



## A Study among Bulgarian Teachers on the Use of the Therapeutic Possibilities of Reading when Working with Preschool Children

Sabina Eftimova<sup>1</sup>, Teodora Genova<sup>2</sup>

University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, Bulgaria<sup>1</sup>

University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, Bulgaria<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

*The topic of the therapeutic potential of reading in kindergartens is gaining increasing popularity among pedagogical specialists and researchers in the field of child development. Bibliotherapy, as a method of using literature to support the emotional and social development of children, is an important tool in the modern educational process. Although the concept of bibliotherapy is relatively new in Bulgaria, more and more teachers are beginning to realize its importance for improving the psycho-emotional state of children. The therapeutic potential of reading is expressed in the ability of literature to help children cope with various emotional and psychological challenges, such as stress, fears, anxiety, as well as to improve socialization and the development of emotional intelligence. The present study aims to examine the attitudes of Bulgarian kindergarten teachers towards the use of the therapeutic potential of reading as a tool for working with children. Reading is recognized as a powerful tool for stimulating emotional and cognitive development in children, while providing opportunities to overcome social, emotional and behavioral challenges. The study examines the level of awareness and readiness of teachers to apply reading in their work for therapeutic purposes. Factors such as knowledge of the methodology of therapeutic reading, personal and professional experience of educators, as well as the availability of support and resources for integrating such practices into the educational process are analyzed. Using quantitative and qualitative research methods, the report summarizes data from a survey and interviews with teachers from different regions of Bulgaria. The results show high motivation among educators to include reading in therapeutic work, but also reveal the need for additional training and guidance for its effective application. The conclusions emphasize the importance of creating methodological materials and training programs to assist teachers in developing skills for using reading as a tool to support the emotional well-being and social adaptation of children in kindergartens.*

**Keywords:** *therapeutic reading, kindergartens, Bulgarian teachers, emotional development, education*

### 1. Introduction

In the contemporary educational context, the importance of pedagogical approaches that support the holistic development of children, while simultaneously addressing their emotional, social and cognitive needs, is growing. One of these approaches is therapeutic reading – a practice that uses literature as a tool to stimulate emotional intelligence, relieve stress and build positive social skills.

In kindergartens, reading often takes a central place in the educational process. In addition to supporting language development and imagination, it can also be used as a means to overcome various emotional and behavioral challenges in children. Therapeutic reading provides an opportunity for teachers to create an environment that stimulates not only the cognitive, but also the emotional development of children.

The aim of this report is to explore the possibility of integrating bibliotherapy as a therapeutic tool in the work of Bulgarian teachers with preschool children. The study includes a survey of teachers, as well as interviews with teachers from different kindergartens in Bulgaria, in order to analyze their attitudes and experiences regarding the use of literature as a means for children's emotional and social development. The results of the study show that despite the great recognition of the benefits of reading in the context of education, a significant number of teachers are not familiar with the concept of bibliotherapy and do not have sufficient knowledge and resources to apply it effectively in their practices.

The study shows that many teachers recognize the emotional and psychological value of literature for children, but the need for additional training and resources remains an important factor limiting the wider application of these methods. Despite these obstacles, there is considerable interest and desire among pedagogical specialists for professional development in this direction, which points to



opportunities for future integration of bibliotherapy into the educational process. Based on the results of the study, the report offers recommendations for creating strategies and approaches for implementing bibliotherapy in kindergartens, which should include teacher training, provision of materials and cooperation with psychologists and other specialists.

## 2. Methodology

For the purposes of the report, a survey was conducted on the topic: "Bibliotherapy in kindergarten - a survey for teachers". The survey is anonymous and voluntary. The questions are aimed at whether the respondents are familiar with bibliotherapy, whether they use its methods and therapeutic functions in their work. The demographic part is aimed at collecting answers about gender, age, education, experience, location. The survey was conducted from February to March 2024 electronically among kindergarten teachers in Bulgaria. A series of interviews were also conducted among teachers with different professional and work experience.

## 3. Analysis of the Results Obtained

When asked: "How often do you use reading fiction as part of the educational process?" 53.8% of respondents indicated that they do it constantly, and 39.4% - several times a week (Table 1).

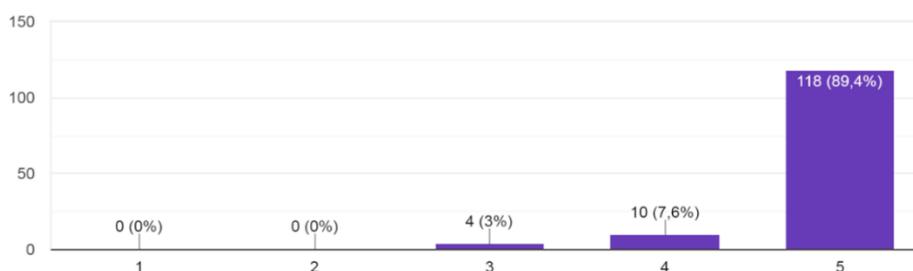
**Table 1**

Constantly	Several times a week	Once or twice a month	Rarely	Never
53.8%	39.4%	3%	3.8%	-

Over half of teachers regularly use fiction in their work, which highlights its important role as a means of educational impact. A significant number of teachers integrate it frequently, although not daily, which is probably dictated by the need for diversity in teaching methods. A small proportion of teachers rarely use fiction, probably due to a lack of time, resources or preparation, and a minimal share of the respondents hardly include it in their practice. This raises the question of the need for support and encouragement for its wider application.

These results confirm the importance of fiction in the daily work of Bulgarian teachers, while highlighting the need for additional efforts to overcome the obstacles faced by those who use it less frequently.

"What is your opinion about the importance of reading for the emotional development of children in kindergarten?" (Fig.1).



**Fig. 1**

**Rating 5 (89.4%):** Almost all teachers surveyed strongly acknowledge the exceptional importance of reading for children's emotional development, rating it with the highest value. This highlights a broad understanding of the importance of literature as a tool for emotional intelligence, empathy, and social skills.

**Rating 4 (7.6%):** A small percentage of participants also rate the importance of reading highly, but with some reservations. This group may indicate that while reading is important, it should be combined with other methods to support emotional development.

**Rating 3 (3%):** A minimum number of respondents show a neutral position or moderate assessment of the importance of reading for children's emotional development.

The lack of responses in categories 1 and 2 (low and very low importance) clearly indicates that there are no respondents who consider reading to be an insignificant or useless tool in this context.



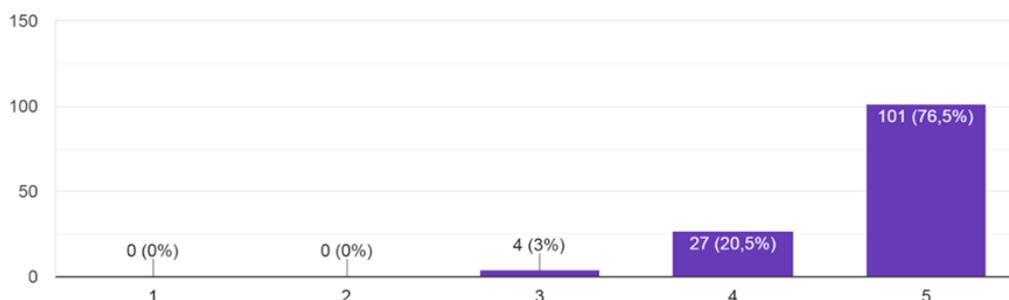
The analysis of the answers to the question: "Do you think that reading can have a therapeutic effect on children?" shows the following distribution:

Rating 5 (76.5%): The majority of respondents strongly believe that reading has a strong therapeutic impact on children. This highlights the importance of reading as a tool for emotional support, stress management, and promoting social skills.

Rating 4 (20.5%): A significant proportion of participants also supports the therapeutic potential of reading, but with some reservations, possibly due to a lack of practical experience or a need for additional evidence.

Rating 3 (3%): A small percentage of respondents show moderate agreement or a neutral position regarding the therapeutic effect of reading.

The lack of ratings in categories 1 and 2 (low or no importance) is a clear indicator that all study participants recognize some degree of therapeutic impact that reading can have on children (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2**

"Do you think that by reading literary works, one can work on resolving conflicts, facilitating adaptation, accepting differences, etc. with children in kindergarten?" – 73.5% of respondents strongly believe that reading literary works is an effective means of resolving conflicts, facilitating adaptation and accepting differences with children in kindergarten. 25% believe that literature partially contributes to these processes, while only 1.5% express skepticism about its role. These data clearly show the prevailing trust in literature as a tool for social and emotional development, emphasizing its importance in pedagogical work with children.

"Are you familiar with the possibilities of using bibliotherapy in kindergarten?" only 18.2% of teachers said they were familiar, 28.8% partially familiar, and 53% not familiar (Table 2).

**Table 2**

Yes	No	Partly
18.2%	53%	28.8

Eighteen point two per cent (18.2%) of teachers stated that they were familiar with bibliotherapy, which represents a small proportion of respondents. This indicates that only a limited number of educators have the necessary knowledge to implement this approach in practice.

Twenty-eight point eight per cent (28.8%) are partially familiar, suggesting that these teachers have a vague idea of the concept but are probably not confident in its effective use.

Fifty-three per cent (53%) are not familiar with the possibilities of using bibliotherapy, which demonstrates a significant deficit in the awareness and training of educators on this topic.

Possible actions to change this trend are the following:

- Raising awareness: By organizing trainings, seminars and practical workshops to familiarize teachers with the basic principles and benefits of bibliotherapy.
- Providing resources and guidance: Developing methodological materials to facilitate the implementation of bibliotherapy in kindergarten.
- Creating a supportive environment: Incorporating bibliotherapy as part of educational policies and teacher training programs.

The low level of familiarity with bibliotherapy among teachers represents a missed opportunity to more effectively use literature as a tool to support children's emotional and social development.

The results of the next question are derivative – "Have you undergone training that presented the possibilities of bibliotherapy?", where only 3.8% have undergone training that discussed the



possibilities of bibliotherapy. This is an extremely low percentage, which highlights the lack of sufficient opportunities for professional development in this field. Those who have undergone training indicate that this took place in a university environment.

Answer "No" (93.9%): Almost all respondents indicated that they have not participated in such training. This result clearly shows a serious deficit in the provision of specialized training for teachers on bibliotherapy.

Answer "I don't remember" (2.3%): A small proportion of respondents are not sure whether they have participated in such training, which may reflect both a lack of commitment and a lack of information about the goals and content of the qualification courses conducted.

These data highlight the need to create and promote training programs that familiarize teachers with bibliotherapy as an effective tool for children's emotional and social development. The lack of such training limits teachers' ability to use the therapeutic potential of literature in their practice.

When asked "Do you use bibliotherapy techniques in your work?" the results show the following:

Twenty-seven point three per cent (27.3%) of respondents use bibliotherapy, but mostly rarely.

Thirty-seven point nine per cent (37.9%) indicated that they had not used bibliotherapy but were interested in it, which highlights the potential for wider application given the availability of resources or training.

Almost 60% of participants (including those who do not use the techniques and do not find them appropriate) do not apply bibliotherapy in their work.

Overall, the data show that although bibliotherapy is not widespread, there is a significant interest in its application, which can be developed through targeted support and training.

When asked "What types of works do you think are most suitable for bibliotherapy with preschool children?" 62.9% of the respondents indicated the choice of fairy tales that support children's emotional development. The most appropriate works for bibliotherapy depend on the individual needs of children. Fairy tales are a universal means of forming moral and emotional values, while realistic stories and poetry are effective in dealing with specific situations. Successful bibliotherapy requires an individual approach, tailored to the age, interests and emotional state of children.

The question "Do you encounter challenges in implementing bibliotherapy in the educational process? If so, please share what they are." receives few responses, which is expected, given the fact that only a small percentage of respondents are familiar with the possibilities of using bibliotherapy in kindergarten.

To the question "Are you familiar with translated publications or those by Bulgarian authors with psychotherapeutic works for children?" only 9.2% of respondents answered positively, which highlights the limited awareness of the existence of such works.

When asked "What resources or support would you like to receive to more effectively implement bibliotherapy in your work?", teachers indicate several basic needs:

Forty-one point four per cent (41.4%) of respondents want access to a variety of materials and resources, such as books, methodological guidelines, scripts and digital libraries. The lack of appropriate resources is a major obstacle to the effective implementation of bibliotherapy.

Thirty-three point six per cent (33.6%) of respondents express a desire for training and workshops to develop skills, which highlights the interest in deepening knowledge and acquiring practical skills.

Twelve point five per cent (12.5%) of respondents seek workshops to exchange experiences with colleagues as a means of sharing good practices and adapting new approaches.

Eleven point seven per cent (11.7%) of respondents need support from psychologists or specialists, which highlights the importance of an interdisciplinary approach, especially when working with children with emotional or behavioral difficulties.

The evidence clearly shows the need for practical resources, targeted training, and professional support to implement bibliotherapy more effectively. Combining these elements can significantly improve the impact of bibliotherapy on children.

To the question "If you use bibliotherapy methods in your practice, how do you assess their impact on children?" the results reveal the following trends:

Fifty-four point six per cent (54.6%) of respondents indicated that they do not apply bibliotherapy methods. This is likely due to a lack of knowledge, resources, or a perceived need to use them.

Recommendations: Raise awareness of the benefits of bibliotherapy through training and provision of appropriate resources.

Thirty-four point five per cent (34.5%) of teachers regularly read books with children in their free time, which indicates awareness of the importance of reading, but not necessarily as a targeted therapeutic method. Most teachers rely on observation of children's behavior and emotional state to assess the effects.

Recommendations: Create standard monitoring tools to facilitate teachers in systematically tracking emotional and social changes in children.



Six per cent (6%) of teachers have not used bibliotherapy, but are interested, which reveals potential for introducing such methods in the future.

A small proportion of teachers use surveys, parent feedback, and other assessment methods, which indicates limited systematization in tracking the effects of bibliotherapy.

Overall, the results highlight the need for more training, access to resources, and the development of clear evaluation methodologies to expand the effective implementation of bibliotherapy in educational practice.

The series of interviews conducted encompass teachers with different professional backgrounds and work experience, allowing for the collection of diverse opinions, perspectives and experiences. The results of the interviews offer valuable information about the differences in teachers' attitudes, needs and expectations, depending on their professional background and experience, allowing for a better understanding of the realities in the educational environment.

The interviews reveal differences in teachers' opinions regarding the effectiveness of bibliotherapy. Some teachers strongly believe in its therapeutic potential, emphasizing its role in the emotional and social development of children. They define it as an effective tool for dealing with emotional problems and developing emotional intelligence. At the same time, others, such as a teacher from Burgas, express skepticism and uncertainty about the effectiveness of the method, which reflects differences in individual experiences and perceptions.

Many of the teachers interviewed cite the lack of sufficient training and resources as a major obstacle to implementing bibliotherapy. They expressed a desire for professional development and access to specialized materials, which highlights the need for better awareness and organization of training on the application of this method.

There are also varying degrees of openness to new pedagogical approaches. While some teachers are willing to embrace bibliotherapy and experiment with it in their practice, others remain more reserved, suggesting the need to overcome resistance and uncertainty through better preparation and support.

The results of the interviews show that bibliotherapy is not fully known or integrated into educational practice. For its successful implementation the following is necessary:

- Organizing targeted training for teachers;
- Providing access to resources and materials for bibliotherapy;
- Promoting the sharing of good practices and experience among pedagogical specialists.

Overall, the study reveals the potential of bibliotherapy, but also highlights the need for better support and encouragement for teachers in its implementation.

The analysis of the demographic part reveals the following results: 93.1% are women, with a predominant percentage of 33.3% aged between 40-49 years, and 40.9% live in the capital, 33.3% in a small town, 18.9% in a regional town and only 6.8% are from villages (Sofia, Bankya, Burgas, Vidin, Dupnitsa, Plovdiv, Haskovo, etc.). 61.2% have a master's degree, 34.1% have a bachelor's degree, 3.9% have a professional bachelor's degree and one of the respondents has a doctoral degree. The largest share (29.4%) of the surveyed teachers has over 20 years of work experience in kindergarten. This shows that a significant part of the respondents have many years of experience, which may have an impact on their attitudes and working methods. The second largest group (25.4%) are teachers with 1-5 years of experience, suggesting that a significant proportion of respondents are relatively new to the profession. They are likely to be more open to new methods and practices, including the use of bibliotherapy. Teachers with 5-10 years of experience represent 21.4% of respondents. This group may have a moderate balance between traditional methods and innovative approaches in their work. Fourteen point three per cent (14.3%) of respondents have 10-15 years of experience, placing them at an intermediate stage of their career, likely with significant professional knowledge and experience in working with children. The smallest proportion of teachers (9.5%) has 15-20 years of experience. This group represents fewer respondents, but is experienced enough to use a wide range of educational methods.

The distribution of experience shows a balanced representation of teachers with different levels of experience, from new entrants to those with over 20 years in the profession. This provides an opportunity to compare attitudes towards innovative methods, such as bibliotherapy, based on their professional experience. Teachers with less experience are likely to be more open to new methods, while those with many years of experience may be inclined to use more traditional approaches.

#### 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

- Professional development of teachers: Specialized training courses need to be created to prepare pedagogical specialists to apply bibliotherapy methods in working with young children.



These programs should combine theoretical knowledge with practical exercises, including examples of using different literary works for therapeutic purposes. Providing regular training is essential to keep teachers up to date with new research and approaches in bibliotherapy.

- **Resource and Material Development:** Effective implementation of bibliotherapy requires the creation of resources that meet the needs of preschool children. This includes selecting appropriate books and materials that can be used for therapeutic purposes. Childcare facilities can seek partnerships with publishers or obtain funding to create libraries of bibliotherapy-related resources.
- **Partnerships with psychologists and specialists:** For a more successful implementation of bibliotherapy, it is important for kindergartens to work closely with child psychologists and other specialists in the field of emotional development. These professionals can provide valuable guidance and advice on the use of literature as a therapeutic tool. Seminars and workshops between teachers and psychologists will facilitate better interaction and exchange of experience.
- **Pilot projects and exchange of experiences:** The launch of pilot projects in several kindergartens will provide practical information on the application of bibliotherapy in the educational environment. These projects can serve as examples for other institutions and will help overcome the challenges of implementing the method. The creation of platforms for exchange of experiences will facilitate the sharing of successful practices and methods.
- **Integrating bibliotherapy into the curriculum:** Incorporating bibliotherapy into preschool curricula is essential for the long-term success of the method. This can be achieved by regularly incorporating therapeutic reading into the daily activities of kindergartens. Planning book sessions that focus on specific emotional and social themes will help children develop emotional intelligence and social skills.
- **Parental support and involvement:** Involving parents in the bibliotherapy process is an important element for the success of the method. Parents can be invited to participate in joint reading sessions or receive guidance on the application of bibliotherapy in the home environment. Organizing campaigns and workshops for parents will help create broad support for children outside of school.
- **Assessing the impact of bibliotherapy:** To ensure the effectiveness of bibliotherapy, it is necessary to establish a system for monitoring the results. This includes regular surveys and interviews with teachers, parents and psychologists, as well as observations of the social and emotional development of children. Collecting data on the impact of bibliotherapy will help to refine practices and adapt approaches to the needs of children.
- **The implementation of bibliotherapy in kindergartens** has significant potential to improve the emotional and social development of children. For the successful implementation of the method, it is important to take strategic steps such as teacher training, provision of resources and partnerships with specialists. The long-term success of bibliotherapy depends on its integration into the curriculum, parental support and systematic monitoring of the effect on children.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that bibliotherapy offers significant potential for the emotional and social development of children in kindergartens. Although some teachers recognize the benefits of the therapeutic effect of reading and use literature as a tool to support children, there is still insufficient awareness of the specific therapeutic possibilities of bibliotherapy. The lack of sufficient training and methodological preparation for the application of these methods, as well as limited access to resources and adapted materials, hinder the wider implementation of bibliotherapy approaches in educational practice.

To realize the full potential of bibliotherapy, it is necessary to invest efforts in the professional training of teachers, providing courses and seminars that prepare them to effectively use therapeutic reading methods. In addition, the creation of platforms for the exchange of experience between pedagogical specialists and cooperation with psychologists and other professionals in the field of emotional development will contribute to increasing the effectiveness of bibliotherapy.

It is also important to provide support for childcare facilities that want to implement bibliotherapy programs by including them within educational policies and strategies for the development of



preschool education. Increasing public understanding of the therapeutic value of bibliotherapy will help its wider acceptance and integration into the educational process.

In conclusion, although bibliotherapy has significant potential to improve children's emotional well-being, its successful implementation requires strategic efforts to provide training, resources, and institutional support, as well as the active engagement of parents and professionals in the process.

### **Acknowledgements**

This publication is implemented under the project "Research on Attitudes towards the Therapeutic Potential of Reading in Atypical Situations for the Individual" with Contract No. KP-06-N45/2 of 30.11.2020, funded by the National Research Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science, headed by Chief Assistant Professor Sabina Kirilova Eftimova-Ilieva, PhD.

### **REFERENCES**

- [1] Eftimova, S., T. Todorova, L. Parijkova, K. Mincheva, P. Mukanova. " Bibliotherapy - Academic Education - Librarians ", INTED21, 2021, pp. 6758-6762. doi: 10.21125/inted.2021.1345
- [2] Mincheva, K. " Educational Role of the Children's Illustrated Book Through the Child's View: Results of a Study ", EDULEARN21 2021, 2021, pp. 3998-4004. doi.org/10.21125/edulearn.2021
- [3] Mukanova, P., S. Eftimova, E. Popova, A. Petkova. " Global Initiatives Related to the Therapeutic Function of Reading in a Pandemic ", INTED2022, 2022, pp. 2838-2842. doi: 10.21125/inted.2022.0818
- [4] Parijkova, L. "Read - So You Never Feel Alone" - Initiatives Born During the Pandemic and Related to the Healing Power of Books ", EDULEARN21, 2021, pp. 4767-4771. doi: doi.org/10.21125/edulearn.2021