

Understanding Bibliotherapy Models: A Descriptive Analysis of Recommended Reading Practices

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ABSTRACT

Bibliotherapy, the therapeutic use of literature, is recognized as an effective intervention for promoting emotional, cognitive and academic development across the lifespan. This descriptive qualitative study analyzes bibliotherapy models, age-specific book selection, reading practices, and the role of facilitators, particularly academic librarians, in supporting student well-being and learning outcomes. Drawing on peer-reviewed literature, institutional guides and curated bibliotherapy resources, the study identifies developmental, creative, prescriptive and crisis-oriented bibliotherapy models and examines their application across children, adolescents and adults. The analysis indicates that structured reading practices such as guided discussions, reflective journaling and role-play combined with age-appropriate and culturally relevant literature enhance emotional regulation, self-esteem, resilience and academic engagement. Librarian play a pivotal role in curating collections, facilitating access, guiding reflective activities and collaborating with teachers and counselors to integrate bibliotherapy into the academic environment. The study underscores bibliotherapy's adaptability and provides a practical framework for academic institutions to foster both psychological well-being and academic development through literature-based interventions.

KEYWORDS: Bibliotherapy Models, Reading Interventions, Literature based therapy and Self-help reading practices.

INTRODUCTION

Bibliotherapy is defined as the therapeutic use of literature to support emotional, cognitive and social development and has gained increasing attention as an accessible, low-cost intervention across the lifespan (Janaviciene, 2010; Parker, 2005). From early childhood to adulthood, carefully selected books can serve as tools for emotional regulation, stress coping and resilience. For children, particularly those aged 3-12 years, bibliotherapy promotes empathy, moral understanding and problem-solving skills (Karmalie, 2002; Dirks, 2010). Studies indicate that up to 78% of school-aged children exposed to structured reading interventions demonstrate improved self-awareness and

reduced anxiety (Davis, 2017). As Parker (2005, p.34) asserts, “Through identification with characters, children learn to navigate their emotions safely and reflectively”.

In adolescence (12-19 years), bibliotherapy addresses developmental challenges such as self-esteem, identity formation and career motivation (Ramar, 2014; Eliasa & Iswanti, 2014). Structured reading of career-focused or emotionally resonant literature has been shown to improve adolescents’ self-efficacy scores by 28-36%, promoting confidence and goal-setting (Dharmarajan & Umadevi, 2023). The choice of books, tailored to age and psychological needs, is critical; for example, narrative that mirror adolescent struggles with peer pressure, family conflict or academic stress allow readers to reflect on their own experiences safely (Skinner, 2016).

In adulthood, Bibliotherapy extends to clinical, rehabilitative and educational contexts, helping individuals manage depression, anxiety and professional stress (Smith et al., 2017; Tukhareli, 2011). Randomized trials indicate that guided bibliotherapy interventions can reduce depressive symptoms by over 40% providing a viable complement to conventional therapy (Smith et al., 2017). Book selection at this stage emphasizes cognitive-behavioural content, self-help strategies or reflective narratives that align with adult challenges.

Across all age groups, effective bibliotherapy relies on matching the reader’s developmental level, emotional needs and contextual challenges with appropriate literature. “A story is not just a story; it is a map to understanding oneself and one’s world” (Allen et al. 2012, p.12). By integrating theory, age-specific materials and guided reading practices, bibliotherapy demonstrates measurable benefits in emotional regulation, resilience and cognitive growth across the lifespan.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The practice of bibliotherapy has evolved into a versatile approach to supporting emotional, cognitive and social development across age groups. A key aspect of effective bibliotherapy lies in selecting books that are age-appropriate, culturally relevant and tailored to readers’ specific challenges.

Firstly, to compile the appropriate literature, studies and resources were first considered as summarized in Table 1. The age group was considered an important selection criterion because bibliotherapy practices differ according to the developmental stage of the participants. This helped in comparing age-appropriate reading materials, facilitator roles and expected outcomes for each group.

Secondly, emphasis was given to studies that clearly described different bibliotherapy models, such as developmental bibliotherapy, creative bibliotherapy, prescriptive bibliotherapy, clinical bibliotherapy, therapeutic bibliotherapy, cognitive-behavioural bibliotherapy and self-help bibliotherapy. Only those works that explained the nature, purpose and application of these models were selected. This criterion ensured that the summarised table did not merely list books, but also classified the theoretical and practical approaches used in bibliotherapy.

Third, the outcomes of the studies were carefully examined to ensure that the selected literature provided evidence of effectiveness. Studies were included when they reported outcomes such as improvement in emotional regulation,

empathy, self-esteem, resilience, coping ability, moral reasoning, career motivation, reduction of anxiety and depressive symptoms, social adjustment and psychological support. This helped in identifying the practical value of bibliotherapy in educational, clinical, counselling and library-based settings.

Fourth, preference was given to peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional guides and curated bibliotherapy resources because these sources provided stronger academic credibility. Works that offered empirical evidence case-based observations, structured frameworks or practical recommendations were prioritized. Studies that only mentioned reading as a general activity without explaining bibliotherapy as a method were excluded.

Fifth, the selected studies were examined for their attention to recommended reading practices and suitable reading materials. Books, stories, fairy tales, self-help texts, picture books, poetry, autobiographies and culturally meaningful narratives were included and linked with specific therapeutic developmental or educational objectives. This criterion ensured that the table presented both the bibliotherapy model and the reading material used for intervention.

Finally, the role of the facilitator was considered, as bibliotherapy is often guided by teachers, counsellors, librarians, psychologists, parents or other trained professionals to ensure relevance and reliability. Overall, the literature selection process emphasized studies that explicitly described bibliotherapy models, their application across different age groups, recommended reading practices and facilitator roles. Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional guides and curated bibliotherapy resources that provided empirical evidence or structured frameworks. This systematic selection process enabled a comprehensive synthesis of bibliotherapy models, recommended reading materials, facilitator roles and reported outcomes across children, adolescents and adults.

To provide a structured overview of existing research, the table below synthesises prominent bibliotherapy models, their target age groups, types of bibliotherapy, recommended reading materials and reported effectiveness based on empirical studies and case reports (Parker, 2005; Kang, 2017; Smith et al., 2017).

Table 1: Classification of bibliotherapy models, Recommended reading Materials and Reported Outcomes

Model / Author	Age Group	Type of Bibliotherapy	Recommended Books / Examples	Effectiveness / Outcomes
Parker (2005)	6-12	Developmental	<i>Holes</i> by Louis Sachar, <i>The Tortoise and the Hare</i> by Aesop	Improved character understanding, empathy, moral reasoning and reading comprehension
Dirks (2010)	5-12	Developmental / Interactive	Picture books addressing grief, social inclusion and aggression	Emotional regulation, social integration, coping with anxiety and increased self-awareness

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Allen et al. (2012)	3-12	Creative / Crisis	Trauma-related stories, generic storytelling books	Emotional processing, resilience, problem-solving, post-disaster coping
Kang (2017)	6-12	Developmental	<i>You Are Special, Doggie's Pooh, The Strongest Hen All Over the World</i>	Increased self-esteem, social adjustment, empathy for minority children
Akgun & Benli (2019)	3-6	Developmental / Prescriptive	<i>No One Will Be Cold This Winter</i>	Expression of emotions, social skills and positive emotion regulation
Biscan & Krpan (2023)	6-12	Developmental / Traditional story-based	Latvian tale <i>Grateful Creatures, Children's Games for Developmental of social skills</i>	Critical thinking, emotional growth, ethical reasoning, empathy
Dharmarajan & Umadevi (2023)	7-14	Creative / Developmental / Prescriptive	Example: <i>Can't Hurt Me</i> by David Goggins	Self-efficacy, resilience, coping skills, emotional confidence
Skinner (2016)	12-24	Therapeutic / Developmental	<i>I Like Myself?</i> By Karen Beaumont, <i>Stand Tall</i> , Molly Lou Melon	Emotional resilience, coping with depression, trauma and life stress
Smith et al. (2017)	18+	Self-help / Cognitive Behavioural	<i>Beating the Blues</i> (CBT book), <i>Silence You Mind</i> (Meditation book)	Reduction in depressive symptoms, anxiety and distress; sustained mental health improvement
Eliasa & Iswanti (2014)	16-24	Developmental / Career-motivational	<i>Think and Grow Rich</i> by Napoleon Hill. <i>Feeling Good</i> by David Burns	Increased career motivation, self-confidence and clarity in career decisions
Ramar (2014)	10-19	Cognitive-behavioural	Not specified; literature matching adolescent struggles	Improved self-esteem, constructive self-reflection and reduced depressive symptoms
Janaviciene (2010)	Adults	Clinical / Rehabilitation / Educational	Therapeutic fairy tales, poetry, autobiographies and philosophical texts	Personal development, emotional engagement, coping with illness, stress management
Tukhareli (2011)	6-58	Creative /	<i>My Mommy Has AIDS</i> ,	Emotional resilience,

		Educational / Books-on- prescription	<i>Ana's Story, The Heaven Shop</i>	reduced fear, improved coping strategies and psychological support for vulnerable youth
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Table1 demonstrates the diversity of bibliotherapy applications, ranging from developmental interventions for preschool- and school-aged children to therapeutic and self-help approaches for adolescents and adults. For younger children, books often employ storytelling, role-play and interactive discussion to develop empathy and coping skills. In adolescence, bibliotherapy emphasizes identity formation, self-esteem and motivation through structured reading and reflective exercises. Among adults, particularly those facing mental health challenges, bibliotherapy may involve guided self-help literature, cognitive-behavioural strategies or creative narrative that support emotional regulation and personal growth.

This synthesized evidence highlights several critical elements like the importance of aligning book content with the reader's developmental stage, the facilitator's role in guiding reflection and discussion and the measurable outcomes associated with targeted bibliotherapy programs. By providing this comparative framework, the table serves as a foundation for understanding how various bibliotherapy models are implemented in practices, which types of reading materials are most effective and the corresponding psychological and educational benefits observed across different populations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative research design, aiming to systematically explore existing bibliotherapy models and recommended reading practices. The descriptive approach enables the identification, classification and comparison of bibliotherapy methods across different age groups and settings without manipulating variables (Creswell, 2014). A descriptive qualitative design is appropriate for this study because it allows an in-depth exploration of bibliotherapy models, book selection practices and facilitator roles across different age groups without manipulating variables. This design facilitates the identification, classification and comparison of patterns in literature and practices, providing rich, context-specific insights into the implementation of bibliotherapy in education, library and clinical settings.

The study relies solely on secondary data sources including published literature and institutional guides, which may introduces bias or limit generalizability. Additionally, the effectiveness of bibliotherapy interventions is inferred from reported outcomes rather than direct observation or experimental measurement, restricting the ability to quantify impact across all populations.

Research Questions:

- What bibliotherapy models are commonly used?
- How are books selected for therapeutic or developmental purposes?
- What practices ensure effectiveness in different age groups?

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Objective of the study:

- Identify key bibliotherapy models.
- Analyze book selection and reading practices.
- Understand the roles of facilitators (teachers, librarians and counsellors)

Data Sources

The study draws upon multiple sources of secondary data, including:

- Peer-reviewed journals covering bibliotherapy research, mental health interventions and educational psychology (e.g., Parker, 2005; Dharmarajan & Umadevi, 2023).
- Institutional guides and frameworks from university libraries and mental health institutions such as Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) and Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) as well as bibliotherapy lists.
- Online bibliotherapy resources including curated book recommendations and practical implementation guides (Tolstoy Therapy, 2026).

These sources provided comprehensive insights into bibliotherapy models, book selection criteria and facilitator strategies across age groups.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The analysis indicates that bibliotherapy models are context-specific: developmental models for schools, creative and prescriptive models for mental health or career guidance and crisis bibliotherapy for immediate support. Book selection is central to the intervention's success; it must align with the reader's age, emotional developmental and cultural background. Structured reading practices such as storytelling, discussion, journaling and dramatization enhance reflection and emotional learning. Finally, facilitators teachers, librarians or counselor play a pivotal role in guiding engagement, maintaining a supportive environment and ensuring that bibliotherapy achieves its intended outcomes across different populations.

Table2: Summary of descriptive findings.

Objectives	Findings from Literature	Interpretation
Identify key bibliotherapy models	• Developmental bibliotherapy (Parker, 2005; Dirks, 2010) • Creative bibliotherapy (Allen et al., 2012; Dharmarajan & Umadevi, 2023) • Prescriptive / Self-help bibliotherapy (Smith et al., 2017) • Crisis bibliotherapy (Allen et al., 2012) • Educational bibliotherapy (Eliasa & Iswanti, 2014)	Bibliotherapy is highly adaptable across age groups and contexts. Developmental models are most effective in educational settings, while creative and prescriptive models are suited for mental health or self-improvement purposes. Crisis bibliotherapy is targeted for short-term interventions in vulnerable populations.
Analyze book selection and	• Books must match age and developmental level (Akgun & Benli, 2019;	Appropriate book selection enhances engagement, empathy and learning

reading practices	Kang, 2017) - Content should be culturally relevant and emotionally engaging (Biscan & Krpan, 2023) - Recommended reading practices include guided reading, role-play, journaling, group discussions (Dirks, 2010; Skinner, 2016) - Examples of books: Holes by Louis Sachar, You Are Special by Max Lucado, Beating the Blues by Christopher Williams, Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill	outcomes. Age-appropriate and culturally sensitive books allow readers to relate to characters and situations, improving emotional processing and problem-solving skills, Structured reading activities reinforce reflection and comprehension.
Understand the roles of facilitators	- Teachers, librarians and counsellors act as guides (Dirks, 2010; Tukhareli, 2011) - Required skills: empathy, knowledge of child/adolescent development, ability to lead discussion and reflection (Parker, 2005; Skinner, 2016) - Facilitators ensure safe, structured environments for engagement (Allen et al., 2012)	Facilitators are critical to the effectiveness of bibliotherapy. Their guidance helps students connect with the material, interpret experiences and apply insights to real-life challenges. Trained facilitators can adapt reading activities to individual or group needs, ensuring positive emotional and cognitive outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Table 3: Recommended Age-Specific Books and psychological Needs

Age Group	Psychological Needs / Challenges	Recommended Books
3-6 years (Preschool)	Emotional regulation, Fear, Anxiety, Social Skills.	<i>No One Will Be Cold This Winter</i> (Akgun & Benli, 2019) <i>The Tortoise and the Hare</i> (Parker, 2005) <i>I Like Myself?</i> (Skinner, 2016)
6-12 years (children)	Empathy, Moral Reasoning, Coping with peer pressure.	<i>Holes</i> by Lousi Sachar (parker, 2005) <i>You Are Special</i> (Kang, 2017) <i>Grateful Creatures</i> (Biscan & Krapn, 2023)
12-19 years (Adolescents)	Self-esteem, Identity, Career motivation, Social challenges.	<i>Think and Grow Rich</i> (Eliasa & Iswanti, 2014) <i>Feeling Good</i> (Eliasa & Iswanti, 201), Cognitive-behavioural self-help books
18+ years (Adults)	Depression	<i>Beating the Blues</i> (Smith et al., 2017) <i>Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy</i> (David D. Burns, M.D., 1980) <i>Reasons to Stay Alive</i> (Matt Haig, 2015)
18+ years (Adults)	Anxiety, Stress management	<i>Silence Your Mind</i> (Smith et al., 2017)

		<i>How to Stop Worrying and Start Living</i> (Dale Carnegie, 1948) <i>The Happiness Trap: How to Stop Struggling and Start Living</i> (Dr. Russ Harris, 2007)
18+ years (Adults)	Personal Development	<i>Can't Hurt Me</i> (Factor: Resilience) by David Goggins focuses on mental toughness, courage, endurance and the ability to overcome hardship. <i>Atomic Habits</i> (Factor: Habit Formation) by James Clear focuses on developing positive habits, self-discipline, consistency and behavioural change. <i>Life's Amazing Secrets</i> (Factor: Life Balance) by Gaur Gopal Das focuses on emotional maturity, relationships, personal values and balanced living. <i>Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life</i> (Factor: Purpose in Life) by Hector Garcia and Francesc Miralles focuses on meaning, life satisfaction, direction and purposeful living. <i>The Power of Your Subconscious Mind</i> (Factor: Positive Thinking) by Dr. Joseph Murphy focuses on self-belief, constructive thinking, confidence and mental conditioning. <i>Inner Engineering: A Yogi's Guide to Joy</i> (Factor: Self-awareness) by Sadhguru focuses on inner reflection, emotional control, spiritual wellbeing and personal transformation.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS

- Implement a Bibliotherapy Section in Libraries**
 - Organize books by age group, Psychological need and type of intervention (developmental, creative, prescriptive or crisis bibliotherapy).
 - Use the table above as a template to curate collections that support mental health and emotional development.
- Collaborate with Faculty and Counselors**
 - Partner with teachers, school counsellors and mental health professionals to identify student's needs and recommend suitable reading materials.
- Promote Guided Reading and Reflection**
 - Encourage students to participate in group discussions, reflective journaling or role-play activities connected to the books.
 - Provide guides or short activity instructions alongside the books to enhance engagement.

4. Maintain a Dynamic Bibliotherapy Catalogue

- Regularly update the collection with culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate books.
- Include evidence-based self-help literature to address a wide range of psychological and academic challenges.

5. Facilitator Training

- Train librarians to recognize emotional needs, guide reflective reading and collaborate with mental health professional to implement effective bibliotherapy.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight bibliotherapy as a versatile and effective intervention that supports emotional, cognitive and academic development across the lifespan. Developmental, creative, prescriptive and crisis-oriented bibliotherapy models address diverse students needs; from fostering emotional growth and empathy to enhancing self-efficacy in children, career motivation and mental health in adolescents and adults. The success of bibliotherapy depends not only on age-appropriate, culturally relevant and emotionally resonant book selection but also on structured reading practices such as guided discussions, journaling, role-play and reflective exercises.

Academic librarians play a pivotal role in the process by curating and maintaining bibliotherapy collections aligned with student developmental levels, academic goals and psychological needs. By facilitating access to carefully selected literature, organizing reading activities and collaborating with teachers and counselors, librarians actively support student engagement, self-reflection and learning outcomes. Their guidance ensures that bibliotherapy interventions are both academically enriching and emotionally supportive. Overall bibliotherapy, when implemented with active librarian involvement, emerges as a practical, low-cost and evidence-informed strategy that integrates academic support with emotional well-being. This underscores the importance of training librarians in bibliotherapy methods and embedding such practices within academic libraries to enhance students' holistic development and academic success.

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