

Enhancing Psychological Flexibility through Reading-Based Bibliotherapy in University Students: A Mixed-Methods Study

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The objective of this study is to examine the effect of bibliotherapy on the psychological flexibility of undergraduate students enrolled in the Turkish Language Teaching program. The study sample consisted of students enrolled at a public university. The experimental group comprised 38 participants, while the control group comprised 31 participants. Quantitative data were collected from both the experimental and control groups, while qualitative data were obtained through interviews with 17 experimental group participants who volunteered. Quantitative data were collected using the Personalized Psychological Flexibility Scale and analyzed via One-Way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) to evaluate the intervention's effect while controlling for baseline differences. Qualitative data were collected using a semi-structured interview form prepared by the researchers. After transcribing the audio recordings, the data were analyzed using a theory-driven approach based on the psychological flexibility model and reflexive thematic analysis approach. Quantitative findings showed that, when pre-test scores were controlled for, participants in the experimental group who participated in bibliotherapy exhibited a significant reduction in avoidance levels compared to the control group, while their levels of acceptance and committed action increased significantly. The qualitative findings revealed that the participants showed positive developments in the core processes of psychological flexibility. These results suggest that bibliotherapy applications can be integrated into Turkish language teacher education programs. Furthermore, it is recommended that the effectiveness of this approach be examined in different teacher training programs and other university departments.

Keywords. Bibliotherapy, psychological flexibility, university students/students in the Turkish language teaching undergraduate program, mixed-methods research

Expectations regarding today's college students have changed and diversified. Students are expected to adapt to technology-driven changes in living conditions, cope with uncertainty, and maintain psychological flexibility. Psychological well-being is closely linked to academic success, academic adjustment, and mental health (Arslan, 2023; Arslan & Genç, 2022; Arslan et al., 2022a). This situation indicates the need to support protective factors that strengthen students' psychological adjustment. In this context, psychological flexibility has become one of the most widely studied concepts in positive psychology and education in recent years. It enables students to respond effectively in line with their values when faced with stressful experiences and to maintain their psychological functioning. Psychological flexibility is defined as an individual's ability to focus on the present moment despite challenging emotions and thoughts. It also involves maintaining behaviors consistent with personal values and flexibly adjusting actions to align with long-term goals as environmental conditions change (Hayes et al., 2006).

Research demonstrates that psychological flexibility is positively associated with academic adjustment, self-regulation, and life satisfaction (Arslan & Allen, 2022; Gloster et al., 2021).

Psychological flexibility facilitates students' adaptation to academic processes and is positively associated with academic motivation, learning engagement, and subjective well-being (Asikainen et al., 2023; López-Crespo et al., 2025). Current research suggests that psychological flexibility supports positive outcomes such as job engagement, life meaning, professional self-efficacy, and psychological well-being. Conversely, psychological flexibility also serves a protective function against risk factors such as burnout, occupational stress, and emotional overload (Çelik & Tuzgöl-Dost, 2025; Kämper et al., 2026). Numerous studies highlight that psychological flexibility influences cognitive and affective factors, including motivation, professional development, psychological well-being, and stress (Cyniak-Cieciura, 2021; Özenli & Yakıcı, 2025).

Recent studies suggest that bibliotherapy significantly enhances individuals' self-awareness, empathy, emotional regulation, psychological flexibility, and well-being (Liao et al., 2025; Sridhar & Vaughn, 2000). Studies have found that bibliotherapy interventions (book-based interventions) increase life satisfaction and psychological well-being by reducing negative emotions (Arslan et al., 2022b; Wu et al., 2025). However, research examining the effects of bibliotherapy on psychological flexibility, and the processes underlying these effects, remains limited. This is particularly true of experimental studies that treat psychological

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flexibility as the primary outcome (Canty, 2017; Brewster & McNicol, 2021). Despite this limited evidence, theoretical studies (Tanhan et al., 2026) and applied research (Doyumğaç, 2026) have highlighted the potential of bibliotherapy as an approach applicable across various intervention contexts, particularly in education. More importantly, bibliotherapy studies conducted with undergraduate students majoring in Turkish language education remain scarce (Doyumğaç, 2026; Türkben, 2022).

This gap is particularly important in the context of teacher education. The Türkiye Century Education Model aims to nurture students into individuals who are critical thinkers, problem solvers, adaptable to changing conditions, and possess well-developed social-emotional skills (Ministry of National Education [MNE], 2024). As future teachers will play a central role in fostering these competencies, supporting their own psychological flexibility and familiarizing them with bibliotherapy practices may contribute to both their personal and professional development.

Theoretical Framework

Bibliotherapy and Psychological Flexibility

Bibliotherapy is based on the stages of identification, catharsis, and insight that an individual experiences during the reading process (Afolayan, 1992). Bibliotherapy is a systematic approach that fosters insight, emotional resilience, and behavioral change in individuals experiencing emotional difficulties (Rubin, 1979; Shechtman, 2009). It has been demonstrated that bibliotherapy also supports the fundamental mechanisms of psychological flexibility, such as self-awareness, perspective-taking, and acceptance of internal experiences (Heath et al., 2017). Through literary characters and narratives, individuals can explore alternative perspectives, confront emotions they have been avoiding, and strengthen their processes of making sense of their life experiences. These experiences have the potential to reduce experiential avoidance and cognitive rigidity (Shechtman, 2009). Therefore, bibliotherapy can be considered a complementary approach that supports interventions aimed at increasing psychological flexibility (Hayes et al., 2012). Psychological flexibility is defined as an individual's capacity to act in accordance with their personal values by accepting, rather than attempting to eliminate, challenging thoughts, emotions, and experiences (Hayes et al., 2012). Thus, psychological flexibility also encompasses an individual's ability to exhibit behaviors consistent with their values despite the obstacles they face. This aligns with contemporary approaches that highlight dimensions of psychological flexibility such as value-oriented behavior, reduced experiential avoidance, and the ability to benefit from distressing experiences (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010; Uğur et al., 2021).

Studies demonstrating that bibliotherapy interventions have positive effects on psychological well-being and psychological flexibility (French et al., 2017; Muto et al., 2011; Tanhan et al., 2026) indicate that reading-based interventions help individuals exhibit more adaptive and value-oriented behaviors in the face of challenging experiences. This contributes to individuals' ability to continue behaving in accordance with their personal values despite the difficulties they face, thereby supporting one of the fundamental functions of psychological flexibility. In this regard, it can be argued that bibliotherapy supports the core components of psychological flexibility—acceptance, cognitive defusion, and value-oriented

behavior (Hayes et al., 2006, 2012) through the processes of engagement, identification, catharsis, insight, and universalization (Heath et al., 2005). However, the limited number of studies directly examining the relationship between bibliotherapy and psychological flexibility, and the fact that this relationship has not been sufficiently investigated, particularly within the framework of the psychological flexibility model, in an educational context (Tanhan et al., 2026), highlight the need for experimental and mixed-methods research in this field.

Bibliotherapy is one of the approaches that can help individuals get to know themselves better, understand human behavior, improve their social relationships, and develop more functional solutions to life's problems (Afolayan, 1992; Rubin, 1979). In the bibliotherapy process, individuals have the opportunity to reevaluate their own life experiences within a safe context (Mendoza & Dillman-Taylor, 2024; Žunkovič, 2025). Bibliotherapy is also recognized as an educational approach that supports the personal and professional development of teacher candidates. Bibliotherapy supports individuals' emotional, social, and cognitive development by increasing self-awareness and fostering processes of self-identification and reflective thinking (Lutovac & Kaasila, 2020; Morawski, 1997; Gumber, 2021; Jack & Ronan, 2008). In this regard, bibliotherapy aligns with the Türkiye Century Education Model's (2024) goals of self-assessment, the development of a reader's identity, and values-based education. However, existing research has largely focused on bibliotherapy's effects on psychological well-being (Arslan et al., 2022b), psychological flexibility (Wu et al., 2025), and emotional well-being (Septiana et al., 2023). However, evidence regarding the processes through which bibliotherapy supports psychological flexibility appears to be insufficient. In this context, this study examined the effect of bibliotherapy on the psychological flexibility of university students (undergraduate students enrolled in the Turkish Language Teaching program) and the underlying psychological processes through a mixed-methods approach.

Method

Research Design

In this study, an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was adopted. In the first phase of the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, quantitative data are collected and analyzed; in the second phase, qualitative data are obtained to explain, elaborate on, and interpret the quantitative findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In the quantitative phase of the study, a pretest-posttest controlled group quasi-experimental design was used to determine, through a mixed-methods approach, the effect of bibliotherapy on the psychological flexibility of university students (undergraduate students enrolled in the Turkish Language Teaching program) and the psychological processes underlying this effect. Using the data obtained in this phase, the effect of bibliotherapy on the participants' psychological flexibility was statistically analyzed. Following the quantitative findings, the study moved to the qualitative phase, during which semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. The primary objective of the qualitative phase was to provide a more in-depth explanation of the quantitative results and to reveal the participants' experiences, perceptions, and learning processes regarding psychological flexibility.

Participants

The study included university students enrolled in the Faculty of Education at a state university (undergraduate students in the Turkish Language Teaching program). Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which individuals possessing the information most relevant to the research objective are deliberately selected based on specific criteria. In this study, participants were selected according to predefined characteristics to shed deeper light on the research objective and to obtain rich and meaningful data (Patton, 2015). It was assumed that the participants enrolled in the undergraduate Turkish Language Teaching program had an appropriate academic foundation for the bibliotherapy process, based on the skills they had developed through reading education and text analysis courses, including text comprehension, interpretation, and meaning-making through texts (Doyumğaç, 2026). The quantitative phase of the study included 69 university students (undergraduate students enrolled in the Turkish Language Teaching program), 38 of whom were in the experimental group and 31 in the control group. The unequal number of participants across the groups resulted from the preservation of intact classes and the voluntary nature of participation in the study. Participants were not individually assigned to the groups to achieve numerical equality; rather, the initial group sizes were determined by the existing class structure. Of the participants, 50 were female and 19 were male. 11 participants were in the 18-21 age range, 57 were in the 22-25 age range, and 1 participant was 26 years of age or older. The qualitative participants for the study were selected from among the participants in the experimental group who consistently participated in the study's activities (regular participation in bibliotherapy sessions), were observed to be best qualified to answer the research questions, and volunteered to participate (Patton, 2015). Based on these criteria, the qualitative participant group for the study consists of 17 volunteers from the experimental group. This study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Adıyaman University Ethics Committee for Social Sciences and Humanities (Approval No. 2025/212; October 7, 2025).

Quantitative Data Collection Tool and Process

To determine the effects of bibliotherapy on the psychological flexibility of university students (undergraduate students majoring in Turkish language education), the study utilized the Personalized Psychological Flexibility Scale, developed by Kashdan et al. (2020) and adapted into Turkish by Kimya et al. (2024). Designed to assess how individuals respond to psychological difficulties encountered while pursuing goals aligned with their values, the scale comprises three subscales—acceptance, avoidance, and harnessing—and 15 items. Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater psychological flexibility. Following the scale's adaptation into Turkish, the results of the confirmatory factor analysis were CFI = .95, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .062, and SRMR = .055. These values indicate that the model possesses acceptable fit indices. Additionally, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale's total score was found to be .87. The internal consistency coefficients for the scale's acceptance, avoidance, and harnessing subscales were .90, .78, and .78, respectively. Findings regarding the scale's convergent, discriminant, and incremental validity also

demonstrate that the scale measures psychological flexibility in a valid and reliable manner.

Quantitative data were collected from the experimental and control groups through a pre-test–post-test procedure. Before beginning bibliotherapy sessions, the measurement instruments used in the study were administered to participants in both groups as a pre-test. These pre-tests were used to determine the baseline levels of the experimental and control groups regarding the study variables and to assess the equivalence of the groups at baseline. Upon completion of the bibliotherapy process, the same measurement tools were re-administered to both groups as post-tests under similar conditions.

Qualitative Data Collection Tool and Process

A semi-structured interview form was used to collect qualitative data for the study. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to collect data within specific themes while also enabling participants to describe their experiences in detail (Tisdell et al., 2025). The interview questions were prepared in line with the study's purpose, theoretical framework, and relevant literature. The draft interview form was submitted to academics specializing in Turkish language education, psychological counseling and guidance, and assessment and evaluation to ensure content and construct validity; necessary revisions were made based on the experts' recommendations, and the final version of the form was established. The interview form and questions used in the study are presented in Appendix 1.

Qualitative data were collected to explain how participants experienced bibliotherapy interventions and to elucidate the underlying processes behind the changes observed in the quantitative findings. To this end, qualitative data were collected from participants in the experimental intervention process. Participants were selected from among those who took part in the experimental group after the experimental process was completed. The criteria for participant selection were regular participation in bibliotherapy sessions and voluntary agreement to participate in the interviews. Among the 38 participants in the experimental group, face-to-face individual interviews were conducted with 17 who met both criteria and volunteered. After obtaining the necessary permissions and participant consent, the interviews were conducted and audio-recorded.

As shown in Table 1, the bibliotherapy intervention process was designed with psychological flexibility in mind. During the first six weeks of the program, bibliotherapy sessions were conducted based on Russ Harris's book "The Reality Slap", and during the following six weeks, they were based on Mevlânâ Celâleddîn-i Rûmî's "Mathnawî". In each session, students spent approximately 15-20 minutes reading the books individually and reflecting on the characters' experiences, the plot, and the metaphors found in the texts. Participants were then asked to relate these contents to their own life experiences and express their feelings and thoughts. The aim was to help participants become more consciously aware of these behavioral patterns and evaluate the difficulties they faced from different perspectives. Each session began with a brief review of the previous week's content. In each session, activities were conducted based on the relevant book, including the analysis of metaphors and character experiences, group-based discussions,

Table 1. Overview of the bibliotherapy intervention

Week	Resource	Flexibility Process	Theme	Core Activities	Expected Outcomes
1	The Reality Slap	Present-Moment Contact	Being Present and Mindful Awareness	Mindfulness practices, breathing exercises, and body awareness exercises	Increased mindful awareness and present-moment attention
2	The Reality Slap	Acceptance	Understanding and Accepting Pain	Storm metaphor	Emotional acceptance and openness to internal experiences
3	The Reality Slap	Cognitive Defusion	Noticing Thoughts	Distinguishing thoughts from reality and metaphor-based activities	Enhanced cognitive awareness
4	The Reality Slap	Self-as-Context	Observing the Self	Identity exploration and self-dialogue activities	Development of the observing self and self-compassion
5	The Reality Slap	Values	Discovering Personal Values	Values card sorting and life purpose activities	Greater values awareness
6	The Reality Slap	Committed Action	Taking Meaningful Action	Behavioral goal setting and action planning	Behavioral courage and enhanced psychological flexibility
7	Mathnawi of Rumi	Present-Moment Contact	Wisdom and Present-Moment Awareness	Mindfulness and contemplative reflection activities	Increased mindful awareness and attentional regulation
8	Mathnawi of Rumi	Acceptance	Making Peace with Adversity	Activities focusing on patience, acceptance, and meaning-making of life events	Emotional acceptance and resilience
9	Mathnawi of Rumi	Cognitive Defusion	Distancing from Thoughts	Metaphor interpretation and reflective analysis	Cognitive flexibility and metacognitive awareness
10	Mathnawi of Rumi	Self-as-Context	Knowing the Self	Stories emphasizing identity, selfhood, and inner awareness	Positive self-concept and self-awareness
11	Mathnawi of Rumi	Values	Meaning, Virtue, and Life Purpose	Values-oriented reflections based on the text	Meaning-making and social connectedness
12	Mathnawi of Rumi	Committed Action	Living in Accordance with Values	Gratitude, forgiveness, empathy, and life planning activities	Psychological flexibility, psychological well-being, and hope
13	Entire Program	Evaluation of Psychological Flexibility Processes	Overall Evaluation	Reviewing acquired skills, group sharing, and participant feedback	Evaluation of the effectiveness of the intervention

mindfulness exercises, and activities to apply the material to daily life. Through group sharing and collaborative discussions, the program aimed to foster empathy, evaluate different perspectives, and strengthen interpersonal interaction skills. Short mindfulness and relaxation exercises conducted at the end of each session helped students restore their emotional balance and leave the session feeling safe. Throughout the program, care was taken to create a safe learning environment where students could express themselves comfortably and without fear of judgment.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

Data analyses were performed using IBM SPSS v27 Statistics. Prior to hypothesis testing, the dataset was screened for missing values and outliers; user-defined missing values were excluded listwise, and all statistics were computed using complete cases for each analysis ($N=69$; experimental group $n=38$, control group $n=31$). Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum values) were computed for the pretest and posttest scores of the three psychological flexibility subscales (Avoidance, Acceptance, and Harnessing) for both groups. Univariate normality was evaluated using skewness and kurtosis values, with indices between -2 and $+2$ considered acceptable for parametric analysis (George & Mallery, 2010). Baseline equivalence between the

experimental and control groups was examined using one-way between-subjects analyses of variance (ANOVA) conducted separately on the pretest scores of each subscale. This step was performed to verify that the two groups did not differ significantly prior to the intervention, thereby supporting the internal validity of subsequent group comparisons.

The primary hypotheses concerning the effect of the bibliotherapy intervention were tested using one-way between-subjects analyses of covariance (ANCOVA), conducted separately for each dependent variable (posttest Avoidance, Acceptance, and Harnessing scores). In each model, group (experimental vs. control) served as the independent variable, the corresponding pretest score was entered as the covariate to statistically control for individual differences at baseline, and Type III sums of squares were used. This design was preferred over a simple posttest-only ANOVA or a mixed (within-between) repeated-measures ANOVA because it directly adjusts posttest group differences for baseline scores, thereby reducing error variance and increasing statistical power in pretest-posttest control-group designs (Dimitrov & Rumrill, 2003). Prior to interpreting the ANCOVA results, the assumption of homogeneity of error variances was tested using Levene's test, and the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was assumed to be tenable given the absence of a significant covariate-by-group interaction in preliminary checks. Effect sizes were reported as

partial eta squared (partial η^2), interpreted according to Cohen's (1988) conventions as small (.01), medium (.06), and large (.14).

Qualitative Data Analysis

In the first stage of reflexive thematic analysis, the data recorded in the audio files were transcribed. The transcribed data were organized structurally for analysis. After the data were organized, the researcher read the interview transcripts repeatedly to familiarize themselves with the data; they were verified by comparing them with the audio recordings, and initial analytical notes were created (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this process, efforts were made to evaluate the participants' experiences regarding the six processes of psychological flexibility from a comprehensive perspective. In the second stage, while creating initial codes, the data were examined line by line, and meaningful statements were coded using open coding (Braun & Clarke, 2021). For example, statements such as "valuing self-compassion," "valuing a compassionate approach toward oneself," and "valuing showing mercy toward oneself" were initially defined as independent codes. However, in a subsequent stage, these three codes were merged into a single code titled "Valuing a more understanding and compassionate approach toward oneself." In the third stage, the initial codes were organized into provisional categories under six high-level themes—acceptance, cognitive defusion, mindfulness, self-as-context, values, and committed action—derived from the concept of psychological flexibility. It is noted that in theory-guided analysis, themes can be constructed based on the theoretical framework; however, the coding and meaning-making process proceeds through interaction with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). During the fourth stage, while reviewing the themes, the codes and categories were continuously compared with the dataset; some codes that did not adequately represent the research question were removed from the analysis; codes carrying conceptually similar meanings were merged into a single category; and some codes were moved to different categories deemed to better represent the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022). For example, it was observed that some behavior-focused codes evaluated under the "values" theme represented acting in accordance with these values rather than merely recognizing them. Consequently, these codes were moved to the "flexible and adaptive behavior" and "empathy and perspective-oriented behavior" categories under the "committed action" theme. All categories and codes across all themes were examined individually, and it was repeatedly verified which category belonged under which theme and which code belonged under which category. In the fifth stage, category names were redefined and reorganized to more accurately reflect the essence of the participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2024). For example, the name of the "mindfulness and staying-in-the-moment practices" category within the "committed action" theme was updated to "applying mindfulness skills in daily life." In addition, the category name "creating distance from thoughts" within the "cognitive defusion" theme was revised to "establishing a flexible relationship with thoughts." The names of categories in other themes were also revised to better represent their respective themes. In the final stage, the themes were supported by direct participant quotes and reported after being interpreted within the framework of the literature on psychological flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2021, 2024).

Results

Quantitative Findings

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to the main analyses, descriptive statistics, normality indices, and baseline group equivalence were examined for the three subscales used to operationalize psychological flexibility: avoidance, acceptance, and harnessing/valued living. Skewness and kurtosis values for all pretest and posttest scores fell mostly within the commonly accepted range of ± 2 (George & Mallery, 2010), supporting the assumption of univariate normality for parametric analysis. Descriptive statistics for the experimental ($n = 38$) and control ($n = 31$) groups are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for pretest and posttest scores by group

Variable	Group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skew.	Kurt.
Avoidance (Pretest)	Experimental	38	26.79	5.73	−.08	−1.20
	Control	31	26.32	4.97	−1.55	3.49
Avoidance (Posttest)	Experimental	38	28.84	3.28	−.50	−.18
	Control	31	24.90	5.82	−1.50	3.53
Acceptance (Pretest)	Experimental	38	23.47	5.04	−.58	−.37
	Control	31	21.61	5.08	−.77	−.33
Acceptance (Posttest)	Experimental	38	29.05	2.18	−.24	1.47
	Control	31	25.84	4.24	−.74	2.95
Harnessing (Pretest)	Experimental	38	23.50	5.77	−.38	.00
	Control	31	22.87	5.75	.17	−.16
Harnessing (Posttest)	Experimental	38	27.08	4.54	−.03	−.73
	Control	31	24.16	6.25	.24	−1.03

To confirm that group assignment produced comparable groups prior to the intervention, one-way ANOVAs were conducted on pretest scores. No significant differences were found between the experimental and control groups on any pretest measure: Avoidance, $F(1, 67) = 0.13$, $p = .722$; Acceptance, $F(1, 67) = 2.31$, $p = .133$; Harnessing, $F(1, 67) = 0.20$, $p = .654$. These results indicate that the two groups did not differ significantly at baseline, supporting the validity of subsequent between-group comparisons.

Effects of the Bibliotherapy Intervention

To examine the effect of the intervention on posttest psychological flexibility scores while statistically controlling for pretest scores, a series of one-way between-subjects analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) were conducted, with group (experimental vs. control) as the independent variable, posttest scores as the dependent variable, and the corresponding pretest score entered as the covariate for each subscale.

Levene's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of error variances was violated for all three outcomes: Avoidance, $F(1, 67) = 5.64$, $p = .020$; Acceptance, $F(1, 67) = 5.75$, $p = .019$; Harnessing, $F(1, 67) = 4.11$, $p = .047$. Given the moderate and roughly comparable group sizes ($n = 38$ and $n = 31$) and the well-established robustness of the F test to moderate variance heterogeneity under these conditions (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019), the ANCOVA results were retained; nonetheless, this violation is noted as a limitation of the analysis.

After adjusting for pretest scores, there was a statistically

significant effect of group on posttest Avoidance scores, $F(1, 66) = 12.38$, $p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .16$. The covariate (pretest Avoidance) was not significantly related to posttest scores, $F(1, 66) = 0.004$, $p = .948$, partial $\eta^2 < .001$. The experimental group had a higher posttest mean ($M = 28.84$, $SD = 3.28$) than the control group ($M = 24.90$, $SD = 5.82$), indicating that participants who received the bibliotherapy intervention reported greater increases in adaptive avoidance-related flexibility than those in the control condition.

The ANCOVA revealed a statistically significant effect of group on posttest Acceptance scores after controlling for pretest scores, $F(1, 66) = 14.26$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .18$. The covariate was not a significant predictor, $F(1, 66) = 1.84$, $p = .180$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. The experimental group demonstrated higher posttest Acceptance scores ($M = 29.05$, $SD = 2.18$) than the control group ($M = 25.84$, $SD = 4.24$), representing the largest effect size among the three outcomes examined.

Table 3. Summary of ANCOVA results for posttest scores controlling for pretest scores

Outcome	Source	SD	df	MS	F	p	η^2
Avoidance	Covariate	0.09	1	0.09	0.004	.948	.000
	Group	264.80	1	264.80	12.38	.001	.158
	Error	1411.67	66	21.39			
Acceptance	Covariate	19.34	1	19.34	1.84	.180	.027
	Group	150.15	1	150.15	14.26	<.001	.178
	Error	694.75	66	10.53			
Harnessing	Covariate	62.86	1	62.86	2.22	.141	.033
	Group	134.59	1	134.59	4.75	.033	.067
	Error	1870.10	66	28.34			

Note. In all three models, the covariate (pretest score) was not a significant predictor of posttest scores, indicating that the adjusted (estimated marginal) means closely approximate the observed posttest means reported above.

A statistically significant effect of group on posttest Harnessing scores emerged after controlling for pretest scores, $F(1, 66) = 4.75$, $p = .033$, partial $\eta^2 = .07$. The covariate did not significantly predict posttest scores, $F(1, 66) = 2.22$, $p = .141$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. Participants in the experimental group scored higher on posttest Harnessing ($M = 27.08$, $SD = 4.54$) than those in the control group ($M = 24.16$, $SD = 6.25$), although this effect was smaller in magnitude than those observed for Avoidance and Acceptance.

Taken together, the results indicate that the two groups were statistically equivalent on all study variables prior to the intervention. Following the bibliotherapy intervention, the experimental group showed significantly higher posttest scores than the control group on all three psychological flexibility subscales—Avoidance, Acceptance, and Harnessing—even after controlling for pretest scores. The largest effect was observed for Acceptance (partial $\eta^2 = .18$), followed by Avoidance (partial $\eta^2 = .16$) and Harnessing (partial $\eta^2 = .07$), suggesting that the intervention was particularly effective in enhancing participants' willingness to accept internal experiences, with a comparatively smaller—though still statistically significant—effect on value-consistent Harnessing.

ANCOVA (pretest as covariate) was selected as the primary inferential test because it directly addresses the study's key question—whether adjusted posttest scores differ by group—while statistically

controlling for baseline differences, offering greater statistical power than a simple posttest-only ANOVA or a mixed (within-between) repeated-measures ANOVA. A supplementary mixed ANOVA (Time $\times$ Group) was also conducted and is available on request; results were largely convergent with the ANCOVA findings, with one exception (Harnessing), where the repeated-measures between-subjects test did not reach significance ($p = .091$) while the ANCOVA group effect did ($p = .033$)—a discrepancy consistent with ANCOVA's greater statistical power in pretest-posttest control-group designs (Dimitrov & Rumrill, 2003).

Qualitative Findings

Quantitative findings suggest that bibliotherapy significantly improved participants' levels of psychological flexibility. However, quantitative findings cannot explain how participants experienced change during the process or through which processes psychological flexibility developed. Therefore, qualitative data were examined to provide a more comprehensive interpretation of these changes in the bibliotherapy process among the experimental group. The qualitative data were analyzed by organizing them according to the six core processes of psychological flexibility. The category, code, and frequency distributions related to the themes are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 presents the themes, categories, codes, and frequency distributions identified through qualitative analysis. The findings are explained in terms of participant experiences and direct participant statements for each theme, in line with the six core processes of psychological flexibility as outlined.

Present-Moment Contact

As seen in Table 4, bibliotherapy is found to support participants in directing their attention to the present moment, becoming more consciously aware of their inner experiences, and adopting a more flexible approach to their emotions and thoughts rather than reacting to them impulsively. It is evident that participants experienced significant improvements in their skills related to emotional awareness, staying in the present moment, focusing on the current experience, and observing their experiences before reacting. The participants' direct statements indicate that bibliotherapy fosters awareness in individuals and that this awareness transforms into a function that regulates behavior. For example, the statement, "*I make sense of my emotions first, and then I take action.*" (K7) reflects that action is taken only after emotions have been recognized and evaluated. This demonstrates that emotional awareness has transformed into a function of behavior regulation. K10's statement, "*I have come to appreciate the beauty of being in the moment,*" reveals that the participant has become aware of their ability to direct their attention toward staying "in the moment." Furthermore, the direct statements by K4 and K11 regarding "stopping to breathe" and "pausing instead of reacting impulsively" indicate that participants have moved away from impulsive decision-making and developed calmer, more mindful self-regulation skills. Furthermore, the statement "*I learned that I need to stay in the present moment rather than getting caught up in the past or the future.*" (K18) demonstrates that staying in the present moment and focusing on "the moment" have been adopted in daily life. These findings indicate that participants have begun to use their ability to connect with the present moment in a more functional way.

Acceptance

As seen in Table 4, it is evident that bibliotherapy plays a significant role in participants' relationships with challenging emotions and experiences. It is observed that, by the end of the bibliotherapy process, participants began to notice and accept these experiences rather than trying to change or avoid negative emotions and thoughts. The participants' direct statements indicate that the acceptance process is characterized by an open and nonjudgmental attitude toward all experiences. For example, the statement by participant K1, "I can say that I've started to experience happiness, sadness, and anger alike," shows that the participant has begun to accept all emotional experiences as a natural part of life. Furthermore, participant K2's direct statement, "Now, when I'm in pain, I can stay with that feeling," indicates that the participant has developed the ability to engage with distressing emotions rather than avoiding them. Furthermore, "Now, in stressful situations, instead of asking 'why me?,' I try to feel the pain" (K6) and "I've learned to acknowledge difficult emotions rather than run away from them" (K12) show that the participant has begun to embrace a more conscious acceptance of the difficulties they face, rather than denying them or running away from them. Furthermore, the direct statement by the participant coded as K1, "I guess I forgot, or maybe I wanted to forget this" reflects that the participant has begun to recognize the avoidance thoughts they used in the past, and that this awareness marks a significant turning point in the development of the psychological acceptance process. The findings in this theme suggest that they contribute to participants developing a more open, flexible, and functional relationship with their distressing emotions and experiences, rather than struggling against them.

Cognitive Defusion

The findings in Table 4 indicate that bibliotherapy helps participants adopt a more critical, flexible, and functional perspective toward their thoughts. Participants' statements indicate that, by the end of the process, their abilities to develop alternative perspectives, question rigid thoughts, and move away from self-blaming evaluations had strengthened. Participants' direct comments reflect that the cognitive defusion process was not limited to merely reducing negative thoughts; rather, it led to a significant improvement in the nature of the relationship individuals established with their thoughts. For example, the statement "*What is the most constructive thing I can do now...*" (K11) indicates that the participant was directed toward solution-focused and functional behavioral options. Furthermore, the statement "*I've started thinking, 'This is hard, but I can handle it.'*" (K12) suggests that thoughts implying inadequacy have been replaced by positive thoughts. This finding shows that the participant is able to develop alternative cognitive interpretations rather than viewing their thoughts as unchangeable facts. Furthermore, the participants' direct statements coded as "*Looking at events from different perspectives...*" (K13) and "*I've learned to evaluate different aspects of events rather than looking at them from a single perspective.*" (K15) indicate that participants have begun to approach events with a more flexible perspective. Similarly, the participant's direct statement coded as "*We actually need to just say, 'It could be,' and move on.*" (K18) reveals that participants have developed an awareness that thoughts are temporary mental experiences, rather

than personalizing the events they have experienced. The findings in this theme reflect that bibliotherapy contributes to participants' ability to transform rigid thoughts into more flexible and functional cognitive processes.

Self-as-Context

Table 4 further shows that bibliotherapy supports participants in observing their own thoughts, emotions, and behaviors from an external perspective, questioning their perceptions of themselves, and developing a more flexible understanding of the self. The participants' direct statements are particularly important in terms of the strengthening of the observing self, increased self-awareness, and the development of a more inclusive perspective on the self. The participants' views reflect that, as a context, the self-process undergoes a meaningful transformation in the way they observe themselves before the individual changes themselves. For example, the direct statement by participant K8, "I think I'm able to evaluate my emotions from a more detached perspective. Instead of seeing an emotion as 'this is who I am'..." shows that experienced emotions and thoughts are beginning to be viewed as observable and transient experiences. Another participant's direct statement, "*Being able to be my own closest and most compassionate friend...*" (K6), reflects how the participant has transformed their critical approach toward themselves into a more compassionate and accepting one. Furthermore, the direct statement by the participant coded as K12, "*During this process, I got to know both myself and my thoughts better.*" indicates that bibliotherapy contributes to the individual's ability to evaluate their inner world more consciously. Similarly, K7's direct statement "*I started behaving differently than I had before.*" shows that inner awareness has been translated into behavioral changes. Another participant's direct statement, "*It is important to confront myself...*" (K14), indicates that the participant has become more open to confronting their emotions and thoughts. This suggests that, in this context, the self-reflection process involves participants observing themselves, deepening their self-awareness, and engaging in an internal evaluation that lays the groundwork for a more flexible way of life. The findings under this theme suggest that bibliotherapy strengthens the observing self in participants, softens rigid self-evaluations, and supports individuals in approaching themselves with greater self-awareness, acceptance, and self-compassion.

Values

The results presented in Table 4 show that bibliotherapy helps participants re-examine the core values that guide their lives. The participants' direct feedback indicates that they have experienced value-oriented growth in areas such as interpersonal relationships, personal development, self-compassion, and professional responsibility. For example, the direct statement by participant K2, coded as "*I can also understand the other person by empathizing with them,*" highlights that an approach based on questioning or judgment in interpersonal relationships has given way to empathy. This suggests that relational values have been reshaped within a more humane framework. Furthermore, the direct statements from participants coded as "*Being my own closest and most compassionate friend...*" (K6) and "*I learned to be compassionate toward myself.*" (K10) reflect a clear development in participants' understanding of self-directed values. Furthermore, the direct

Table 4. Themes, categories, codes, code counts, and frequency distributions obtained from the qualitative analysis

Theme	Category	Total Number of Codes	Total Frequency
Present-Moment Contact	Emotional awareness	12	22
	Being present	7	11
	Mindful awareness	7	10
	Orientation toward present experiences	6	8
	Awareness before responding	6	10
	Breath awareness	1	4
	Bodily awareness	4	5
Acceptance	Letting go of control and accepting the situation	16	16
	Recognizing and reducing experiential avoidance	13	14
	Emotional acceptance and openness	11	15
	Accepting life experiences and realities	11	14
	Openness to pain and difficult experiences	7	7
	Self-acceptance and self-compassion	5	5
	Confronting reality and engaging with lived experiences	4	4
Cognitive Defusion	Openness to personal and social resources	2	3
	Alternative thinking and perspective taking	16	33
	Distancing from rigid and extreme thoughts	14	22
	Flexible relationship with thoughts	11	15
	Distancing from self-blaming thoughts	9	13
Self-as-Context	Questioning prejudices and initial judgments	6	9
	Observing self	12	54
	Self-awareness	5	19
	Recognizing the changing self	4	10
	Flexible self-concept	4	8
Values	Perspective awareness	2	5
	Self-compassionate self	2	5
	Confronting the self	3	4
	Awareness of the limits of change	2	4
	Relational values	17	32
	Personal values	17	21
	Professional values and development	21	23
	Growth and life values	8	13
	Self-compassion and self-understanding	4	13
	Courage and help-seeking	3	3
Committed Action	Sharing and social support values	1	3
	Flexible and adaptive behavior	12	26
	Values- and relationship-oriented behavior	7	12
	Transferring learning into daily life	5	8
	Applying mindfulness skills in everyday life	5	8
	Problem-solving and generating alternatives	4	18
	Emotion and stress regulation	3	15
	Conscious coping and response regulation	3	11
	Empathy- and perspective-oriented behavior	3	10
	Facing challenges and seeking support	3	6
	Professional action orientation	2	8
	Applying acceptance skills to daily life	2	10
	Action based on self-compassion and inner resources	2	6

Note. The themes were predetermined based on psychological flexibility processes; the categories and codes were derived from the data. Frequency (f) refers to the total number of times a code appears in the dataset. The same code may appear in the statements of more than one participant, and a single participant's statement may be associated with more than one code. For this reason, the frequency values do not correspond exactly to the number of codes and participants

statement by the participant coded as K14, “*For me, the most valuable outcome of this process was that it enhanced my ability to empathize.*” suggests that participants have embraced empathy as a fundamental value guiding their lives. This approach to

understanding the underlying context of human behavior demonstrates that the participant has reevaluated their relational values from a more inclusive perspective. Similarly, the direct statement by participant K18, “I learned that I must respect the

feelings of all my students” shows that the values acquired during the bibliotherapy process have begun to reflect in their future professional identity. The findings in this theme demonstrate that bibliotherapy contributes to participants’ reassessment of their life priorities and value orientations.

Committed Action

Table 4 also shows that the bibliotherapy process is reflected in the participants’ daily lives, interpersonal relationships, and professional practices. The participants’ direct statements indicate that skills such as developing flexible behavior, problem-solving, emotion regulation, and value-oriented action are reflected in their daily lives. This positive change reflects that bibliotherapy has begun to produce functional outcomes at the behavioral level. For example, “*When my plans fall through, I can now more easily find alternative solutions...*” (P4) and “*I pause to think first, then take action.*” (P7) These direct statements from the participants indicate that they are able to diversify their behaviors in the face of unexpected situations and make more conscious decisions appropriate to the circumstances. Furthermore, the direct statement by participant K8, “*When I feel anxious, instead of immediately getting caught up in my thoughts, I try to pause for a moment and focus on my breathing,*” shows that the awareness skills acquired during the bibliotherapy process have begun to be actively applied in real-life situations. In the same context, the direct statement from participant K12, “*I noticed that I didn’t react as harshly as I used to in unexpected situations.*” reveals that participants are exhibiting more controlled, balanced, and flexible behaviors in the face of stressful situations. Additionally, the direct statement by participant K15, “*It made me realize that I need to face challenges more courageously.*” reflects a tendency to take action regarding value-oriented behaviors. The findings in this theme reveal that bibliotherapy translates participants’ psychological flexibility into behavioral changes.

Discussion

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrated that bibliotherapy is effective in increasing the psychological flexibility of university students (undergraduate students enrolled in the Turkish Language Teaching program). While the quantitative findings indicate a significant difference in the overall level of psychological flexibility and its subdimensions following bibliotherapy sessions, the qualitative findings reveal that this positive development occurred through transformations in the university students’ relationships with their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. In this regard, the study not only demonstrates the effectiveness of bibliotherapy as an intervention but also provides explanatory evidence regarding the psychological processes through which this effect is realized. The findings from the study are consistent with the theoretical approach that views psychological flexibility as a dynamic structure emerging from the interplay of processes such as presence, acceptance, cognitive defusion, self-as-context, values, and committed action (Hayes et al., 2006, 2012; Tanhan, 2019). The study’s results also align with research findings reporting that bibliotherapy is effective in significantly improving mental health and, in particular, reducing anxiety symptoms (Liu et al., 2025). These findings are consistent with the results of a study by Arslan and colleagues (2022b), which indicated that reading-

based therapy increases mindfulness, optimism, happiness, and positive emotions. Furthermore, a recent study reviewing 23 quasi-experimental and experimental studies highlighted that bibliotherapy implemented in schools has the potential to foster psychological processes that support children’s mental health (Redman et al., 2026).

The qualitative findings of the study indicate that the processes of mindfulness, acceptance, and cognitive defusion—which form the foundation of psychological flexibility—are complementary and mutually supportive. University students reported that by the end of the process, they were more consciously aware of their emotions and thoughts; they began to accept challenging experiences rather than suppressing or avoiding them; and they adopted a more flexible approach to their thoughts rather than evaluating them as absolute truths. These findings are consistent with the theoretical approach of Hayes et al. (2006), who explain in their study that the components of psychological flexibility interact with one another. The current study demonstrates that university students accept their experiences with a less judgmental/questioning attitude, and that this acceptance process lays the groundwork for the development of cognitive defusion by reducing identification with thoughts. Therefore, the positive development observed in the study can be explained by the mutually reinforcing interactions within the psychological flexibility process. The codes of emotional awareness, bodily awareness, breath awareness, and pre-response awareness that emerged under the study’s theme of “connection with the present moment” align with the core components of mindfulness. While Kabat-Zinn (2003) defines mindfulness as the ability to direct one’s attention to one’s current experience without judgment, Brown and Ryan (2003) highlight that this skill is one of the key determinants of psychological well-being. Furthermore, randomized controlled experimental research has found that bibliotherapy enhances mindfulness skills and reduces anxiety, depression, and psychological distress (Teske et al., 2025). In the present study, university students reported observing their emotions and thoughts more mindfully, suggesting that the identification with literary characters, reflective reading, and group discussions during the bibliotherapy process facilitated the individual’s awareness of their own inner experiences. Thus, participants developed a more conscious perspective that allowed them to observe their experiences rather than reacting to them impulsively and unconsciously (without being aware of it). The fact that the “acceptance” dimension had the highest effect size among the study’s quantitative findings also supports this interpretation. University students reported that, rather than trying to change negative emotions and experiences, they viewed them as a natural part of life and noted a decrease in avoidance behaviors. This finding is consistent with the findings of Bowers et al. (2025), which show that ACT-based bibliotherapy is more effective than cognitive-behavioral therapy-based bibliotherapy in increasing psychological flexibility (in individuals with perfectionism). Acceptance aims not to eliminate distressing experiences but to transform the individual’s relationship with them (Hayes et al., 2006). Therefore, the increase in acceptance levels observed in the study indicates that participants began to cope with the difficulties they faced in a more functional way, rather than trying to change them. Findings on cognitive defusion, which develops alongside the acceptance process, indicate that university

students are moving away from viewing their thoughts as absolute truths and are able to develop alternative perspectives. Expressions such as questioning self-blaming thoughts, reevaluating initial judgments, and adopting a different approach to assessing events demonstrate that participants were able to create psychological distance from their own thoughts. This positive change can be explained by the fact that the identification with and reflective discussions about the experiences of literary characters-developed during the bibliotherapy process-enable individuals to reevaluate their own thoughts. Thus, bibliotherapy transcends its role as a reading-based intervention and becomes a process of change that restructures the individual's relationship with their inner experiences and supports the development of psychological flexibility.

The qualitative findings of the study-particularly the developments observed in the contexts of self, values, and processes of committed action-indicate that bibliotherapy also transforms self-perception, life orientation, and behavioral patterns. University students reported that they evaluated themselves from a more objective and compassionate perspective, reexamined their professional and personal values, and began to act more consciously in line with these values. These findings show that psychological flexibility is a process that not only regulates thoughts and emotions but also reshapes an individual's sense of self, their vision for their life, and how they will act in accordance with that vision (Hayes et al., 2012). The codes that emerged within the context of the "self" theme-such as the observing self, self-awareness, and a more compassionate approach toward oneself-indicate that participants developed a more inclusive perspective of the self by separating themselves from the emotions and thoughts they experienced. It is understood that this development contributes to university students positioning themselves not merely as defined by the negative experiences they have undergone, but as subjects capable of observing and evaluating these experiences. Thus, the psychological distance that begins with cognitive defusion is reflected in self-perception, enabling students to evaluate themselves in a more flexible manner.

As a natural extension of this development, students reported that they had reevaluated areas such as family relationships, professional responsibility, personal development, empathy, and life purpose within the theme of values. This finding suggests that reflective reading and group discussions-conducted through the experiences of literary characters during the bibliotherapy process-facilitate individuals' examination of their own life priorities. In this context, Kang's (2025) study on picture book-based bibliotherapy observed improvements in students' self-understanding, self-acceptance, understanding of others, acceptance of others, emotional expression, problem-solving skills, and positive self-perception. Furthermore, other recent studies have indicated that bibliotherapy enhances psychological well-being and empathy (Kim & Kim, 2025) and supports psychological adjustment through reading self-efficacy and empathy (Yuan & Li, 2025). While the current study is consistent with these findings, it provides a detailed account, based on qualitative findings, of how the bibliotherapy in question unfolds through processes of psychological flexibility. Findings from the study's "committed action" theme, meanwhile, indicate that awareness of values is reflected at the behavioral level. University students reported that they began to exhibit empathy-based

behaviors, fulfill their professional responsibilities more consciously, develop more constructive attitudes in their interpersonal relationships, and take more decisive steps toward their life goals. In this context, the Türkiye Century Education Model (MNE, 2024) considers the integration of the values adopted by the individual into daily life through responsibility, empathy, and constructive behaviors as one of the fundamental indicators of holistic development. Accordingly, it is understood that bibliotherapy offers an effective intervention approach that can be easily adapted to educational settings to support psychological flexibility and foster value-based behaviors. A key indicator of psychological flexibility is an individual's ability to act in accordance with their values even while experiencing distressing emotions and thoughts (Hayes et al., 2012). When evaluated from this perspective, the positive change observed in the study demonstrates that it not only facilitates cognitive and affective improvement but also strengthens the behavioral manifestation of psychological flexibility. Thus, it is demonstrated that bibliotherapy not only enables individuals to reframe their experiences but also supports their ability to integrate this reframing into their daily lives and behaviors. In this regard, the findings of the present study are consistent with the research findings of Hoover et al. (2023), which report that bibliotherapy contributes to the reframing of life experiences, the strengthening of self-efficacy, and the development of a positive self-concept.

The quantitative and qualitative findings of this study are found to largely align with recent experimental studies examining the effects of bibliotherapy on psychological adjustment, psychological well-being, and interpersonal communication (Bowers et al., 2025; Kang, 2025; Kim & Kim, 2025; Samiminejad, 2026; Yuan & Li, 2025). However, unlike previous studies, the present study does not merely demonstrate bibliotherapy's effect on psychological outcome variables. It also demonstrates how this development/change occurs through the processes that constitute psychological flexibility. From this perspective, the study provides an explanatory context regarding the psychological development/change processes underlying bibliotherapy interventions, in addition to the existing findings on the effectiveness of bibliotherapy. For example, in Kang's (2025) study, it was noted that picture-book-based bibliotherapy led to significant improvements in students' self-understanding, self-acceptance, understanding of others, emotional expression, and positive self-perception. In addition, recent studies indicate that bibliotherapy enhances psychological well-being and empathy (Kim & Kim, 2025) and supports psychological adjustment through empathy (Yuan & Li, 2025). Furthermore, a randomized controlled study has shown that bibliotherapy also strengthens individuals' interpersonal understanding and their processes of making sense of life experiences (Yuan & Li, 2025). In the present study, university students' more understanding approach toward themselves and others, their restructuring of professional and personal values, and their reflection of these values in their behavior appear consistent with the aforementioned studies. However, by demonstrating that this development/change arises through transformations in the six core processes of psychological flexibility, this study offers a more comprehensive and holistic explanation of bibliotherapy's mechanism of action.

Once again, the quantitative and qualitative findings of this study

largely align with the results of numerous studies conducted in recent years that have examined the impact of bibliotherapy on psychological functioning. For example, in Samiminejad's (2026) study, it was noted that a short-term, 15-20-minute, visually focused bibliotherapy session supported students' emotional regulation, increased positive emotions, and enhanced psychological well-being. In the present study, it was determined that bibliotherapy increased university students' psychological flexibility; helped them become more consciously aware of their emotions; and enabled them to develop more flexible coping strategies in the face of challenges. When the results of both studies are evaluated together, it becomes clear that, despite differences in the duration of bibliotherapy, it supports psychological adaptation processes by restructuring participants' relationship with their inner experiences. Furthermore, the study's quantitative and qualitative findings support the psychological flexibility model, which posits that psychological flexibility is not a fixed structure composed of independent subdimensions, but rather a set of dynamic processes that operate in mutual interaction (Hayes et al., 2006). It has been demonstrated that the improvements observed following bibliotherapy occur through an increase in psychological flexibility, and that psychological flexibility constitutes the core change process of the intervention (Muto et al., 2011). A recent study has also reported that ACT-based interventions are more effective in increasing psychological flexibility and that psychological flexibility should be considered one of the primary goals of the intervention (Bowers et al., 2025). Another study comparing interactive reading and reading-based bibliotherapy found that reading-based bibliotherapy was effective in helping participants in the bibliotherapy group feel more at ease and in reducing emotional distress (Wu et al., 2025). While the qualitative findings of the present study support this research, they also explain, through participants' experiences, how the quantitative improvements observed in psychological flexibility were achieved through transformations in the processes of mindfulness, acceptance, cognitive defusion, self-as-context, values, and committed action. In this regard, the study differs from previous research that evaluated the effectiveness of bibliotherapy through quantitative changes or psychological outcome variables. The comprehensive perspective provided by the mixed-methods research design explains not only whether the intervention is effective but also through which psychological processes it exerts its effect. Thus, the study goes beyond the outcomes frequently highlighted in the bibliotherapy literature, revealing the complementary functioning of the six core processes of psychological flexibility and offering a stronger theoretical explanation of the components and sources of change in bibliotherapy. In this context, the study demonstrates that it not only strengthens the existing evidence regarding the effectiveness of bibliotherapy interventions but also makes a significant theoretical and methodological contribution to the literature by explaining through which psychological components bibliotherapy facilitates change.

Strengths and Limitations

A key strength of this study is that it examined the effect of bibliotherapy on psychological flexibility using a mixed-methods approach, thereby supporting quantitative findings with participants' experiences. Additionally, the fact that the intervention was systematically implemented over an academic term, included

structured bibliotherapy activities, and directly demonstrated participants' progress throughout the process is considered among the study's strengths.

In addition to its strengths, the study has some limitations. The research was conducted exclusively with Turkish language teacher candidates enrolled at a single university. Consequently, the study does not represent all university students. Furthermore, the use of only two books (*The Reality Slap* and *the Mathnawi*) in the bibliotherapy process limited the evaluation of the effects of different book genres.

Implications

The findings of this study have practical implications particularly for higher education and teacher education. The observed development in psychological flexibility suggests that structured bibliotherapy practices may provide a useful means of supporting university students' personal and psychological development. In teacher education specifically, bibliotherapy may create opportunities for prospective teachers to reflect on their experiences, thoughts, and emotions through literary texts. Accordingly, structured bibliotherapy activities may be considered for integration into teacher education programs and relevant university curricula as a complementary approach to supporting students' psychological flexibility and personal development. From a mental health perspective, bibliotherapy may also be considered as a complementary approach within university-based psychological support and well-being services. Such practices may provide students with structured opportunities to recognize and reflect on difficult thoughts and emotions while developing more flexible responses to challenging experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

For this reason, it is recommended that future studies work with broader and more diverse samples comprising students from different universities and departments, incorporate a variety of book types and quantities into the bibliotherapy process, and utilize longitudinal research designs to determine the sustainability of developments/changes in psychological flexibility. Furthermore, comparative studies involving students from different universities and departments are expected to provide more comprehensive evidence regarding bibliotherapy's effect on psychological flexibility. Future studies may employ innovative qualitative, participatory, or mixed-method approaches, particularly Online Photovoice (OPV) (Tanhan, 2020; Tanhan & Strack, 2020), Online Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (OIPA) (see Jiang et al., 2026), and Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) (Armiya'u et al., 2024; Dari et al., 2025), to explore participants' experiences of bibliotherapy in greater depth. These approaches may provide a more contextualized understanding of how participants experience and interpret changes in psychological flexibility.

Conclusion

The findings of this study consistently demonstrate, through both quantitative and qualitative data, that bibliotherapy is an effective intervention method for enhancing the psychological flexibility of university students (undergraduate students majoring in Turkish language education). The quantitative findings revealed that participants in the experimental group showed significantly

greater improvements than those in the control group across the three dimensions of psychological flexibility—avoidance, acceptance, and harnessing—following the bibliotherapy intervention. The study found that the strongest effects were observed, in order, in acceptance, avoidance, and harnessing. These quantitative findings suggest that bibliotherapy sessions structured around psychological flexibility, conducted over a specific period (13 weeks), can significantly enhance university students' psychological flexibility.

The university students' perspectives indicate that the bibliotherapy process enabled them to establish more flexible relationships with their emotions and thoughts, observe themselves more mindfully, restructure their life values, and develop more functional behaviors in line with these values. The qualitative findings complement these quantitative results by explaining how changes in psychological flexibility occurred. When evaluated from an educational perspective, the study findings highlight that bibliotherapy is a practical approach that can be applied in teacher training programs (at universities) to support students' psychological well-being, emotional resilience, and professional awareness, particularly their academic development. The fact that bibliotherapy can be easily implemented in a group setting and is a low-cost intervention makes it an important practice that can be integrated into university education programs.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethics Approval. All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments, or comparable ethical standards. This study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Adıyaman University Ethics Committee for Social Sciences and Humanities (Approval No. 2025/212; October 7, 2025).

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Form (English Translation Version)

This semi-structured interview form was developed to explore in greater depth the effects of the bibliotherapy intervention on participants' psychological flexibility. The form consists of two sections. The first section includes questions designed to collect demographic information, such as participants' age, gender, year of study, and reading habits. The second section comprises open-ended questions aimed at evaluating participants' experiences throughout the bibliotherapy intervention. These questions seek to explore participants' perceptions of the intervention, the extent to which they identified with the literary characters, their ways of coping with challenges, changes in their perspectives, and the psychological skills they perceived to have developed by the end of the intervention.

Participation in the interviews was entirely voluntary, and audio recordings were made only with the participants' informed consent. All data obtained from the interviews were used solely for scientific research purposes. During the interviews, follow-up questions were asked whenever necessary to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses, thereby enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of the bibliotherapy intervention on psychological flexibility.

Section	Questions	Interview Questions
Demographic Information	1	<i>Do you voluntarily agree to participate in this study?</i> ☐ No ☐ Yes
	2	Participant Code: _____
	3	Age: _____
	4	Gender: ☐ Female ☐ Male
	5	What year of study are you in?: _____
	6	Have you previously participated in a bibliotherapy intervention? ☐ No ☐ Yes
	7	How often do you read books? ☐ Every day ☐ Several times a week ☐ Several times a month ☐ Rarely
Semi-Structured Interview Questions	1	How did the book you read and the activities conducted during the bibliotherapy intervention make you feel? How would you evaluate this experience? Which part affected you the most? Did you identify with any of the characters? If so, why?
	2	Did the challenges experienced by the characters in the book and the ways they coped with those challenges influence how you view events in your own life? Were there any situations that you related to your own experiences? Did you learn or adopt any behaviors from the characters?
	3	Do you think the bibliotherapy intervention changed the way you cope with difficulties or stressful situations? What differences do you notice between how you responded before and after the intervention? Have your thoughts or problem-solving strategies changed when facing challenges?
	4	How did this intervention contribute to your ability to adapt to unexpected situations or generate alternative solutions? Can you describe a situation in which you believe you responded more flexibly? Do you think the intervention helped you develop new perspectives?
	5	What do you consider to be the most valuable contribution of the bibliotherapy intervention? Which activity, example, or practice did you find most beneficial? What recommendations would you make to improve the effectiveness of this intervention for pre-service Turkish language teachers?