The Effect of Bibliotherapy on Emotion Regulation Competence and Language Learning Outcomes: A Study on Left-Behind Children in China

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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of bibliotherapy on emotion regulation competence and language learning outcomes, using theme-based English picture books with left-behind children who had experienced parental absence that caused the frequent expression of negative emotions. To examine its effectiveness, 90 participants were recruited and divided into three groups: a bibliotherapeutic treatment group, a semi-treatment group, and a control group. The data were analyzed via a paired samples t-test, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson correlation analysis. The results revealed that bibliotherapy with specific theme-based English picture books worked effectively in improving left-behind children's emotion regulation competence and later their English proficiency. Some implications and suggestions for school counselling projects and future studies are offered and discussed.

Keywords: bibliotherapy, theme-based English picture books, left-behind children, emotion regulation, English academic attainment

Introduction

The unequally shared economic development within China has been leading hundreds and millions of people who live in rural areas to stream into well-developed cities in search of higher-paid jobs. Such mass migration has caused the emergence of *left-behind children* who are individuals under the age of 18 that have been left in their hometowns, separated from one or both of their parents who seek work in developed regions (Banister, 1997; UNCIEF, 2017). According to *2017 White Paper on Psychology of Chinese Left-behind Children* (Li, 2018), more than 23 million left-behind children exist in China, and approximately 58% of them suffer from psychological problems, such as the frequent expression of negative emotions. The number is still increasing. Such negative emotional conditions have been proven to be highly associated with low academic achievement, especially in English language learning (Chen & Gong, 2006). These children are in urgent need of therapeutic intervention for negative emotion regulation which could improve their emotional well-being and later lead to improved academic performance. To achieve this goal, many school counselling projects, which are one of the most essential sources of guidance and support for left-behind children, are increasingly emerging. However, these projects, such as musical healing projects, have been proven to be unaffordable, unfeasible, inappropriate or not able to be implemented on a large-scale (Yang, 2013; Sun, 2013).

Bibliotherapy refers to the employment of literature to conduct emotional treatments. Research demonstrates that bibliotherapy can benefit students in both academic and emotional growth (Heath, Smith, & Young, 2017). Also, theme-based bibliotherapy has been proven as an effective method that guides students in dealing with the emotional problems caused by parental absence (Betzalel & Schechtman, 2017). Furthermore, it has shown to be a "strategy to offer in school settings at a minimal cost and with minimal resource and time investment" (Heath & Young, 2017, p. 453). The characteristics of English picture books make them one of the genres of literature that can be used to deliver bibliotherapy to left-behind children with low emotion regulation competence and English proficiency. Therefore, theme-based English picture book bibliotherapy can be reasonably assumed to be one of the most appropriate therapeutic interventions. However, its effectiveness for left-behind children has rarely been studied.

Thus the purpose of the present study is to examine whether using theme-based English picture books to conduct bibliotherapeutic intervention, in combination with English classes, for left-behind children could be a two-birds-one-stone method that improves not only their emotion regulation competence but also their English learning outcomes. The following research questions guided the current study:

(1) Does English literature based bibliotherapeutic intervention, particularly when using theme-based English picture books, work effectively in helping left-behind children improve their emotion regulation competence?

(2) If the emotion regulation competence of left-behind children improves with the help of bibliotherapy, can this lead to progress in English learning?

Literature review

Parental absence: the cause of frequent expression of negative emotions

John Bowlby's theory on attachment is useful when considering how being left behind affects children's emotional condition (Goldberg, 2000; Goldberg, Muir, & Kerr, 2013). Bowlby (1969) describes attachment as "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (p. 194). According to Bowlby's theory (1988), whenever a young individual's process of attachment to parental figures is ongoing, unwilling separation causes distress and anxiety. Therefore, it seems evident that some left-behind children's unexpected emotional conditions are caused by the fact that they have been unwillingly deprived of their parental attachment figures. Hence, the left-behind children are facing developmental challenges, placing them at a higher risk and more detrimental situations for developing emotional and psychological problems, and proper therapeutic interventions are demanded (Leve et al., 2012).

Detrimental effects of negative emotions on academic attainment – English learning in particular

Pekrun and Garcia (2012) state that "emotions are ubiquitous in academic settings, and they profoundly affect students' academic engagement and performance" (p. 259). Studies also indicate that emotions can profoundly impact the learning of a foreign language, as emotions are closely associated with students' motivation, engagement, memory and cognitive progress (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Additionally, a study involving 189 foreign language pupils and 152 English learners and users in Saudi Arabia found that better tests results could be obtained when students experienced higher levels of enjoyment in foreign language classes (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018). Similarly, MacIntyre and Vincze (2017) examined the relationship between foreign language learning outcomes and ten positive and nine negative emotions. Their findings demonstrated that positive emotions strongly and consistently correlated with better lan-

guage learning outcomes. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that left-behind children can achieve better English learning outcomes, when they are able to effectively regulate negative emotions and increase the emotional valence.

Emotion regulation

Based on the abovementioned discussions, it is imperative for left-behind children to improve their emotion regulation competence, as young students' emotional functioning plays a vital role in learning and academic achievement (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger, 2011). Blair (2010) argued that emotion regulation ability could act as a significant marker of school readiness. Other researchers (e.g. Kwon, Hanrahan, & Kupzyk, 2016; King & Mrug, 2018) have also suggested that effective emotion regulation, especially negative emotion regulation, could be a predictor for positive academic outcomes.

In psychology, various theories about emotion regulation and emotion regulation strategies have been proposed. The definition used to guide the present study was developed by Gross (1998, 2014): "emotion regulation refers to shaping which emotions one has, when one has them, and how one experiences or expresses these emotions [in particular situations]" (Gross, 2014, p. 6). To achieve successful emotion regulation, individuals employ one or more strategies, and there are five regulatory families of emotion regulation strategies: 1) situation selection; 2) situation modification; 3) attentional development; 4) cognitive change; and 5) response modulation (Gross, 2014). Individuals of different age groups tend to apply different emotion strategies. Klipker, Wrzus, Rauers, and Riediger (2017) contend that adolescents seem to be more sophisticated than others in using *cognitive change* approach to deal with negative emotions. *Reappraisal* is one of the cognitive change emotion regulation strategies. When applying it, individuals "modify how [they appraise] a situation so as to alter its emotional significance, either by changing how [they think] about the situation or about [their] capacity to manage the demands it poses" (Gross, 2014, p. 10).

Hence, it is fair to assume that guiding left-behind children at different ages to enhance emotion regulation competence by adopting effective strategies can effectively benefits their learning, and English learning in particular.

Bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy is defined as "an indirect intervention that uses literature for personal growth" (Rozalski, Stewart, & Miller, 2010, p. 33), and "refers to the use of literature as treatment of emotional concerns", i.e. "treatment through books" (Betzalel &

Shechtman, 2017, p. 474). It has been proven to be a therapeutic strategy that can be offered in school with minimal cost, resources and time investment (Heath & Young, 2017). Furthermore, it is well-recognized as an effective method in assisting foreign language learners to improve their target language skills (Afolayan, 1992; Eur, 2012; Forgan, 2002; Maich & Kean, 2004; McMillen, 2006).

Bradley and Bosquet (1936) were the first researchers to recommend that physicians use books to treat children with emotional disorders (Jack & Ronan, 2008). The principles which function as the foundation of bibliotherapy are based in the classic psychotherapy principles of *identification*, *catharsis*, and *insight* (Iaquinta & Hipsky, 2006; Rozalski, Stewart, & Miller, 2010). When readers relate themselves to specific characters or situations in the stories, the first principle, *identification*, occurs (Rozalski, Stewart, & Miller, 2010). This process allows a reader to "gain a sense of security in finding that he is not alone, and there may be help for him also" (Livengood, 1961, p. 27). The process of *catharsis* occurs "when readers revisit feelings that previously were repressed" and gain insights into what happened to the characters and to themselves. *Insight* "occurs when readers understand the feelings and situations in a new way" (Livengood, 1961, p. 34) and positive changes are motivated and triggered (Iaquinta & Hipsky, 2006). Rozalski, Stewart, and Miller (2010) argue that, in the process of bibliotherapeutic intervention, target individuals can discern their own behaviors and emotions on the basis of characters' experience in the literature. More importantly, this can imperceptibly and unconsciously exert a subtle influence by changing the way they think about the same or similar situations. From this perspective, these principles share similar characteristics to the cognitive emotion regulation approach *reappraisal*. This suggests that bibliotherapy could be an effective tool for the improvement of target left-behind children's emotion regulation competence, as posited in the current study.

Apart from the benefits of bibliotherapy on emotion regulation, a number of researchers advocate the use of bibliotherapy as scaffolding for struggling English learners (e.g. Afolayan, 1997; Eur, 2012; Forgan, 2002). Bibliotherapy is fundamentally based on reading literature and therefore shares the advantages of literature use in language education. McKay (1982) shows that literature occupies an essential place in the ESL curriculum and "literature [is] an ideal vehicle for illustrating language use" (p. 536). Ghosn (2002) suggests that "literature [could] contribute to language learning as it [presents] natural language use, language at its finest, and could thus foster vocabulary development in context" (p. 173).

Rationale for choosing English picture books as bibliotherapy materials

For successful bibliotherapeutic intervention, choosing appropriate literature materials is essential (Briggs & Pehrsson, 2008). English picture books are books with a blend of illustrations and text (Driggs Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007). Many studies evidence that picture books can act as effective teaching and bibliotherapeutic materials. Furthermore, picture books explore various themes, including emotion regulation, parental love, parting, and parental absence (Elsenman & Harper, 2016). Betzalel and Shechtman (2017) propose that specific theme-based literature could meet unique demands for different purposes of bibliotherapy. Additionally, English picture books are regarded as sound materials in terms of English learning (Smallwood, 1987; Hsiu-Chih, 2008). They have been shown to be an effective type of teaching material for individuals with lower English proficiency, due to the nature of picture books, namely their uncomplicated plots, natural use of English, and simple authentic sentences with illustrations.

As noted in the review of literature, some left-behind children express negative emotions more frequently due to long-lasting periods of parental absence. This can have a detrimental influence on their learning, in particular their learning of English. To improve their learning outcomes, emotion regulation competence needs to improve. Research indicates that bibliotherapy is likely a sound interventional approach for the improvement of both emotion regulation competence and English learning outcomes in school settings. Considering the characteristics of English picture books, it is reasonable to think they would work effectively as materials for bibliotherapy. Therefore, we can predict that theme-based English picture book bibliotherapy will function as an effective interventional approach to improving left-behind children's emotion regulation competence and subsequently their English learning outcomes.

Method

Research design

This study was devised to examine the effect of bibliotherapy on emotion regulation competence as well as language learning outcomes among left-behind children. Aspects of the bibliotherapeutic materials, such as the interest levels of the books, the implicit influence of contents, etc., as well as the way bibliotherapy is implemented can also influence the research findings (Harper, 2010). This means that, when encountering teaching materials and instructional approaches that are different from the regu-

lar ones, the participants' higher emotional valence that can influence their response to ERQ and ERICA questions, and the motivation for learning may be stimulated, even though there is no bibliotherapeutic intervention. If there is only an experimental group whose subjects are exposed to the theme-based English picture book bibliotherapy and a non-treatment control group, it is hard to determine whether the results reflect the effect of bibliotherapy or the impact of different teaching materials and instructional approaches. Thus, in order to obtain more rigorous results, the study was conducted by comparing participants who received treatment with the theme-based English picture book bibliotherapeutic intervention (Group A), to those who received semi-treatment (Group B), i.e. treatment was given with the same pedagogy and the theme-based English picture books, but no bibliotherapeutic intervention inserted, and to non-treatment participants (Group C). This way, the effect of bibliotherapy can be examined in a more rigorous manner.

Participants

The participants in the current study were students, aged 12-13, who were studying at second grade of the MS middle schools (anonym of the school) where approximately 96% of students were left-behind children in Guangxi Province, China. Participants received no therapeutic intervention regarding emotion regulation beforehand. All students had been learning English since they were third graders in primary school. Their three years of middle school English education emphasized words as well as grammatical knowledge, focusing mainly on tenses and basic sentence structure acquisition.

Teachers' feedback about students' emotional conditions was collected, because, although previous research indicates a high percentage of left-behind children have emotional problems, this is not true for all. After getting the information required, 90 students (girls 51.1%, boys 48.9%, age M=13.16, SD=.833) who were in similar conditions were selected and randomly divided into three equal groups; the experimental and semi-experimental groups A and B, and the control group C. The software, *Gpower,* which was suggested in previous research conducted by Glaser (2014), was applied to predict the total sample size. The total sample size of 75 was indicated. Thus, the 90 was deemed to be sufficient to test the research hypotheses.

Instruments

Emotion regulation competence was measured by the revised version of the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; Gross & John, 2003) developed by Gullone,

and Taffe, (2012) and the Emotion Regulation Index for Children and Adolescents (ERICA; MacDermott, Betts, Gullone, & Allen, 2009) as an additional measure.

ERQ (see appendix 1), which specifically focuses on *emotion regulation skills*, *suppression* and, mainly, *reappraisal* that was assumed to be improved through the bibliotherapeutic intervention in the present study, was applied, allowing for a more rigorous measurement. The revised version of ERQ was reworded based on the original version of ERQ proposed by Gross and John (2003). "The ERQ has been reported to have high internal consistency (α=.79 for *reappraisal*, α=.73 for *suppression*) and 3-month test–retest reliability (r=.69 for both scales), as well as sound convergent and discriminant validity" (Gullone & Taffe, 2012, p.3). Gullone and Taffe (2012) reworded each item to make it optimal for non-adult participants. ERQ is comprised of 10 items with 6 items focusing on *reappraisal* and 4 items measuring *suppression*. They also reduced the response scale length to five-point Likert scales. Higher scores show higher emotion regulation competence.

ERICA (see appendix 2) is a 16-item self-report questionnaire using the five-point Likert scale response format, which aims to evaluate the level of emotion regulation competence. It is reported to possess sound internal consistency (α=.81) and acceptable test-retest reliability (MacDermott, et al. 2009, Glaser, 2014). Higher scores demonstrate higher emotion regulation competence.

Since there were no Chinese adaptations of either ERQ or ERICA, two native English speakers fluent in Chinese translated and back-translated the measurements to generate the final Chinese adaptations of ERQ and ERICA.

English proficiency was measured by school English exams administered before and after the treatments. The English exams consisted of 40 multiple choice items about English grammar in the form of a listening test, grammar test, and reading test. All items were selected from a middle school English test question bank, which ensured those items possessed satisfactory reliability and validity. The highest possible mark was 120.

Intervention and procedure

Treatments were conducted by the same English teacher, who had received bibliotherapy training, through 40-minute extra after-school English classes four times a week for 10 weeks. The participants' emotion regulation competence and English proficiency were measured before and after the treatment period to detect whether there were any significant and meaningful differences.

Treatments for Group A were designed to impart English knowledge and conduct English picture book bibliotherapeutic intervention with picture books about emotion

regulation, parental absence, and parting. For Group B, the same English picture books were utilized but only English knowledge was taught and there was no bibliotherapeutic intervention. For the control group (Group C), no bibliotherapeutic intervention inserted either, and the regular textbooks were used for teaching and reviewing the same English knowledge, such as past tense, learnt by participants of the Group A and B during extra English courses. The general information is shown in Figure 1.
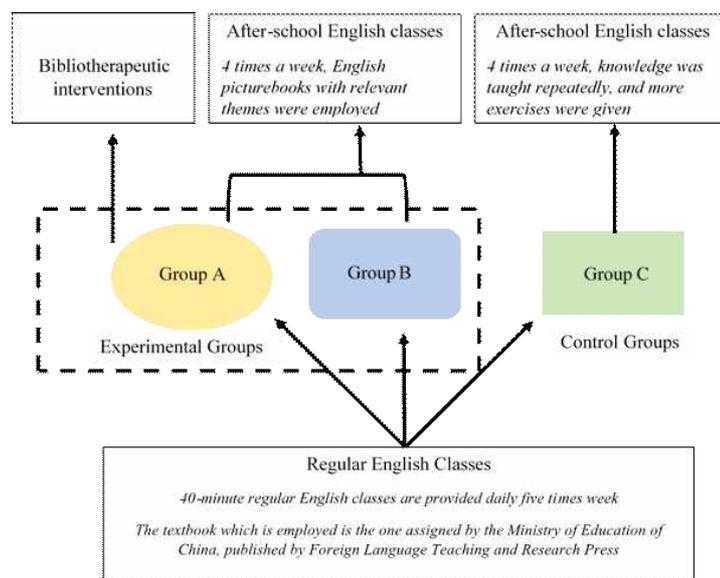

Figure 1. General information about research design: treatments and instruction for experimental groups and control group

Steps to implement bibliotherapeutic intervention

Bibliotherapeutic intervention (Appendix 3) was implemented in accordance with three stages of bibliotherapy, integrating steps proposed by Prater, et al. (2006) and Forgan (2002).

Identification, which functions as the theory underpinning bibliotherapy, decides whether the bibliotherapy can be therapeutic (Afolayan, 1992; Sridhar & Vaughn, 2000). Thus, selecting proper theme-based literature is the key for this step (Forgan, 2002). The readability and language accessibility of the selected materials should also match target readers' English levels (Pardeck, 1995). Specific approaches were provided by researchers (e.g. Heath et al. 2005; Prater et al. 2006; Rozalski, Stewart, & Miller, 2010). After going through the suggested steps, five English picture books con-

cerning how to deal with parental absence, parting, and negative emotion regulation were selected: (a) *Wherever You Are: My Love Will Find You*, (b) *The Goodbye Book*, (c) *Happy Hippo, Angry Duck*, (d) *Cool Down and Work through Anger*, and (e) *When Sophie Gets Angry – really, really angry*. During sessions when the teacher read the stories aloud, the participants were led to fully engage with the stories in order to make meaningful connections with the characters.

Catharsis allows readers to become emotionally involved in the stories' plots after making meaningful connections to characters and events (McEncroe, 2007) and to recognize that they are not the only ones who have experienced such situations and difficulties (Forgan, 2002). To encourage students to form meaningful and emotional ties with characters, post-reading activities were conducted. Participants were instructed to make comparisons between how they felt and how characters would feel in similar situations by drawing Venn diagrams and compiling contrast lists. They were then assisted in discussing the similarities and differences between themselves and the characters with their peers or the teacher. The teacher asked questions about stories and allowed participants to response in a comfortable environment, thereby helping participants comprehend the problems and solutions offered by the stories. Additionally, participants were encouraged to retell the stories, rewrite part of the stories and write a letter to the characters to describe their own feelings. This allowed the teacher to get a deeper understanding of how they felt after being involved in the bibliotherapeutic intervention.

Insight is the final stage of bibliotherapy, during which the participants were able to take action and make positive changes. Prater et al. (2006) suggested that teachers should discuss with participants, centering on what they learned from the stories as well as the real-life applications of problem-solving strategies. Therapeutic activities were implemented based on their ideas. The emotion regulation strategies, especially *reappraisal*, were specifically emphasized during the activities. The teacher provided questions to inspire participants to re-evaluate their situations. Later, participants were instructed to consider the strategies that were used by characters to deal with difficulties and regulate their negative emotions. Take the activity which used the picture book titled "*When Sophie Gets Angry – really, really angry*" as an example. Learning about *reappraisal* as an emotion regulation strategy was the bibliotherapeutic goal of using this picture book. Discussion were conducted by talking about how characters deal with anger, and participants were required to compile contrast lists to compare the characters' anger-regulation strategies with their own. Consecutively, they were instructed to discuss whether either of these strategies were acceptable or effective. After that, the teacher assisted participants in brainstorming more strategies they could use to re-consider or reappraise the situations that aroused their anger, especially in the context of learning English.

English Teaching Methods

For Group A and Group B, English knowledge was taught via creative teaching methods proposed by Peachey and Maley (2015). For Group A, the abovementioned bibliotherapeutic intervention activities, e.g. drawing Venn diagrams, storytelling, and role play, were integrated with English teaching by using English as the medium. Target English knowledge was also integrated into those activities. For Group B, similar teaching activities, e.g. role play and storytelling, were conducted to guide participants in learning the target English knowledge, but no in-depth bibliotherapeutic intervention was used. For the control group, the grammar translation method and regular English textbooks were used.

Results

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 24. Based on the aims of the present study, the preliminary data were firstly obtained. The means of pre-test scores for ERQ and ERICA are shown in Figure 2. The one-way ANOVA was used to test the initial levels of participants. No significant differences were found at the significance level of .05, regarding English proficiency ($F_{(2, 87)} = 2.483$, $p > .05$) or participants' emotion regulation competence (ERQ: $F_{(2, 87)} = 1.595$, $p > .05$, ERICA: $F_{(2, 87)} = .426$ $p > .05$). Also, no significant difference could be noted between participants' gender and either their emotion regulation competence (ERQ: $F_{(1, 88)} = 3.102$, $p > .05$, ERICA: $F_{(1, 88)} = .210$ $p > .05$), or their English proficiency ($F_{(1, 88)} = 1.392$, $p > .05$).

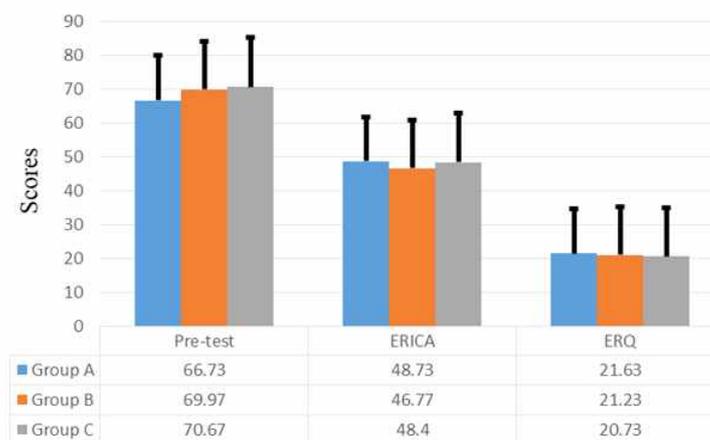|	Pre-test	ERICA	ERQ
Group A	66.73	48.73	21.63
Group B	69.97	46.77	21.23
Group C	70.67	48.4	20.73

Figure 2. Comparison of preliminary data of participants of each group.

Bibliotherapeutic effects

To answer the first research question, ANOVA was conducted on participants' ERQ and ERICA scores obtained after the treatments to test the effect of the theme-based English picture book bibliotherapy on target participants' emotion regulation competence. Table 2 shows the ANOVA results. The results indicated a significant difference (F (2, 87) =125.57, p <.05, η²=.742) between conditions: participants of Group A had higher ERQ and ERICA scores (ERQ: M=40.63, SD=3.996, ERICA: M=61.90, SD=6.835) than did participants of Group B (ERQ: M=23.07, SD=6.08, ERICA: M=49.17, SD=9.703) and Group C (ERQ:M=21, SD=5.54, ERICA: M=48.90, SD=7.849), indicating that the participants who received bibliotherapeutic treatments showed great improvement in their emotion regulation competence and better competence than participants in the semi- and non-treatment groups. This suggests that the theme-based English picture book bibliotherapy has a positive effect on the improvement of emotion regulation competence. Table 3 shows the results of multiple comparisons. The results revealed that ERQ scores of Group A significantly differed from those of semi- and non-treatment groups (p<.05), while no significant difference could be observed between the two non-bibliotherapeutic intervention groups (p>.05). Additionally, the ERICA measurement results (F (2, 87)=24.538, p<.05, η²=.361) further support these findings (see Tables 4 and 5).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (after the treatment)

Group		ERQ	ERICA
Group A	N	30	30
	M	40.63	61.90
	SD	3.996	6.835
Group B	N	30	30
	M	23.07	49.17
	SD	6.080	9.703
Group C	N	30	30
	M	21.00	48.90
	SD	5.540	7.849

Table 2. The ANOVA analysis of ERQ scores

ERQ scores after the treatments					
	df	MS	F	p	η^2
Between Groups	2	3491.633	125.275	.000	.742
Within Groups	87	27.872			
Total	89				

Table 3. Multiple comparisons among ERQ scores

Dependent Variable: ERQ scores after treatments

Bonferroni

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	*p*	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Group A	Group B	17.567	1.363	.000	14.24	20.89
	Group C	19.633	1.363	.000	16.31	22.96
Group B	Group A	-17.567	1.363	.000	-20.89	-14.24
	Group C	2.067	1.363	.399	-1.26	5.39
Group C	Group A	-19.633	1.363	.000	-22.96	-16.31
	Group B	-2.067	1.363	.399	-5.39	1.26

Table 4. ANOVA analysis of ERICA scores among three groups

ERICA scores after the treatments

	df	MS	F	*p*	η^2
Between Groups	2	1656.044	24.538	.000	.361
Within Groups	87	67.489			
Total	89				

Table 5. Multiple Comparisons among ERICA scores

Dependent Variable: ERICA scores after treatments

Bonferroni

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	*p*	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Group A	Group B	12.733	2.121	.000	7.56	17.91
	Group C	13.000	2.121	.000	7.82	18.18
Group B	Group A	-12.733	2.121	.000	-17.91	-7.56
	Group C	.267	2.121	1.000	-4.91	5.44
Group C	Group A	-13.000	2.121	.000	-18.18	-7.82
	Group B	-.267	2.121	1.000	-5.44	4.91

Further demonstrating significant change in emotion regulation competence, each group's participants' ERQ and ERICA scores that were obtained before and after the treatments were analyzed by a paired-samples t-test. The descriptive statistics are shown in Figure 3. The paired-samples t-test results indicated that, in the bibliotherapeutic intervention group, outcomes were more favourable and significant differences could be noted: Group A: ERQ: t(29)=-24.206, $p<.05$; ERICA: t(29)=-12.417, $p<.05$; Group B: ERQ: t(29)=-1.989, $p>.05$; ERICA: t(29)=-1.573, $p>.05$; Group C; ERQ: t (29)=-.701 $p>.05$; ERICA: t (29)=-.672, $p>.05$.
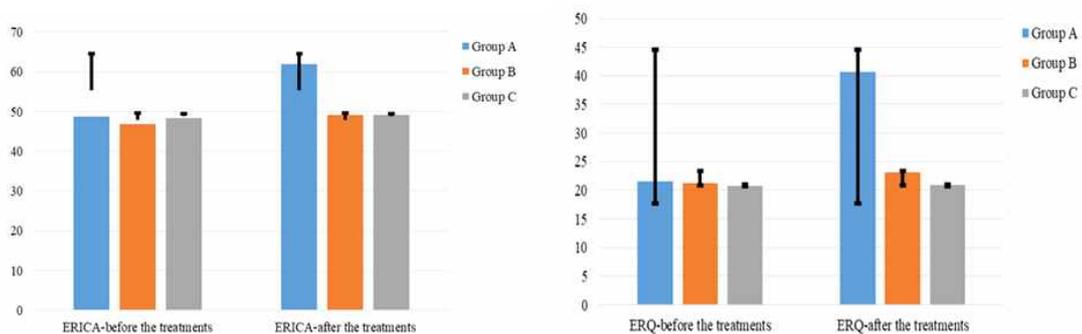

Figure 3. Comparisons of ERQ and ERICA scores obtained by participants of each group before and after the treatments

Furthermore, since the emotion regulation strategy *reappraisal* is commonly used by juveniles, whether the treatments made specific improvements to this skill was analyzed by a paired-samples t-test. Group A's results evidenced that the treatment made the anticipated contribution, namely participants' *reappraisal* competence was enhanced by the bibliotherapeutic intervention (reappraisal scores: M-before=10.77, SD=3.2, M-after=24.85 SD=1.8, t(29)=-25.881 $p<.05$). Interestingly, a significant difference could also be noted in the semi-treatment group, having 9.37 and 12.9 as mean before and after the treatments respectively (t(29)=-8.701, $p<.05$). No significant difference between *reappraisal* scores that were obtained before and after the treatments could be observed for participants of Group C (t(29)=-.993, $p>.05$). However, the result of the Post Hoc test further indicated that, although the *reappraisal* scores obtained by participants of both the treatment group and semi-treatment group showed significant differences before and after the treatments were administered, a statistically significance difference ($p<.05$) could be noted between Group A and Group B, and more favorable outcomes were indicated by the higher scores achieved by Group A's participants (see Figure 4 and Table 6).
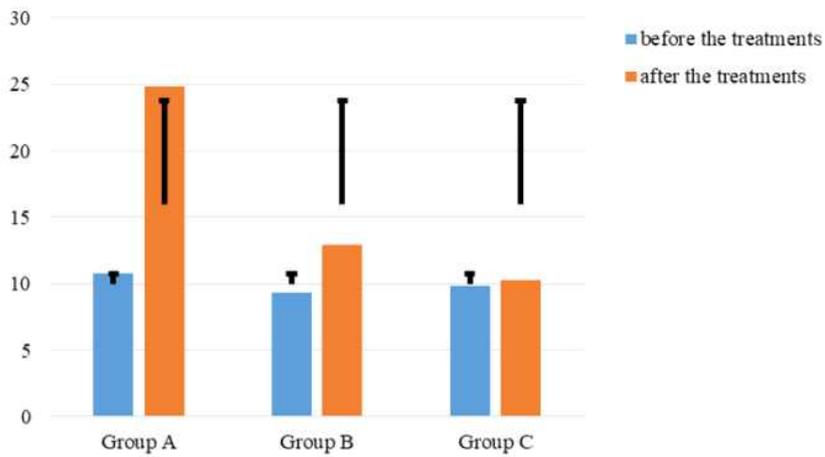
Figure 4. Comparison of *reappraisal* scores obtained by participants of each group before and after the treatments.

Table 6. Multiple Comparisons of reappraisal scores obtained by participants of each group (before and after the treatments)

Bonferroni

Dependent Variable	(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	p	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
R-before	Group A	Group B	1.400	.897	.367	-.79	3.59
		Group C	.900	.897	.955	-1.29	3.09
	Group B	Group A	-1.400	.897	.367	-3.59	.79
		Group C	-.500	.897	1.000	-2.69	1.69
	Group C	Group A	-.900	.897	.955	-3.09	1.29
		Group B	.500	.897	1.000	-1.69	2.69
R-after	Group A	Group B	11.953	.813	.000	9.97	13.94
		Group C	14.553	.813	.000	12.57	16.54
	Group B	Group A	-11.953	.813	.000	-13.94	-9.97
		Group C	2.600	.813	.009	.62	4.58
	Group C	Group A	-14.553	.813	.000	-16.54	-12.57
		Group B	-2.600	.813	.009	-4.58	-.62

The correlation between the changes of emotion regulation competence and English academic attainment

The second research question of the current study was that when left-behind children improved their emotion regulation competence, they might make positive progress in English learning. Thus, the English learning outcomes of participants were measured. The paired-samples t-test results demonstrated a significant positive change in the bibliotherapy condition: the pre-test scores and scores obtained after the bibliotherapy treatment by participants of Group A differed significantly(M-pre- test= 66.73, SD=7.625, M-after the treatment=85.20, SD=9.636, t(29)=-22.397, $p<.05$) from the other groups.

Interestingly, in the semi-treatment condition, significant and positive changes were also observed, M-pre-test=69.97, SD=7.462; M-after the treatment=78.50, SD=8.266; t(29)=-12.625, $p<.05$. No statistically significant changes were noted in Group C (M-pre-test =70.67, SD=6.764; M-after the treatments=73.5, SD=7.19; t(29)=-1.725, $p>.05$). While within group differences were observed in both the treatment and semi-treatment groups, the ANOVA (F(2, 87)=13.903, $p<.05$) and Post Hoc test analysis (see Table 7) revealed that there was also a significant difference ($p<.05$) between scores obtained by participants of Group A and Group B in regard to their improvement of English proficiency. This indicated that more favorable outcomes were gained by participants in the bibliotherapy condition.

Table 7. Multiple Comparisons of English test scores among three groups -- after the treatments

Dependent Variable: English Test score -- after the treatment

Bonferroni

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	p	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Group A	Group B	6.700	2.227	.010	1.26	12.14
	Group C	11.700	2.227	.000	6.26	17.14
Group B	Group A	-6.700	2.227	.010	-12.14	-1.26
	Group C	5.000	2.227	.082	-.44	10.44
Group C	Group A	-11.700	2.227	.000	-17.14	-6.26
	Group B	-5.000	2.227	.082	-10.44	.44

To further establish the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in the improvement of emotion regulation competence and, subsequently, participants' English learning outcomes, a Pearson correlation analysis was applied to the data. Figure 5 and Table 8 illustrate high correlations (r-ERQ-English score changes=.86 r-ERICA-English score changes= .749) with a significance level of .01. These results provided a positive answer to the second research question, namely whether the improvement of left-behind children's emotion regulation competence benefited their English learning. In other words, the bibliotherapeutic intervention contributed to the enhancement of participants' English academic attainment by assisting them in the improvement of their emotion regulation competence.
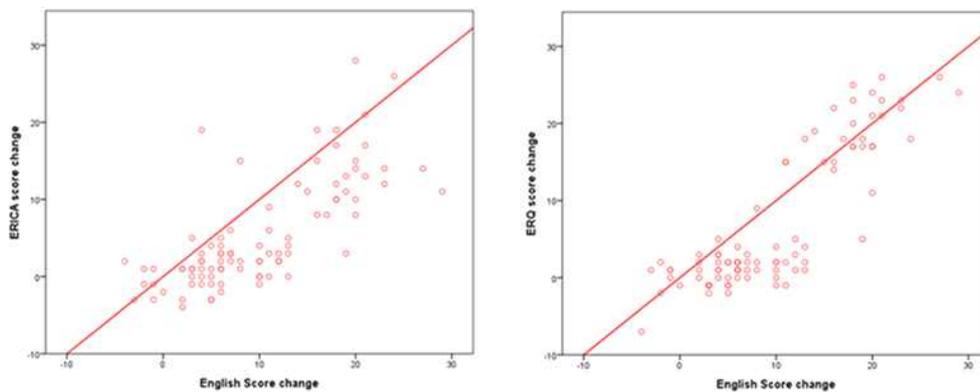

Figure 5. Correlations between the changes of ERQ and ERICA scores and English scores

Table 8. Correlations between the changes of ERQ, ERICA and test scores

		English score changes
ERQ changes	Pearson Correlation	.860*
	p	.000
	N	90
ERICA changes	Pearson Correlation	.749**
	p	.000
	N	90

** *p*<.01 (2-tailed)

Discussion and implications

The present study examined the effect of bibliotherapeutic intervention on left-behind children who have frequently expressed negative emotions due to parental absence, with the goal of examining the efficacy of theme-based English picture book bibliotherapy in the improvement of their emotion regulation competence and, subsequently, their English academic attainment.

Based on the ERQ and ERICA measurements, results revealed that participants in the bibliotherapy condition exhibited significant positive improvement in emotion regulation competence, especially *reappraisal* strategies. Unlike the participants who received bibliotherapeutic intervention, the participants in the semi-treatment group and the control group demonstrated no statistically significant changes in emotion regulation competence in general. Thus, it is fair to assert that theme-based English picture book bibliotherapy can facilitate the improvement of left-behind children's emotion regulation competence. These results are in line with and support previous research on theme-based literature bibliotherapy (e.g. Betzalel & Shechtman, 2017).

The positive outcomes achieved by participants in the bibliotherapeutic group can be attributed to the unique features of bibliotherapy. To start with, bibliotherapy allows target readers to feel less threatened as they are indirectly exposed to difficulties and problems rather than being directly confronted by problems which may make them feel threatened, nervous, and annoyed. Previous studies showed that directly leading participants to face problems could trigger negative outcomes. For example, Qiao and Duan (2009) and Cui (2009) asserted that when talking about their parents and the fact that they were left-behind in their hometowns, left-behind children were quick to become angry, irritable, and self-abased. Furthermore, previous research demonstrated that, since most emotional problems were caused by the absence of parental care, the majority of left-behind children tended to avoid talking about and facing this fact and its by-product problems (Gao, 2008). Such problems can be avoided when conducting bibliotherapeutic intervention. In the current study, rather than forcing participants to directly discuss or face problems, participants in the bibliotherapeutic condition were aided in viewing problems from different perspectives with the help of theme-relevant English picture books. Unlike the negative interventional outcomes reported in the above-mentioned research (e.g. Gao, 2008; Qiao & Duan, 2009; Cui, 2009), the participants of the present study did not show disgust, anger or other negative emotional or behavioral reactions when involved in bibliotherapeutic intervention.

Secondly, as mentioned previously, bibliotherapeutic intervention allows target readers to identify their own personal issues, problems, and situations by following stories which show similar situations from a distance, and then to make positive

changes. Li (2008) asserted that some left-behind children, especially when they were between the age of 6 to 12, started to be aware of their surroundings and bear a grudge against their parents and circumstances, becoming irritable, introverted, eccentric, self-abased and unsociable. More severely, they sank in negative states which left them unable to develop alternate perspectives. Under such conditions, making positive changes seems hardly possible (Li, 2008). Such problems were proven to be solved effectively by conducting bibliotherapy as shown in the present study. The left-behind children in the bibliotherapeutic condition stated that after reading and discussing the English picture books with themes of parting and the similar situations from an emotional distance, they started to identify and analyze their own reactions and behaviors. Some participants elaborated that after comparing the reactions of characters (such as the little fish in *The Goodbye Book*) to their own reactions to parting, they realized that they were not the only ones suffering and experiencing sadness. Such empathy made them realize that different reactions could lead to different results, and that trying to react like those characters might help to improve their emotional condition.

Furthermore, although no significant improvement was observed in emotion regulation competence of the participants of Group B in general, the comparison of the *reappraisal* scores revealed that meaningful changes still occurred. There are some possible explanations for this. To start with, the content of the selected English picture books is about reappraising and re-evaluating the situations that characters experience in order to make positive and meaningful changes. This may implicitly lead participants of Groups B to employ such emotion regulation strategy. Secondly, these English picture books showed the participants optimistic and hopeful endings, which allowed them to view their lives with more hope and believe that they might also be able to improve their academic and personal lives. These results are partly in line with the research results provided by Betzalel and Shechtman (2017) and further substantiates their suggestion that the specific content of literature can meet the unique needs of readers.

In terms of English learning outcomes, correlation analyses were conducted to detect relationships between the changes in ERQ and ERICA scores and English test scores. Both results revealed positive relationships and high correlations between these two variables. The results offer robust evidence that effective emotion regulation which increases learners' emotional valence can make positive contributions to the improvement of English learning outcomes. This can be explained by examining the detrimental effects of negative emotions on English learning. Negative emotional states are reported to hinder positive language learning outcomes and comprehension (e.g. Verhees, 2015). Interestingly, unlike the participants in Group C, the participants in Group B also made some progress in English learning, although it was much less and not as favorable as that obtained by Group A's participants. Using English picture

books, which are more interesting than the school English textbooks, and teaching ac-
tivities which could trigger participants' interest should be considered as possible
rationales.

The results of the present study hold some implications for school counselling and
teaching. Considering the positive results of the bibliotherapy condition, it may func-
tion as an effective counselling strategy to guide students in improving emotion regu-
lation competence by helping them identifying their problems, while looking at them
from an emotional distance in an unthreatening way. Bibliotherapy could be im-
plemented by combining it with daily courses or after-school courses, enabling adop-
tion in large-scale school settings, especially at schools located in impoverished areas.
Furthermore, while the present study showed the effectiveness of theme-based English
picture books, it is possible to tailor the selection of literature to other students with
different needs. The basic principle is that theme-based literature should be employed
to generate meaningful ties between readers and characters. This enables the inter-
vention to be bibliotherapeutic and ensures the expected interventional outcomes. Also,
as theme-based English picture books worked effectively as the teaching materials in a
context of middle school EFL teaching, it is reasonable to suggest that English picture
books could be employed to stimulate learning interests, motivations, and positive
emotions of other low-achieving students as well.

Conclusion

The present study helps to fill the gap of previous unstudied aspects of bib-
liotherapy for the purpose of emotion regulation and for a specific group of juveniles,
left-behind children. Results clearly indicate that theme-based English-picture book bib-
liotherapy worked effectively in the improvement of emotion regulation competence of
left-behind children who frequently expressed negative emotions due to parental ab-
sence, and that this improvement of emotion regulation competence could trigger better
English learning outcomes. Future studies could apply a similar approach to help lean-
ers facing a range of emotional problems, and explore how different literary themes
could meet the unique needs of students of different ages, socioeconomic backgrounds,
etc.

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Korean Abstract

감정 조절 능력 및 언어 학습 결과에 **Bibliotherapy**의 효과 : 중국에서의 **left-behind children**에 관한 연구

Nan Hu(고려대)

본 연구는 부정적인 감정을 빈번하게 일으키는 부모가 부재 한 좌식 left-behind children의 감정 조절 능력과 언어 학습 결과에 bibliotherapy 조영술의 효과를 조사 하였다. 테마 기반 영어 그림책이 자료로 사용되었습니다. 그 효과를 확인하기 위해 90 명의 참가자를 모집하여 세 가지 그룹으로 분류했다 : 실험군, 반실험군 및 대조군. 데이터는 Paired sample t-test, 일원 분산 분석 (one-way ANOVA) 및 피어슨 상관 분석을 통해 분석되었습니다. 그 결과 특정 테마 기반 영어 그림책은 left-behind children이의 감정 조절 역량을 향상시키고 나중에 영어 실력을 향상시키는 데 효과적으로 작용한다는 것이 밝혀졌습니다. 학교 상담 프로젝트와 향후 연구에 대한 몇 가지 함의와 제안이 제시되고 논의되었습니다.

주요어: bibliotherapy, 테마 기반 영어 그림책, left-behind children, 감정 조절 능력, 영어 학습 결과

Appendix 1: Emotion Regulation Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents (ERQ) reworded by Gullone, E., and Taffe, J. (2012)
(1= strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=half and half 4=agree 5=strongly agree)

Reappraisal	
1	When I want to feel happier, I think about something different
3	When I want to feel less bad (e.g. sad, angry or worried), I think about something different.
5	When I'm worried about something, I make myself think about it in a way that helps me feel better
7	When I want to feel happier about something, I change the way I'm thinking about it
8	I control my feelings about things by changing the way I think about them

10	When I want to feel less bad (e.g. sad, angry or worried) about something, I change the way I'm thinking about it
Suppression	
2	I keep my feelings to myself
4	When I am feeling happy, I am careful not to show it
6	I control my feelings
9	When I'm feeling bad (e.g. sad, angry or worried), I'm careful not to show it

Appendix 2: Emotion Regulation Index for Children and Adolescents (ERICA)
MacDermott, Betts, Gullone, & Allen (2009).
(1= strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=half and half 4=agree 5=strongly agree)

1	I am a happy person
2	When adults are friendly to me, I am friendly to them
3	I handle it well when things change or I have to try something new
4	When I get upset, I can get over it quickly
5	When things don't go my way I get upset easily
6	When other students are friendly to me, I am friendly to them
7	I have angry outbursts
8	I enjoy seeing others hurt or upset
9	I can be disruptive at the wrong times
10	I get angry when adults tell me what I can and cannot do
11	I am a sad person
12	I have trouble waiting for something I want
13	I am quiet and shy, and I don't show my feelings
14	I do things without thinking about them first
15	When others are upset, I become sad or concerned for them
16	I annoy others by not minding my own business

Appendix 3. Bibliotherapy Lesson plan (example)   Book title: *The Goodbye Book*

Objective: Students will learn that when you experience parting, reconsider the situation positively can bring more happiness and hopes.

Pre-reading: Show the picture books to students and have them predict what the book will be about.

Guided reading: Read the aloud the whole story. Give students time to reflect on the reading.

Post-reading: 1. Evaluate characters feelings. (draw Venn diagram to compare your feelings and characters' feelings about parting)
2. Discuss the characters' and students' situations.
3. Ask questions about the book to help facilitate a class discussion for bibliotherapy.
   a. Who was the main character in the book?
   b. What was the situation in the book? It is similar or different from yours?
   c. How do you think the main character felt?
   d. Why do you think that she felt this way?
   e. Have you ever felt this way before?
   f. What was the resolution used by the character, can you list some more solutions?
   g. Can you tell what the character feel when it reappraisal the problem?

Problem solving activity: The students will discuss many ways to help the character and things they could do to trigger better outcomes in such situation. The teacher assisted students to talk about the theme (parting) and demonstrate whether and how they could reappraisal the situation for better outcomes.

English knowledge: 1. Sentence structure: It is + adj. to do something… 2. The usage of modal verbs. (Sample sentence in the *The Goodbye Book*)