

Impact of bibliotherapy on resilience in special needs children during divorce

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ABSTRACT

Although cognitive intervention programs are used for special needs children who have difficulties such as resilience and problem solving in which their families are in the divorce process, studies on the use of bibliotherapy are very limited. It was investigated whether this assistive technique, which is thought to be both improving and entertaining, has a positive effect on the resilience and interpersonal problem-solving skills of two siblings with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and learning disabilities (LD). Bibliotherapy method able to improve competence capability of the children experienced process of divorce through generating an inherent mechanism over psychological, social and emotional problems they face to while reconstituting their lives as they preferred. Qualitative research method was used in the study. Questions in this method were asked about insight, catharsis, and generalization and open-ended and semi open-ended questions, activity applications of the research agenda and the problem-solving inventory for primary school children was used pre and post intervention as a checklist for data gathering tools. It was concluded that bibliotherapy was effective in improving resilience and problem-solving conversion of negative attitudes of the children with their parents in a process of divorce into positive.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Compared with children from typical families, children from divorced families are at greater risk of having lower school success, behavioral and emotional problems, lower self-esteem and self-confidence, and greater difficulties in social relations [1], [2]. Various studies have shown that as the number of difficulties experienced in childhood increases, the incidence of depressive disorders, substance use disorders, and suicide attempts increases in the future, and more generally, there is a persistent link between children's internalizing and externalizing problems [3], [4]. Several factors affect post-divorce children, such as their age, gender and time since divorce. While younger children are more affected by this condition, the effect decreases as age progresses. In circumstances where divorce is inevitable, the continuity of communication between parents and their children is also a very important factor. The problem here is the sparsity of communication. When the duration of being a single parent increases, the duration of regular contact with children decreases, which negatively affects communication [5]. The increase in divorce has had major impacts on the environments in which children are nurtured and socialized [6]. The increasing rate of divorce globally has emphasized the need for greater support in cultivating resilience among children from divorced families. The breakdown of the

family, which serves as the safest haven for children, profoundly affects them, undermining their sense of attachment and trust. As a result, children who no longer feel secure may exhibit various inappropriate reactions due to heightened anxiety. Since the 2000s, scholarly investigation has progressively concentrated on the critical aspects of divorce that contribute to building and promoting resilience in children, underscoring the global importance of addressing this issue [7].

Resilience that has universal importance is often characterized as the capacity to recover or adapt to major life experiences, such as parental divorce. Resilience is a multi-faceted concept, implying that it is not a binary characteristic had or not possessed by an individual. Resilience is a quality that is cultivated and assimilated over time, enabling individuals to effectively manage and adjust to challenging life circumstances [8]. Several treatments have been devised to assist children who have encountered challenging life circumstances, such as parental divorce. Common kinds of divorce interventions often include individual and group therapy sessions, as well as school-based initiatives. The objective of these therapies is to enhance children's resilience in comprehending and coping with the impact of their parents' divorce [9]. Bibliotherapy, the use of written materials, is often employed as a therapeutic technique to aid people in enhancing their ability to cope with and comprehend different types of traumas and loss [10]. Recent studies (e.g., [11]–[13]) bibliotherapy, utilizing narratives to identify, achieve catharsis, and gain understanding into the functions and roles of different components is an efficacious approach for treating internalizing and externalizing behaviours, including anxiety, fear, and loss.

So far, there have been dozens of studies (e.g., [14]–[16]) this approach is used to standardize a child's response to sorrow in the context of divorce, diminish sensations of seclusion, strengthen the ability to solve problems and bounce back, and foster positive coping mechanisms, such as promoting youngsters to develop advanced cognitive abilities. Nevertheless, there has been little investigation into the use of bibliotherapy as a therapeutic approach to enhance resilience and communication skills in individuals dealing with the difficulties that arise after their parents' divorce. Nevertheless, some data indicates that children who experience divorce might get advantages from bibliotherapy [17]. McCarthy and Chalmers [18] state that the use of this method will provide great benefits for students with special needs, who have a high incidence in schools. Bibliotherapy can be used in preventive and corrective treatments by teaching problem-solving skills to students with special needs or by providing correct responses to trigger stimuli that reveal inappropriate behaviors [19]. In the proactive model of counseling for children with special needs, the conceptual, operational, evaluative, public relations, and personal development of children are the core points. The use of bibliotherapy in educational settings is an appropriate complementary approach for children with special needs and to protect their mental health [20], [21]. Special needs children include children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and learning disability (LD). Children with ADHD experience impairment in multiple domains, such as emotion regulation, basic academic skills [22], behavior regulation, social functioning with low self-regulation and negative problem orientation [23].

Ensuring continued sustainability and developing strong core developmental processes in children affected by traumatic stress is a key role of intervention in children experiencing traumatic stress [24] and adaptability in the face of stressors. Self-regulation, a complex ability to monitor and adjust behavior, cognitions, and emotions to be in line with an individual's goals, involves short- and long-term consequences that can positively or negatively impact these personal goals. To maximize the balance of consequences, children must consider possible response options and evaluate the reward versus cost of each option to adapt responses to everyday challenges, many of which are common to children with ADHD [25].

Consequently, children in particular have difficulty responding appropriately to traumatic situations such as bereavement or abandonment [26] and the study findings emphasized the importance of using bibliotherapy to facilitate emotional healing and maturation in children. In another study, found that children in the bibliotherapy intervention were able to connect with characters in the stories, which allowed them to learn problem-solving and self-reflection skills and improved relationships between children [27] was used pre- and postintervention as a checklist, and it was concluded that the program significantly increased children's interpersonal problem-solving skills [28].

This study investigated the effects of bibliotherapy stories on addressing the negative impact of divorce in a family with children who have special needs. While earlier studies have explored the impact of divorce on typically developing students, they have not explicitly addressed its influence on children with special needs. Further research is needed to explore the benefits of bibliotherapy for children from a divorced family. The entire well-being of children can benefit from this brief, easy-to-administer, cost-effective, empirically supported bibliotherapy intervention not only to help children cope with divorce process. Bibliotherapy applications of parents with children with special needs during the divorce process are limited. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effect of bibliotherapy on developing resilience and problem-solving skills of children with special needs during the divorce process.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research design

The current study used the case study method, which is a qualitative research method. The factors related to the situation were handled with a holistic approach, and how they were affected by the relevant situation was determined. A case study, which is accepted as a research method, is a methodological approach that involves an in-depth examination of a limited system using multiple data collection methods [29]. In this study, two approaches were utilized to ensure validity: member checking and thick description. For member checking, interviews were conducted with two participants. After reading the bibliotherapy stories together, feedback was gathered on both the responses they provided and the conclusions they reached at the final stage. This process served as a means of revisiting and verifying the study's findings. The other method employed was thick description, where the findings obtained from the participants were described in detail. However, due to page limitations and to maintain the article's readability, these descriptions were summarized.

2.2. Participants

The participants were 9-year-old twin siblings who were in the second grade of primary school. Information obtained from class teachers: Denizalp has ADHD disorder accompanied by LD. He has poor social, emotional, and school-level outcomes, including academic underachievement and challenging behaviors. His feelings about learning mathematics are greater than reading, and cognitive engagement, such as willingness and motivation to exert effort to learn reading and comprehension, is low. He has low participation and active involvement in tasks and activities at school. He has a problem with trust in the people around him. He does not see himself as safe. He cannot accept the separation and constantly wants his father to come back. He is experiencing sibling jealousy that requires improvement. He attends school as an inclusion student and takes one-on-one lessons in the resource room.

Information obtained from class teachers: during the stages of separation, Cansu is becoming emotionally, socially and psychologically more positive and optimistic than her brother. She has attention deficit disorder. She is an inclusion student and takes one-on-one lessons in the resource room. Bibliotherapy material preparation: information was obtained from two participants about their favorite cartoon characters, animals and books. The short stories, in which these personal preferences are included, were created for bibliotherapy purposes, and the stories were finalized by receiving feedback from the Turkish lecturer holding the title of associate professor. Stories include positive examples to increase adaptive response to everyday challenges, such as behavioral and emotional self-regulation processes, proactive thinking, problem solving and resilience so that children can consider possible response options and evaluate the reward versus cost of each option to adapt their responses.

The reading skills of the participants were evaluated by using three of these short stories, and it was concluded that the reading skills of the participants were weak; accordingly, it was decided to read the bibliotherapy materials to the participants. Interobserver reliability and application reliability data: Interobserver reliability and application reliability data were checked by listening voice recordings by two specialists from the guidance and psychological counseling and special education teaching departments. The therapy environment and implementing procedure: Biotherapy was carried out in a park very close to the participants' homes. The Park is a quiet and safe place with large trees and benches. In the bibliotherapy sessions, the participants were provided with sufficient time to develop their thoughts about the reading material and the catharsis situation. During the monitoring process, the situation was discussed with various questions, and a conclusion was reached. Questions about interpretation, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation were included in the process.

The researcher has benefited from a number of strategies that will facilitate the operation. For example, after reading the story, she reminded the main story line, target character, emotions, values, and attitudes. In addition, as a communication technique, affirmations were included, and judgmental sentences were avoided. How the main character handles the problem is discussed. The opportunity was given to investigate the similarities between the problems of the participants and the characters in the story. Selected solutions are discussed and evaluated. When necessary, alternative solutions to the problems were identified. Finally, after each session, a small number of presentations were presented to the participants.

Reading material-based general, insight and catharsis-related questions about the "sensitive Munmun" story are as follows:

a. Generalization-related questions:

- What could Munmun, who failed in his classes because he could not manage his emotions, do to obtain good grades and be successful?

b. Insight-related questions:

- How do you feel about the lessons at school?
- Do you have any traits in your life that you find difficult to control? How do you feel when you put effort into it?

- Munmun thinks that at the end of the story, a life in which he controls his emotions would be happier? Do you agree with this idea? Why?
- c. Questions related to catharsis:
 - Munmun in the story used to go to bed and cry whenever he was sad or angry. Do you have times when you cry too? What are you doing these times?
 - His teacher one day gives Munmun and his classmates ideas on managing emotions? Do you think Munmun's teacher is saying something positive and nice? Are there people in your life who have helped in this way?
- d. Questions related to generalization:
 - What do you think about your new way of life? How do you feel? Do you think in this new way of life in which you control your emotions would be happier?
 - Do you have any traits in this new way of life that you find difficult to control? Would you like to control the difficulties?

2.3. Data collection instruments

Data collection: The data of this study were collected with the help of the research agenda, feedback from questions about bibliotherapy, interviews and audio recordings. Additionally, the problem-solving inventory for primary school children inventory (PSIC) developed by Oğuz *et al.* [30] was used as a checklist for pre- and postintervention assessments. Researcher's agenda: during the research, the researcher included audio recordings and the researcher's agenda, which are data collection tools. The content of the agenda includes the session date, session duration, location and time of the session, the topics to be discussed in that session, a summary of the implemented bibliotherapy procedure, the decisions on these topics, the agenda of the next meeting, the date of the meeting and what will be discussed. Questions in the bibliotherapy method: one of the data collection tools used in the research is questions. Questions about bibliotherapy were asked about insight, catharsis, and generalization.

2.4. Social validity questions:

At the end of this study, the researcher prepared social validity questions to assess the effects of the research on the participants in their family life. These questions were asked to the mother, as she had the opportunity to make more observations, as she spent the most time with the participants. The questions asked are as follows: Do you think the bibliotherapy method is successful? Was a change in the participant's behavior noticed after applying this method? Would you recommend this method for another child whose parents are going through the divorce process? Do you think your child's coping skills are supported?

2.5. Ethical considerations

This study ensured that participation was voluntary, allowing participants the option to either accept or refuse engagement after receiving information about the study's objectives, benefits, and potential downsides. A parental consent form for voluntary participation was shared with the mother, providing detailed information about the study's timing, location, and content. The mother was reminded of her right to read the consent form and that she could withdraw from the study at any time if she wished. Additionally, it was explained that the information obtained from the study would be used solely for research purposes and that personal information would be kept confidential. If the mother wished to have access to the study results, she could request in writing that the results be shared exclusively with her.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After transferring the stories as reading materials of the bibliotherapy method to the participants, the findings regarding the coping skills related to resilience, according to the answers received from the participants, are as follows:

Denizalp (D) and Cansu (C)

- 1 - *I am generally pessimistic about the events that I encounter, such as the sensitive Munmun. What do you think?*
- D : *I am not pessimistic. I do not always take a pessimistic view of the problems I face.*
- C : *I am not usually pessimistic about the problems I encounter.*
- 2 - *Understanding that crying does not solve his problems, I struggle patiently in the face of difficulties, as sensitive Munmun finds new ways to solve his problems.*
- D : *I know that I can find solutions to my problems by finding different ways.*

- C : *Yes. I can find new solutions to the problems I encounter.*
- 3 - *I can come up with creative solutions that no one notices, like the Tabby Cat, who makes every effort to drink the water in the bottle in the story "I can solve a problem" and ends it successfully.*
- D : *If I could not solve my problem by finding a solution, I would try another way.*
- C : *I know that a problem can have more than one solution. I can produce new solutions when necessary.*
- 4 - *I can easily adapt to innovations in my life, such as Titi, the little cat, who changed the city she lived in and the school she attended.*
- D : *Although I cannot adapt right away when something changes in my life, I can adapt over time.*
- C : *I can easily adapt to changes in my life...*
- 17 - *I think that changes in my life are not always negative, as in the story of Titi Cat Titi.*
- D : *Changes in my life can be positive or negative.*
- C : *Yes. The things we experience do not always have to be negative.*
- 18 - *I know how to deal with negative living conditions*
- D : *I can try until I get over it.*
- C : *I can cope with negative life conditions by getting support from people I love.*
- 19 - *I am confident*
- D : *Yes.*
- C : *Yes, I am confident.*
- 20 : *20- It is difficult for me to take on responsibilities such as Sinşin in his life story with rules.*
- D : *My self-confidence increases when I take on and handle certain responsibilities.*
- C : *I can take on the responsibilities of my age. For example, I can make my bed when I wake up. However, I cannot make money now.*
- 21 - *I have the confidence and intelligence to get through the job even in the most difficult conditions.*
- D : *I know I'm a smart kid. I can use this for difficult situations.*
- C : *I can use my intelligence to get through difficult situations.*
- 22 - *I can motivate myself to reach my goals*
- D : *When I wake up in the morning and have trouble going to school, I think that I will see my dear friend Cenk, and I get up and get ready immediately.*
- C : *I can reward myself with chocolates when I finish my math homework. I'm doing this in the assignments of another class.*

The PSIC was significantly different before and after the intervention. Factor 1, "confidence in problem-solving skills," has 12 items. Eight out of the 12 items were positive. Factor 2, "self-control," has 7 items. Six out of the 7 items were positive. Factor 3, "avoidance," has 5 items, 4 out of which are positive.

Interobserver reliability and application reliability: The research data were checked and found to be above 85%. At the end of this study, the researcher prepared social validity questions to determine the effects of her research on the participants in their family life. Accordingly, participants' mothers provided positive answers to all social validity questions. The study supports the fact that, the premise behind bibliotherapy is that students recognize and identify with similar story characters, share similar communications, gain new perspectives on life, and discover new ways to interact with adults. It is possible to say that the studies in the literature are consistent with the findings of this article where students recognize and identify with similar story characters, share similar communications, gain new perspectives on life, and discover new ways to interact with adults [31]–[34]. Accordingly, bibliotherapy provides a channel for learning how to solve interpersonal problems by reflecting on how the characters in a book solve their own problems and increase their resilience [28]. The findings are similar to the results of previous studies [35] on this method. Similarly, in another study in which postintervention data provided a significant positive improvement in children, different dimensions of ADHD behaviors [33] were assessed in child-friendly environment.

In this study, it was determined that after the bibliotherapy intervention, the participants demonstrated desirable adaptation when their responses to the divorce situation and related problems were evaluated based on their replies during communication following the catharsis process. Accordingly, the findings of this study show that bibliotherapy is effective in improving the resilience skills of children with special needs. Bibliotherapy techniques can be developed at various critical milestones specific to children's developmental years, such as establishing relationships, confronting challenges, and increasing attention to strategy and academic performance [36], [37]. Our study suggests that, despite the limitation in generalizability due to the small number of participants, students with special needs benefited from bibliotherapy. Interdisciplinary bibliotherapy programs structured for cognitive and emotional development are thought to improve the social skills, self-care skills and academic achievement of children with intellectual disabilities [12]. Children need

opportunities to learn and develop problem-solving and social/emotional skills to cope with life's challenges, bibliotherapy can provide these opportunities [38]. The bibliotherapy method can help children cope with the sadness, depression, trauma and anger experienced during the divorce process [39]. So that bibliotherapy is a technique that can be used with children with special needs.

3. CONCLUSION

Recent observations and findings suggest that the bibliotherapy has been demonstrated to be effective in treating children who divorce. Although some studies have been conducted in school settings, research in natural settings such as parks is currently lacking. This research supports this method as an effective treatment for children with special needs who are coping with divorce; however, more research is needed to strengthen the argument for its use. One can conclude that bibliotherapy is a valuable treatment intervention, and the field could benefit from using this approach to augment other empirically supported treatments for children coping with divorce in various settings. In this study, there were 2 participants, 1 girl and 1 boy, who were in the 2nd grade of primary school and were continuing one-on-one lessons in the resource room. The bibliotherapy method applied to the participants achieved successful results in developing an internal mechanism that can cope with various problems. Moreover, after the stories were told, the participants were more willing to participate in the next session because of the gifts presented. The fact that the study was conducted in a quiet and natural area contributed positively to the effectiveness of the study. Thus, students with special needs can seek similar solutions by clearly witnessing the experiences of others in stories struggling with related problems such as the process of divorce or social acceptance. As a summary, recent observations suggest that the proposed bibliotherapy method is providing conclusive evidence that this approach is functional with students with special needs.

Few studies in the literature have examined the effectiveness of the bibliotherapy method in improving the coping skills of children whose parents are going through the divorce process. In this respect, it is thought that it will contribute to the field. Accordingly, this study provides a comprehensive compilation of the literature describing mild special needs populations where bibliotherapy has been deemed an effective treatment intervention. The study content, including general, insight and catharsis questions about coping skills, was asked at the end of the original stories told in the sessions, and the effect of the bibliotherapy method on coping skills or resilience was examined based on the answers given by the participants. The project not only provides an example of a therapeutic environment such as “natural parks” but also contributes a creative, useful resource for special education teachers, psychological counselors, resource room teachers, and clinicians to use to assist them in incorporating bibliotherapy into their practice.




The primary and general limitation in bibliotherapy was the lack of books or reading materials. This study included stories written specifically for children with mild special needs. Another limitation can be expressed as the limited number of participants and the limited diagnosis of children with special needs. There is a need for studies to be conducted with larger participant sizes and children with a wider spectrum of special needs. Future studies could integrate bibliotherapy with drama activities, implementing a hands-on learning approach, and focus on research involving students with special needs. Additionally, future projects could review books from publishing companies. In conclusion, the existing empirical evidence arguing that bibliotherapy is a valuable, effective treatment intervention for children with mild special needs due to divorce suggests that this treatment is a great asset to the field.

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