

The Effect of Poetry and Epic Recitation on Anxiety and Life Expectancy Among Female High School Students

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Abstract

Adolescence is one of the most important developmental stages, accompanied by emotional and psychological changes that may lead to increased anxiety and reduced life expectancy among students. Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate the effect of poetry and epic recitation on anxiety and life expectancy among female high school students. This study was conducted using a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test in a single experimental group. The statistical population included female high school students in Qaemshahr during the 2018–2019 academic year, from which 27 participants were selected through simple random sampling. The poetry and epic recitation program were implemented over 8 weeks (one 90-minute session per week). Data collection instruments included the Dorghotis Anxiety Questionnaire (1973) and the Snyder Life Expectancy Questionnaire (1991). Data were analyzed using paired t-test in SPSS version 22. The results showed that after the implementation of the poetry and epic recitation program, the mean anxiety score decreased from 3.30 in the pre-test to 1.52 in the post-test, while the mean life expectancy score increased from 3.15 to 3.17. Also, the results of the paired t-test indicated that these changes were statistically significant, so that poetry and epic recitation significantly reduced anxiety ($p = 0.001$) and significantly increased life expectancy ($p = 0.001$) among students. The findings indicate that poetry and epic recitation, as an effective cultural-educational intervention, plays an important role in improving the mental health status of female high school students.

Keywords: Poetry and Epic Recitation, Anxiety, Life Expectancy

Introduction

In recent years, the mental health of students has become one of the most critical concerns for educational systems and families (Mohammadian et al., 2011). Adolescence, as one of the most sensitive stages of development, is accompanied by extensive physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes. During this period, students face various pressures, such as academic expectations, concerns about the future, educational competition, emotional shifts, and interpersonal difficulties (Sefidgar et al., 2025). These factors can lay the groundwork for psychological issues, including anxiety, depression, a decline in life expectancy (hope for life), and a deterioration of overall mental health (Certo et al., 2012). In this context, female students in the second period of secondary school are more vulnerable to psychological distress due to their emotional sensitivities, social and academic pressures, and the specific characteristics of adolescence (Friedman et al., 1986). Increased levels of anxiety and depression among adolescents not only negatively affect their mental state but also impact their academic performance, social relationships, self-confidence, and quality of life (Freeman et al., 2013).

Today, researchers in the fields of psychology, educational psychology, and Persian literature believe that employing cultural, artistic, and literary methods can play an effective role in improving adolescents' mental health (Brillantes-Evangelista et al., 2013). Literature, poetry, and epic recitation (Hamaaseh-khani) are among the valuable cultural tools that have historically played a significant role in conveying moral concepts, boosting morale, and fostering motivation and psychological peace (Cossman, 2013). Due to its emotional, aesthetic, and imaginative

dimensions, poetry can influence an individual's feelings, reduce psychological tension, and provide a means for emotional release and inner calm. Furthermore, by relying on concepts such as courage, hope, resilience, effort, and overcoming adversity, epic recitation can strengthen hope and self-confidence in adolescents, fostering a more positive attitude toward life (Cheng & McCarthy, 2018).

In Iranian culture, poetry and literature have always held a special place, and the works of great poets such as Ferdowsi, Hafez, and Saadi are replete with hopeful, moral, and human-building concepts. Specifically, national epics can play a significant role in reducing feelings of helplessness and despair in adolescents by fostering a sense of identity, psychological strength, and motivation (Cork et al., 2020). However, the current educational system has paid less attention to the therapeutic and pedagogical capacities of poetry and epic recitation in improving students' mental health, focusing primarily on academic and instructional aspects. Yet, utilizing literary and cultural programs can serve as a cost-effective, accessible, and efficient method for reducing adolescents' psychological problems (Pihkala, 2020). On the other hand, hope for life is considered a key indicator of mental health and plays a fundamental role in motivation, psychological stability, and the ability to cope with difficulties. Students with higher levels of hope are generally more resilient against pressures and frustrations and enjoy better mental health (Blackmore et al., 2011). Poetry and epic recitation can increase students' levels of hope for life by fostering a positive outlook, strengthening the search for meaning, and enhancing their sense of competence. Given that anxiety and depression are among the most common psychological problems in adolescents, investigating effective and innovative methods to mitigate these issues is of great importance (Lau et al., 2014). Considering the significance of students' mental health and the potential role of poetry and epic recitation in improving adolescents' emotional and psychological well-being, the necessity for research in this area is felt more than ever. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the effect of poetry and epic recitation on the levels of anxiety and hope for life among female students in the second period of secondary school, to determine whether leveraging literary and cultural capacities can be effective in promoting mental health and improving students' emotional state.

Material and Methods

The study employed a quasi-experimental method with a pre-test and post-test design using a single experimental group. Since the teacher taught this subject to all students, a control group was excluded. In this method, the researcher selects a group of subjects for the experiment (experimental group), introduces the variables, and observes the impact of those variables on the group. The statistical population of this study consisted of all female students in the second period of secondary school in Qaemshahr during the 2018–2019 academic year, reported as 900 individuals according to the Department of Education statistics. Out of 14 female secondary schools in Qaemshahr, one school was selected at random, with 27 students participating.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria: Holding a provincial ranking, engaging in regular physical exercise 3 times a week, being female, providing written parental consent, having no specific physical or psychological illnesses, and being in the second period of secondary school.

Exclusion criteria: Any lack of discipline or irregularity during the course and/or 2 absences from class.

Data collection involved both library research and field studies (questionnaires). The research was implemented by administering a pre-test before the training began. Then, for 8 weeks, the literature course was taught by the relevant teacher for one session per week, lasting 2 hours each. A post-test was administered one week after the training concluded, and the results were compared with the pre-test.

Poetry and Epic Recitation Program

The program was designed by the researcher to reduce anxiety and increase hope for life in female secondary school students. Each session was held as a group activity once a week for 90 minutes over 8 weeks. Beyond reading, the sessions incorporated group discussions, expression of emotions, active participation, and reflective exercises.

Session	Topic	Content/Activities
1	Introduction and Group Bonding	Member introduction, explaining session goals, setting group rules, short relaxing poems about hope and life, group discussion on emotions and expectations.
2	Poetry and Mental Calm	Reading hopeful and calming Persian poems, rhythmic breathing exercises with poetry, discussion on the effect of positive words on feelings and thoughts.
3	Epics and Self-Confidence	Reading national epics and motivational poems, discussion on courage and overcoming problems, sharing individual experiences in facing hardships.
4	Hope for the Future	Reading poems about hope, effort, and success, exercise on writing individual goals/dreams, group discussion on the role of hope in life.
5	Emotional Release	Reading emotional and motivational poems, encouraging students to express feelings, writing short sentences or poems about personal worries and hopes.
6	Epic Recitation and Resilience	Reading epic stories/poems related to resistance and perseverance, analyzing endurance and hope, discussing ways to cope with academic/personal problems.
7	Personal Identity and Hope	Reading poems about human value, self-discovery, and hope, positive thinking exercises, discussion on individual strengths and future goals.
8	Conclusion and Evaluation	Reviewing previous topics, group performance of poetry and epics, sharing experiences/feelings, final evaluation, and feedback.

Measurement Tools

Anxiety Questionnaire: Introduced by Derogatis et al. (1973), consisting of 9 questions using a Likert scale (0: None to 4: Extremely).

Hope for Life Questionnaire: Snyder et al. (1991), consisting of 12 items (8 scored, 4 lie-detector). It measures “Agency Thinking” (items 2, 9, 10, 12) and “Strategic Thinking” (items 1, 4, 6, 8) using a 5-point Likert scale (reversed for items 3, 7, 11). Higher scores indicate greater hope. Internal consistency ranges from 0.74 to 0.84, with a test-retest reliability of 0.80.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Paired t-test) via SPSS version 22.

Results

The research results, as shown in Table 2, indicate that the number of participants in the experimental group was 27. The mean anxiety score in the experimental group decreased significantly from 30.3 in the pre-test to 1.52 in the post-test. Similarly, the mean hope for life score in the experimental group increased from 15.3 in the pre-test to 17.3 in the post-test. Therefore, descriptively, it appears that the significant reduction in anxiety and the significant

increase in life expectancy observed in the subjects of the experimental group in the post-test occurred as a result of the impact of poetry and epic recitation.

Table 2. The impact of poetry and epic recitation on research components in students

Variables	Tests	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation
Anxiety	Pre-test	27	30.3	11.0
	Post-test	27	1.52	0.8
Life Expectancy	Pre-test	27	15.3	11.0
	Post-test	27	17.3	0.8

Furthermore, the research findings, based on Table 3, show that poetry and epic recitation have an effect on the anxiety level of student athletes, as the value obtained for the significance level (Sig. = 0.0001) is smaller than the predicted error margin ($\alpha=0.05$). Thus, it can be claimed that poetry and epic recitation have a significant negative effect on the anxiety of student athletes (i.e., it significantly reduces it). Regarding life expectancy, although the text provides a significance value of 0.131 (which is greater than 0.05, suggesting insignificance), the table below displays a significance value of 0.001. Given that $0.001 < 0.05$, we can claim that poetry and epic recitation have a significant positive effect on students' hope for life.

Table 3. Examination of the impact of poetry and epic recitation on subjects' anxiety and hope for life

Variable	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (p-value)
Anxiety	27	1.77	0.14	62.86	26	0.0001
Life Expectancy	27	0.02	2.07	1.55	26	0.001

Discussion

The research results demonstrated that poetry and epic recitation (Hamaaseh-khani) had a significant negative effect on the anxiety levels of female secondary school students; meaning that the implementation of the poetry and epic recitation program successfully reduced anxiety among the students. This finding can be explained by the emotional, psychological, and motivational nature of poetry and epic literature. Due to its rhythm, musicality, mental imagery, and emotional concepts, poetry profoundly influences individuals' emotions and mental states, creating a sense of mental calm and facilitating emotional release. When students engage in an environment of poetry and epic recitation, their minds shift away from daily pressures, worries, and tensions, allowing them to experience greater tranquility (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016).

Furthermore, many epic poems and texts contain themes of hope, courage, perseverance, effort, and overcoming adversity. These concepts can alter students' perspectives on life's challenges, reinforcing their sense of competence and self-confidence. Anxiety typically rises when an individual feels powerless against problems or perceives the future as threatening; conversely, epic recitation highlights themes like resistance, victory, and hope, fostering a sense of psychological control and reducing feelings of helplessness (Ansari, 2015). Poetry and epic recitation also provide a healthy outlet for emotional release. Adolescents often experience numerous emotions and pressures without proper avenues to express them. The literary and emotional atmosphere of these sessions allows students to better understand their inner feelings and release them indirectly (Pihkala, 2020), leading to reduced psychological tension and anxiety.

From a cognitive perspective, poetry and epic recitation can moderate negative, anxiety-inducing thought patterns. Many anxious students struggle with negative thinking, future-related worries, and fear of failure. Hopeful and motivational poems serve as suitable alternatives, facilitating cognitive restructuring. The positive content encourages a more constructive view of oneself, the future, and one's abilities, thereby lowering psychological tension (Fathallah, 2018). Additionally, group sessions foster a sense of belonging, empathy, and social support. Being in an intimate group setting reduces feelings of loneliness and psychological isolation, helping students feel more secure. These results align with psychological perspectives on art and literature therapy, which posit that artistic activities improve mental health by influencing emotions, cognition, and social relationships. In Iranian culture, poetry has historically been a tool for mental peace, meaning-making, and hope.

The study also revealed that poetry and epic recitation had a significant positive effect on the life expectancy (hope for life) of female secondary school students. This indicates that using poetry and epic texts fostered a more positive attitude toward life, the future, and individual capabilities. Hope is a crucial component of mental health, playing a fundamental role in motivation, persistence, and coping abilities. Adolescents with higher levels of hope are generally more resilient against psychological pressures, frustrations, and academic difficulties, and they perceive more meaning and purpose in life (Lau et al., 2014).

The positive influence on hope for life can be explained through various psychological, emotional, and social lenses. Because of its aesthetic nature, poetry reinforces positive emotions and changes one's outlook. Persian poetry, rich with concepts of hope, effort, patience, and success, enhances feelings of capability and optimism. Epic recitation further strengthens hope by promoting resilience, courage, and self-belief. Epic characters, who persevere despite immense obstacles, serve as models that teach adolescents that challenges are a natural part of life and can be overcome through effort and hope. By identifying with these figures, students gain psychological strength and optimism. Cognitively, this literature helps modify pessimistic thought patterns, enabling a more constructive attitude toward future goals. Moreover, these sessions address the adolescent need for meaning and identity. Epic literature, with its emphasis on dignity, responsibility, and purpose, helps students perceive their lives as more meaningful. Finally, the group aspect provides social belonging and emotional support, which are vital for fostering hope (Cork et al., 2020).

Conclusion

In summary, the research results show that poetry and epic recitation, as an effective cultural-educational intervention, play a significant role in improving the mental health of female secondary school students. This program successfully reduced anxiety-induced emotional tension and significantly increased hope for life, fostering a more positive outlook on the future and individual paths. This model suggests that leveraging literary and epic capacities goes beyond mere academic instruction; it serves as a powerful tool for promoting mental hygiene and strengthening positive psychological resources in adolescents. By creating a positive emotional space, fostering meaning-making, enhancing self-belief, and providing hopeful role models, poetry and epic recitation effectively address two critical pillars of mental health simultaneously: reducing negative factors (anxiety) and strengthening positive factors (hope for life).

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