

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF BIBLIOTHERAPY IN DEVELOPING COPING SKILLS IN CHILDREN DURING THE DIVORCE PROCESS

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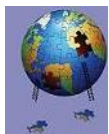
Abstract

The objective of the thesis was to assess the effects of bibliotherapy therapy method on process competence of 1 female and 1 male participant studying at the 1st grade of a primary school in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus with their parents in a process of divorce. It was assumed that generated specific narrations will develop an inherent mechanism in participants and let them to reflect narrative solutions on their actual life; thus minimize the effects of divorce on children. Participatory action research method was used in this thesis. In data acquisition phase of the study, catharsis, insight, generalization questions, recorder and agenda of the researcher were used. Research findings and results revealed that participants were able to set a coherence with the characters in narrations generated with bibliotherapy method, had a chance to learn how to solve the problem, gained a new perspective, was able to produce alternative solutions to problems and cope with current difficulties. Besides, it was observed that inherent mechanisms of the participants were supported to allow them to develop strategies for the solution of problems through supporting indomitableness and coping skills, they were able to develop various coping skills.

Keyword: Divorce, coping skills, bibliotherapy, action research.

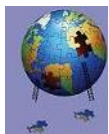
INTRODUCTION

The family, which forms the smallest unit of society, possesses its own unique social structure. It is an institution that sustains itself through socialization, harbors various rules, and facilitates cultural transmission. The socializing function of the family includes teaching and preserving the common rules of social life. The family is also directly interactive with society from various perspectives (economy, psychology, law, etc.) (Alicik, 2003; Akoğlu & Küçükkaragöz, 2018). Divorce is a common social occurrence in today's society (Türkaslan, 2007). According to the Turkish Statistical Institute's 2017 data, the number of divorced couples was 128,411; while in 2018, the crude divorce rate rose by 10.9% to 142,448. The 2018 statistics of the Turkish Statistical Institute indicate that 37.6% of divorces occurred within the first 5 years of marriage, and 20.4% occurred within 6-10 years of marriage. While the Turkish Statistical Institute conducts yearly studies on divorce; in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, a study has been conducted on the reasons for divorce among divorced individuals. This research, conducted with



participants who are divorced individuals, identified major factors leading to divorces among married couples in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus as differences in opinions and conflicts, acts undermining trust and loyalty, insensitivity among spouses, failure to fulfill financial responsibilities expected from the marriage, excessively dedicating time to pleasurable activities thus neglecting the partnership, and the desire to change the living area by moving to another country (Alkan, 2018).

The issues a child faces in the realm of life focus—relationships in daily life, school life and success, and their internal conflicts—can turn into problems that the child is unable to cope with during the process. Now that the child is living with only one of their parents, their relationships with both parents will inevitably change (Öngider, 2013). According to Şentürk (2012), one of the factors affecting the child is with whom the child lives after the divorce, including whether they stay with the parent of the same sex. When examining the long-term behaviors related to the child's age at the time of the divorce, it has been seen that individuals who experience parental separation before the age of seven enter a risk group in terms of divorce (Feldhaus & Heintz-Martini, 2015). Studies on the impact of time elapsed after divorce on depressive thoughts and feelings have found that children who spend 2 to 3 years after their parents' divorce have lower levels of depressive thoughts and feelings compared to those who are only 24 weeks post-divorce (Karakuş, 2003; Öztürk, 2006; Bulut Serin & Öztürk, 2007; Franklin, Mooney-Doyle, 2015; Hockenberry, 2014). Additionally, children may develop a sense of shame due to the divorce and perceive a negative impact on their status within their peer group. This situation can also negatively affect their self-perception. Another response is that children may feel responsible for the divorce themselves, leading to self-assessments that negatively affect their self-worth. At this point, children may see themselves as unworthy of love, useless, or problematic (Franklin, Mooney-Doyle, 2015). In overcoming the challenges faced by individuals, bibliotherapy is known by various names in the literature, relying on the soul-cleansing and healing functions of literature. It is highlighted not only for its therapeutic effect but also for its preventive function. This approach is variously called "healing through reading" (Yeşilyaprak, 2008; Bulut, 2010), "therapy through books" (Turan, 2005), "an approach that helps individuals recognize and solve problems through books" (Öner, 2007), "healing with knowledge" (Yılmaz, 2014), and "bibliopsychological counseling" (Karacan Özdemir, 2016), among others. Its use is practical and effective, and it can be utilized across various educational levels, allowing psychologists, counselors, and educators to apply bibliotherapy for a range of purposes and derive many benefits (Forgan, 2002). Bibliotherapy enables the client to realize that a problem, which they may feel is unique to them, is actually experienced by many others. It emphasizes that correctly timing the introduction of the right book to an individual may not always solve problems but starts a problem-solving process with the story's protagonist. This process generally completes in three stages (Öner and Yeşilyaprak, 2006): In the first stage, the client is introduced to a book, where they need to understand and recognize the protagonist's problem in the story, identify similarities and differences with their own problem, and create an identification. The second stage, if the client is ready, involves a process aimed at expressing emotions. This helps the client become aware of their feelings, undergo catharsis, and achieve a level of relief. In the third and final stage of bibliotherapy, support is provided to gain insight. Factors such as the client's age, educational level, cognitive level, motivation, religious and spiritual orientations, and cultural background provide clues about how functional bibliotherapy can be (Bulut, 2010:48). Moreover, well-chosen books can produce effective outcomes in the cognitive and social development areas of clients (Akinola, 2014: 1281). This is because stories can create an emotional bond with goodness, evoke the desire to do the right thing, provide numerous appropriate examples not found in a child's daily environment, and offer information about rules, facts, and behaviors that help them understand life. Consequently, the books selected in bibliotherapy are tools that can change clients' lives and assist in activating effective decision-making mechanisms (Goddard, 2011; Rozalski, Stewart, & Miller, 2010). With all this preliminary knowledge, counselors must carefully read the selected book or story before



any bibliotherapy session. It is essential to share that bibliotherapy is not just a "story reading time" but a process involving planning, opening, discussion, and closure (Berns, 2004).

Research Purpose

The goal of this study is to assess the efficacy of bibliotherapy in enhancing coping skills among two primary school second-grade students (one boy and one girl) in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, whose parents are in the process of divorcing. The study also incorporates social validity questions to obtain families' perspectives on the therapy's effectiveness during the divorce. Given that the study aims to improve the coping mechanisms of children undergoing their families' divorce, it is of notable significance. The findings are expected to provide a valuable model for guidance counselors and primary school teachers dealing with similar situations.

METHOD

Research Design

This study is structured around a case study approach, a method often employed in qualitative research to explore complex issues in real-life settings. The case study method provides a comprehensive examination of situational factors and their effects, aiming to offer insights into the phenomena under study (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). According to Yin (1984), there are four types of case study designs: 1) Single-unit analysis, focusing on one particular element of the study. 2) Embedded case studies, which involve several units or layers within a single case. 3) Multiple case studies, each analyzed holistically but within the same broader context. 4) Nested case studies, where multiple cases are examined, each with sub-units. For this research, a holistic single-case study design was chosen to concentrate on the unique and specific experiences of the children involved, providing a focused analysis of the effects of bibliotherapy on their coping abilities during their parents' divorce.

Participant Characteristics

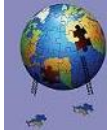
The subjects of this study are two second-grade primary school students, one boy and one girl, experiencing their parents' divorce process. Their characteristics, as obtained through repeated interviews by the co-counselor and the researcher, are as follows:

About Denizalp: Denizalp is known to have trust issues with people around him. He does not feel secure and has difficulty accepting the separation, constantly wishing for his father's return. He experiences sibling jealousy that requires therapeutic intervention. Along with these issues, a decline in his academic performance has been noted. When his desires are denied, he tends to use forceful behaviors and shouting to get what he wants, indicating an emotional and behavioral problem.

About Cansu: Cansu is known to have a learning disability. She is managing the emotional, social, and psychological aspects of the separation more positively and optimistically compared to her brother.

Identification of Participants:

During the preparation phase for bibliotherapy, discussions were held with the two participants and their mothers to gather information about their favorite cartoon characters, animals, and books. This helped to assess their interests, preferences, and their reading and comprehension abilities. To evaluate their reading skills, three texts appropriate for second-grade level were read to them. It was discovered that both participants had weak reading skills, leading to the decision that the bibliotherapy materials would be read by the researcher. The materials were specifically created by a second consultant and then shared with two faculty members for content and spelling accuracy, with corrections made based on their feedback. This process ensured that the bibliotherapy materials were tailored, taking into account individual and cultural



differences, and facilitated an approach that was simplified and guided by the researcher, given the young age of both participants.

Practitioner

The implementation of the study was carried out by the author of the thesis, who holds a bachelor's degree in preschool teaching, has two years of experience as a preschool teacher at a private kindergarten, and is continuing a thesis-based master's program in guidance and psychological counseling at Lefke European University.

Observer:

The inter-rater reliability and implementation reliability of the study were assessed by listening to experts who have completed master's programs in guidance and psychological counseling and Turkish language teaching, and who serve as faculty members in these fields.

Implementation Process Contact was established with the participants' mother to set an appropriate day, time, and location. On the scheduled day and time, the group met and the story sessions were conducted, lasting between 35-45 minutes. During these sessions, discussions revolved around topics previously mentioned, new stories were introduced and narrated. After each story, participants were asked specific questions designed for the story, and their responses were collected. At the end of the session, if the participants had any specific shareable experiences, these were discussed; otherwise, a general topic of mutual interest was chosen for discussion to conclude the session.

Data Collection. Data for this study were collected using a research agenda, feedback from questions related to bibliotherapy, interviews, and audio recordings of these interviews.

Questions Included in the Bibliotherapy Method One of the data collection tools used in the research involves questions aimed at fostering insight, catharsis, and generalization:

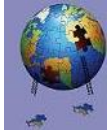
- **Insight:** The process of gaining awareness about one's own feelings, thoughts, and behaviors in given situations.
- **Catharsis:** The experience of relief and purification through vividly recalling intense emotions such as fear or sorrow from the past.
- **Generalization:** The ability to apply the understanding from a specific situation or event to a broader context.

Audio Recording. Another technique used for collecting data in this research is audio recording. Discussions during the sessions were recorded using a Huawei L09 audio recorder to ensure that the conversations were captured completely, could be interpreted, and accessed whenever needed.

Examples of Social Validity Questions. At the conclusion of the study, the researcher prepared social validity questions to gauge the impact of the research on the participants and how these effects reflected in their family life. Given that the mother spends the most time with the children, she was asked these questions to allow for more extensive observation. The questions included are as follows:

FINDINGS

This section presents findings related to the coping skills of participants, derived from their responses to the bibliotherapy sessions and subsequent discussions.



Key Insights from Bibliotherapy Sessions:

Adapting Unpleasant Tasks into Enjoyable Activities:

Denizalp (D): Discussing his dislike for drinking milk, Denizalp shared that he mixes cocoa or jam into his milk on his mother's insistence, making it more palatable for him. He has learned to modify an unpleasant task (drinking milk) by adding something he enjoys to make it better.

Cansu (C): Cansu expressed her fondness for a fluorescent pink, poofy skirt resembling a ballerina's dress, a gift from her aunt. She is careful when wearing it to avoid damage. If it were to tear, she plans to repurpose it into new outfits for her dolls, decorations, or hair accessories, demonstrating creativity and resourcefulness in coping with potential loss.

Dealing with Disappointment:

Denizalp (D): Reflecting on a scenario where his favorite team loses, similar to the character Kiki, Denizalp mentioned that while he would be upset, his love for playing soccer would outweigh his disappointment. He emphasized continuing to play and enjoy soccer despite the outcomes of matches, showing resilience.

Cansu (C): Cansu's response was not recorded for this scenario but would similarly reflect a method of dealing with setbacks in a constructive or emotionally healthy manner.

Analysis of Social Validity Questions:

The responses from both Denizalp's and Cansu's mothers indicate positive changes and improvements in coping skills following the bibliotherapy sessions. Both parents observed not only enhanced problem-solving and coping capabilities but also improvements in their children's social interactions and academic performance.

The positive feedback extends to recommendations for other parents experiencing similar situations, suggesting a strong endorsement of bibliotherapy as an effective tool for helping children navigate the emotional challenges of their parents' divorce.

The perceived effectiveness of the bibliotherapy in supporting coping mechanisms confirms the utility of this therapeutic approach, aligning with the initial goals of the study to enhance the children's ability to deal with their circumstances.

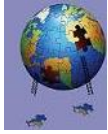
The findings underscore the potential of bibliotherapy to serve as a valuable intervention for children experiencing significant life changes, such as parental divorce. The method has not only helped the participants in coping with immediate challenges but also equipped them with skills that they can use in future situations. This supports the continued use and development of bibliotherapy programs in educational and counseling settings to aid children in emotional and psychological development.

Further Analysis of Participant Responses:

Coping with Sadness or Anger:

Denizalp: He expressed that he feels very sad when his parents argue about rent, seeking solitude to cry where no one can see him. After crying, he approaches his parents to ask them to stop fighting, finding relief when they listen to him. Additionally, he copes by drawing and listening to music, indicating that creative activities help him manage his emotions.

Cansu: Cansu mentioned that she cries quietly in her bed when she misses her father or sees something on TV that reminds her of him. To cope, she seeks comfort by cuddling with her mother in bed, finding solace in physical closeness, which makes her feel better.

***Adapting to Changes:***

Denizalp: While initially struggling with changes, Denizalp shared that he eventually adapts over time, suggesting resilience and an ability to adjust after initial discomfort.

Cansu: Cansu stated that she easily adapts to changes in her life, demonstrating flexibility and a positive attitude toward new circumstances.

Handling Problems:

Denizalp: He confidently stated that he does not give up when faced with a problem, indicating a strong resolve and persistence.

Cansu: Similarly, Cansu expressed that she does not give up easily when encountering difficulties. Instead, she thinks about possible solutions, showing proactive problem-solving skills.

Seeking Help in Difficult Situations:

Denizalp: He is open to seeking help from adults when facing challenges he cannot handle alone, often turning to his mother for support.

Cansu: Cansu also does not hesitate to seek help from adults, typically her teacher or her mother, when she feels overwhelmed, highlighting her understanding of when and how to seek assistance effectively.

Implications for Future Interventions:

The responses indicate both children have developed certain coping mechanisms to deal with emotional stress, changes, and challenges effectively. They utilize both internal strategies, such as self-soothing and problem-solving, and external resources, like seeking adult support. These skills are crucial for emotional resilience and are likely reinforced by their experiences in bibliotherapy sessions.

This information is invaluable for tailoring future bibliotherapy sessions to further enhance these skills or address areas where each child might still feel vulnerable. It also provides insights for parents and educators about the importance of supportive relationships and creative outlets in fostering children's emotional and psychological growth.

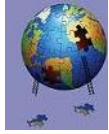
Overall, the bibliotherapy has positively impacted both Denizalp and Cansu, as indicated by their responses and the feedback from their mothers. This success suggests that bibliotherapy could be an effective approach for other children facing similar life challenges, emphasizing its potential for broader application in educational and therapeutic settings.

Conclusion and Discussion

This research examined the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in enhancing coping skills among children undergoing the divorce process. The study involved reading original stories during sessions followed by questions targeting coping skills, with the efficacy of bibliotherapy assessed based on the responses provided by the participants.

The study included two second-grade primary school students, one girl and one boy. The application of bibliotherapy was found to successfully develop internal mechanisms for dealing with various challenges. The findings corroborate those of previous studies (Pehrsson, McMillen, 2007; Bulut, 2010), indicating that bibliotherapy is a valuable tool for supporting children in distress.

The stories used in the research were created with the input from specialists in Guidance and Psychological Counseling teachers, tailored to support the unique circumstances of the children. The effectiveness of the method was further highlighted by the increased eagerness of the participants to attend subsequent sessions



after receiving gifts at the end of each storytelling session. Additionally, conducting the study in a calm, natural environment in cases where divorce is unavoidable, maintaining communication with children is a crucial factor. During our study, the father's passive involvement occasionally negatively impacted the process. One of the factors influencing children during the divorce process is their age. Our participants being young made them more susceptible to the effects of the situation. The situation of living with one parent inevitably changes a child's relationship with both parents (Öngider, 2013). The children staying with their mother and the conflicts between the parents also reflected on the children's communication with both parents. Economic difficulties faced by the participants and their families, exposure to a poor cultural environment, witnessing parental disputes involuntarily, using profanity learned from their surroundings, and using the divorce process to fulfil personal desires, with parents often yielding to these demands—along with frequent illnesses of a grandmother living with the family—were disadvantages encountered during our study.

Another factor affecting children's responses to divorce is their coping skills. Various therapeutic methods exist to help children navigate the divorce process more healthily by developing resilience and coping skills. During the study, bibliotherapy was seen as advantageous due to its ease of implementation and lack of financial burden on individuals.

When evaluating the general findings of the research, bibliotherapy positively influenced coping skills in situations involving developing alternatives and solving problems. Further research supports the efficacy of bibliotherapy (Bulut, 2010; Öner, 2007; Higgins et al., 2005; Harper, 2010; Benan, 2017; Özan, Gülberk Benan, 2017). A literature review did not find previous research specifically examining the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in developing coping skills among children experiencing their parents' divorce, suggesting this study contributes significantly to the field.

Recommendations:

Instead of conducting sessions in natural environments, therapy could be performed in rooms specifically designed for therapeutic methods.

Bibliotherapy session durations could be varied according to the age group of the participant to optimize engagement and effectiveness.

To aid participants in adapting to new and different situations more quickly after bibliotherapy sessions, additional reinforcement through various artistic elements such as songs and poetry could be incorporated.

Recommendations for Future Research:

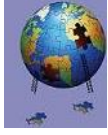
Bibliotherapy studies could be expanded to address different emotional or social crises beyond divorce to change incorrect attitudes and strengthen motivation. Individual and organizational efforts could be made to develop policies that enhance reading habits to increase the success of bibliotherapy. Prior to creating original stories for bibliotherapy, extensive preparation involving articles, theses, educational videos, books, and other resources could facilitate the creation of unique products.

Building on existing research in this field, books suitable for use in bibliotherapy could be authored.

It is recommended that future research in this field involves more interdisciplinary collaborations to enhance the effectiveness of bibliotherapy contributed positively to its effectiveness.

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