

AN EXPLORING STUDY OF BIBLIOTHERAPY IN A LIBRARY SETTING: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

K. R. N. Harshani¹


Abstract

This article offers a thorough examination of the idea of bibliotherapy and specific recommendations for its efficient application in libraries. Bibliotherapy is a subset of expressive therapy that methodically uses books to assist clients in resolving mental, physical, emotional, developmental, or social issues. A complex idea, bibliotherapy is crucial to understanding the core of the library profession in the twenty-first century. The research methodology is predicated on desk research of working correspondence and educational documentation conducted internally and online. An in-depth analysis of the smooth integration of bibliotherapy into library settings is provided in this study, along with insightful recommendations for its practical use. Provide a thorough grasp of the idea and use of bibliotherapy in library settings through this research, highlighting the critical role that librarians play. Research in the field to address one research question: What proof is there in the literature to explain how libraries have gone about offering bibliotherapy? Furthermore, researchers emphasize the many benefits of integrating bibliotherapy programs into libraries, emphasizing the pressing need for enhanced awareness and collaborative efforts to establish bibliotherapy as a widely recognized and easily accessible service within libraries. This collective endeavor undoubtedly contributes to the overall well-being of library users.

Keywords: Bibliotherapy, Reading-therapy, Literary-therapy, Library services,

¹ Senior Lecturer, Department of Library Science and Information Science, University of Kelaniya

Email: nilukah@kln.ac.lk

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0882-6766>



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Introduction

"Reading is an exercise in empathy. To read is to enter another world in a way different from any other art form. The reader is actively participating, activating the pages of a book simply by picking it up and beginning. We discover through reading that we are less alone, as the inner lives of characters on the page become accessible to us. No matter how foreign or different a life experience might be, the writer is always saying to the reader, and the reader to the writer, me too. I've been there too."- DANI SHAPIRO

Bibliotherapy, along with other related practices like dance therapy, music therapy, art therapy, and play therapy, highlights the notion of the comforting, healing power of art in all its forms. (Zanal Abidin, Shaifuddin, & Wan Mohd Saman, 2023).

et al. (2006) have identified six potential objectives for bibliotherapy, which include providing information, offering insights into problems, presenting alternative solutions to challenges, initiating discussions about the issues at hand, exploring fresh attitudes and values regarding these issues, and helping individuals realize that others have faced similar problems. To gain understanding or solve problems related to human development or treatment needs, bibliotherapy is defined as "using written materials or computer programs, or the listening/viewing of audio/videotapes" (Marrs, 1995).

Many individuals attempt to suppress their emotions and feelings tied to life situations, often seeking refuge within the pages of books. Librarians, intimately engaged with readers, lend an empathetic ear to their life stories and endeavor to assist them. Research has been conducted to gauge how books can provide solace and support in various situations. Some books serve as a universal remedy, while others prove beneficial in combating feelings of fatigue, loneliness, psychological absence, and a lack of companionship, love, understanding, self-esteem, or independence. Certain books are instrumental in addressing apathy, offering support, or aiding in self-discovery, particularly among adolescents navigating the challenges of this critical life stage. Reading can lead to catharsis, a process where readers, by sharing emotions with literary characters, find emotional relief (Marinkovic, 2022).

Numerous professionals concur that reading constitutes a constructive activity that can contribute to positive mental health. Reading has been demonstrated to boost empathy, enhance cognitive acuity, and influence behavior. Research conducted within library settings has shown a growing trend where readers turn to books to address their psychological, mental, and emotional concerns, seeking guidance and support from librarians.

Background of the Study

The Greek word for "treatment" is where the word "bibliotherapy" originates. This method comes in a variety of forms, each distinguished by its own function. Crucially, bibliotherapy does not always have to be used to treat psychological disorders—even though the word "therapy" appears in its name (Vukadin, 2022). An alternate definition of bibliotherapy is provided by Gregory and Vessey (2004), who define it as the use of books to assist people in solving problems. Bibliotherapy is now recognized as a helpful strategy that enables librarians to handle emotional, behavioral, and social issues with effectiveness (Noordin et al., 2017). Libraries hold a unique position due to their wealth of resources and connections within the community. Like therapeutic landscapes, they serve as empowering spaces by taking advantage of organizational opportunities to benefit the communities in which they are situated.

The discipline of bibliotherapy is diverse and ever-evolving, incorporating ideas from education, social and community work, psychology, psychiatry, medicine, healthcare, information studies, and literary

studies. Over time, it has changed to reflect changing societal views on health and well-being (McNicol & Brewster, 2021).

Reading is frequently seen to escape from the real world. It enables readers to envision a wide range of scenarios and lose themselves in different worlds. Reading provides a safe haven for many people to explore new possibilities. Readers can empathize with the characters in the story by immersing themselves in an alternate reality and feeling their emotions. This is true even with non-fiction, where readers can be guided through a range of emotional experiences and realizations by credible voices. According to McCaffrey (2016), reading can, therefore be a powerful therapeutic tool, with each reading session providing the reader with a therapeutic experience.

Moreover, the primary goal of libraries' bibliotherapy programs is to help people become more informative and spiritually literate. Because of this, librarians must be highly skilled professionals who are conversant with alternative approaches to addressing emotional and psychological imbalances brought on by dynamic lives and the ever-increasing expectations placed on individuals by society. The application of bibliotherapy in library practice is the focus of this article's historical exploration of the field and how libraries have offered bibliotherapy.

Literature Review

Bibliotherapy is no longer an unfamiliar concept in contemporary library services, particularly in hospital libraries. It is recognized as a powerful approach that enables librarians to more effectively address emotional, behavioral, and social concerns. This transformation underscores the evolving role of libraries and librarians, moving beyond traditional roles as mere custodians of information and books (Noordin, Husaini & Shuhidan, 2017). As a continuation of the altruistic side of librarianship, bibliotherapy recognizes the therapeutic value of books and the advantages that readers can gain from them. As a method that enables librarians to more effectively address emotional, behavioral, and social concerns, bibliotherapy—often summed up as "healing through books" (Smith, 1989: 241)—has garnered much attention (Tukhareli, 2011; Battleson & Nessel, 2012; Arulanantham & Navaneethkrishnan, 2013).

The basic idea of bibliotherapy is to use reading materials for psychiatric therapy or to help with personal problem-solving. It is seen as a service that uses reading's healing power to comfort those in need. It is acknowledged that literary sources can help with complicated problem-solving (Sullivan & Strang, 2002).

There are several ways to approach bibliotherapy in a library setting. In their paper "The Power of Story: The Role of Bibliotherapy for the Library," Allen et al. (2012) highlight important bibliotherapy components in library settings. They stress how important librarians are in establishing secure environments in libraries where kids can grow and express themselves. Further, they suggested storytelling is promoted to give kids realistic situations and role models so they can picture themselves in them and grow as people.

Although the effects of bibliotherapy are discussed in the context of children who have gone through crises, the principles can be applied to any child and could potentially have a positive impact. Additionally, Allen et al. (2012) highlight the active role that librarians play in the bibliotherapy process by proposing a framework for addressing problem-solving with children. Librarians are able to choose pertinent books, start conversations with kids to address their worries and inquiries and create a therapeutic, non-judgmental atmosphere. It is commonly known that bibliotherapy is a valuable strategy for assisting librarians in more effectively addressing emotional, behavioral, and social issues.

Bibliotherapy is the practice of using reading materials to assist people in seeking psychiatric therapy or resolving personal issues. Based on the idea that reading can be therapeutic, it is a service that provides comfort to those in need. In this situation, literary sources are effective resources for figuring out difficult issues (Sullivan & Strang, 2002).

According to this article (Allen et al., 2012), librarians would play a significant role in children's bibliotherapy. In order to address children's concerns and questions in a safe, therapeutic, and supportive environment, librarians can engage children by reading books that are relevant to them and facilitating discussions.

Regarding the roles of librarians and libraries, aligned with the evolving knowledge paradigm, libraries serve as knowledge hubs. In contrast, librarians act as bibliotherapists, guiding individuals in accessing appropriate reading materials and instructing them on how to benefit from them. Librarians are responsible for promoting the advantages and significance of bibliotherapy to foster a knowledgeable, well-informed society with a positive and healthy mindset (Bankar & Patil, 2021). They have identified various issues and their characteristics that can be addressed through bibliotherapy. They have proposed a list of sample books for practitioners to use, tailoring it to the availability and preferences of their library's collection.

Objectives/ Research Questions

The original purpose of this study was to answer the main research question:

RQ 1: What proof exists in the literature to explain how libraries have offered bibliotherapy?

Methodology

The research methodology encompassed an extensive literature review. In the initial phase, we identified several keywords to formulate search strings, which were subsequently used to search for pertinent literature across various databases. For published literature, relevant studies were identified by searching electronic databases (including Emerald, EBSCO, Taylor & Francis, and JSTOR). These databases were selected for their extensive coverage, particularly within the library and information science field.

Furthermore, this study incorporated sources from the World Wide Web, specifically focusing on information gathered from Google Scholar and other non-academic websites dedicated to the topic. In addition to these digital sources, we consulted books on the subject, which were identified through the university's Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC). Further, the reference lists of relevant studies were checked for reports of other potentially relevant studies. To identify relevant literature, we employed a predefined set of search terms closely associated with bibliotherapy within the context of libraries. This systematic approach ensured a thorough examination of the existing body of literature on this subject.

Table 2: Shows the sources and the key terms used in this study

Sources	Online database: Emerald, JSTOR, Taylor & Francis and EBSCO,
World Wide	Web: Google Scholar
Search Terms	Search queries formulation: Bibliotherapy AND library Bibliotherapy
AND History	AND Reading Therapy AND Library Book therapy AND Library
	of Bibliotherapy

The 90 records were obtained from Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis, JSTOR, EBSCO, and Emerald. Twenty-two duplicate (22) articles were eliminated in the screening process. Based on the inclusion criteria that made them eligible for this study, the 68 records that were still in this phase underwent screening. Forty-two (42) irrelevant articles were eliminated during this phase due to their poor quality, missing data, and irrelevant results. In this study, only twenty-one (21) were included.

Results and Discussions

RQ 1: What proof exists in the literature to explain how libraries have offered bibliotherapy?

The Kirkless Council offers hope. Bibliotherapists are required to meet two requirements. These are the love of reading and interpersonal communication skills. Librarians can assist teachers and guidance counselors by offering a bibliography of books with summaries arranged by age and theme. Bibliotherapy relies heavily on the book being used, so having a list like this would be beneficial. There is justification for a librarian to assume the role of bibliotherapist if they are passionate about books and have strong interpersonal skills. Pelias is a certified guidance counselor and bibliotherapist. She provides the following advice to librarians and non-counselors who would like to adopt the role of bibliotherapist:

- 1) Read so that you know a variety of materials that can be used - nothing beats personal knowledge of a story especially a personal connection to a story.*
- 2) Identify significant points of the story that touches on the theme. Make sure not to miss asking questions that dwell on these.*
- 3) Be keen to connections you know the student can make with the selection at hand.*

Based on these valuable suggestions, the bibliotherapist librarian can provide bibliotherapy services within the library. After all, the foundational principle—to every book a reader; to every reader a book—was imparted to countless librarians by the legendary librarian RS Ranganathan both in his day and in this one. However, it will be advantageous if some librarians take literature and psychology courses as part of their education (Jackson, 1962).

Librarians and other school staff members in the Philippines are only now beginning to investigate the possibility of offering bibliotherapy services in academic and school libraries. There is a bibliotherapy collection in the San Beda College elementary and high school libraries. Neither one of the libraries has to conduct bibliotherapy sessions or work in tandem with the guidance counselors. Librarians then direct guidance counselors and teachers to the bibliotherapy collection when they request book titles and a list of books for developmental reading. Similarly, college students can find a collection at the Adamson University library.

Books from the university's bibliotherapy collection cater to older readers and include worksheets to help with introspection. The librarian compiles the readers' worksheet responses. There is a bibliotherapy collection in the Beacon Academy. As the librarian and guidance counselor have started recognizing the issues, problems, worries, and challenges the Academy's high school students face, this collection is expanding. A one-on-one bibliotherapy session will be conducted once the collection of resources for bibliotherapy is reliable and adequately meets the needs of the students. This initiative is a work in progress between the guidance office and the library to improve student services.

Hospital libraries around the world may be significantly impacted by the bibliotherapy programs now offered in public libraries in collaboration with the NHS in the United Kingdom. The hospital library has the potential to become a hub of knowledge, offering detailed information on a range of illnesses and assisting patients in managing their diagnosis and course of treatment. This is particularly true for diseases like cancer, which significantly affect patients' and their families' emotional well-being. Books can offer patients reassurance and practical, helpful information that they can refer to repeatedly while also helping to normalize unusual circumstances. A knowledgeable librarian can tailor information to a patient's needs at various stages of their illness. Hospital librarians can also recommend books for patients to read for pleasure and relaxation, which helps to create a positive atmosphere within the hospital.

The "UWS Big Read 2018" program was launched by the University of the West of Scotland in response to conversations about how to assist students who had expressed feeling alone. The initiative chose five hundred incoming BA Business students and gave them all copies of the book Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine, which explores the theme of isolation and loneliness. After the author visited the university library, students took part in a discussion with her about the book's themes.

The University of the West of Scotland's library has a "mood-boosting" book display with fiction and non-fiction books to help students under stress. The exhibit was put up as a part of the library's comprehensive support program, as staff.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The best way to introduce bibliotherapy to customers or launch a program may only sometimes involve psychology's take on the practice or having a bibliotherapist on staff at the library. Instead, librarians should always work to offer their clients the most significant resources and activities, giving back to the community in various ways (McCaffrey, 2016). Libraries play a crucial role in making knowledge, pleasure, and empowerment accessible through reading, and their impact on the well-being of local communities is immeasurable. It is incumbent upon libraries to seize this opportunity to educate users about this valuable endeavor. Bibliotherapy is an integral part of the librarian's responsibilities. Additionally, leveraging machine learning, a recommender system can be developed for book recommendations tailored to users' preferences. Libraries should actively collaborate with local practitioners and health counselors to facilitate bibliotherapy (Nazi & Akhouri, 2023).

The United States of America was the most productive nation, and the most productive university was Linköping University. It was found that the Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology produced the most results. The effectiveness of bibliotherapy in treating anxiety and depression is the primary area of study for pertinent academics. Future studies should concentrate more on the fields in which bibliotherapy is applied and the procedures and forms involved in implementation. (Xu et al., 2023).

Moreover, providing services to modern library readers necessitates librarians possessing interpersonal skills, such as empathetic dialogue, effective communication, critical thinking for book choices, and discussions on reading materials. Librarians delivering bibliotherapy services should deepen their understanding of psychology and other knowledge relevant to issues that can be addressed through bibliotherapy. Successful implementation of bibliotherapy requires librarians to develop the necessary skills (Khoeini, Noruzi, and Fahimnia, 2019). With numerous literary sources being published on a daily basis, bibliotherapy is not only a very affordable therapeutic approach but also a rapidly developing field.

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