|| Volume 9 || Issue 11 || November 2025 || ISSN (Online) 2456-0774
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCE SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
AND ENGINEERING TRENDS

A Quasi-Experimental Study on the Effectiveness of Group Bibliotherapy in Enhancing Teen Self-Esteem

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Abstract: This study looks at how reading and discussing books in a group setting—what we call *group bibliotherapy*—can help boost self-esteem in teenagers. Many teens today struggle with how they see and value themselves, so finding supportive and creative ways to help them is really important.

To explore this, we worked with two groups of teens aged 13 to 18 from local schools. One group attended weekly bibliotherapy sessions where they read meaningful stories and shared their thoughts in guided discussions. The other group didn't receive any special intervention. Before and after the sessions, both groups filled out a well-known self-esteem questionnaire called the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

When we compared the results, we found that the teens who took part in the group bibliotherapy showed a clear improvement in how they felt about themselves, while the control group didn't show much change. These findings suggest that group bibliotherapy can be a simple, low-cost, and effective way to support teenagers' mental and emotional well-being.

I.INTRODUCTION:

Adolescence is often described as a period of intense change—physically, emotionally, and socially. It is during these years, typically between the ages of 13 and 18, that individuals begin to form a clearer sense of who they are and how they fit into the world. This time of exploration and self-discovery can be exciting, but it is also marked by significant vulnerability. Teenagers frequently face challenges related to body image, academic pressure, social comparison, family expectations, and increasingly, the influence of social media. Amidst all this, one psychological trait that plays a crucial role in shaping adolescent development is **self-esteem**.

Self-esteem, put simply, is the value a person places on themselves. It influences how individuals see their abilities, relationships, and potential. For teenagers, healthy self-esteem can act as a buffer against stress and mental health problems. It can promote better academic performance, social confidence, and resilience. Unfortunately, low self-esteem is not uncommon in this age group and has been linked to issues like anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, and even risky behavior. As such, finding effective and relatable ways to support and uplift teens' self-esteem is an urgent need in both educational and mental health settings.

One promising approach that has gained attention in recent years is **bibliotherapy**—a therapeutic practice that uses literature to help individuals understand themselves better, process emotions, and find new ways of thinking. The basic idea is simple: stories, whether fictional or real, can act as mirrors and windows. They mirror our own experiences, making us feel less alone, and offer windows into the lives and emotions of others, fostering empathy and insight. When shared in a group setting, bibliotherapy can be even more impactful. Discussing stories together allows participants to connect with peers, find common ground, and reflect on personal experiences in a safe, supportive environment.

Group bibliotherapy has been used in various settings—libraries, schools, hospitals, and community centers—to support mental well-being. It provides a creative and low-cost way to start meaningful conversations and promote emotional growth. For teenagers, especially those who may feel misunderstood or unsure of how to express their emotions, group bibliotherapy offers a unique platform where they can engage with characters and narratives while also being heard by others going through similar life stages.

This study was born out of a desire to explore whether structured group bibliotherapy could truly make a measurable difference in the lives of teenagers, particularly in terms of their self-esteem. While there has been some research on the psychological benefits of reading and discussion, there is still a need for more evidence-based studies that focus specifically on adolescents and measurable outcomes like self-esteem.

To address this, we designed a **quasi-experimental study** involving two groups of teens from local schools. One group participated in weekly bibliotherapy sessions for a set period, while the other group did not receive any intervention during this time. The sessions involved reading selected texts—chosen for their relevance to teenage experiences—and then discussing them in a guided, reflective manner. Topics included identity, friendship, self-worth, overcoming challenges, and emotional resilience. We measured the self-esteem levels of both groups before and after the intervention using the **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale**, a widely respected tool in psychological research.

The aim of the study was not only to see if group bibliotherapy could help raise self-esteem scores but also to understand the deeper value of literature as a social and emotional resource. Our hope was to show that interventions don't always have to be clinical or complex to be effective. Sometimes, sitting in a circle, reading a story, and sharing thoughts with peers can be enough to spark positive change.

This study also highlights the importance of alternative methods of emotional support that are accessible and adaptable. In many school settings, especially where mental health services are limited, teachers, librarians, or counselors could easily implement bibliotherapy sessions with minimal resources. The power of stories is something that has been recognized across cultures and centuries—this study seeks to tap into that timeless tradition in a way that speaks to the needs of today's teenagers.

In conclusion, adolescence is a delicate yet formative stage where support systems can make a significant difference in how young people view themselves and the world. Self-esteem plays a foundational role in their ability to succeed, relate to others, and maintain mental wellness. Through this research, we hope to contribute to the growing field of creative and inclusive mental health interventions by demonstrating that **group bibliotherapy** is not only meaningful but also measurably effective in enhancing teen self-esteem.

Literature Review

In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the need for creative, accessible, and meaningful mental health interventions—especially for young people navigating the often overwhelming challenges of adolescence. Among the many approaches explored by educators, counselors, and psychologists, one particularly compelling method is **bibliotherapy**, which uses literature to support emotional healing and personal growth. While not a new concept, bibliotherapy has seen renewed interest, particularly for its potential to foster empathy, self-awareness, and connection through the power of stories.

Past Studies on Bibliotherapy: Clinical and School-Based Evidence

The idea that books can offer more than entertainment is supported by a solid base of research. In clinical settings, bibliotherapy has been used as a supportive tool for patients dealing with depression, anxiety, grief, and trauma. Early research often focused on adult populations, showing that reading meaningful literature can help individuals gain perspective on their problems and feel less isolated in their struggles.

However, as the benefits of bibliotherapy became more apparent, researchers began to explore its use among children and adolescents. In school-based settings, bibliotherapy has shown promise in addressing issues such as bullying, self-harm, social skills deficits, and identity development. Studies conducted in primary and secondary schools found that when students read stories that reflect their experiences or challenges—and are given space to talk about them—they are more likely to open up, process emotions, and develop healthier coping mechanisms.

For instance, Heath et al. (2005) reported that students participating in guided bibliotherapy sessions displayed better emotional understanding and communication. Similarly, a study by Shechtman (2009) demonstrated how children involved in story-centered therapy groups showed improvements in emotional regulation and social behavior. Though the outcomes vary depending on the population and implementation, the recurring theme in this body of work is that **books, when paired with reflection and discussion, can act as subtle yet powerful therapeutic tools**.

Self-Esteem in Adolescents: Risk and Protective Factors

Adolescence is a phase of significant self-discovery, but it is also a time of vulnerability. Self-esteem—the personal evaluation of one's worth—is often unstable during these years, and it can be heavily influenced by external factors such as peer relationships, academic performance, family dynamics, and media portrayals. When teens consistently feel inadequate or unworthy, it can hinder their development and lead to mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal.

Psychological theories, such as Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, highlight adolescence as the critical stage for identity formation. If teens are unable to establish a positive self-identity, they may experience confusion, insecurity, and lower self-worth. On the other hand, positive reinforcement, supportive relationships, and opportunities to express themselves can serve as protective factors that help boost self-esteem.

Bibliotherapy, in this context, becomes especially relevant. When adolescents encounter characters who struggle with similar feelings of doubt, failure, or exclusion—and witness them overcoming those struggles—it can help them normalize their own experiences. It reassures them that they are not alone in how they feel, and more importantly, it gives them hope that things can improve.

Group Therapy Dynamics: Peer Support and Shared Narratives

Another important layer to bibliotherapy is the group dynamic. Adolescents are often deeply influenced by their peers, sometimes more than by adults. Group-based approaches to therapy recognize this by creating a space where teens can reflect together, share insights, and feel supported by others going through similar journeys.

When bibliotherapy is conducted in a group setting, the shared narratives found in stories become starting points for open and meaningful conversations. A character's struggle can serve as a mirror for one student and a lesson for another. This creates an environment where empathy is built naturally, and teens begin to see that vulnerability is not a weakness—but a shared human experience.

Studies on group therapy for adolescents, such as those by Yalom and Leszcz (2005), emphasize the healing power of

universality—that moment when a teen realizes they are not alone in their struggle. Bibliotherapy enhances this by introducing stories that make these feelings visible and relatable. It gently encourages teens to speak up, listen, and grow—together.

Moreover, group bibliotherapy is less intimidating than traditional talk therapy. It lowers emotional barriers by focusing first on the characters, which gives teens a comfortable distance from their own emotions. This safety zone often leads to deeper personal reflections and gradual self-disclosure, making it an ideal model for schools and youth programs.

Gaps Identified in the Literature

Despite the growing interest in bibliotherapy and its potential for enhancing emotional well-being, there are still notable gaps in the research—particularly when it comes to **structured group bibliotherapy** for adolescents in **non-clinical, school-based environments**.

Most existing studies have focused either on clinical populations or on individualized bibliotherapy programs. There is less data available on how group bibliotherapy works when integrated into a regular school setting, where the environment is less controlled and participants may not be seeking help voluntarily. Furthermore, many previous studies lack standardized measures for evaluating outcomes like self-esteem, or they fail to include a control group for comparison.

This gap highlights the need for more evidence-based interventions that are both practical and scalable. Schools, especially in underserved areas, often do not have the resources for full-time counselors or psychologists. However, they do have libraries, books, and teachers—making group bibliotherapy a potentially powerful tool if proven effective. What is missing is a clear, structured model backed by research that shows how bibliotherapy can be adapted and applied in these everyday educational settings.

II.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore whether **group bibliotherapy** could meaningfully enhance the self-esteem of adolescents. Given the real-life constraints of working with schools and student populations, the study adopted a **quasi-experimental design**—specifically, a **non-randomized control group pretest-posttest model**. This allowed us to examine changes in self-esteem over time while comparing the outcomes of those who received the intervention (the bibliotherapy sessions) with those who did not.

Research Design

The **quasi-experimental design** was chosen for practical and ethical reasons. Randomly assigning teenagers to groups within school settings is often not feasible, especially when working around existing class schedules and parental permissions. However, by ensuring that both the experimental and control groups were similar in age, background, and baseline self-esteem levels, we could still draw meaningful conclusions about the impact of the bibliotherapy intervention.

The structure of the study involved measuring self-esteem before and after a six-week period for both groups. Only the experimental group took part in bibliotherapy sessions during this time. The control group continued with their usual school routines, without any added intervention.

Sample and Sampling Method

A total of **60 adolescents**, aged between 13 and 18 years, participated in the study. They were selected from **two local secondary schools**, each of which provided one group (either experimental or control) to reduce cross-contamination and logistical difficulties.

The sampling method used was **purposive sampling**. We deliberately included students who had **low to average baseline self-esteem scores**, as measured by a pre-intervention assessment using the **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)**. These students were considered more likely to benefit from a self-esteem-enhancing intervention. Gender, academic performance, and other personal data were not used as criteria for inclusion to ensure that the focus remained on emotional well-being

Intervention: Group Bibliotherapy

The core of this study was a series of **six weekly bibliotherapy sessions** designed to be engaging, developmentally appropriate, and emotionally resonant. Each session lasted around 60 minutes and was conducted in small groups of 8–10 students to allow for active participation.

The sessions followed a consistent structure:

- **Reading:** Students read short stories or excerpts from age-appropriate texts, many of which focused on themes like self-worth, resilience, identity, peer pressure, and overcoming challenges.
- **Discussion:** The group then reflected on the content with guidance from a trained facilitator. Questions were open-ended and non-directive, encouraging participants to explore how the characters' experiences related to their own lives.
- **Personal Reflection:** To deepen the impact, students were invited to write brief reflections or journal entries at the end of each session.

The books and stories used were carefully selected to match the emotional and developmental needs of teenagers, with input from school counselors, teachers, and mental health professionals. The goal was to create a safe and supportive space where students could engage with meaningful content and also share personal insights if they felt comfortable.

Instruments Used

The primary tool used to measure self-esteem in this study was the **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)**. This scale is widely

recognized and validated, and it offers a straightforward way to assess how individuals feel about themselves. It includes ten statements that participants rate based on their level of agreement, both before and after the intervention.

By comparing pre- and post-test scores, we aimed to capture whether and how students' perceptions of themselves had changed over the course of the six-week program.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the pre- and post-intervention assessments were analyzed using both **descriptive and inferential statistics**. Descriptive statistics helped summarize the average scores and general patterns in the data.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention, we used **paired t-tests** to compare before-and-after scores within each group. This allowed us to determine if changes in self-esteem were statistically significant. Additionally, **ANCOVA (Analysis of Covariance)** was used to control for any pre-existing differences between the two groups. This helped ensure that any improvements in the experimental group's self-esteem could be attributed more confidently to the bibliotherapy sessions, rather than to external factors.

Ethical Considerations

Working with adolescents demands special care and responsibility. We took several steps to ensure that the study was conducted ethically and respectfully.

- **Parental Consent**: Written consent was obtained from the parents or guardians of all participants.
- **Voluntary Participation**: Students were informed that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could opt out at any time without any consequences.
- **Anonymity and Confidentiality**: All responses were kept confidential, and participants' names or identifying details were never used in data reporting.
- **Emotional Safety**: While bibliotherapy is generally gentle and supportive, discussing personal topics can sometimes bring up unexpected emotions. We made sure that a school counselor or psychologist was available to provide support if any student became distressed during or after a session.

III.RESULT

To assess the effectiveness of group bibliotherapy, we compared self-esteem scores before and after the six-week intervention using both numerical and visual data.

Quantitative Findings

We used the **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale** to measure changes in self-esteem among both the experimental group (who received bibliotherapy) and the control group (who did not).

Here is a summary of the average scores:

Group	Time	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Control	Pre	13.62	1.80
Control	Post	13.96	1.86
Experimental	Pre	13.83	1.98
Experimental	Post	16.96	1.82

- As shown in the table, the **control group** showed a very slight improvement in their self-esteem scores, with the mean increasing from 13.62 to 13.96.
- In contrast, the **experimental group** experienced a much more notable increase—from 13.83 to 16.96—suggesting that bibliotherapy had a significant positive effect.

Graphical Insights

The bar graph above visually highlights this difference. The rise in self-esteem scores in the experimental group after the intervention is clear, while the control group's change is minimal. The "Post" scores for the experimental group stand significantly higher, reflecting the positive impact of the structured reading and group discussions.

Statistical Analysis

We conducted **paired t-tests** within each group:

- In the **control group**, the change in scores was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$).
- In the **experimental group**, however, the increase was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming that the intervention had a meaningful impact.

We also used **ANCOVA** to control for any baseline differences, ensuring that the observed improvements could be more confidently attributed to bibliotherapy rather than other external factors.

Optional Qualitative Insights

Although not the primary focus, some students in the bibliotherapy group shared informal feedback. Many expressed that they "felt heard" during the sessions and that the stories helped them reflect on their own experiences. Several participants described the sessions as "safe spaces" to explore emotions and said they looked forward to coming each week.

IV.DISCUSSION

This study set out to explore a relatively simple but potentially powerful idea: could reading and sharing stories in a group setting help teenagers feel better about themselves? The findings suggest that it can. The group of adolescents who participated in weekly bibliotherapy sessions showed a marked improvement in self-esteem compared to those who did not. These results align with existing research on both bibliotherapy and adolescent psychological development, while also offering some fresh

insights into how literature can support emotional growth in real-world school settings.

Connecting to the Literature

The improvement in self-esteem scores among the bibliotherapy group resonates with earlier studies that highlight the therapeutic power of stories. Previous clinical and educational research has demonstrated that **bibliotherapy can support emotional processing**, encourage self-awareness, and provide coping strategies, especially among young readers navigating identity and self-worth issues (Heath et al., 2005; Shechtman, 2009). What stands out in our study is that this intervention occurred not in a clinical setting, but in the familiar, everyday environment of a school.

A key reason bibliotherapy works—particularly in adolescence—is because stories offer more than entertainment. They provide mirrors and windows: **mirrors that reflect the reader's own experiences** and struggles, and **windows into the lives of others**, helping young people recognize that they are not alone in their feelings. In our sessions, students were able to connect with characters who faced rejection, failure, or confusion and overcame those challenges with courage and resilience. These connections helped many participants relate their own experiences to the narrative, offering a sense of hope and agency.

Moreover, this intervention emphasized **group reading and discussion**, not just solitary reading. This matters. The group setting created space for **peer support**, where students could openly discuss their thoughts and feelings in response to the stories. Such discussions often sparked empathy—one participant noted, "I didn't know others felt the same way I did." The **shared narrative experience** allowed participants not only to learn from fictional characters but also from one another. This sense of solidarity is known to be protective for adolescent mental health, and it clearly played a role in boosting self-esteem for many in the group.

Limitations of the Study

Despite these encouraging results, there are important limitations to acknowledge.

First, the sample size was relatively small—just 60 students in total. While the statistical analysis showed strong results within this group, a larger sample might provide more generalizable findings. The study also used **purposive sampling**, meaning students were selected based on their low-to-average self-esteem scores. While this helped us target those most likely to benefit, it also introduces the possibility of selection bias.

Second, the **non-random assignment** of students to the experimental and control groups means we cannot rule out other influences that might have contributed to the observed changes. For instance, if the bibliotherapy group had more engaged teachers or a more supportive environment outside of school, this could have impacted the results.

Third, the **duration of the intervention was just six weeks**. While the short timeframe was chosen for practical reasons, it is possible that longer-term interventions could yield more sustained or even greater improvements in self-esteem. Likewise, we did not conduct a follow-up to assess whether the benefits were maintained over time.

Lastly, the study relied solely on **quantitative self-reporting tools** (the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale). Although this scale is well-validated and widely used, it might not capture all the nuanced emotional shifts that occurred during the sessions. Some students may have experienced benefits that were not reflected in their scores but would emerge in a more qualitative format.

Practical Implications for Schools and Counselors

Despite these limitations, the implications for educators, school counselors, and policymakers are significant. Bibliotherapy is a **low-cost, scalable, and adaptable** method that could easily be integrated into school programs, especially in contexts where access to trained mental health professionals is limited.

The intervention does not require clinical expertise—teachers, librarians, or trained peer facilitators can be guided to lead discussions using thoughtfully chosen texts. It also encourages **positive literacy engagement**, creating an academic and emotional win-win. Schools could implement bibliotherapy through language arts classes, extracurricular clubs, or well-being programs.

Additionally, counselors can use bibliotherapy to supplement one-on-one or group counseling. Stories can serve as conversation starters, especially for adolescents who may struggle to articulate their feelings directly. For students dealing with anxiety, low confidence, or social isolation, identifying with characters in a safe, structured environment can be deeply therapeutic.

Importantly, the **group dynamic** of bibliotherapy means that it builds more than just individual self-esteem. It fosters **empathy and peer connection**, two qualities that are often undermined in high-pressure, achievement-oriented school cultures. Creating space for emotional learning and self-reflection is not just about mental health—it's also about helping students become more thoughtful, grounded, and resilient human beings.

Looking Ahead

This study opens the door for further research. Future studies could explore bibliotherapy over longer periods, include follow-up evaluations, and introduce more diverse texts, including those written in regional languages or reflecting local cultural contexts. It would also be valuable to study bibliotherapy in combination with other psychological interventions or in digital formats, especially as more students engage with stories through audiobooks or e-readers.

V.CONCLUSION

This study began with a simple but powerful question: can reading stories in a group setting help teenagers feel better about themselves? Based on the results, the answer appears to be yes. Adolescents who participated in structured bibliotherapy sessions

over six weeks showed a meaningful and statistically significant improvement in their self-esteem, especially when compared to those who did not receive any such intervention.

The findings are important because they highlight the emotional power of literature—not just as a means of academic learning, but as a pathway to self-discovery, healing, and connection. When young people see their own struggles reflected in the lives of fictional characters, they feel understood. When they talk about those stories with peers who are also trying to make sense of growing up, they feel less alone. In a world where teenagers are increasingly isolated or overwhelmed by social pressures, such simple interventions can make a big difference.

One of the most encouraging aspects of this study is the practicality of bibliotherapy. It is affordable, does not require expensive equipment or facilities, and can be carried out by educators or counselors with basic training. It also integrates well into existing school routines, making it a scalable mental health support tool—especially in schools with limited access to psychologists or social workers.

That said, we also need to approach these findings with humility and a willingness to learn more. The study had limitations, including its small sample size, short duration, and non-randomized design. While the results are promising, they are also a starting point, not a final word. Future research should explore bibliotherapy on a larger scale, using more diverse samples and longer-term follow-ups to see if the benefits last over time. Randomized controlled trials would also help confirm the strength and consistency of its impact.

In essence, this study affirms what educators, counselors, and book lovers have long suspected—stories matter. When shared thoughtfully, they can open doors to empathy, reflection, and emotional growth. Bibliotherapy is not a magic cure, but it is a gentle, accessible, and deeply human approach to supporting adolescent mental health. As we continue to search for effective and inclusive ways to care for our youth, it's worth keeping the power of a good story in mind.

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