



## THE EFFECTS OF THE BIBLIOTHERAPY TECHNIQUE ON PERFECTIONISM LEVELS IN GIFTED CHILDREN: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY<sup>i</sup>

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### Abstract:

Perfectionism is one of the personality traits of gifted children. When this trait, which may have positive or negative effects on the individual, is incorrectly handled by the child, it can cause problems such as anxiety and stress. The aim of this study was therefore to investigate the effects of bibliotherapy on perfectionism levels in gifted children. A total of 64 gifted children in the 3rd and 4th years of primary school (that is, children aged 9-10) took part in the study. The scale used to measure their perfectionism levels was the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) (Özbay & Mısırlı-Tasdemir, 2003), while the Reading Attitude Scale (RAS)(Ünal, 2006) was used to measure attitudes to reading. A random selection of 14 individuals whose scores were above the group average was identified for this study, in which the 2X2 experimental model was applied. Of these 14, 7 who had received high scores in RAS were placed in the experimental group, while another 7 of the same ages and genders were placed in the control group. When equivalence between the two groups had been obtained, the 7-session bibliotherapy-based training program was administered by the researcher to the experimental group. As a result of the study, it was found that the bibliotherapy training program thus applied reduced perfectionism levels to a significant degree. This reduction was found to be significant in terms of the following sub-scales of MPS: excessive concern over making mistakes, personal standards, doubting the quality of one's actions and preference for order, and organization (but not in the dimension of parental criticism).

**Keywords:** perfectionism, bibliotherapy technique, gifted children

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## 1. Introduction

It is well known that perfectionism, which is a common research area in psychology and brings about the formation of high personal standards (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990), is a personality characteristic of gifted children – whose IQ, creativity, artistic ability and leadership qualities are higher than those of their peers (Colangelo & Davis, 2003). Studies in this field continue to investigate the question of whether or not gifted individuals are more perfectionist than their peers (Parker, 2000; Schuler, 2000), while attempts are being made to identify techniques for coping with the negative consequences of the phenomenon.

Although it is a comparatively new technique, bibliotherapy (which involves the use of directed readings of written materials in order to solve problems, or to gain an insight into the reader's therapeutic needs) (Riordan & Wilson, 1989) is seen as a useful technique for gifted individuals, who acquire reading and other skills at an earlier age than their peers and are keen readers.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Perfectionism

The subject of whether perfectionism is a personality trait or a character type is still under investigation. Defining perfectionism is a difficult task owing to the lack of the necessary criteria, one of which is the ability to distinguish its adaptive faces from its maladaptive ones (Slaney & Ashby, 1996). However, various researchers have examined the issue from a number of perspectives, and have arrived at varying definitions.

Various forms of perfectionism have been identified: the one-dimensional, the categorical and the multi-dimensional. As Gençtan (2006) mentioned, Freud (1959), who was one of the first to describe perfectionism, saw the attempt to achieve perfection as a basic function of the superego – one of the features of which is over-eagerness to succeed.

Hollander (1965), who was one of the first to study perfectionism and adopted a one-dimensional approach, emphasized its maladaptive aspects, defining it as an expectation that both the individual and others should perform better than actually necessary. Burns (1980), meanwhile, carried out an extensive analysis of the concept of perfectionism, defining it as 'a network of knowledge' involving expectations, interpretations of events and evaluations of oneself and others.

Hamachek (1978), the foremost interpreter of perfectionism as categorical, saw it as a process leading the individual away from normal behaviour patterns and towards neurotic ones. Thus, he identified two dimensions of the phenomenon: normal and neurotic. Frost et al. (1990) on the other hand, adopted the multi-dimensional approach, identifying six sub-dimensions of perfectionism: personal standards, high parental expectations, parental criticism, doubting the quality of one's actions, preference for order and organization, and excessive concern over making mistakes.

Although theoretical perspectives may show some variation, many specialists agree that the characteristics of perfectionist individuals exhibit strong similarities. According to Antony and Swinson (2009) these characteristics are excessive control- and trust-seeking, repetition and correction, excessive organizing and listing, indecision, suspension, quick renunciation, avoidance, and lack of authorization. While these characteristics may at first glance appear negative, Silverman (1993) takes a different view in the case of gifted children, as will be seen below.

## **2.2 Perfectionism in gifted children**

It was Hollingworth (1926) who first – in the 1920s, following her studies of gifted children – recognized that perfectionism is an emotional feature of giftedness. In Clark (2002)'s view, perfectionism (in addition to a number of other features) is one of the basic characteristics of giftedness. Silverman (1993), meanwhile, sees it as an energy requiring direction rather than as a negative characteristic; she lists the following 6 reasons for perfectionism in gifted children:

1. Perfectionism is an abstract concept, and abstract intelligence is required in order to understand it. The ability to conceive of abstractions is an essential condition of giftedness.
2. Perfectionism is a function of asynchronous development.
3. Gifted children also set standards according to the mental age of their peers, rather than their chronological age.
4. Thanks to their greater capacity for forethought, gifted children are more frequently successful, and come to expect success.
5. When schoolwork is easy, the only challenge is to accomplish it perfectly.
6. Perfectionism is a distortion of the desire for self-perfection, which is a positive evolutionary drive (Silverman, 2007).

Other educators and researchers have lent their support to the belief that perfectionism has both positive and negative aspects (Roedell, 1984); also, its role in the emotional wellbeing of gifted children and adolescents has been investigated from the point of view of pathology (Schuler, 2000). It is believed that perfectionism is by nature a negative characteristic that needs to be treated, and that it can lead to a number of psychological problems ranging in severity from anxiety to suicidal tendencies (Sisk, 2005). When seen from these viewpoints, perfectionism is an obstacle that needs to be overcome if the talents of gifted children are to be developed (Schuler, 2000).

Roedell (1984), too, noted that perfectionism has both positive and negative aspects; he maintains that most gifted children make a secret effort to set impossible goals for themselves in order to achieve perfection. Hearing parents and teachers compliment them ("Great job!") for success in tasks that are not particularly difficult leads to a lack of self-confidence on the part of gifted children, reducing in their estimation the value of praise for success in more difficult matters.

Some studies involving gifted children have included comparisons between them and their more 'average' peers (Kanlı, 2011; LoCicero & Ashby, 2000) ; others, meanwhile, have concentrated on gender differences in gifted children (Kline & Short,

1991). Of these latter studies, some have attempted to identify the dimensions of perfectionism (Siegle & Schuler, 2000) while some have investigated the factors affecting the development of perfectionism (Neumeister, 2004). The great majority of such studies have focused on adolescents; however, as the foundations of perfectionism are laid during childhood, the phenomenon needs to be addressed at an earlier stage of the child's development.

When the various studies that have been conducted into perfectionism both in Turkey and in other countries are examined, it will be seen that cognitive techniques are the ones most often used to cope with perfectionism (Kağan, 2006; Kearns, Forbes, & Gardiner, 2007; Kutlesa & Arthur, 2008). However, in recent years there has been increasing interest in a number of therapeutic approaches used in psychology, as well as in assistive techniques. One of these assistive techniques is bibliotherapy, the use of which as a tool during the process of coping with perfectionism has been advised (Hebert, 1991; Leana-Taşçılar, 2012; Silverman, 1993).

### **2.3. The bibliotherapy technique**

Bibliotherapy, in its simplest form, is using books in order to help people solve their problems (Cornett & Cornett, 1980). According to another definition, it is a subjective evaluation of the relationship between a work of literature and the personality of the reader – a dynamic interaction which can be used to achieve successful adaptation and development (Cornett & Cornett, 1980). Bibliotherapy, which may alternatively be defined as putting the individual in contact with the right book at the right time, should not be seen as a 'free reading' activity. Choosing the right book for the individual's condition is of critical importance; moreover, bibliotherapy is a lengthy and challenging process when we take into account the various steps of implementation, the activities involved and the characteristics the practitioner needs to possess (Cornett & Cornett, 1980).

The various stages of bibliotherapy may be defined as identification, catharsis, insight and generalization. Identification may be briefly described as the perception of similarities between one of the characters in the book and the reader's own self (Cornett & Cornett, 1980; Pardeck, 1994). Catharsis is the release of suppressed feelings on the part of the reader as a result of vicariously experiencing the thoughts and feelings of the character concerned (Afolayan, 1992). At the insight stage, it is the reader's attempt to experience by proxy the resolution of the character's problems (thus realizing that her or his own problems will not remain insoluble) that is of greatest importance (Afolayan, 1992). The purpose of the generalization stage, meanwhile, is to enable the reader to see her or his problems from a broader perspective, and to acknowledge that other people encounter similar difficulties (Heath, Sheen, Leavy, Young, & Money, 2005).

According to Pardeck (1993), the administration of bibliotherapy has four basic stages: identification on the part of the reader with the subject matter of the book, the selection of a book that is appropriate for the problem, the presentation of the material to be read, follow-up, and discussion (McCulliss, 2012). The discussion stage is of

fundamental importance as it is during and after this time that many participants develop the desired understanding and empathy.

Since the 1980s, a number of studies into bibliotherapy conducted in various countries have shown that it can play an effective role in the treatment of more serious mental disorders such as non-adaptability (Betzalel & Shechtman, 2010), aggression (Honig, 2009) and harassment (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1984) – in addition to depression (Floyd, 2003), anxiety (Jones, 2006) and panic attack (Febbraro, 2005); it can also be profitably used during training in social skills (Forgan & Gonzales-DeHass, 2004). In Turkey, however, the use of bibliotherapy has been limited. The first to speak of it was Öner (1987), while Yeşilyaprak (2009) gave an overview of studies conducted into its use in schools. Bulut (2010), for his part, mentions the role of bibliotherapy in the counseling of adults, and Leana-Taşçılar (2012) maintain that it can be used in regular classes attended by gifted students.

#### **2.4. The use of bibliotherapy with gifted children**

Bibliotherapy, which is used for various purposes by psychological counselors and educators, can be used to enhance positive characteristics in gifted children just as much as in others: in particular, it can be used to increase self-esteem, and to develop a sense of value, positive attitudes and critical thinking. In addition, it can be used in many other ways – for instance, to enhance problem-solving abilities and to support and guide career development, as well as to modify aggressive behaviors in underachieving gifted individuals (Jeon, 1992).

The exceptional enthusiasm for reading that is shown by gifted individuals, their keenness to ask questions and their capacity for abstract thinking all combine to improve their response to bibliotherapy. The fact that they begin to read at an earlier age is another contributory factor (Frasier & McCannon, 1981). It is considered that because gifted readers hesitate to discuss their outstanding characteristics as it causes discomfort, bibliotherapy will provide them with a secure environment in which to explore, discuss and evaluate their fears (Hebert, 1991). It is also claimed that this technique is highly useful in enabling gifted children to understand their thoughts and feelings (Sisk, 2005). When gifted children realize that other young people have emotional experiences that are similar to their own, the discussions during bibliotherapy in which they listen to their peers may help them to understand that they are not alone (Hebert & Kent, 2000).

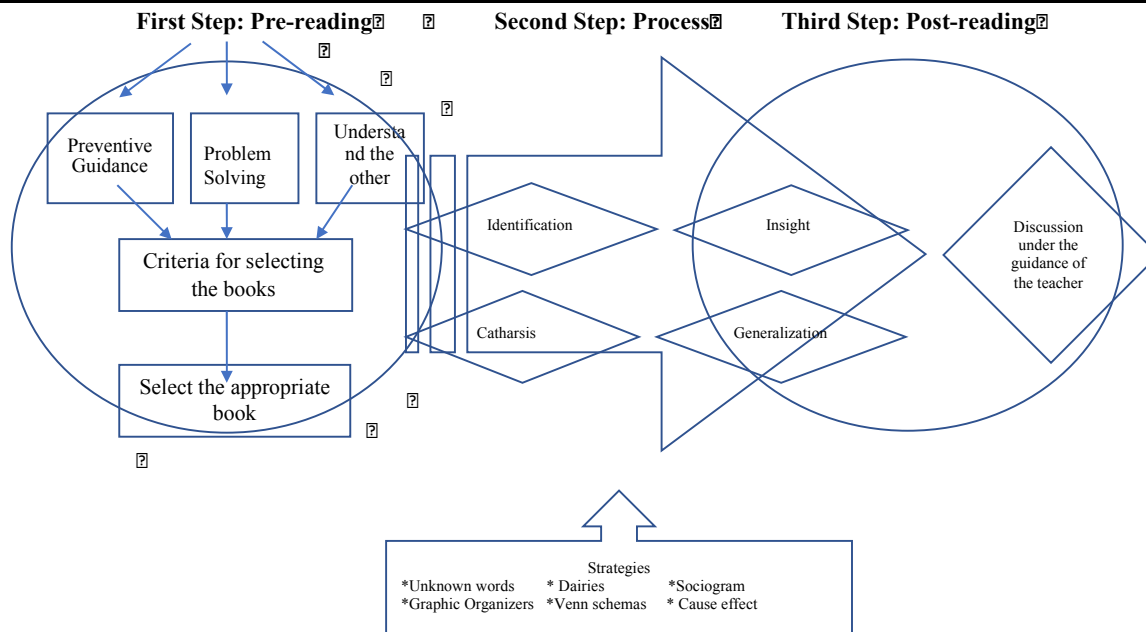
Bibliotherapy is an effective technique that can be used with children of every level of intelligence. However, as gifted children have characteristics such as deriving pleasure from reading, learning to read both at an earlier age and generally through their own efforts (rather than being taught), and possessing reading skills that are at least two years ahead of their peers (as well as more advanced comprehension and language abilities) (Reis et al., 2004), this technique may be expected to be even more effective in solving their problems. Gifted readers are quicker to integrate the information in texts, and the experiences these texts describe, with materials they have previously read; they are creative in their use of high-level thinking abilities such as

analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Catron & Wingeback, 1986). Reis et al. (2004) lists the characteristics of gifted readers as enthusiasm for reading-based activities, the ability to perceive how concepts encountered in books previously read might relate to new experiences, extended concentration, attempting to understand challenging reading materials without being deterred by their difficulty, and feeling enthusiasm for materials thought to be of interest.

When all the above factors are taken into consideration, the criteria that need to be borne in mind when choosing books for gifted children in order to gain the maximum benefit from the technique (over and above the general criteria that need to be applied in book selection, which is the first step in bibliotherapy) may be listed as follows:

1. It is important that the language in the books selected should be expressive, original, varied and exciting.
2. The books selected should be open-ended, inspiring the reader to think what the outcome of the story might be.
3. The actions of the characters should not be too complex, and should be well-defined enough to allow the reader to interpret and evaluate them.
4. The books should contribute to the development of problem-solving skills and creative thinking.
5. The characters should be suitable for adoption as role-models.
6. A wide range of book types should be selected – from comics to mythological stories and real-life dramas, and from biography and science fiction – and these should embody a variety of styles of writing (Leana-Taşçılar, 2012).

The study carried out by Leana-Taşçılar (2012) contains a proposed model that may be applied in regular classes attended by a certain number of gifted children. This model consists of the following phases: pre-reading, the process itself (that is, the reading of the book) and post-reading. In the pre-reading phase, a book appropriate to the topic to be focused on (for instance, perfectionism and anxiety) must be selected, and this book must be suitable for the unique characteristics of gifted children. During the process itself, in order for bibliotherapy to result in the wished-for identification and catharsis, the practitioner should facilitate these two steps by asking appropriate questions. In the post-reading phase, meanwhile, the aim is the achievement of insight and generalization – these being the last two steps in the bibliotherapy process. Thus, the post-reading discussion phase, led by the practitioner or teacher, is of critical importance (Leana-Taşçılar, 2012) (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Steps of a bibliotherapy model for the gifted students they are attend in regular classrooms

Those bibliotherapy-related studies that have been carried out in Turkey have generally focused on explaining the term itself; by contrast, the number of experimental studies actually carried out has been extremely limited (Aracı, 2007; Uçar, 1996). As stated above, most gifted children are usually keener on reading than their peers. Thus, in the current study an answer to the following question was sought:

1. Has the bibliotherapy training program carried out on gifted children by the researchers had any effect on their levels of perfectionism?

### 3. Method and Materials

#### 3.1. Method

The participants in this study, which was carried out during the 2014-2015 academic year, were 64 gifted children in the third and fourth-class years – that is, aged between 9 and 10 years – at Istanbul Enderun Children’s University (a special pull-out program for gifted children) (Table 1.). All participants were given RAS, MPS and WISC-R. When results had been evaluated, the parents of students who had achieved above-average results in RAS ( $x=109.02$ ) and MPS ( $x=102.43$ ) were given information about the purpose and content of the bibliotherapy program. 7 students who were keen to participate and had promised to continue until the end were chosen for the experimental group; meanwhile, another 7 students whose RAS scores were again above average but who had not acquired the habit of reading were selected for the control group. The experimental and control groups were formed on the basis of the lack of any significant difference between their MPS scores.

### **3.2. Materials**

In order to determine the intelligence level of the participants, WISC-R was applied by psychologists at Istanbul Enderun Children's University. The researchers, meanwhile, used the personal information form to collect information on certain demographic parameters, and MPS (Özbay & Mısırlı-Taşdemir, 2003) to measure perfectionism levels; they also applied RAS (Ünal, 2006) in order to determine attitudes towards reading.

#### **3.2.1. The personal information form**

The personal information form, which was developed by the researchers, consisted of questions on students' gender, school, grade level and level of academic success, plus questions on their parents' level of education, profession, income level and reading habits.

#### **3.2.2. WISC-R**

The WISC-R was developed by Wechsler (1974) in order to measure cognitive abilities in children between the ages of 6 and 16, and was adapted to the Turkish language by Savaşır and Şahin (1995). It consists of two parts: Verbal and Performance. The two-half test reliability is .98 for Verbal, .96 for Performance and .98 for Total. The criterion for giftedness was 130 and above.

#### **3.2.3. MPS**

Attempts to modify the MPS, which was first developed by Frost and his colleagues (1990), were carried out by Özbay and Mısırlı Taşdemir (2003) on a group of 489 students at high schools specializing in science subjects. The scale, which consisted of 35 items, contains 5 sub-dimensions: personal standards, high parental expectations, parental criticism, doubting the quality of one's actions, preference for order and organization, and excessive concern over making mistakes. A high score indicates high perfectionism level. The reliability of the scale varied between .63 and .87 for Total and the subscales. The Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient was .83, and the Split Half Reliability was .80. For the current study, meanwhile, the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient was .87 and the Split Half Reliability was .74.

#### **3.2.4. RAS**

The one-dimensional scale developed by Ünal (2006) consists of 25 items, of which 11 are negative and 14 positive. The study of the scale's validity and reliability was carried out with 1017 students attending the fifth grade (aged 11-12 years). Cronbach's Alpha value was .90. The test-retest correlation coefficients for items between the two applications were found to have significance above 0.001. In the current study, the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient was .90 for the sample, and the Confidence Interval Coefficient for the partition was .82.



### 3.2.5. The bibliotherapy-based training program

This program, which was applied in seven sessions, was developed by one of the researchers under the supervision of the second researcher. The main aim of the program was to raise awareness of the factors contributing to the development of perfectionism, and the identification of new ways of dealing with it. All the sessions were based on a previously-chosen book, which was given to participants to read as homework (Pardeck, 1993). Care was taken to ensure that the books chosen for the sessions met the two criteria of suitability for the need and embodiment of strategies for dealing with perfectionism as defined by the five subscales of MPS.

A list of the books to be used in the sessions was given to the participants and their families, and a period of one week was allotted for the reading of each book. During the first and third sessions, the researcher read the books to participants from the smartboard in the classroom, while the students followed the text. The sessions usually began with pre-reading activities, following which the researcher elicited an account of the story. Afterwards, a list of questions on the story (prepared in advance by the researcher) was distributed to the class, and written answers to these questions were produced by the students. Then, after a short break, a class discussion on the questions was initiated. This phase was supplemented by a variety of activities, and the total length of each session was 80-90 minutes. During the first session, the researcher used 'Eliza is Afraid of Being Unsuccessful' (Noreau & Masse, 2015), which takes as its theme failure and the fear of making mistakes, and is short enough to be finished in one session. As this was the initial session, it began with an introduction game; then, after an explanation of classroom rules, the book was read out by the researcher. Finally, the class answered the questions in writing, and as a post-reading activity students were asked to make up a slogan that would boost confidence in situations where they were afraid of failure.

The second session was designed to raise awareness of the negative effects of extreme orderliness and over-organization, and to this end '*Puldan Taştan Lahanadan*' ('*Of Stamps, Stones and Cabbages*') (Ak, 2014) was selected. In order to direct attention towards the post-reading discussion questions, the researcher asked participants to draw a symmetrical picture, and a class discussion was then held on the difficulties involved.

The third session began with a discussion focusing on a list of quotations on the subject of fear of failure that had been displayed on the classroom wall. The book chosen for this session, '*The Girl Who Never Made Mistakes*' (Pett & Rubinstein, 2013), was read out by the researcher. As a monitoring activity, participants were asked to write down five mistakes that they had made during their lives up to that point, and what they had learned from them.

The focus of the fourth session was a book called 'The Report Card' (Clements, 2008). This book, in which the main character is a gifted child, shows the reader the negative effects of inflated parental expectations, pressure applied by them on their children, and the making of unfavourable comparisons – the aim being to demonstrate that high grades are not the sole criterion of success. Following the discussion phase,

participants were asked to develop a new grading system, and to design a new report card.

The subject matter of the fifth session was the negative effects of inflated expectations and over-critical attitudes on the part of parents. The book chosen for this session was *'Annem Babam Okul 1.incisi'* (*'Both my Mother and my Father were the Most Successful Students in their Schools'*) (Güneş, 2013) . One of the things participants were asked to do during the written post-reading activity was to hold a brain-storming session in groups of three in which they brought forward various solutions to the problem described above. This was followed by a general class discussion.

The theme of the sixth session was the fact that making mistakes is a part of the learning process, and the book chosen – *'The Value of Creativity: The Story of Thomas Edison'* – (Johnson, 1984) was again one in which the main character was a gifted person. Following a discussion of the written questions, the researcher explained that perfectionist individuals have no liking for group activities; 'tetriso' (a group game) was then played in order to illustrate this fact and to teach students how co-operation leads to success.

In the seventh and last session, *'Ramona's World'* (Cleary, 2013) was used to raise awareness of the negative effects of 'perfect performance' – that is, of extreme effort. In order to develop problem-solving skills, the post-reading discussion ended with the researcher asking the class to suggest solutions to the problem posed in the book.

#### 4. Results

A total of 64 gifted children took part in the research program. The socio-demographic characteristics of these individuals are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sociodemographic Information About the Gifted Students Attending to the Istanbul Enderun Children's University Pull-out Program

Variables	Groups	n	Percent (%)
Gender	Female	33	51.6
	Male	31	48.4
Age	9	44	68.8
	10	20	31.2
Grade	3	44	68.8
	4	20	31.2
Mothers' Education Level	Primary-Secondary	16	28.1
	High School	15	26.3
	College Degree	26	45.6
Mothers' Occupation	House wife	40	65.6
	Working	21	34.4
Fathers' Education Level	Primary- Secondary	12	21.1
	High School	13	22.8
	College Degree	32	56.1
Fathers' Occupation	Private	33	54.1
	Public	9	14.8

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	Freelance	19	31.1
Number of Siblings	One	41	65.1
	More than one	22	34.9
Income Level	Average	27	42.2
	Above Average	37	57.8
<b>Total</b>		64	100

When Table 2 is examined, it will be seen that the mean score of the 64 gifted students in MPS was 109.02, while their mean score in RAS was 102.43.

**Table 2:** Mean and SD of MPS and RAS

Scales	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
MPS	64	56	141	109.02	18.86
RAS	63	49	121	102.43	14.65

The means and standard deviations in the pretest-posttest results of MPS for the control and experimental groups are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3:** MPS Pre-test and Post-test Means and SD of the Experimental and Control Groups

Group	n	Pre-test		Post-test	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Experimental	7	127.71	8.20	98.43	13.12
Control	7	123	8.46	123	11.60

It will be seen from Table 3 that while the mean scores of the experimental group in MPS was 127.71, this group's posttest result was 98.43. In the control group, however, MPS mean scores for pretest and posttest were 123 and 123. When we examine the MPS results of both groups, we observe that there was a difference – though not a significant one (see Table 4) – between them with regard to the MPS scores obtained before the training program.

**Table 4:** MPS Pre-test Mann Whitney-U Test Results of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Mean Rank	Rank Total	U	P
Experimental	7	9.21	64.5	12.5	0.12
Control	7	5.79	40.5		

p>.05

As shown in Table 4, there was no significant difference in pretest levels of perfectionism between the control and experimental groups (U=12.500, p>.05).

While pretest MPS results for the control and experimental groups showed no significant difference, posttest results showed a difference in favour of the group that had received bibliotherapy training. In order to determine whether or not this difference was significant, students' posttest MPS scores were analyzed using the Mann Whitney-U test; the results are summarized in Table 5.

**Table 5:** MPS Post-test Mann Whitney-U Test Results of Experimental and Control Groups

Groups	N	Mean Rank	Rank Total	U	P
Experimental	7	4.64	32.5	4.500	.010*
Control	7	10.36	72.5		

\*p<.01

Table 5 demonstrates that following the bibliotherapy program, a significant difference in levels of perfectionism was found between students who had participated in the program and those who had not (U=4.500, p<.01). When mean ranks are taken into consideration, levels of perfectionism in participants will be seen to be lower than those of non-participants. This finding shows that the bibliotherapy program was effective in reducing levels of perfectionism in individuals with a high level of this trait.

**Table 6:** MPS Subscales Pretest Mann Whitney U Test Results of Experimental and Control Groups

MPS Subscales	Groups	n	Mean Rank	Rank Total	U	P
Excessive Concern over Making Mistakes	Experimental	7	10.13	81	19.000	.171
	Control	7	6.88	55		
Parental Criticism	Experimental	7	7.38	59	23.000	.339
	Control	7	9.63	77		
Parental Expectations	Experimental	7	7.25	58	22.000	.291
	Control	7	9.75	78		
Personal Standards	Experimental	7	8.63	69	31.000	.915
	Control	7	8.38	67		
Doubting the Quality of Ones Actions	Experimental	7	7.38	59	23.000	.332
	Control	7	9.63	77		
Preference for Order	Experimental	7	10.19	81.5	18.500	.129
	Control	7	6.81	54.5		

Table 6 shows the results of Mann Whitney-U analysis carried out on pretest MPS subscales of students in the experimental and control groups. No significant difference was found between pretest scores for the experimental and control groups (p>.05).

While results of Mann Whitney-U analysis carried out on pretest MPS subscales of students in the experimental and control groups showed no significant difference, it will be seen (in Table 7) that there was a significant difference in favour of the experimental group with regard to posttest results. Table 7 provides information on exactly which subscales exhibited differences between the two groups.

**Table 7:** MPS Subscales Posttest Mann Whitney-U Test Results of Experimental and Control Groups

MPS Subscales	Groups	n	Mean Rank	Rank Total	U	p
Excessive Concern Over Making Mistakes	Experimental	7	4.1	33	3.000	.013*
	Control	7	10.29	72		
Parental Criticism	Experimental	7	4.29	30	2.000	.004**
	Control	7	10.71	75		

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Parental Expectations	Experimental	7	5.14	36	8.000	.034*
	Control	7	9.86	69		
Personal Standards	Experimental	7	6.36	44.5	16.500	.304
	Control	7	8.64	60.5		
Doubting the Quality of Ones Actions	Experimental	7	5.71	40	12.000	.107
	Control	7	9.29	65		
Preference for Order	Experimental	7	7.14	50	22.000	.748
	Control	7	7.86	55		

\*p<.05 \*\*p<.01

A significant difference was found in the posttest results of students who had received bibliotherapy training, which were lower in the following subscales of MPS than those of participants who had not received this training: excessive concern over making mistakes, high parental expectations, and parental criticism (U=12.500, p<.05). When mean ranks are taken into consideration, it will be seen that all subscales of MPS were lower for those had received bibliotherapy training than for those who had not.

**Table 8:** MPS Subscales Pretest Wilcoxon Marked Order Test Results of Control Group

MPS Subscales	Ranks	n	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	p
Excessive Concern over Making Mistakes	Negative	2	4	8	-1.018	.309
	Positive	5	4	20		
	Ties	0				
	Total	7				
Parental Criticism	Negative	2	3	6	-.943	.345
	Positive	4	3.75	15		
	Ties	1				
	Total	7				
Parental Expectations	Negative	2	3.5	7	-.135	.893
	Positive	3	2.67	8		
	Ties	2				
	Total	7				
Personal Standards	Negative	4	5.25	21	-1.192	.233
	Positive	3	2.33	7		
	Ties	0				
	Total	7				
Doubting the Quality of Ones Actions	Negative	4	2.88	11.5	-1.084	.279
	Positive	1	3.5	3.5		
	Ties	2				
	Total	7				

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	Total	7				
	Negative	2	1.5	3		
Preference for Order	Positive	2	3.5	7	-0.736	.461
	Ties	3				
	Total	7				

Wilcoxon Marked Order Test revealed that no significant difference was found in MPS subscales between pretest and posttest results for the control group (see Table 8).

**Table 9:** MPS Subscales Pre-test Wilcoxon Marked Order Test Results of Experimental Group

MPS Subscales	Ranks	n	Mean Ranks	Sum of Ranks	Z	P
Excessive Concern over Making Mistakes	Negative	6	4.5	27	-2.197	.028*
	Positive	1	1	1		
	Ties	0				
	Total	7				
Parental Criticism	Negative	3	3	9	-1.461	.144
	Positive	1	1	1		
	Ties	3				
	Total	7				
Parental Expectations	Negative	6	3.5	21	-2.214	.027*
	Positive	0	0	0		
	Ties	1				
	Total	7				
Personal Standards	Negative	6	4.5	27	-2.201	.028*
	Positive	1	1	1		
	Ties	0				
	Total	7				
Doubting the quality of Ones Actions	Negative	7	4	28	-2.384	.017*
	Positive	0	0	0		
	Ties	0				
	Total	7				
Preference for Order	Negative	6	3.5	21	-2.214	.027*
	Positive	0	0	0		
	Ties	1				
	Total	7				

\*p<.05

Table 9 shows that Wilcoxon Marked Order Test revealed the following significant differences (.05) in favour of posttest subscales between pretest and posttest results for the experimental group in MPS: excessive concern over making mistakes ( $z=-2.197$   $p <.05$ ), parental expectations ( $z=-2.214$   $p <.05$ ), personal standards ( $z=-2.201$   $p <.05$ ), doubting the quality of one's actions ( $z=-2.384$   $p <.05$ ), and preference for order ( $z=-2.214$   $p <.05$ ). At the end of the process, all MPS subscales for students in the experimental group except those for parental criticism were found to have decreased.

## 5. Discussion

Although perfectionism among children and adolescents is a frequently-discussed topic, only a limited number of studies have dealt with the problem of how to deal with its negative aspects. It is true that there have been a certain number of studies of the effect of cognitive approaches on perfectionism (Şirin, 2011); however, no research has been carried out on the effects of bibliotherapy on gifted individuals, and only two studies have been conducted into its effects on individuals of average intelligence (Mofield & Chakraborti-Ghosh, 2010; Zousel, Rule, & Logan, 2013). Silverman (1993) maintains that perfectionism, while being a positive characteristic of gifted students, can also lead to perceived failure, feelings of guilt, depression, anxiety – and even suicide. The fact that it can have such negative consequences makes the need for such studies even more urgent. Thus, the aim of the current study is to investigate the value of bibliotherapy as a way of dealing with perfectionism.

The fact that the group chosen for this study was made up of gifted students who enjoyed reading (Frasier & McCannon, 1981), were keen readers and had high levels of empathy (Clark, 2002), problem-solving skills and reasoning ability was an important factor in the application of the bibliotherapy program. In the current study, students were encouraged to discuss problems similar to those encountered by fictional characters in stories, and the use of these stories allowed participants to distance themselves from the situation involved (Stamps, 2003). Thus, the positive effects of bibliotherapy were further reinforced.

The results of this study show that there was a decrease in perfectionism levels in gifted children in the experimental group as a result of the program. This decrease was not confined to total scores of MPS, but was also seen in the following subscales: excessive concern over making mistakes, high parental expectations, personal standards, doubting the quality of one's actions, and preference for order and organization. The only subscale in which no significant decrease was observed was parental criticism. The findings of the current study support those of Mofield and Chakraborti-Ghosh (2010), who created a program that investigated the effects of emotional development on perfectionism in gifted children. In this context, it appears that levels of perfectionism are not static, but may be changed by means of various programs of this nature.

The most marked decrease was in the subscale of excessive concern over making mistakes, which Frost (1990) identified as the central feature of unhealthy perfectionism. In the current study, two factors contributed to the decrease in this particular subscale: the fact that the first and third sessions focused on the fear of making mistakes, and the fact that techniques for coping with this fear were put into practice (for instance, posters saying that making mistakes is a part of the learning process were displayed on the classroom walls, students were asked to write down five mistakes they had made and what they had learned from them, and students were requested to think of a slogan to help overcome the fear of making mistakes). The decrease shown in this subscale supports the conclusion of Mofield and Chakraborti-Ghosh (2010), who have carried

out the only study of this kind in the field. Nugent (2000) speaks of a number of strategies for learning from mistakes and learning to see them as valuable that can be used in the classroom; in doing so, he lays particular emphasis on bibliotherapy. He believes that bibliotherapy has a useful role to play, especially in the case of students who feel excessive concern over making mistakes.

Another subscale in which a decrease was expected was preference for order and organization; although this feature has been associated with healthy perfectionism (Parker & Mills, 1996), in excessive amounts it leads to various psychological disorders. According to Parker (2000), if the father is a perfectionist, his children will show an excessive concern for order. In the current study, this subject was explored by means of the selection of a book entitled '*Puldan Taştan Lahanadan*' ('*Of Stamps, Stones and Cabbages*'). The fact that the main character in this book is a boy encouraged students to identify him with their own fathers, and it is believed that this may have changed students' attitudes towards excessive concern for order. In pursuit of this goal, students were asked questions on the place of order, discipline and rules in our lives, and on the advantages and disadvantages of symmetry and neatness – thus raising their awareness of the positive and negative aspects of these two things.

Personal standards were yet another subscale in which a significant decrease was found between pretest and posttest results for the experimental group. This decrease also confirms the conclusion of Mofield and Chakraborti-Ghosh (2010). Even though the subject matter of the books used in the sessions does not specifically contain this particular subscale, the questions asked during the post-reading discussion (for example, 'Is it failure if you get 90% rather than 100% in an examination?') did encourage reflection on this topic.

A significant decrease was also found, as expected, with regard to the subscale of doubting the quality of one's actions in results for the experimental group. None of the books read actually centered on this subscale. However, the following two factors may have contributed to the decrease: firstly, the fact that it is not absolutely necessary to do everything perfectly was discussed during post-reading activities, as was the fact that perfectionism can have negative results, and secondly, these discussions involved the evaluation of mistakes. One feature of this subscale is the feeling that something remains incomplete in the performance of a task, and this is accompanied by an expectation of higher standards. The discussion that followed the reading of one the books used during the sessions – '*Ramona's World*' (which focuses on the negative feelings that may arise in an individual who attempts to be perfect) – focused on techniques for coping with situations of this kind, and it is this that may be thought to have brought about the significant decrease in this subscale. This finding also supports that of Mofield and Chakraborti-Ghosh (2010).

The last subscale to demonstrate a significant decrease was that of parental expectations. The books discussed during two of the sessions in the training program focused largely on this subscale. At various times, all participants experienced catharsis while sharing their recollections of parental expectation. The two factors that may have brought about the decrease in this subscale were firstly, the discussions on the theme of



parental expectations that were held (prompted by the posters displayed on the walls which centered on this theme), and secondly, the brainstorming activity on the subject of possible solutions to this problem. Also, it is thought that the homework task set after one of the sessions – a task which required participants to write a letter to their parents – played some role in reinforcing the message. Furthermore, at the beginning of the training program the practitioner gave some information (albeit brief) to parents on the subject of perfectionism and its possible negative effects. This may have shaped parents' expectations, and may in turn have had an influence on the 'parental expectations' subscale.

The only subscale in which a decrease was found, but not a significant one, was that of parental criticism. Examination of the items in this subscale reveals that they are, for the most part, concerned with previous experience (for example, 'When I was little, I was punished for not doing something perfectly', 'My parents never showed understanding towards my mistakes'). It is thought that the fact that the aims of the training program did not include any attempt to alter attitudes towards previous experience might explain the lack of significance in the decrease in this subscale.

Investigation of the literature on the reasons for perfectionism shows that parental factors play a very important role (Barrow & Moore, 1983; Cook, 2012; Fisak & Grills-Taqechel, 2007). Even though two of the books read mention the parental criticism subscale, a program directly involving both children and their parents was not carried out – leading one to the conclusion that this was an important factor in the lack of any significant decrease in this subscale. Also, the parental criticism subscale is concerned with parental attitudes towards perfectionism rather than those of participants themselves. Thus, it is recommended that parents should be directly involved in future programs focusing on perfectionism training.

One of the reasons why another study into the subject of bibliotherapy (focusing on the question of whether or not it has an effect on self-esteem in gifted students) did not yield significant results was that students did not like the books chosen (Spear, 1996). Another conclusion that this piece of research came to was that a period of 6 weeks is not enough for significant results to be achieved from a program of this kind. However, although the current study lasted only 7 weeks, it yielded significant results. Evaluations carried out after each of the 7 sessions showed that participants had enjoyed the books chosen, and this contributed to the significance of the results.

Those studies into the effects of bibliotherapy on gifted children and adolescents that have been carried out (though these are limited in number) have arrived at similar conclusions to those of the current study (Tofaha, 2012; Zousel et al. , 2013). Those studies which failed to yield significant results were found to have had limitations with regard to their application of the fundamental principles of using bibliotherapy (Spear, 1996; Weber, 1998).

In the last session of the current study, an examination of written statements made by participants showed that the books they had enjoyed the most were 'The Report Card' and 'The Value of Creativity: The Story of Thomas Edison'. The fact that in each of these books the main character is a gifted person is an important factor in

bringing about identification with her or him, thus increasing students' enjoyment. This finding supports the conclusion that gifted children derive more benefit from books in which the main character is a gifted person (Leana-Taşçılar, 2012; Weber & Cavanaugh, 2006) .

Another result of the examination of these written statements was that the most enjoyable part of the sessions students had participated in had been the discussions, while the least enjoyable part had been writing their answers to the questions. Participants stated that the most important things they had learned from the training were that they were not obliged to do everything perfectly, that reading books was necessary, and that it was important to comprehend what one read. These conclusions support the claim that bibliotherapy contributes to the achievement of the aim of increasing knowledge and enhancing insight, as well as that of provoking discussion (Pardeck, 1995). The quotations that had been displayed on the walls beforehand attracted a good deal of interest from participants, and they even began to use the words of these quotations themselves during the sessions. This may be seen as yet another indication that bibliotherapy plays a part in increasing knowledge.

During the current study, a considerable amount of time was devoted to the discussion phase of the sessions, and this phase was further supplemented by activities designed to increase creative thinking and problem-solving ability (for example, 'If you were a friend of the main character, what advice would you give her or him?', 'If you yourself were in this situation, what would you do?'). Thanks to the discussion phase, students learned (1) that they are not alone in having the negative feelings described in the books; (2) that other people beside themselves also have this experience; (3) that there are alternative solutions to the problems they encounter; and (4) that the knowledge of all the foregoing can provide a feeling of relief.

Examination of the findings of the current study will demonstrate that although it had certain limitations, it nevertheless enables certain recommendations to be made with regard to future studies. One of the subscales of RAS – that of parental criticism – did not show any significant decrease. The items in this subscale were concerned with attitudes towards perfectionism on the part of participants' parents rather than with those of participants themselves; therefore, it is recommended that as parental attitudes can influence students' perfectionism levels, future studies should ensure that parents are directly involved in bibliotherapy training. A further recommendation is that teachers should be trained in the use of bibliotherapy in the classroom, as it is a technique whose usefulness in the treatment of psychological problems is well established. Lastly, the current study has two limitations: the relatively small number of participants limits its generalization to other populations, and the lack of follow-up prevents the results of the bibliotherapy training program from being fully evaluated.

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### Conflicts of Interests

Each author certifies that he or she has no commercial associations (e.g., consultancies, stock ownership, equity interest, patent/licensing arrangements, etc.) that might pose a conflict of interest in connection with the submitted article.

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