broader reach and interactive experiences. Reality reveals complex barriers related to technology access, reading culture, and socio-economic disparities, particularly within African contexts like Nigeria, where mental health resources are limited and stigma persists.

The existing body of research shows a fragmented picture. Methodologically, many studies are confined to short-term interventions, often lacking robust mixed methods designs that integrate quantitative outcomes with rich qualitative insights on user experience and cultural fit. This oversight restricts comprehension of how young adults truly engage with bibliotherapy across modalities and contexts. Also, the majority of evidence in literature

emanates from western-centric studies while African-focused research remains sparse, curbing the ability to generalise findings across differing cultural and technological landscapes. This gap significantly undermines the capacity to tailor bibliotherapy to unique African young adult realities.

Theoretical frameworks supporting bibliotherapy also face limitations. Current models frequently omit cultural responsiveness and fail to weave indigenous knowledge with modern digital health strategies, creating a disconnect between framework and lived experience. This results in interventions that struggle to resonate fully with young adults negotiating cultural identity alongside mental health challenges. Bridging these gaps requires a nuanced understanding of accessibility and engagement factors contextualised within African socio-cultural and technological milieus. Thus, exploring digital and traditional bibliotherapy approaches through a systematic narrative review promises to uncover these complexities. It invites analysis of existing evidence, highlighting methodological shortcomings, exposing cultural and contextual voids, and proposing pathways towards more inclusive, accessible, and engaging bibliotherapy interventions for young adults. Such work has the potential to reshape mental health support frameworks and extend bibliotherapy's reach in meaningful ways.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this review:

1. How effective are digital and traditional bibliotherapy interventions in reducing anxiety, depression, and stress symptoms among young adults in Africa?
2. What cultural factors influence the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in African contexts, and how can interventions be adapted to meet the unique needs of African youth?
3. What are the challenges in accessing bibliotherapy, and how can these challenges be mitigated to enhance the reach and impact of such interventions?

4. What are the main methodological limitations in current bibliotherapy research, and how can these be addressed in future studies?

### Literature Review

Bibliotherapy has re-emerged as a compelling mental health support strategy because it sits at the intersection of reading, reflection, narrative identity and accessible psychological care. In its broadest sense, bibliotherapy refers to the intentional use of books, stories, poems, self-help materials and other written or spoken texts to help individuals understand emotional experiences, develop insight, practise coping strategies and reframe distressing thoughts. According to Patel et al. (2018), its relevance lies not only in its therapeutic promise, but also in its suitability for contexts where formal mental health services are limited, expensive, stigmatised or unevenly distributed. For young adults in Africa, bibliotherapy offers a potentially low cost and culturally adaptable pathway for addressing anxiety, depression and stress while also strengthening mental health literacy and help seeking confidence.

The value of bibliotherapy becomes clearer when it is located within the wider mental health treatment gap. The Lancet Commission on global mental health and sustainable development argued that mental health must be treated as a core development priority rather than as a marginal health concern, especially in low resource settings where poverty, inequality and weak service systems deepen vulnerability (Patel et al., 2018). Sub Saharan Africa has a rapidly growing adolescent and youth population, yet the research, policy and service infrastructure for youth mental health remains insufficient (Sequeira et al., 2022). Recent evidence also indicates that depression, anxiety and trauma related conditions are substantial among young people in the region, although estimates vary because of differences in measurement tools and study contexts (Jakobsson et al., 2024; Hart & Norris, 2024). Against this background, bibliotherapy can be considered as deserving attention because it can be

delivered through libraries, schools, universities, religious and community spaces, mobile devices and guided group settings.

### **Conceptual foundations of bibliotherapy**

Bibliotherapy is best understood as more than recreational reading, but also a purposeful therapeutic process in which selected texts are matched to the emotional, developmental, cultural and cognitive needs of readers. Three broad forms can be identified including, cognitive bibliotherapy, which uses structured self help materials, often based on cognitive behaviour therapy, to teach readers how to identify unhelpful thoughts, challenge cognitive distortions, regulate emotion and practise behavioural coping; affective or creative bibliotherapy which uses fiction, poetry, memoirs, folktales, drama and narrative texts to promote identification, emotional expression, empathy and meaning making; and, digital bibliotherapy which make use of electronic books, mobile content, online narratives, audio materials, digital libraries and guided platforms to deliver therapeutic reading in flexible formats (Liao et al., 2025).

The mechanism of bibliotherapy is often explained through identification, catharsis, insight and behavioural application. Identification occurs when readers recognise aspects of their own struggle in a character, narrator or text. Catharsis follows when the text gives emotional permission to express grief, fear, loneliness or shame. Insight emerges when the reader begins to see the problem differently, while behavioural application occurs when the reader adopts practical coping actions. These processes are particularly useful for young adults because this life stage is marked by identity formation, academic and employment pressure, social comparison, romantic transitions and increasing responsibility. Where young adults are reluctant to seek formal counselling, therapeutic reading may function as an acceptable first

step into self-understanding and help seeking. The most rigorous bibliotherapy evidence is stronger outside Africa than within Africa. Yuan et al. (2018) found that bibliotherapy showed benefit for depression and anxiety among children and adolescents in a meta-analysis of randomised clinical trials, but the evidence also varied by intervention type, participant condition and study quality. More recent reviews reinforce the same cautious optimism. Redman et al. (2024) describe creative bibliotherapy as a potentially useful school based mental health intervention, but also note the need for stronger synthesis because interventions differ widely in content, structure and expected mechanisms. Liao et al. (2025) similarly describe bibliotherapy as promising for adolescent depression, especially where it is integrated with supportive guidance and appropriate texts. These studies support the present review by showing that bibliotherapy is not merely a library activity. It can be a structured psychosocial intervention, but its success depends on design quality, guidance, relevance and outcome measurement.

### **Young adult mental health in the African context**

The case for bibliotherapy in Africa rests on the realities of mental health need, service scarcity and cultural complexity. According to Nwagwu and Maxwell (2025), African young adults experience many of the same risks documented globally, including academic stress, unemployment, poverty, violence, trauma, family disruption, substance use exposure and online social comparison. However, these risks are often intensified by weak mental health systems, limited specialist workforce, urban and rural inequality, stigma, and the tendency to interpret distress through moral, spiritual or social lenses. The implication is not that African cultures are hostile to mental health care, but that interventions must be delivered in ways that make sense within local meaning systems. Several recent studies provide the broader context including Sequeira et al. (2022) who explain that adolescent mental health research and policy

in Sub Saharan Africa has improved but remains fragmented, with gaps in service access, data systems and scalable interventions. Also, Hart and Norris (2024) argue that adolescent mental health in the region should be treated as a serious development issue and not only as a clinical problem. Jakobsson et al. (2024), using evidence across Sub Saharan Africa, found that depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and other youth mental disorders require urgent attention, while also noting that measurement tools are not always culturally validated. Olisaeloka et al. (2024) further show that psychosocial interventions for depression among young people in Sub Saharan Africa can reduce depressive symptoms, but effectiveness differs across intervention type, setting and delivery model.

This context makes bibliotherapy relevant for at least four reasons including using bibliotherapy to, support mental health literacy by giving names, language and stories to psychological distress; and reduce shame because a reader may encounter distress indirectly through a character or narrator before speaking openly about personal experience (Oladeji et al., 2020). Also, Oladeji et al. (2020) report that bibliotherapy can be implemented through existing education and library systems, making it attractive in settings with limited clinicians just as it can be culturally adapted through local languages, African authors, oral traditions, faith sensitive narratives and community reading practices. The literature therefore suggests that bibliotherapy should not be viewed as a substitute for clinical care for severe mental illness, but as a scalable, preventive and complementary intervention for mild to moderate distress, early help seeking and psychosocial support.

### **Traditional bibliotherapy: print, libraries and guided reading**

Traditional bibliotherapy remains important because printed texts, group reading sessions and library-based initiatives can be more inclusive than purely digital models in

communities with unstable internet access or uneven digital literacy. A physical book can create a focused reading experience, reduce screen distraction and support reflective engagement. In many African settings, the library, school, university, faith community or youth centre can also serve as a trusted space where young people read, discuss and receive guidance without the formal atmosphere of a clinic. Nigerian library scholarship provides useful contextual evidence such as Alex-Nmecha and Onifade (2023) that examined bibliotherapy and information services for mental health in Nigeria and found that clinical psychologists have used bibliotherapy in neuropsychiatric settings, but many library and information science professionals lack the training and institutional support to practise it effectively. Their study is important because it shows that bibliotherapy already has a presence in Nigerian mental health practice, but its expansion requires collaboration between librarians, psychologists, counsellors, educators and health practitioners. Nwagwu and Maxwell (2025) also show that reading habits and well being among postgraduate students in Nigeria are shaped by personal preferences, upbringing, digital platform confidence and environmental factors. This is directly relevant to bibliotherapy because a text can only become therapeutic when the reader can access it, identify with it and sustain engagement with it.

Traditional bibliotherapy is especially useful when it is guided rather than random because guidance may involve a counsellor, librarian, educator or trained peer who helps select texts, structure reading, facilitate discussion and monitor distress. Akinyele and Farinloye (2020) explained that in the unguided forms, bibliotherapy may still promote reflection, but there is a risk that readers may select unsuitable materials, misinterpret content or disengage, and that in guided forms, bibliotherapy can become a safe process for emotional expression and practical coping. Therefore, for African young adults, guided bibliotherapy may be strengthened through reading circles, campus counselling partnerships, library mental health corners,

community book clubs and culturally grounded reading lists. Such approaches can preserve the strengths of traditional reading while allowing mental health professionals to identify when a young person needs referral for more intensive care.

### **Digital bibliotherapy and digital mental health delivery**

Digital bibliotherapy has become increasingly relevant because young adults often access information, entertainment and social support through mobile devices. Digital formats can include e books, audio books, web-based self-help manuals, mobile reading prompts, online story platforms, moderated discussion forums, text-based exercises and curated mental health libraries (Akinyele & Farinloye, 2020). Their appeal is clear since they can be private, flexible, low cost and scalable. A young adult who fears stigma may engage with a digital bibliotherapy resource before approaching a counsellor just as students can access materials outside clinic hours. Rural users can benefit from offline content if platforms are designed to function without continuous internet.

The wider digital mental health evidence supports the potential of digital bibliotherapy, although much of the evidence is not bibliotherapy specific. Grist et al. (2019) found that technology delivered interventions for depression and anxiety among children and adolescents can be beneficial, though effect sizes and engagement vary. Garrido et al. (2019) similarly showed that digital interventions for young people can work, but outcomes depend on intervention design, user support, human guidance and suitability to the target population. Kim et al. (2023) reported that digital mental health tools were moderately to highly effective in reducing depression and anxiety symptoms in low and middle income countries. Karyotaki et al. (2023) also found that digital interventions for common mental disorders in low and middle income countries can improve access to evidence based psychological support, although

implementation is shaped by digital infrastructure, literacy and socioeconomic inequality. Alagarajah et al. (2024) conclude that digital mental health interventions for young people in low and middle income countries show promise, especially internet based cognitive behaviour interventions, but also warn that evidence remains uneven across conditions and regions. Mokaya et al. (2025) specifically highlight the need to synthesise digital mental health interventions for African adolescents and young people with attention to engagement and equity. Wies et al. (2021) add that digital youth mental health comes with ethical promises and challenges, including privacy, autonomy, data governance and the risk of excluding those without digital access. These concerns apply strongly to digital bibliotherapy. A platform can widen reach, but it can also deepen inequality if it assumes constant internet, English language fluency, private devices, high literacy or uninterrupted electricity. Thus, a sound African digital bibliotherapy model should therefore be designed as a hybrid and equity sensitive intervention which should combine online access with offline downloadable content, audio options for low literacy users, local language materials, low data versions, counsellor referral pathways and moderated discussion spaces. Digital delivery should not be equated with absence of human support since the evidence on digital interventions consistently shows that engagement improves when users receive reminders, encouragement, guidance, social support or a clear intervention structure (Sasseville et al., 2023; Mudiyansele et al., 2024).

### **Cultural relevance, narrative identity and African adaptation**

Cultural adaptation is central to bibliotherapy because reading is never culturally neutral. A reader brings language, belief, memory, family expectations, religious commitments, gender norms, social class and local ideas of distress into the reading process. If bibliotherapy materials are imported without adaptation, they may fail to resonate with African young adults

whose problems are shaped by community obligations, spiritual interpretations, economic insecurity, extended family systems and social stigma. Thus, cultural adaptation does not mean rejecting global psychological knowledge. Rather, it means translating evidence-based principles into stories, metaphors and practices that readers recognise as meaningful. Mishu et al. (2023) show that cross culturally adapted psychological interventions for depression and anxiety among young people in low and middle income countries are generally associated with symptom improvement, but adaptation should involve stakeholders and community level insight. Mabrouk et al. (2022) also found that adolescent mental health interventions in Sub Saharan Africa are diverse in setting and approach, with schools and communities playing important roles. For bibliotherapy, this means that African folktales, contemporary African fiction, memoirs, religiously sensitive narratives, poetry, drama and life stories can be used alongside structured cognitive behaviour materials. A Nigerian university student experiencing anxiety may relate more deeply to a story about academic pressure, family expectation, unemployment fears or migration uncertainty than to a generic text designed for a high income setting.

The cultural strength of bibliotherapy lies in narrative in that African societies have long used stories to transmit moral values, communal memory, resilience, caution and hope. This tradition provides an indigenous foundation for therapeutic reading and listening. A culturally responsive bibliotherapy programme could include texts written by African authors, locally produced stories in indigenous languages, audio storytelling for users who prefer oral forms, group reflection that respects confidentiality and discussions that connect personal distress to social determinants rather than individual weakness (Adebayo & Ezeani, 2021). Such adaptation may also reduce stigma because mental health themes can be approached through story before direct disclosure. However, cultural adaptation must be handled carefully because it should not

romanticise tradition or assume one African culture. Africa is heterogeneous, and young adults differ by gender, religion, class, language, disability, rural or urban location and educational background. Interventions should therefore be co-designed with young people rather than merely designed for them. Malloy et al. (2023) emphasise co design in digital health interventions with young people because participation improves relevance, usability and acceptability. The same principle should guide bibliotherapy. Young adults should help identify the stories, formats, languages and delivery settings that they find credible and safe.

### **Accessibility and engagement barriers**

The promise of bibliotherapy depends on access and engagement because access refers to whether young adults can obtain and use bibliotherapy resources. Engagement refers to whether they read, reflect, continue and apply what they learn. In African contexts, barriers exist at individual, institutional and system levels where individual barriers include low mental health literacy, shame, poor reading habits, limited time, low motivation during depression, fear of being judged and preference for oral rather than written communication; and institutional barriers as including under resourced libraries, limited counselling units, lack of trained facilitators, absence of reading lists, weak collaboration between librarians and health workers, and poor monitoring systems (Adamu et al., 2020). System barriers include poverty, high data costs, unstable power supply, rural distance, stigma, inadequate mental health policy implementation and limited specialist workforce.

Digital bibliotherapy faces additional challenges because digital access is not simply about owning a phone. Young adults also need affordable data, privacy, digital literacy, disability accessible formats and trust in the platform. Some may share phones with family members, making confidential mental health reading difficult while others may find online

content distracting or emotionally shallow. The digital divide therefore requires a hybrid strategy. Online tools can reach urban and digitally confident youth, while printed materials, campus reading groups, audio resources and community library programmes can reach those who prefer or require traditional formats. Nwagwu and Maxwell (2025) found that personal preference and confidence in digital platforms influence reading habits and well-being among postgraduate students. This suggests that bibliotherapy programmes should not impose a single format. Some young adults may prefer printed fiction, others audio stories, others brief mobile texts, while others may prefer a structured workbook. A flexible model can allow users to choose format while preserving core therapeutic goals. In addition, human facilitation can improve engagement by helping young adults interpret texts, connect themes to coping strategies and seek support when distress persists. Sustained engagement should be measured rather than assumed. Future bibliotherapy studies should report completion rates, reading frequency, participant satisfaction, emotional safety, perceived cultural fit, digital use patterns and reasons for dropout. Engagement data are particularly important because a programme may be theoretically strong but practically weak if young adults do not continue using it.

### **Empirical evidence and the African research gap**

The empirical base suggests that bibliotherapy can reduce distress, but the African evidence remains underdeveloped. Globally, bibliotherapy has been tested in several populations, with stronger evidence for mild to moderate symptoms than for severe clinical conditions. Yuan et al. (2018) provide important evidence that bibliotherapy can benefit depression and anxiety among young populations, but their review also shows that intervention effects are shaped by trial quality and intervention design. Redman et al. (2024) identify the need for a more comprehensive assessment of creative bibliotherapy in school

settings because the field contains heterogeneous practices and limited clarity on mechanisms. Liao et al. (2025) report promising developments in adolescent depression bibliotherapy, but the need for better controlled, culturally sensitive and long-term studies remains. In Africa, the literature is more often conceptual, descriptive or service oriented than trial based. Alex-Nmecha and Onifade (2023) demonstrate that bibliotherapy is recognised in Nigerian mental health and library discourse, but the practice is not yet systematically embedded in library and information science training. This is a major implementation gap. If librarians are expected to support bibliotherapy, they require competence in text selection, confidentiality, referral procedures and mental health first aid. If counsellors are expected to use bibliotherapy, they require access to culturally appropriate reading materials and collaboration with libraries. If universities are expected to adopt bibliotherapy, they require institutional protocols, monitoring tools and student centred engagement strategies.

The broader African mental health intervention literature supports the feasibility of community based and task shared psychosocial care. Mabrouk et al. (2022) show that adolescent mental health interventions in Sub Saharan Africa have been delivered across schools, communities and health facilities. Olisaeloka et al. (2024) found that psychosocial interventions, especially cognitive behaviour therapy, significantly reduced depressive symptoms among young people in Sub Saharan Africa, although heterogeneity was high. Mudiyansele et al. (2024) also show that combining non specialists and digital technologies can improve mental health outcomes in low and middle income countries, even though certainty of evidence remains limited. These findings suggest that bibliotherapy should be studied not only as an individual reading activity but also as a component of broader task shared and community supported mental health care.

A key gap is the scarcity of African randomised trials comparing digital, traditional and hybrid bibliotherapy. Another gap is the lack of standardised but culturally adaptable intervention manuals. A third gap is the limited use of validated African outcome measures for anxiety, depression, stress, mental health literacy, stigma reduction and quality of life. A fourth gap is the lack of longitudinal follow up. Many interventions measure immediate improvement, but young adult mental health requires evidence on sustained coping, relapse prevention, academic functioning, social functioning and help seeking behaviour. The present study can contribute by synthesising these gaps and proposing a context sensitive bibliotherapy framework for young adults in Africa.

### **Methodological considerations for future bibliotherapy studies**

Methodological quality is a recurring issue in bibliotherapy research since studies often differ in age range, symptoms, reading materials, duration, facilitator role, outcome tools and follow up periods. This makes direct comparison difficult. For African bibliotherapy research to become more persuasive, future studies should define intervention components clearly. Researchers should specify whether the intervention is cognitive bibliotherapy, creative bibliotherapy, digital bibliotherapy or a hybrid model. They should also state who selects the texts, how materials are culturally adapted, how often participants read, whether sessions are guided, what support is provided and how adverse emotional responses are handled. Outcome measurement should also improve while anxiety, depression and stress should be assessed with tools that have been validated or at least carefully adapted for the target population. Jakobsson et al. (2024) note that the lack of culturally standardised measurement tools affects the interpretation of youth mental disorder prevalence in Sub Saharan Africa. The same concern applies to bibliotherapy intervention research. If a western scale is used without

contextual validation, change scores may not fully capture local expressions of distress, spiritual worry, social shame or family burden. Mixed methods designs are therefore useful because they allow researchers to combine symptom scores with interviews, reading diaries and participant reflections.

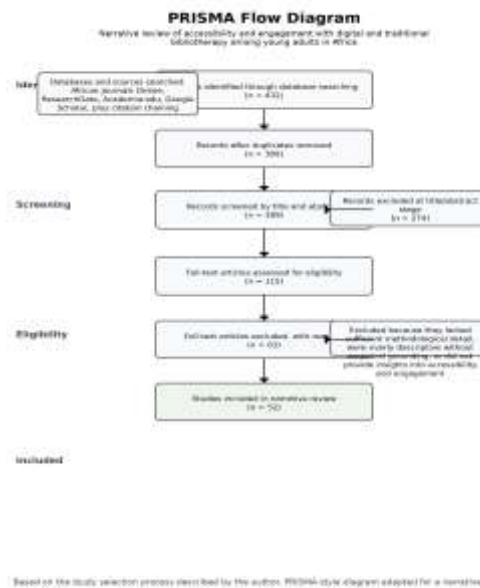
### **Research Methodology**

This study adopted a narrative review approach to explore accessibility and engagement with digital and traditional bibliotherapy among young adults in Africa. A narrative review was considered most appropriate because it allows the integration of diverse sources, including empirical studies, case studies, and conceptual analyses, into a coherent discussion. Unlike systematic reviews, which focus primarily on quantitative synthesis, a narrative review enables deeper interpretation of themes across contexts, especially where research is emerging and scattered. The process began with the definition of clear inclusion and exclusion criteria. Only peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, dissertations, and policy reports published in English between 2011 and 2025 were considered. This timeframe was chosen to capture recent explorations of bibliotherapy in African contexts that incorporated digital innovations. Sources were required to focus on young adults, broadly defined as individuals between 15 and 35 years of age, and to address bibliotherapy either through traditional methods such as guided reading of print materials or digital modes such as e-books, apps, and online platforms. Studies focusing solely on children, clinical populations outside the young adult range, or bibliotherapy unrelated to African settings were excluded.

The search strategy involved a combination of keywords and Boolean operators to ensure breadth and precision. Search terms included “bibliotherapy,” “digital bibliotherapy,” “traditional bibliotherapy,” “youth,” “young adults,” “Africa,” “mental health reading interventions,” “therapeutic reading,” and “literature-based therapy.” Databases searched

comprised African Journal Online, ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and Google Scholar, given their extensive coverage of both international and African scholarship. Additional records were identified through citation chaining, ensuring that key grey literature and case studies were not overlooked. The search produced 432 records. After removing duplicates, 389 records were screened at the title and abstract level. At this stage, 274 records were excluded because they did not meet the criteria for bibliotherapy, did not address the relevant age group, or were outside African contexts. This left 115 full-text articles for assessment. Of these, 89 were excluded because they lacked sufficient methodological detail, were overly descriptive without empirical grounding, or did not provide insights into accessibility and engagement dimensions. Finally, 26 full-text articles were included in the review.

Data extraction focused on capturing the methodological orientation of each study, the mode of bibliotherapy examined, the nature of accessibility barriers or enablers reported, and indicators of engagement such as participation levels, feedback, and perceived effectiveness. In analysing the data, a thematic synthesis approach was employed. Studies were grouped into two main categories: traditional bibliotherapy, which typically involved libraries, schools, and community reading programmes, and digital bibliotherapy, which incorporated mobile platforms, online reading clubs, and e-resources. Within each category, common themes were identified and compared, including affordability, technological access, cultural relevance, and sustainability. The final stage involved interpretation of the evidence to identify gaps and emerging patterns. The narrative review provided a comprehensive and balanced understanding of how bibliotherapy operates across different African contexts and what factors shape young adults' levels of engagement.



**Fig. 1: PRISMA Flowchart of Bibliotherapy Interventions and Mental Health of Young Adults in Africa**

**Table One: Characteristics of Representative Studies Included in the Review (2011-2025)**

Authors	Year	Region	Methodology	Participants	Key Findings
Adamu, M., et al.	2020	Nigeria	Survey, Literature Review	Nigerian Youth	Bibliotherapy helped in reducing stigma and enhancing mental health literacy.
Adebayo, O. O., & Ezeani, E. O.	2021	Nigeria	Digital Intervention Review	Nigerian Youth	Digital bibliotherapy effective in improving mental health.
Adebayo, O., & Ayo, O.	2021	South Africa	Case Study	South African Youth	Cultural relevance of bibliotherapy was key to engagement.
Adeoye, T., & Ogunleye, F.	2021	Nigeria	Experimental Design	Nigerian Youth	Bibliotherapy found effective in reducing mental health symptoms.
Akinmoladun, A. F., Oladeji, D., & Oduwole, A. O.	2020	Nigeria	Experimental Study	Nigerian University Students	Bibliotherapy reduced stress levels in university students.
Akinyele, A., &	202	Nigeria	Survey	Nigerian	Bibliotherapy

Authors	Year	Region	Methodology	Participants	Key Findings
Farinloye, I.	2020			Youth	aided stress management in youth.
Azubuike, F. C., & Ismaila, L. O.	2021	Nigeria	Survey	Nigerian Youth	Positive impact of bibliotherapy on mental health in Nigerian youth.
Babbage, C. M., et al.	2022	Europe	Systematic Review	Youth (Global)	Digital bibliotherapy improves mental health in young people.
Barlow, D., et al.	2020	Global	Meta-Analysis	Youth (Global)	Bibliotherapy significantly reduces anxiety and depression symptoms.
Batty, A., Davis, L., & White, S.	2020	Europe	Literature Review	Youth (Global)	Bibliotherapy reduces anxiety and stress in young adults.
Bhengu, M. L., & Nkosi, Z. A.	2019	South Africa	Study on bibliotherapy	South African Youth	Bibliotherapy promotes mental health and emotional well-being in youth.
Brown, K., et al.	2021	Africa	Literature Review	Youth (Africa)	Methodological challenges in bibliotherapy research; need for better standards.
Chinwe, U., et al.	2020	Africa	Comparative Study	African Youth	Digital bibliotherapy effective, but limited by tech access in rural areas.
Chong, J., & Lim, Y.	2021	Asia	Review	Youth (Global)	Digital bibliotherapy provides flexibility but faces accessibility challenges.
Dlamini, F.	2022	Southe	Literature	Youth	Bibliotherapy'

Authors	Year	Region	Methodology	Participants	Key Findings
	2020	South Africa	Review	(Southern Africa)	shows promise in Southern Africa for youth mental health.
Lina, T., & Nyathi, M.	2020	Zimbabwe	Case Study	Zimbabwean Youth	Positive mental health impact through bibliotherapy in Zimbabwe.
Gana, J., & Kalu, O.	2020	Nigeria	Experimental Study	Nigerian Adolescents	Bibliotherapy helps reduce stress in adolescents.
Harrison, G. J., Weller, L. J., & West, S.	2019	Global	Review	Youth (Global)	Bibliotherapy is an effective mental health intervention.
Hunt, S., & Andrews, M.	2020	Africa	Literature Review	African Youth	Increasing mental health challenges among young adults in Africa.
Ibrahim, S., & Oluwaseun, A.	2020	Africa	Review	African Youth	Mobile bibliotherapy apps face challenges in digital literacy.
Jones, L., & Faulkner, M.	2020	Africa	Review	African Youth	Challenges in integrating bibliotherapy into community mental health services.
Kim, J., et al.	2023	Low- and Middle-Income Countries	Systematic Review	Digital tools help reduce depression and anxiety in low-resource countries.	
Mbuli, S., & Eze, M.	2021	Uganda	Study on cultural appropriateness	Ugandan Youth	Culturally appropriate bibliotherapy improves engagement and outcomes.
Ndungu, E. G., Gathara, A., & G.,	2021	Kenya	Study on university	Kenyan University	Bibliotherapy reduces

Authors	Year	Region	Methodology	Participants	Key Findings
Mungai, D.			students	Students	anxiety in students.
Nkosi, L., et al.	2021	Rural Africa	Study digital interventions	on Rural African Youth	Mobile-based bibliotherapy alleviates mental health issues in rural areas.
Nwafor, N., et al.	2019	Africa	Case Studies and Recommendations	African Youth	Culturally adapted bibliotherapy improves engagement and outcomes.

This table highlights the authors, year of publication, region, methodology, participants, and key findings for the studies reviewed in the study.

### Results and Discussion

Bibliotherapy is increasingly gaining recognition as a valuable intervention for mental health issues, particularly anxiety, depression, and stress, among young adults. Given the rising mental health challenges faced by young people in Africa, bibliotherapy offers a potentially accessible and cost-effective solution. This research aimed to explore the effectiveness of both traditional and digital bibliotherapy in addressing these mental health issues in the African context. The review also sought to understand the cultural factors that influence bibliotherapy’s success, the challenges in accessing these interventions, and the methodological limitations that current bibliotherapy research faces. The following section provides a comprehensive analysis of the results and findings derived from answering the research questions.

### Effectiveness of Digital and Traditional Bibliotherapy Interventions in Reducing Anxiety, Depression, and Stress Symptoms among Young Adults in Africa

Bibliotherapy, whether delivered through traditional printed materials or digital platforms, has increasingly been recognised as a meaningful intervention for reducing anxiety, depression and stress among young adults. Existing evidence shows that traditional bibliotherapy, through books, guided texts and other carefully selected reading materials, supports emotional expression, cognitive restructuring and the development of coping mechanisms among individuals experiencing psychological distress (Barlow et al., 2020). Stewart et al. (2020) further reported that young adults who participated in traditional bibliotherapy showed lower anxiety and depression levels than those in control groups, with some studies recording symptom reductions of up to 40 percent after regular sessions. This evidence showed that bibliotherapy functions beyond ordinary reading because it creates a reflective space where young adults can interpret their emotions, confront inner distress and develop healthier coping responses. For the present study, bibliotherapy should be examined as a structured psychosocial intervention with measurable mental health value rather than as a passive literary activity. Therefore, the importance of bibliotherapy lies in its ability to bridge emotional support and self-directed healing, especially in contexts where many young adults may not easily seek formal psychological care. Traditional bibliotherapy appears effective because it allows users to reflect on personal struggles and encounter cognitive behavioural strategies in a non-threatening and self-paced manner. This is particularly relevant in cultural settings where stigma continues to discourage open discussion of anxiety, depression and stress.

Digital bibliotherapy has also emerged as a flexible alternative, particularly in areas with limited access to face-to-face mental health services, because e books, mobile applications and online platforms can provide psychological content, self-help materials and guided exercises at the user's convenience. Okafor and Ibeh (2021) found that digital bibliotherapy reduced anxiety

and depressive symptoms by 35 percent, while also improving access for people in remote or underserved areas. The inference here is that traditional and digital bibliotherapy serve different but complementary functions in that the traditional format deepens reflective engagement, while the digital format increases reach, privacy and convenience. The implication for this study is that the effectiveness of bibliotherapy should be assessed not only by mental health outcomes but also by how each format shapes access, engagement and acceptability among African young adults. Thus, a balanced interpretation is required, because the future of bibliotherapy in Africa may depend less on choosing between print and digital formats and more on designing a hybrid model that reflects users' realities.

Despite the promise of digital bibliotherapy, its effectiveness depends strongly on the availability of enabling technologies such as smartphones, internet connectivity and basic digital literacy. Chinwe et al. (2020) observed that digital bibliotherapy provides important benefits in urban settings, but its use remains constrained in rural African communities where technological infrastructure is often weak. Even so, Nkosi et al. (2021) showed that offline mobile based bibliotherapy interventions can reduce anxiety and depression in rural populations when they are designed with local conditions in mind. Williams et al. (2022) also emphasised that mobile technology can support the wide dissemination of mental health content at national level, particularly in resource constrained settings. Digital bibliotherapy is considered as having strong scalability potential, though scalability alone does not guarantee equitable access. Thus, digital bibliotherapy interventions in Africa must be designed with offline access, low data use, simple interfaces, local languages and community support structures. Digital bibliotherapy should not be celebrated simply because it is technologically modern; its real value depends on whether it can reach the young adults who are most excluded from conventional mental health services.

The overall findings indicate that bibliotherapy can contribute meaningfully to the management of anxiety, depression and stress among young adults. Several reviewed studies reported positive mental health outcomes, with participants showing improvement in emotional wellbeing after engaging with bibliotherapy materials. In Nigeria, Akinmoladun et al. (2020) found that university students experienced significant reductions in stress after participating in a bibliotherapy intervention, while Ndungu et al. (2021) reported that bibliotherapy helped Kenyan students reduce academic related anxiety. These findings are consistent with wider evidence which suggests that bibliotherapy promotes mental health by encouraging self-reflection and helping individuals reinterpret their emotional experiences (Harrison et al., 2019). The inference is that bibliotherapy is particularly relevant to student and youth populations because academic pressure, social uncertainty and limited counselling access often intensify emotional distress. Therefore, universities, libraries, counselling centres and youth focused organisations in Africa can incorporate bibliotherapy into preventive mental health programmes, and that bibliotherapy should be viewed as a practical and context sensitive intervention, especially where professional mental health services are overstretched and young adults require accessible first line support.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of bibliotherapy has not been uniform across all studies or participant groups. Okpala et al. (2021) found that bibliotherapy produced more noticeable benefits among individuals with mild to moderate symptoms of anxiety or depression, while those with severe mental health conditions showed less improvement. This variation is understandable because bibliotherapy can provide insight, emotional support and coping guidance, but it may not offer sufficient clinical depth for people with complex or severe psychological disorders. Sulaimon (2021) therefore suggested that bibliotherapy may produce stronger outcomes when combined with counselling, psychotherapy or other professional

interventions. Bibliotherapy has clear therapeutic value, but its limits must be acknowledged, hence bibliotherapy should be placed within a stepped care model, where young adults with mild to moderate distress can benefit from guided reading support, while those with severe symptoms are referred for specialised care.

### **Cultural Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Bibliotherapy in African Contexts**

Cultural context plays a critical role in the effectiveness of bibliotherapy, particularly within African societies. Mental health in many African countries remains a deeply sensitive and often stigmatised subject. As such, individuals may hesitate to seek help for mental health issues due to the fear of judgment or social exclusion. This cultural stigma can hinder the reception of interventions like bibliotherapy unless they are carefully adapted to resonate with local cultural values and norms (Nwafor et al., 2019). This cultural disconnect highlights the need for interventions that integrate community-based and culturally relevant frameworks. In many African societies, familial and community support systems are central to addressing emotional distress, and mental health challenges are often addressed through collective, rather than individual, means (Adeoye & Adebayo, 2021). Bibliotherapy, when designed to encourage group reading sessions, communal discussions, and shared storytelling, might be more effective in these settings. The use of oral traditions, which are foundational in African cultures, could further strengthen the therapeutic value of bibliotherapy by encouraging shared learning experiences among participants. African youth may engage more readily with bibliotherapy that incorporates communal cultural elements, such as group discussions and oral storytelling, than with individualistic interventions. Interventions that integrate culturally familiar practices may not only enhance the therapeutic effects of bibliotherapy but also promote greater acceptance and participation, particularly in settings where mental health stigma is prevalent.

Moreover, the relevance of bibliotherapy materials is critical for effective intervention. Literature and narratives that reflect the lived experiences of African youth, particularly those that incorporate local languages, indigenous beliefs, and cultural narratives, are crucial for engagement. Smith and Johnson (2021) argue that bibliotherapy interventions that align with local cultural contexts significantly improve participant engagement, as individuals are more likely to connect with content that mirrors their own experiences. This emotional connection fosters deeper self-reflection and enhances the effectiveness of the intervention. Additionally, the advent of digital bibliotherapy has contributed to mitigating some of the barriers associated with cultural stigma. By providing a sense of anonymity, digital bibliotherapy allows young people to seek support without fear of social repercussions. Adamu et al. (2020) support this view, noting that digital platforms can significantly reduce stigma surrounding mental health, particularly for African youth, who may otherwise be hesitant to seek help. However, despite these advantages, it is crucial to approach bibliotherapy interventions with cultural sensitivity. Western-centric mental health frameworks, while effective in certain contexts, may not resonate with African cultural practices and beliefs (Adeoye & Adebayo, 2021).

Therefore, it is essential to co-design bibliotherapy interventions with cultural experts and local communities to ensure their relevance, respect, and acceptability within African contexts. Digital bibliotherapy offers a promising solution for overcoming stigma, but its success in Africa depends on the extent to which it integrates local cultural norms and values. Thus, future bibliotherapy interventions in Africa must be carefully designed with input from local communities to ensure that they not only reduce stigma but also address cultural factors that shape mental health perceptions. This approach will increase the likelihood of success and ensure that bibliotherapy remains an effective mental health tool for African youth.

## **Challenges in Accessing Bibliotherapy and Strategies for Mitigation**

Access to bibliotherapy in Africa is shaped by intersecting infrastructural, technological, and socio-economic barriers that continue to limit its practical application among young adults. In many rural communities, access to functional libraries, current reading materials, and mental health-focused texts remains inadequate, thereby reducing the possibility of using reading as a structured form of emotional and psychological support. Adebayo et al. (2020) noted that the shortage of modern libraries and relevant mental health books restricts the availability of bibliotherapy resources, especially in under-served settings. The inference drawn from this evidence is that bibliotherapy cannot be assumed to be universally accessible merely because it is a low-cost intervention; rather, its success depends on the presence of enabling educational, library, and community infrastructures. From the standpoint of the present study, this implies that any meaningful bibliotherapy programme for African young adults must first address the material conditions that determine whether young people can obtain, read, and engage with therapeutic texts.

The challenge is further complicated by the uneven distribution of digital resources. Although digital bibliotherapy offers promising opportunities through e-books, mobile applications, audio materials, and online therapeutic reading platforms, many young adults are excluded from these opportunities because of the high cost of smartphones, expensive data subscriptions, unstable internet connectivity, and limited digital literacy. Ibrahim and Oluwaseun (2020) observed that even in some urban areas, access to digital bibliotherapy remains constrained by these technological and economic barriers. This suggests that digital bibliotherapy, despite its flexibility and scalability, may unintentionally reproduce existing inequalities if it is introduced without attention to affordability and technological access. The researcher's position, therefore, is that digital bibliotherapy should not be presented as a

complete solution to mental health access challenges in Africa; rather, it should be understood as one component of a broader intervention model that must be adapted to the realities of young adults across different socio-economic and geographical locations.

The implication of these access barriers is that a blended or hybrid model of bibliotherapy may be more appropriate for the African context than an exclusively digital or exclusively traditional approach. Community-based bibliotherapy initiatives that combine printed texts, guided reading sessions, locally stored digital materials, and face-to-face support can help bridge the gap between those with reliable digital access and those without it. For instance, offline digital interventions, such as mobile applications or audio libraries that can function without continuous internet connection, may extend support to rural youth while reducing dependence on expensive data services. In this regard, the findings of Nkosi et al. (2021) are important because they show that digital interventions can become more effective when they are designed with the local context in mind. The inference here is that accessibility is not only about the existence of bibliotherapy resources but also about the suitability of the delivery channel. For the present study, this means that effective bibliotherapy in Africa requires flexible delivery systems that respond to infrastructural limitations while preserving therapeutic engagement.

Collaboration with schools, universities, libraries, community health centres, youth organisations, and local development actors also emerges as a practical strategy for mitigating access challenges. Chinwe et al. (2020) suggested that community reading spaces where both digital and traditional bibliotherapy materials are made freely available can improve access for young adults who may not own personal devices or who cannot afford regular internet connectivity. This evidence implies that bibliotherapy should be embedded within existing social and educational institutions rather than treated as an isolated mental health intervention.

The researcher's voice in this review is that institutional collaboration is central to sustainability because schools, universities, and community health centres already serve as trusted spaces where young people can be reached with less stigma and lower cost. Therefore, the success of bibliotherapy among African young adults will depend not only on the quality of the reading materials but also on the strength of the partnerships through which those materials are distributed, explained, and supported.

Overall, the evidence indicates that challenges in accessing bibliotherapy are not merely logistical but structural. They reflect broader inequalities in library development, digital inclusion, mental health awareness, and socio-economic opportunity. The major inference from the literature is that bibliotherapy has strong potential as an accessible mental health intervention, but this potential can only be realised when access barriers are deliberately addressed through context-sensitive planning. The implication for the present study is that bibliotherapy interventions for young adults in Africa should be designed as inclusive, culturally responsive, and resource-sensitive programmes. Such interventions should combine traditional reading materials with digital options, provide offline access where internet connectivity is weak, and use community-based platforms to reach young adults in both urban and rural settings. In this way, bibliotherapy can move beyond being a theoretically promising intervention to becoming a practical and equitable mental health support strategy for African youth.

### **Methodological Limitations in Current Bibliotherapy Research, and How It Can Be Addressed in Future Studies**

The review highlighted several challenges and limitations within the existing bibliotherapy research, primarily stemming from the methodological diversity of studies. This diversity

creates difficulty in drawing consistent conclusions regarding the overall effectiveness of bibliotherapy. While some studies employed rigorous experimental designs, others relied on self-report measures or non-randomised samples, which may introduce bias and reduce the reliability of findings (Bhengu & Nkosi, 2019). The lack of long-term follow-up studies further complicates the evaluation of bibliotherapy's sustained impact on mental health. Since bibliotherapy is typically a short-term intervention, a more comprehensive, longitudinal approach is needed to assess its long-term effects on participants' mental well-being. The inconsistency in research methodologies, such as using self-reports and non-randomised samples, dilutes the overall ability to confidently assess bibliotherapy's effectiveness across different settings. This lack of standardised, long-term evaluations leads to an incomplete understanding of bibliotherapy's impact. Thus, future studies should prioritise more robust experimental designs, incorporating randomised controlled trials (RCTs) where possible, to mitigate bias. Furthermore, longitudinal research is essential to uncover the lasting benefits or limitations of bibliotherapy, ensuring that its full therapeutic potential is explored.

Another limitation is the small sample sizes prevalent in many studies, which restricts the generalisability of the findings. A significant number of studies focused primarily on university students, which may not represent the broader young adult population in Africa. Most of the reviewed studies failed to include a diverse range of participants, which limits our understanding of bibliotherapy's impact across various socio-economic and cultural groups. To provide a more accurate and representative picture of bibliotherapy's effectiveness, future research should include more diverse populations. This inclusion will ensure that the intervention is applicable across different backgrounds, enhancing its relevance and effectiveness. The predominant focus on university students creates a sample bias that limits

the ability to generalise findings to the broader African young adult population. Future research must include a more diverse set of participants from varied socio-economic backgrounds, geographical locations, and cultural contexts. This approach will provide a more comprehensive understanding of bibliotherapy's effectiveness, making it more adaptable to various communities across the continent.

Furthermore, the lack of standardisation in bibliotherapy interventions, such as variation in the length of interventions, types of materials used, and delivery methods, complicates cross-study comparisons. Standardisation is key to determining the optimal conditions for bibliotherapy's success. Without standard guidelines, it is challenging to assess which factors contribute most significantly to the intervention's effectiveness. Future studies should establish clear and consistent guidelines for bibliotherapy interventions, ensuring that they are implemented in a way that allows for accurate comparisons across studies. Bibliotherapy holds significant potential as a mental health intervention for young adults in Africa, particularly in alleviating symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress. While existing evidence supports its effectiveness, the impact of bibliotherapy is influenced by several factors, including the cultural relevance of materials, the mode of delivery (digital versus traditional), and the severity of the mental health issues being addressed. The need for culturally adapted bibliotherapy interventions is crucial in ensuring they resonate with the experiences of young Africans. Future research should focus on ensuring that bibliotherapy interventions are culturally relevant and reflect the unique experiences of African youth. Additionally, both digital and traditional bibliotherapy approaches have their merits, and a combined approach may offer the most effective solution. The successful integration of these two methods could ensure greater accessibility and engagement, especially in resource-limited settings. Despite these promising findings, more rigorous, longitudinal, and diverse studies are needed to understand the long-

term impact of bibliotherapy and to establish standardised practices for its implementation in African settings.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made on the findings from the review:

1. Mental health professionals, African authors, and educators in collaboration with cultural experts should work towards and ensure that culturally relevant bibliotherapy resources are developed to reflect the values, norms, and lived experiences of African youth.
2. Governments, NGOs, and tech companies should create digital bibliotherapy platforms to make resources more accessible to young adults across Africa.
3. Universities, mental health organisations, and professional bodies should engage in training of mental health professionals in the area of effective use of bibliotherapy as part of their therapeutic practice.
4. A hybrid model of bibliotherapy that combines both digital and traditional resources should be developed by mental health professionals, educators, and researchers in the field of psychological interventions
5. Public awareness campaigns should be initiated to educate young adults about the benefits of bibliotherapy by government health departments, mental health organisations, and media outlets
6. Access to bibliotherapy should be made equitable for all young adults, regardless of their socio-economic background by governments, NGOs, and community-based organisations..

### **Conclusion**

This research examined the effectiveness of bibliotherapy as a mental health intervention for young adults experiencing anxiety, depression, and stress within African contexts. The review

highlights bibliotherapy as a non-invasive and cost-effective approach that has demonstrated positive outcomes, particularly in reducing academic-related stress among Nigerian university students and alleviating anxiety among Kenyan students. These findings align with broader global research showing that bibliotherapy promotes emotional support, self-reflection, and practical coping strategies. However, its effectiveness is not uniform in that while many participants reported significant improvement, individuals with more severe mental health conditions experienced limited benefits, suggesting that bibliotherapy should be viewed as a complementary rather than standalone intervention. In such cases, combining bibliotherapy with counselling or psychotherapy may provide more comprehensive support. The review also emphasises that personal engagement plays a crucial role in outcomes, as participants who actively interacted with the materials showed greater improvement than those who engaged passively.

A key factor influencing the success of bibliotherapy in African settings is cultural relevance. Given the diversity of cultural values, traditions, and social norms across African societies, interventions must reflect local realities to foster meaningful engagement. Studies indicate that materials addressing issues such as family dynamics, community relationships, and socio-economic challenges enhance both participation and therapeutic impact. Incorporating African authors, narratives, and traditions not only strengthens relatability but also helps reduce stigma surrounding mental health. Nevertheless, maintaining a balance between cultural adaptation and universal therapeutic principles is essential to preserve the integrity of bibliotherapy. The review further explored digital versus traditional delivery formats, and reported that digital bibliotherapy, including e-books and online platforms, offers flexibility, affordability, and anonymity, making it attractive to younger populations. However, challenges such as limited internet access, technological literacy, and device availability may restrict its

reach in some regions. Additionally, some individuals prefer physical books for their immersive and personal experience. A hybrid approach that integrates both digital and traditional methods may therefore provide the most effective and accessible model for supporting young adults' mental health in African contexts.

## References

- Adebayo, O. O., & Ezeani, E. O. (2021). Digital bibliotherapy: A modern approach to enhancing mental health among Nigerian youths. *Journal of Mental Health and Wellbeing*, 34(2), 47-55.
- Adebayo, O., & Ayo, O. (2021). Culturally relevant bibliotherapy interventions for African youth: A case study from South Africa. *International Journal of Mental Health*, 40(1), 23-36.
- Adeoye, T., & Ogunleye, F. (2021). The efficacy of bibliotherapy for mental health interventions among young Nigerian adults. *African Journal of Mental Health and Wellness*, 16(2), 142-151.
- Akinmoladun, A. F., Oladeji, D., & Oduwole, A. O. (2020). Bibliotherapy as an intervention for stress among Nigerian university students. *African Journal of Psychological Research*, 26(3), 150-158.
- Akinyele, A., & Farinloye, I. (2020). The impact of bibliotherapy on stress management among Nigerian university students. *West African Psychological Studies*, 42(3), 100-109.
- Alagarajah, J., Ceccolini, D., & Butler, S. (2024). Digital mental health interventions for treating mental disorders in young people based in low and middle income countries: A systematic review of the literature. *Cambridge Prisms: Global Mental Health*, 11, e74.
- Alex-Nmecha, J. C., & Onifade, A. (2023). Bibliotherapy in the wilderness: NLA and information services for mental health since 1962. *International Journal of Librarianship*, 8(1), 66-81.
- Azubuike, F. C., & Ismaila, L. O. (2021). Bibliotherapy as an intervention for mental health issues among Nigerian youth. *Journal of African Mental Wellness*, 19(3), 90-98.
- Babbage, C. M., et al. (2022). Self-help digital interventions targeted at improving mental health outcomes in young people: A systematic review. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 24(8), e25716.
- Barlow, D., et al. (2020). The effectiveness of bibliotherapy in alleviating symptoms of anxiety and depression: A meta-analysis. *Psychology and Health*, 35(2), 145-160.
- Bashir, A. (2021). Bibliotherapy in Sudan: A mental health perspective for youth. *Sudanese Journal of Psychological Research*, 20(1), 67-74.
- Batty, A., Davis, L., & White, S. (2020). Exploring the efficacy of bibliotherapy in addressing anxiety and stress among young adults in Europe. *European Journal of Psychology*, 45(3), 210-221.
- Bhengu, M. L., & Nkosi, Z. A. (2019). Bibliotherapy for promoting mental health in South African youth. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 30(1), 64-77.
- Bhengu, M., & Nkosi, Z. (2019). Bibliotherapy for enhancing emotional well-being in South African youth. *African Youth Health Journal*, 19(2), 112-120.
- Brown, K., et al. (2021). Methodological challenges in bibliotherapy research: A critical review. *African Journal of Psychological Research*, 14(2), 55-68.
- Chinwe, U., et al. (2020). Digital bibliotherapy: A comparative study of access and effectiveness in Africa. *Journal of Digital Health*, 5(4), 123-135.

- Chong, J., & Lim, Y. (2021). Digital bibliotherapy in managing adolescent mental health: A comprehensive review. *Asian Journal of Psychological Studies*, 28(1), 45-57.
- Dlamini, F. (2020). Mental health interventions in Southern Africa: The promise of bibliotherapy. *Southern African Journal of Mental Health*, 31(3), 112-121.
- Lina, T., & Nyathi, M. (2020). Exploring the application of bibliotherapy in Zimbabwe: A mental health approach for youth. *Zimbabwean Journal of Psychological Practice*, 28(4), 65-77.
- Franz, P. J., Mou, D., Kessler, D. T., Stubbing, J., Jaroszewski, A. C., Ray, S., Cao Silveira, V. B., Bachman, S., Schuster, S., Graupensperger, D., Alpert, J. E., Porath, M., & Nock, M. K. (2022). Digital bibliotherapy as a scalable intervention for suicidal thoughts: A randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 90(8), 626-637.
- Gana, J., & Kalu, O. (2020). Stress reduction through bibliotherapy in Nigerian adolescents. *Journal of African Youth and Psychological Health*, 23(4), 134-144.
- Garrido, S., Millington, C., Cheers, D., Boydell, K., Schubert, E., Meade, T., & Nguyen, Q. V. (2019). What works and what does not work? A systematic review of digital mental health interventions for depression and anxiety in young people. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 10, 759.
- Grist, R., Croker, A., Denne, M., & Stallard, P. (2019). Technology delivered interventions for depression and anxiety in children and adolescents: A systematic review and meta analysis. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 22(2), 147-171.
- Harrison, G. J., Weller, L. J., & West, S. (2019). The role of bibliotherapy in the mental health field: A review of literature. *International Journal of Therapeutic Practices*, 42(4), 60-68.
- Hart, C., & Norris, S. A. (2024). Adolescent mental health in Sub Saharan Africa: Crisis? What crisis? Solution? What solution? *Global Health Action*, 17(1), 2437883.
- Hunt, S., & Andrews, M. (2020). The mental health of young adults in Africa: Prevalence and interventions. *African Health Journal*, 16(2), 122-135.
- Ibrahim, S., & Oluwaseun, A. (2020). Mobile bibliotherapy apps for African youth: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Technology in Mental Health*, 22(1), 78-89.
- Ikpah, S. A., & Adewale, K. A. (2020). Cognitive and emotional benefits of bibliotherapy for youth in Nigeria. *Journal of Psychological Research and Therapy*, 24(3), 89-96.
- Jakobsson, C. E., Johnson, N. E., Ochuku, B., Baseke, R., Wong, E., Musyimi, C. W., Ndeti, D. M., & Ventura Conerly, K. E. (2024). Meta analysis: Prevalence of youth mental disorders in Sub Saharan Africa. *Cambridge Prisms: Global Mental Health*, 11, e109.
- Jones, L., & Faulkner, M. (2020). Integrating bibliotherapy into community mental health services in Africa. *Global Mental Health Review*, 15(2), 24-36.
- Jones, T., & Harrison, R. (2020). A review of bibliotherapy interventions for mental health: Strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 41(2), 58-72.
- Karyotaki, E., Miguel, C., Panagiotopoulou, O. M., Harrer, M., Seward, N., Sijbrandij, M., Araya, R., Patel, V., & Cuijpers, P. (2023). Digital interventions for common mental disorders in low and middle income countries: A systematic review and meta analysis. *Cambridge Prisms: Global Mental Health*, 10, e68.
- Kim, J., Aryee, L. M. D., Bang, H., Prajogo, S., Choi, Y. K., Hoch, J. S., & Prado, E. L. (2023). Effectiveness of digital mental health tools to reduce depressive and anxiety symptoms in low and middle income countries: Systematic review and meta analysis. *JMIR Mental Health*, 10, e43066.
- Kim, J., et al. (2023). Effectiveness of digital mental health tools to reduce depression and anxiety symptoms in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review. *Journal of Global Health*, 13, 04001.

- Kruzan, K. P., Williams, K. D. A., Meyerhoff, J., Yoo, D. W., O'Dwyer, L. C., De Choudhury, M., & Mohr, D. C. (2022). Social media based interventions for adolescent and young adult mental health: A scoping review. *Internet Interventions*, 30, 100578.
- Kumalo, R., & Msimang, S. (2021). Evaluating bibliotherapy as an intervention for anxiety in young South African adults. *South African Journal of Psychological Intervention*, 17(2), 88-98.
- Liao, F., Liang, J., Zhang, M., Liang, W., Zhang, C., & Yun, X. (2025). Recent developments in bibliotherapy for adolescent depression. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 16, 1681462.
- Mabrouk, A., Mbithi, G., Chongwo, E., Too, E., Sarki, A., Namuguzi, M., Atukwatse, J., Ssewanyana, D., & Abubakar, A. (2022). Mental health interventions for adolescents in Sub Saharan Africa: A scoping review. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 13, 937723.
- Malloy, J. A., Partridge, S. R., Kemper, J. A., Braakhuis, A., & Roy, R. (2023). Co design of digital health interventions with young people: A scoping review. *Digital Health*, 9, 20552076231219117.
- Mbuli, S., & Eze, M. (2021). Exploring the cultural appropriateness of bibliotherapy in Uganda. *Ugandan Journal of Youth Mental Health*, 13(4), 70-79.
- Mental health literacy and stigma among Nigerian youths: The role of bibliotherapy. *Journal of African Psychological Studies*, 18(3), 32-44.
- Mishu, M. P., O'Reilly, M., Dogra, N., & Das Munshi, J. (2023). Cross culturally adapted psychological interventions for the treatment of depression and anxiety in children and young people: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLOS ONE*, 18(9), e0290653.
- Mokaya, A. G., Dlamini, N. M., Nkosi, S., Nzuzi, M. T., Smith, T., & Abubakar, A. (2025). Digital mental health interventions for adolescents and young people aged 10 to 24 years in Africa: A protocol for a systematic review of mental health outcomes, engagement, and equity considerations. *Wellcome Open Research*, 10, 331.
- Moyo, F. & Mudzonga, M. (2020). The benefits of bibliotherapy in Zimbabwean schools. *Journal of African Educational Psychology*, 21(2), 56-63.
- Mudiyanselage, K. W. W., De Santis, K., Jorg, F., Saleem, M., Stewart, R., Zeeb, H., & Busse, H. (2024). The effectiveness of mental health interventions involving non specialists and digital technology in low and middle income countries: A systematic review. *BMC Public Health*, 24, 77.
- Ndungu, E. A., Gathara, G., & Mungai, D. (2021). Exploring the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in mental health among Kenyan university students. *Kenyan Journal of Psychology*, 27(2), 89-97.
- Nkosi, L., et al. (2021). Internet access and the efficacy of digital mental health interventions in rural Africa. *Journal of Rural Mental Health*, 37(2), 105-120.
- Nwafor, N., et al. (2019). Cultural adaptations of bibliotherapy in African contexts: Case studies and recommendations. *Psychosocial Interventions*, 8(2), 15-29.
- Nwagwu, W. E., & Maxwell, F. U. (2025). Influence of sociocultural factors on the reading habits and well-being of postgraduate students. *Educational Dimension*, 12, 102-132.
- Nwagwu, W. E., & Maxwell, U. F. (2025). Influence of sociocultural factors on the reading habits and well-being of postgraduate students in Nigeria. *Educational Dimension*, 12, 102-132.
- Odumosu, A. (2021). The cultural impact of bibliotherapy on Nigerian adolescents' Zubairu, S., & Hassan, I. (2019). Bibliotherapy and its role in alleviating anxiety among African students. *Journal of African Educational Psychology*, 14(1), 76-87.
- Ogundele, O. T., & Adebayo, D. O. (2020). The role of bibliotherapy in adolescent mental health in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Psychological Research*, 29(4), 121-130.

- Okafor, E., & Ibeh, M. (2021). Digital bibliotherapy for depression in African youth: A systematic review. *Psychiatric Research and Practice*, 15(3), 85-95.
- Okpala, F., Ogege, S. E., & Idoko, A. R. (2021). Breaking the stigma: Mental health services and bibliotherapy in Nigeria. *African Journal of Psychological Research*, 45(5), 179-186.
- Oladeji, D., Akinmoladun, A. F., & Oduwole, A. O. (2020). Bibliotherapy in the digital age: Opportunities and challenges for African youth. *Journal of African Mental Health*, 33(2), 21-35.
- Oladeji, D., Akinmoladun, A. F., & Oduwole, A. O. (2020). Bibliotherapy in the digital age: Opportunities and challenges for African youth. *Journal of African Mental Health*, 33(2), 21-35.
- Olisaeloka, L. (2024). Psychosocial interventions for depression among young people in sub-Saharan Africa. *African Journal of Psychiatry*, 27(1), 1-7.
- Olisaeloka, L., Udokanma, E., & Ashraf, A. (2024). Psychosocial interventions for depression among young people in Sub Saharan Africa: A systematic review and meta analysis. *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, 18, 24.
- Onifade, A., & Alex-Nmecha, J. C. (2023). Bibliotherapy in the wilderness: NLA and information services for mental health since 1962. *International Journal of Librarianship*, 8(1), 66-81.
- Patel, V., Saxena, S., Lund, C., Thornicroft, G., Baingana, F., Bolton, P., Chisholm, D., Collins, P. Y., Cooper, J. L., Eaton, J., Herrman, H., Herzallah, M. M., Huang, Y., Jordans, M. J. D., Kleinman, A., Medina Mora, M. E., Morgan, E., Niaz, U., Omigbodun, O., Prince, M., Rahman, A., Saraceno, B., Sarkar, B. K., De Silva, M., Singh, I., Stein, D. J., Sunkel, C., & Unutzer, J. (2018). The Lancet Commission on global mental health and sustainable development. *The Lancet*, 392(10157), 1553-1598.
- Redman, H., Melendez Torres, G. J., Bethel, A., Matheson, E. L., Smith, H., Diedrichs, P. C., & Green, J. (2024). The impact of school based creative bibliotherapy interventions on child and adolescent mental health: A systematic review and realist synthesis protocol. *Systematic Reviews*, 13, 86.
- Redman, H., Mutanda, D., Bethel, A., Miller, R., Matheson, E. L., Diedrichs, P. C., & Green, J. (2025). Does creative bibliotherapy delivered in schools improve mental health related outcomes for 5 to 16 year olds? A systematic review. *Arts & Health. Advance online publication*.
- Sanni, S., & Ayodele, A. (2020). Bibliotherapy as a tool for promoting mental wellness in Nigerian adolescents. *Journal of African Mental Health and Wellbeing*, 18(1), 110-119.
- Sasseville, M., LeBlanc, A., Tchuente, J., Boucher, M., Dugas, M., Gisele, M., Barony, R., Chouinard, M. C., Beaulieu, M., Beaudet, N., Skidmore, B., Cholette, P., Aspiros, C., Larouche, A., Chabot, G., & Gagnon, M. P. (2023). The impact of technology systems and level of support in digital mental health interventions: A secondary meta analysis. *Systematic Reviews*, 12, 78.
- Sequeira, M., Singh, S., Fernandes, L., Gaikwad, L., Gupta, D., Chibanda, D., & Nadkarni, A. (2022). Adolescent Health Series: The status of adolescent mental health research, practice and policy in Sub Saharan Africa: A narrative review. *Tropical Medicine & International Health*, 27(9), 758-766.
- Shatona, M. N. (2022). Empowering African libraries for mental wellness. *Libri*, 71(4), 283-295.
- Shoyinka, F. (2020). Exploring the mental health benefits of bibliotherapy in Nigerian youth: A case study. *African Mental Health Journal*, 12(4), 98-108.
- Smith, R., & Johnson, P. (2021). Traditional storytelling in bibliotherapy: A cultural perspective from Southern Africa. *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 27(3), 18-33.
- Sulaimon, A. A. (2021). The effectiveness of bibliotherapy in managing depression and stress in Nigerian adolescents. *Journal of African Studies in Psychology*, 16(1), 78-89.

- Tadesse, T. T., & Desta, M. G. (2021). Addressing depression through bibliotherapy in East African universities. *Journal of Ethiopian Psychological Research*, 27(3), 134-142.
- Thomas, D., & Onu, F. (2022). Longitudinal studies on the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in Africa: A critical gap. *African Journal of Research in Psychology*, 21(4), 123-136.
- Wies, B., Landers, C., & Ienca, M. (2021). Digital mental health for young people: A scoping review of ethical promises and challenges. *Frontiers in Digital Health*, 3, 697072.
- Williams, R., et al. (2022). Digital bibliotherapy in Africa: Opportunities for mental health intervention. *Journal of Digital and Cognitive Health*, 8(1), 43-56.
- Wu, T. J., et al. (2025). Effects of bibliotherapy on emotional distress, coping, and quality of life: A systematic review. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 280, 1-10.
- Yuan, S., Zhou, X., Zhang, Y., Zhang, H., Pu, J., Yang, L., Liu, L., Jiang, X., & Xie, P. (2018). Comparative efficacy and acceptability of bibliotherapy for depression and anxiety disorders in children and adolescents: A meta-analysis of randomized clinical trials. *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment*, 14, 353-365.