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Deploying Music Therapy for Mental Health Wellness and Academic Success for University Students in Delta State

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Abstract

Deploying Music Therapy for Mental Health Wellness and Academic Success among University Students in Delta State. Music therapy offers a powerful tool for Nigerian university students to enhance mental health and academic performance; by reducing stress and anxiety, improving mood and boosting focus, helping students navigating academic pressure. The study is a descriptive survey using ex-post facto design. The population comprises all university students in Delta State. Purposive sampling technique was used to select sample of 1,000 students from the study area. A self-developed questionnaire titled “Music Therapy for Mental Health Wellness and Academic Success Questionnaire – MTMHWASQ)” was used to gather information from participants. To establish reliability, the instrument underwent a test-re-test in a pilot study, yielding a coefficient index of 0.85 and above. Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The researchers personally distributed 1,000 questionnaires to the selected participants. Simple percentage, Mean score, Standard deviation and t-test were used to analysed data at 0.05 level of significance. Benchmark of 2.50 was established to accept any item with a mean rating of 2.50 or above as agreed while any item with a mean rating less than 2.50 was regarded as disagreed for research questions. Although Music could be distractive, the study highlights ignorance and importance of music therapy’s positive impact on both mental health wellness and academic success among Nigerian university students. Thus, reducing stress, anxiety and improving focus. Music therapy emerges a valuable support tool to help students navigate their rigorous academic activities and self-sustenance. Therefore, educational stakeholders should consider integrating music therapy into counselling services and academic support programs. Training of staff in music therapy techniques, offering regular sessions and promoting music-based stress management workshops.

Keywords: *Music-Therapy, Mental-Health, Academic Success, Students, Nigeria*

Introduction

Human beings possess a mind-body connection, which indicates that our mental, physical, and social well-being are interconnected. For students, mental health is crucial as it influences their learning and involvement in school activities. A student's mental wellness directly correlates with their academic performance, where positive mental health fosters a readiness to learn, higher self-esteem, and greater motivation to achieve educational aspirations (Marshall-Seslar, 2023). It is a key determinant of overall life satisfaction and quality. Unfortunately, poor mental health represents a significant and widespread psychological challenge for university undergraduate students in both advanced and developing countries (Pedrelli et al., 2015).

Academic pressures, social expectations, and the transition to adulthood can deeply affect individuals. It's essential to prioritize mental health for students facing academic and relational struggles (Aksoy & Ozturk, 2024). Students dealing with conditions such as depression and anxiety often face academic hurdles and show resistance to school activities. This can manifest as disinterest in pursuing hobbies or future planning, strained relationships with peers and teachers, and limited classroom engagement. Their ability to retain and recall information is also hindered by anxiety and depression, resulting in negative impacts on their learning processes.

Consequently, such mental health challenges can impede academic progress and contribute to underachievement, with students experiencing higher anxiety levels scoring lower on IQ and achievement tests compared to their peers (Conti & Sloan, 2024). Anxiety and depression can hinder the ability to manage stress (NYU, 2011). While school can foster social connections, these relationships can sometimes lead to tensions and emotional difficulties. Factors such as bullying, social rejection, and isolation often accompany depression. Common risk factors for students include low self-esteem and insufficient social support. It is crucial to note that striving for academic excellence can inadvertently result in low self-esteem, which is a known risk factor for depression.

Furthermore, various influences, including genetic factors, life experiences, and neurological changes, can contribute to the development of depression (Harris, 2023). Music, a universal language, significantly impacts the human brain. It can evoke emotions, enhance memory, and create a calming effect. Research indicates that both listening to and creating music can spark signals that positively influence mood and cognitive functions, effectively alleviating feelings of anxiety and despair (Chanda & Levitin, 2013). Music serves as a coping mechanism for students during challenging times, helping them process emotions and manage psychological stress (de Witte et al., 2020).

Silverman (2020) emphasizes the therapeutic role of music in addressing personal issues and fostering resilience among students. This therapeutic application relates directly to both the environment and individual lives. Music offers students non-invasive coping strategies to manage academic pressures and peer influences, enabling them to handle their emotions constructively. Positive research outcomes have been reported in the educational sector that highlight music's benefits, such as enhanced focus, increased motivation, and a more supportive learning atmosphere. Evidence suggests that rhythmic music improves attention and academic performance, while lyrical and melodic music serves as an emotional release (Rickard et al., 2018). These findings illustrate the advantages of integrating music therapy into educational settings to support mental health.

Music therapy is increasingly recognized as an innovative treatment approach that effectively addresses cognitive challenges and bolsters students' emotional resilience. It is not only effective in alleviating symptoms

of stress, anxiety, and depression but also contributes to emotional well-being. This involves adding to the growing research base supporting the incorporation of music as a therapeutic and educational resource to meet students' mental health needs (Chanda & Levitin, 2013). Ghetti (2022) highlights music therapy as a developing field that uses musical interventions to meet individual physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs, showing the ability to enhance mood, reduce stress, and promote feelings of connection. It is recognized as a valuable, non-invasive option in addressing these issues. Music therapy, described as the systematic and evidence-based application of music to achieve specific outcomes, has been found to lower stress levels, promote self-soothing, and strengthen students' resilience (Silverman, 2020).

Statement to the Problem

University students in Nigeria face escalating mental health crisis that severely undermines their psychological well-being and academic achievement. These conditions are compounded by suicidal behaviours, a critical indicator of severe distress. The consequences extend directly to academic success. Poor mental health impairs concentration, motivation, memory retention, assignment completion, and overall performance, leading to lower grade point averages, increased dropout risks and reduced productivity. Academic stressors such as heavy workloads, financial hardship, poor social amenities, off-campus living, and institutional inadequacies exacerbate these issues, creating a vicious cycle where mental distress hinders learning and further deteriorates well-being.

However, despite music's cultural significance in Nigeria where indigenous practices have long used music, rhythm, and dance for emotional healing and community bonding—music therapy remains underutilized and under-researched as a formal intervention in university settings. This represents a critical gap, an accessible, low-cost, culturally resonant, stigma-reducing approach that could address emotional regulation, cognitive enhancement, and social connection is largely absent from campus mental health strategies. Deploying music therapy—integrating Nigeria's rich musical heritage with clinical practices offers a promising yet unexplored pathway to promote mental health wellness and academic success, and this is the gap the study tends to fill.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised in the study:

1. Does deploying music therapy improve mental health wellness among university students in Delta State?
2. Does deploying music therapy improve academic success among university students in Delta State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated in the study:

1. There is no significant difference between deploying music therapy and mental health wellness among university students in Delta State
2. There is no significant difference between deploying music therapy and academic success among university students in Delta State

Literature Review

Music has the ability to evoke emotions. Colleges can harness music to help address and overcome students' psychological issues, necessitating a focus on psychological counseling that fosters healthy emotions and supports the positive psychological development of students (Zhao, Wang & Shan, 2017). When college students express their emotions, their outlook often shifts towards positivity. In such moments, educators can play uplifting music to further enhance their positive feelings and assist them in overcoming psychological challenges (Xiao, 2019). Music therapy utilizes music as a medium to improve the psychological climate for

college students and facilitate emotional expression. Additionally, music acts as a versatile medium that can support various activities, thus serving not only its therapeutic purpose but also creating a nurturing environment for students (Meng, 2019).

Music has the capacity to elevate spirits, aid in personality development, and gradually enhance students' temperament. The integration of music therapy reflects the advancement of mental health education. It stimulates students' emotional experiences and alleviates psychological barriers through the interplay of rhythm and melody. Consequently, incorporating music therapy into college mental health education positively impacts students' emotional experiences. Furthermore, music therapy aligns well with educational settings and proves effective in preventing and treating mental and physical health issues in students, while also helping to regulate negative emotions, promote positive feelings and collaboration, and encourage self-expression, growth, and creativity (Koeisch, 2020).

Music acts as a powerful medium for individuals to express their feelings, simultaneously correcting detrimental communication patterns and fostering positive interactions. Within music therapy, diverse methods such as role-playing and musical performances create scenarios for students to engage with. As they enjoy these activities, they learn to use music as a means of expressing their emotions and gaining valuable experiences. These experiences are crucial for developing accurate self-assessment and self-concept among students, making music therapy a vital approach for addressing their psychological issues (Welch, Biasutti & Macritchie, 2020).

HEALTH BENEFITS OF MUSIC

6 Benefits of Music for Your Mental Health



Fig. 1: Health Benefits of Music (McCaffrey, Edwards & Fannon, 2011).

In therapy sessions, students are encouraged to explore a variety of musical styles, including both uplifting and serious, slower melodies. This mix of musical experiences enables students to tap into profound emotions, let go of negative feelings, and eventually turn to more positive and inspirational music, aiding them in resolving psychological challenges. This journey empowers them to reevaluate themselves, leading to enhanced memory, better mental health, and academic achievement (Abdulah, Miho, Alhakem, & Piro, 2018).

Research by Chan et al. (2012) found that music therapy significantly reduced stress levels among university students, highlighting music's effectiveness as a coping strategy for anxiety and overall mental well-being. Music therapy provides a safe and creative outlet for emotional expression, helping students better recognize and manage their feelings, as noted by Silverman (2020). Additionally, Rickard, James, Gill, Appelman, and Murphy (2013) demonstrated that listening to classical music during music therapy led to improvements in cognitive functions such as memory and attention, which can positively influence academic performance. Furthermore, music therapy fosters social connections and alleviates feelings of isolation through collaborative musical activities that encourage interaction and community.

A study by Elefant et al. (2012) supports the notion that music therapy enhances social relationships. Adequate sleep is essential for college students, and music therapy has shown to enhance sleep quality. According to Jespersen et al. (2015), listening to calming music before sleep can improve sleep patterns and reduce insomnia symptoms. The essence of music therapy is in active participation, where each participant contributes to the collective harmony—just as in choral singing, where even a single off-note can disrupt the cohesive effect, highlighting the need for collaboration (Li, 2018).

Studies suggest that specific music genres can positively impact students' mental health by alleviating stress, anxiety, and depression while enhancing focus, emotional regulation, and cognitive performance, thereby aiding academic success. However, the effects may vary based on personal preferences and contexts, and music should complement other mental health strategies such as therapy or physical activity (Chan et al., 2012). Welch, Biasutti, and Macritchie (2020) emphasized that classical music consistently provides significant therapeutic benefits for students, often surpassing other genres in reducing anxiety and promoting productivity.

The calming rhythms and absence of lyrics in classical music help regulate the nervous system, lower cortisol levels, and activate brain regions associated with attention and memory. This genre can decrease test anxiety, enhance mood, facilitate problem-solving, and improve academic performance by fostering relaxation without distraction. Ideal tempos of 60-80 BPM synchronize with heart rates and alleviate physiological stress (Koeisch, 2020). Lo-Fi Hip Hop and ambient instrumentals create a soothing background with slow beats and natural sounds that help to concentrate and lower stress, making them particularly effective for study sessions by minimizing cognitive overload and promoting a sense of calm. Jazz is another genre that enhances creativity, reduces stress, and improves memory retention. Its improvisational style is beneficial for emotional expression and cognitive flexibility, helping students manage academic pressures or creative barriers (Abdulah, Miho, Alhakem, & Piro, 2018).

Uplifting melodies and positive lyrics in pop music can significantly reduce anxiety and elevate mood during therapy sessions, potentially increasing motivation and engagement in academic tasks. Gospel music is especially popular among Nigerian students due to its uplifting lyrics and spiritual themes that foster happiness, relaxation, and emotional resilience (Bangquiao & Galigao, 2024). This genre plays a role in alleviating anxiety, stress, and loneliness while cultivating a positive mindset conducive to better focus and motivation in academic

pursuits. Traditional Nigerian styles, such as Highlife, promote social bonding and emotional release through group activities, thereby lessening feelings of isolation and stress. These genres are effective in community-based therapy for youth, enhancing cognitive benefits like improved concentration on academic tasks. While music is accessible to students, many are unaware of its therapeutic effects, and some perceive it as a distraction that hinders their study efforts (Abdulah, Miho, Alhakem, & Piro, 2018).

Methods and Materials

The study is a descriptive survey using ex-post facto design. The population comprises all university students in Delta State. Purposive sampling technique was used to select sample of 1,000 students from the study area. A self-developed questionnaire titled “Music Therapy for Mental Health Wellness and Academic Success Questionnaire – MTMHWASQ” was used to gather information from participants. To establish reliability, the instrument underwent a test-re-test in a pilot study, yielding a coefficient index of 0.85 and above. Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The researchers personally distributed 1,000 questionnaires to the selected participants. Simple percentage, Mean score, Standard deviation and t-test were used to analysed data at 0.05 level of significance. Benchmark of 2.50 was established to accept any item with a mean rating of 2.50 or above as agreed while any item with a mean rating less than 2.50 was regarded as disagreed for research questions.

Results

Table 1: Response to deploying music therapy to improve mental health wellness among university students in Delta State

Music therapy to improve mental health wellness	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	STD	Remark
Music therapy improve mood and wellness	312 (31.2%)	245 (24.5%)	198 (19.8%)	245 (24.5%)	3.74	.85	Agreed
Music therapy reduce anxiety level	325 (32.5%)	302 (30.2%)	278 (27.8%)	95 (9.5%)	2.93	.81	Agreed
It help students feel confident	177 (17.7%)	360 (36%)	251 (25.1%)	212 (21.2%)	3.18	.84	Agreed
Music therapy helps students to cope with difficult emotions	289 (28.9%)	314 (31.4%)	155 (15.5%)	242 (24.2%)	2.83	.92	Agreed
It improves overall mental wellbeing	270 (27%)	288 (28.8%)	292 (29.2%)	150 (15%)	2.89	.94	Agreed

Table 1 shows responses on deploying music therapy to improve mental health wellness among university students in Delta State. From the remark, the respondents agreed on all items.

Table 2: Response to deploying music therapy to improve academic success among university students in Delta State

Music therapy to improve academic success	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	STD	Remark
It helps to improve problem-solving skills	290 (29%)	245 (24.5%)	200 (20%)	265 (26.5%)	2.44	.65	Agreed
It helps students to stay organized	300 (30%)	223 (22.3%)	290 (29%)	187 (18.7%)	3.46	.91	Agreed
Music therapy helps manage study-related stress	118 (11.8%)	454 (45.4%)	256 (25.6%)	172 (17.2%)	2.79	.80	Agreed
Motivate students to study	310 (31%)	247 (24.7%)	198 (19.8%)	245 (24.5%)	2.78	.88	Agreed
It helps to boost confidence in academic activities	325 (32.5%)	300 (30%)	97 (9.7%)	278 (27.8%)	2.80	.74	Agreed

Table 2 shows responses on deploying music therapy to improve academic success among university students in Delta State. From the remark, the respondents agreed on all items.

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis showing deploying music therapy to improve mental health wellness among university students in Delta State

Variables	N	X	STD	DF	P-value	Level of Sign	Decision
Music therapy	1000	3.50	.94	2	0.013	0.05	Significant
Mental health wellness		3.35	.89				

Table 3 presents the descriptive analysis deploying music therapy to improve mental health wellness among university students in Delta State. The statistics in the table showed mean scores of 3.50 and 3.35 respectively, standard deviations of .94 and .89. Since the p-value < 0.05, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 4: Descriptive Analysis showing deploying music therapy to improve academic success among university students in Delta State

Variables	N	X	STD	DF	P-value	Level of Sign	Decision
Music therapy	1000	2.92	.88	2	0.022	0.05	Significant
Academic success		2.90	.86				

Table 4 presents the descriptive analysis showing deploying music therapy to improve academic success among university students in Delta State. The statistics in the table showed mean scores of 2.92 and 2.90 respectively, standard deviations of .88 and .86. Since the p-value < 0.05, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The study highlights deploying music therapy to improve mental health wellness among university students in Delta State. The findings indicated positive trends. Majority of respondents agreed that music therapy helps manage stress, improve mood and reduce anxiety. Respondents also reported feeling more relaxed, better able to express emotion and experiencing improved overall mental well-being.

Thus, music therapy is a valuable tool for supporting students' mental health well-being. In support of this, Zhao, Wang & Shan, (2017); Meng, (2019); (Xiao, 2019) music has the function of arousing personal personality. Universities can use music to treat and solve the psychological obstacles of students, which requires universities to pay attention to students' psychological counseling, cultivate students' healthy emotions and promote the healthy development of students' psychology. When the emotion of college students is vented to a certain extent, the mood gradually changes to a positive direction. At this time, the teacher will play some music full of positive energy, so as to stimulate the positive emotion of the treated and help them get rid of their psychological problems. Music therapy uses music as a carrier to help college students improve their psychological environment and promote emotional communication. At the same time, music is a common medium; using music can carry out a variety of activities, which can not only play the therapeutic role of music, but also create a good growth environment for university students.

The study focuses on deploying music therapy to improve academic success among university students in Delta State. The findings point out promising results. Respondents agreed music therapy improves focus, reduces anxiety, boost motivation to study. Respondents also reported better concentration and improved handling of academic pressure. Thus, music therapy is an indispensable tool for students' academic success. In collaboration to this, Chan et al (2012); Rickard, James, Gill, Appelman and Muphy (2013); Silverman (2017) found that University students stress levels were significantly decreased by music therapy interventions and that the use of music as a coping mechanism decreased anxiety and bettered overall mental health. Music therapy offers college students a secure and imaginative outlet for emotional expression. Music therapy aids students in recognizing and expressing their emotions, which leads better emotional regulation. Studies demonstrated that music therapy interventions, such as listening to classical music, improved cognitive performance, including memory and attention. This could have a positive impact on academic success among college students. Music therapy can also help university students build social connections and reduce feelings of isolation.

Conclusion

The study highlights music therapy's positive impact on both mental health wellness and academic success among Nigerian university students. Thus, reducing stress, anxiety and improving focus. Music therapy emerges a valuable support tool. Therefore, educational stakeholders should consider integrating music therapy into counselling services and academic support programs. Training of staff in music therapy techniques, offering regular sessions and promoting music-based stress management workshops.

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