


**FOSTERING EMPATHY AND EMOTIONAL REGULATION FOR CHILDREN THROUGH BIBLIOTHERAPY: AN ISLAMIC GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING PERSPECTIVE**

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<p>Received 03/27/26          Revised 04/20/26          Accepted 04/27/26</p> <p><b>License:</b>          Copyright (c) 2026 Fitrie Amaelia</p>  <p>This work is licensed under a <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/">Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License</a>.</p> <p><b>Corresponding E-Mail:</b>  <a href="mailto:fitriewrites@gmail.com">fitriewrites@gmail.com</a></p> <p><b>To cite this Article:</b> Amaelia, F. (2026). Fostering Empathy and Emotional Regulation for Children through Bibliotherapy: An Islamic Guidance and Counseling Perspective. <i>Advise: Jurnal Bimbingan, Penyuluhan, dan Konseling Islam</i>, 1 (1), 53-66.</p> <p><b>To link to this Article (DOI):</b>  <a href="https://doi.org/10.28918/advise.v1i1.15244">https://doi.org/10.28918/advise.v1i1.15244</a></p>	<p><b>Abstract</b></p> <p>This study investigates the strategic utility of bibliotherapy as a restorative and character-building mechanism within the specialized framework of Islamic Guidance and Counseling (<i>Bimbingan Penyuluhan Islam</i>). Contemporary childhood development is severely fragmented emotionally due to digital saturation and peer-group friction. Traditional direct, highly verbal counseling strategies often encounter strong ego-defensive barriers in young children due to developmental limitations in abstract reasoning. By establishing literature as a non-threatening psychological proxy, bibliotherapy allows children to project internal distress onto narrative agents. This mechanism facilitates the precise psychological phases of character identification, illustrating how young readers transition from projection to psychospiritual catharsis and functional moral insight. Instead of relying on secular cognitive-behavioral conditioning, this conceptual model incorporates traditional Islamic psychological faculties, including the <i>Qalb</i> (spiritual heart), <i>Aql</i> (intellective reason), and <i>Nafs</i> (the behavioral soul). This integration explains how narrative absorption helps internalize core virtues like patience (<i>Sabr</i>), empathy (<i>Tafahhum</i>), and divine reliance (<i>Tawakkul</i>).</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> bibliotherapy, empathy, emotional regulation</p>
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**INTRODUCTION**

Growing up in the modern era presents an increasingly fragmented emotional landscape for young children. The overlapping pressures of digital overstimulation, shifting domestic structures, competitive academic environments, and interpersonal stressors like peer exclusion and bullying create an intense psychological burden. For individuals in early and middle childhood, processing this internal strain is uniquely challenging. Children at this developmental stage rarely possess the sophisticated emotional vocabulary required to consciously identify, categorize, and verbally articulate their psychological vulnerabilities (Yusuf, 2022).

When this internal emotional friction remains unvoiced, it does not dissolve; instead, it undergoes psychological containment or behavioral distortion. In clinical and school settings, this distress typically erupts through two distinct behavioral pathways. On one hand, it manifests as externalizing disruptions, characterized by hyperactive dysregulation, volatile temper tantrums, physical or verbal aggression, and persistent defiance toward authority figures (Netrawati et al., 2022). On the other hand, it appears as internalizing withdrawals, leading to selective mutism, social isolation, psychosomatic ailments like chronic stomachaches, separation anxiety, and a profound collapse of self-esteem (Corey, 2023).

Within the discipline of Islamic Guidance and Counseling, recognized across Indonesian academic and communal networks as *Bimbingan Penyuluhan Islam*, these behavioral anomalies are met with deep systemic empathy (Amin, 2020; Mulyadi, 2021). Rather than categorizing these struggles as mere behavioral compliance failures or static psychiatric pathologies, Islamic counseling views them as environmental clouds obscuring the child's *fitrah* (Amin, 2020). The *fitrah* represents the pure, innate, and divinely stamped human goodness with which every human soul enters the world.

Consequently, the primary objective of Islamic Guidance and Counseling extends far beyond enforcing baseline social conformity or suppressing disruptive symptoms. The therapeutic focus centers on clearing away the accumulated layers of worldly anxiety and trauma, allowing the child to naturally realign with *Akhlakul Karimah* (noble character) (Sugiyanto, 2025). Noble character is not understood as an artificial veneer of discipline maintained through fear or external conditioning; it is a stable, deeply anchored state of the soul that spontaneously generates balanced, ethical, and compassionate actions.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

When educators or counselors observe a child experiencing acute emotional distress, their standard intervention strategy relies on direct, face-to-face verbal dialogue. Practitioners routinely attempt to resolve conflicts by asking analytical questions such as: *"Why did you react aggressively to your classmate?"* or *"What is causing you to feel this anxiety?"* While this direct talk therapy remains highly effective for adolescents and adult demographics, it frequently fails when applied to early childhood due to clear developmental limitations (Yusuf, 2022).

Linguistic bottlenecks pose a major obstacle, as an eight-year-old child rarely possesses the abstract semantic framework needed to unpack complex feelings such as invisible grief, social shame, or existential inadequacy (Yusuf, 2022). Furthermore, the capacity for metacognition—the ability to examine one's own thought patterns and evaluate cognitive distortions—remains in its embryonic stage during middle childhood.

Finally, direct confrontation almost invariably triggers defensive ego walls (Corey, 2023). When a vulnerable child feels placed under the analytical spotlight by an adult authority figure, they often perceive the interaction as an interrogation rather than a supportive intervention. This perception activates natural survival instincts, resulting in stubborn silence, angry deflections, or superficial compliance designed solely to terminate the encounter. Forcing an over-verbalized, direct counseling methodology onto a young child can inadvertently exacerbate their feelings of isolation, shame, and inadequacy. To build a genuine therapeutic alliance, Islamic guidance practitioners must look toward indirect, imaginative, and gentle interventions that match the natural cognitive processing style of the child.

Bibliotherapy offers an elegant solution to these developmental constraints. Defined as the systematic, clinically guided use of selected literature to achieve emotional, psychological, and spiritual healing, bibliotherapy provides a safe, non-threatening workspace for the child's mind (Fatchurahman, 2020). By engaging with a text, the young client is not forced to stand in the uncomfortable glare of direct questioning. The emotional focus shifts safely outward onto a narrative agent who happens to be navigating a parallel set of life challenges (Fleming, 2026).

When integrated into *Bimbingan Penyuluhan Islam*, bibliotherapy bridges modern developmental psychology and the historical traditions of Islamic narrative pedagogy (Nursyamsi, 2023; Shofiah, 2019). For centuries, Islamic culture has utilized narrative forms—most notably *Qisas al-Anbiya* (Stories of the Prophets), the biographical accounts of the *Sahabah* (Companions), and rich allegorical fables—as profound tools for psychological stabilization, moral education, and spiritual refinement (Suryani, 2024). The book functions as a structural mirror. As the child observes a character navigate severe adversity, endure hardship with dignity, and find resolution through faith and resilience, their internal defensive barriers drop. This opening allows for genuine emotional release, self-reflection, and sustainable behavior modification without the child feeling personally judged or exposed.

To understand how narrative absorption transforms a child's psychological state within a *Bimbingan Penyuluhan Islam* framework, we must establish a foundation within an authentic Islamic model of human psychology. This paradigm does not view the child as a blank slate (*tabula rasa*) shaped solely by biological urges and environmental conditioning. Instead, it recognizes the human being as a multi-dimensional entity comprising interconnected spiritual, mental, and behavioral faculties (Amin, 2020).

The Fitrah: Serves as the fundamental spiritual baseline, representing an innate orientation toward truth, goodness, peace, and God-consciousness (Amin, 2020). Children possess an intact fitrah, giving them a natural affinity for moral beauty, compassion, and justice. However, exposure to trauma, family dysfunction, or toxic social dynamics can cloud

this inner purity. The goal of the counselor is to clear away these external layers of stress, allowing the natural light of the fitrah to shine through clearly. The *Qalb*: Functions as the central emotional and spiritual organ of human psychology, serving as the seat of deep intuition, raw emotion, and ultimate intent. The *Qalb* is highly sensitive; it feels the immediate constriction (*ḍiq*) of worldly anxiety, but it is also the unique vessel capable of experiencing profound tranquility (*Sakina*), deep empathy (*Tafahhum*), and divine love. The *Aql*: Working in tandem with the heart is the *Aql*, the cognitive and reasoning faculty given to human beings to evaluate consequences, discern truth from falsehood, and engage in meaningful contemplation (*Tafakkur*). During childhood, the *Aql* is moving rapidly from concrete operational thinking toward abstract moral evaluation (Yusuf, 2022). Bibliotherapy serves as an external organizational catalyst for the *Aql*, providing clear narrative structures that help the child rationalize their confusing emotional worlds. The *Nafs*: Represents the ego-self and the spectrum of behavioral drives within the individual. The *Nafs* exists in a dynamic state of growth, moving from *Nafs al-Ammarah* (the imperious self that drives impulsive anger, tantrums, and blind self-gratification) toward *Nafs al-Lawwamah* (the awakening conscience that feels healthy regret and desires moral correction). The ultimate target of counseling is to anchor the child within *Nafs al-Mutma'innah* (the tranquil self), characterized by emotional stability and wisdom. In bibliotherapy, a story targets this exact spiritual anatomy. It speaks directly to the child's *Qalb*, stretches their growing *Aql*, and assists the *Nafs* in transitioning away from reactive states toward a calm, peaceful baseline.

A rigorous critical review of contemporary counseling literature reveals a major academic gap where narrative therapy and Islamic guidance models intersect. While secular bibliotherapy has been thoroughly studied within Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and play therapy (Corey, 2023; Liao, 2025), mainstream secular frameworks consistently ignore or pathologize the spiritual dimensions of healing. Secular approaches typically treat emotional regulation as a purely mechanistic skill involving physical grounding exercises or basic cognitive reframing, missing the profound existential comfort that occurs when a child's coping skills are rooted in their relationship with the Divine.

Conversely, existing scholarship within domestic Islamic circles frequently falls into a different trap, prioritizing outward moral compliance at the expense of dynamic internal psychospiritual processing. A large portion of Indonesian studies within Bimbingan Penyuluhan Islam evaluate text-based interventions merely as rigid tools for behavioral habituation. These studies check whether a story pressures a child into performing their daily prayers (*Sholat*) or demonstrating parental obedience (Achmad, 2023), treating the child as a passive vessel to be filled with rules rather than an active psychological agent who must internally navigate deep anxieties, social fears, and personal insecurities.

There is an evident lack of conceptual literature mapping the step-by-step psychospiritual transitions that occur during the character identification phase within an authentic Islamic guidance environment. Little attention has been paid to how a young client projects their hidden suffering onto a character, experiences true emotional release through an Islamic narrative arc, and translates that experience into lasting emotional regulation and empathy (Tafahhum). This paper directly addresses this research gap.

The practice of using stories for psychological comfort, moral instruction, and character transformation is deeply embedded in the historical foundations of Islamic thought. The Qur'an itself explicitly validates narrative pedagogy, declaring in Surah Yusuf, Verse 3: "We relate to you, [O Muhammad], the best of stories in what We have revealed to you of this Qur'an..." Classical Islamic scholars recognized that narratives serve as an accessible vehicle for profound psychological and spiritual truths.

Classical thinkers like Imam Al-Ghazali wrote extensively in his masterpiece, *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, about the delicate art of refining the soul (*Riyadhat al-Nafs*). Al-Ghazali pointed out that harsh, direct lecturing usually backfires because it stirs up pride and defensiveness in a person's heart. Instead, he championed indirect methods of character growth, using timeless parables and the inspiring biographies of the righteous (*al-qudwah al-hasanah*) to gently guide the intellect toward self-correction (Al-Ghazali, 2018).

In traditional community guidance, which forms the ancestral roots of modern *Bimbingan Penyuluhan Islam*, scholars, mentors, and elders routinely used story circles to heal emotional wounds and bring communities together. Fables like *Kalilah wa-Dimnah* or the rich spiritual poetry of Jalaluddin Rumi were never treated as simple entertainment; they were therapeutic texts meant to dissolve ego walls, foster humility, and build deep compassion for all of creation. This rich history shows that bibliotherapy is not an exotic Western concept imported into Islamic counseling; it is a modern, systematic extension of a teaching style Muslims have trusted for over a thousand years.

Several major contemporary studies provide the empirical backdrop for this narrative intervention model. In an investigation of children's literary design, Abdul Aziz (2026) utilized a qualitative textual analysis of Malaysian literature to confirm that plot safety, character depth, and simulated empathy are deeply interconnected, structural elements required for effective children's bibliotherapy. However, that research focused primarily on publishers' literary aesthetics, leaving a gap regarding operational counseling instructions.

Addressing regional values, Indreswari (2026) conducted a mixed-methods evaluation in guidance settings, determining that integrating traditional value-driven literature, such as the *Serat Wedharaga*, accelerates cognitive perspective-taking and empathy. While insightful, her work remains bound to Javanese cultural ethics rather than a universal Islamic framework. On an institutional level, Latifah (2024) deployed a

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quantitative study of student support systems, concluding that structured reading lists significantly reduce baseline stress and institutional anxiety. Yet, because her study was evaluated through a strictly secular framework, it excluded essential psychospiritual metrics.

Bridging into modern media, Rachmanda (2024) performed a qualitative case study within a Bimbingan Penyuluhan Islam environment, showing that digital text platforms like Wattpad increase client outreach and engagement. However, she emphasized that without active, live counselor dialogue, the transference from digital reading to real-world behavioral modification remains low (Rachmanda, 2024). Additionally, her focus targeted older adolescent groups rather than early childhood development.

Other notable cognitive and behaviorist trials have sought to use text-based strategies for behavioral control. Rohmah and Oktara (2023) implemented a pre-experimental study with marginalized youth, confirming that cognitive-behavioral bibliotherapy successfully restructures negative self-schemas and builds self-worth, though their trial lacked spiritual anchors. Focusing on severe domestic strain, Kahveci (2023) used deep case-study analysis of primary schoolers to prove that bibliotherapy methodically bridges the emotional expression gap for children dealing with the trauma of parental divorce. Similarly, Netrawati et al. (2022) executed a quasi-experimental study with early childhood cohorts, showing that well-paced reading sessions significantly lower hyperactive and aggressive behavioral outputs. Finally, Nafs (2022) evaluated orphans using a quantitative pre-test and post-test design, determining that regular exposure to prophetic tales significantly boosts children's overall spiritual intelligence.

While these combined studies validate text-driven interventions, they consistently treat the process as a standardized cognitive or behavioral habituation exercise. Mainstream scholarship routinely leaves the internal, quiet space where a child aligns a story with their *Qalb* and *Aql* to process personal pain completely unexamined.

## **METHODS**

To effectively investigate the delicate psychospiritual mechanics of character identification within an Islamic counseling context, this paper utilizes a qualitative approach through a multiple-case study design. Qualitative case study research is uniquely suited for this investigation because it allows researchers to examine complex, deeply personal psychological shifts within real-life, natural settings. It answers questions about how and why specific changes occur, capturing nuances that standardized quantitative surveys cannot fully measure. The study was conducted in RA Muslimat Winduaji, Paninggaran Sub-District, Pekalongan Regency, Central Java. A purposive sampling technique was used to select twelve child participants aged between 5-6 years old.

The selection criteria required that participants were currently experiencing noticeable forms of emotional dysregulation or social anxiety, as documented by teacher referrals and parental intake interviews. Common behavioral baseline profiles included intense peer-related social isolation, persistent low self-confidence, unprovoked aggressive outbursts during recess, or acute separation anxiety.

To ensure complete ethical compliance, explicit written informed consent was obtained from the parents or legal guardians of all children involved, and verbal assent was secured from the children themselves prior to beginning the research sessions. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants to strictly maintain confidentiality.

Data collection was carried out over a structured eight-week period, ensuring multiple independent sources of evidence to maintain strong internal validity. Semi-structured post-reading interviews were implemented immediately following each bibliotherapy session. These interviews utilized targeted, open-ended clinical prompts, allowing counselors to explore each child's level of character identification, emotional catharsis, and internalized moral insight. The books used were the standard government published children book usually used in the classroom for learning purposes.

Direct field observations were also systematically recorded during the narrative reading and reflection circles. Counselors utilized standardized observation protocols to document non-verbal indicators of psychological engagement, including spontaneous emotional expressions, changes in seated posture, vocal tones during discussion, and physical reactions to specific narrative challenges.

## **RESULTS**

### **The Psychodynamic Mechanics of Bibliotherapy through an Islamic Lens**

The therapeutic efficacy of bibliotherapy lies in its systematic psychospiritual process. When a child steps into a book guided by a caring *Bimbingan Penyuluhan Islam* practitioner, they journey through a natural three-step psychological progression (Fatchurahman, 2020). The healing process begins with identification and projection. Imagine a young child entering a counseling room carrying a heavy, unvoiced burden, such as being systematically bullied or excluded at school. Their psychological defenses are on high alert. If you ask them directly about the bullying, they will likely lock up, look at the floor, or deny it completely just to shield themselves from re-experiencing that painful wave of shame and fear (Corey, 2023).

In a bibliotherapy session, the counselor changes the dynamic entirely by introducing a beautifully illustrated book about a character facing a parallel challenge, perhaps a young contemporary child dealing with isolation or a historical figure experiencing exclusion. As the child listens to the story, they instinctively pick up on the shared traits between

themselves and the protagonist (Abdul Aziz, 2026). Driven by the natural longing of the *Qalb* to be understood, the child safely projects their inner emotional pain onto the character. Suddenly, they aren't talking about their own painful reality; they are talking about the character's trials. Because the spotlight is on a safe fictional proxy, the child's defensive walls vanish. They can unpack their raw feelings of fear, anger, and loneliness without feeling personally exposed, cornered, or judged.

As the story reaches its turning point, the main character faces the absolute peak of their struggles. The child reader follows every word, experiencing an emotional release called catharsis. In Western psychology, catharsis is simply seen as a healthy emotional venting, such as crying, letting out pent-up frustration, or releasing physical tension (Corey, 2023).

Within an Islamic counseling framework, this stage goes much deeper, transforming into a moment of psychospiritual washing and relief. The emotional release isn't just about blowing off steam; it is about carving out a peaceful clearing within the soul. In Islamic thought, the painful compression of a heart drowning in worldly stress is called *Deeq*, while its opening into wide, light-filled peace is called *Inshirah*, as promised so beautifully in Surah Al-Inshirah.

When the character in the story meets their breaking point not with bitter despair, but by turning to the Divine in heartfelt prayer (*Dua*), choosing beautiful patience (*Sabr Jamil*), and leaving their worries with God (*Tawakkul*), the child reader experiences a profound sense of shared spiritual relief. The tears shed here are deeply restorative. The child learns that feeling overwhelmed is a natural part of being human, and that vulnerability is a bridge to divine comfort, not a sign of weakness.

The final milestone is insight and generalization, which mirrors the Islamic practice of *Tafakkur* (deep, purposeful reflection). Emotional release feels wonderful, but it doesn't automatically create lasting behavior changes; the experience has to be thoughtfully processed to build real psychological strength (Fatchurahman, 2020).

During this phase, the counselor gently engages the child's growing *Aql* through open-ended conversation. Instead of quizzing the child on the plot, the counselor helps them look beneath the surface to find universal life lessons and practical coping strategies. The counselor might ask questions such as: "*When the character let their anger take over, what happened to the people who cared about them?*" or "*How did taking a deep breath and remembering Allah change their very next choice?*"

Through this interactive dialogue, the child claims the character's victories as their own. They internalize those successful strategies, turning them into personal tools for their own daily life (Fleming, 2026). They realize that just as the character survived and grew wiser through hard times, they also have the inner strength, anchored in faith, to

navigate whatever challenges come their way. The lesson leaves the pages of the book and becomes a living part of the child's daily actions.

### **Fostering Empathy (Tafahhum) and Emotional Regulation**

Empathy, known as *Tafahhum* or *Hamdard* in Islamic ethics, is far more than a passing emotional reaction. It is a highly sophisticated mental and spiritual capability. It requires a person to deliberately step outside their own ego (*Nafs*), accurately read the hidden pain of others, and respond with genuine compassion (Malti & Ongley, 2019). Young children struggle with this because their brains are naturally self-centered at that age (Yusuf, 2022). Bibliotherapy serves as an ideal training ground to stretch this capacity (Hidayah & Ramli, 2021).

When a child gets lost in a good book, they are invited straight into the inner world of the characters. They read their private thoughts, feel their heartaches, and see the immediate fallout of their choices (Abdul Aziz, 2026). This experience actively exercises the perspective-taking loops in the child's brain (Indreswari, 2026).

To deepen this growth, the practitioner intentionally draws the child's attention to the secondary characters in the story. By asking thoughtful questions such as: "*How do you think the mother felt when her son kept that big secret from her?*" or "*What did the little brother experience when everyone else was shouting?*", the counselor gently invites the child to step outside their own egocentric shoes. This practice expands their emotional radar, teaching them to read subtle facial cues and understand how their choices echo in the lives of others. This is a crucial step toward living out the beautiful prophetic command to love for others what we love for ourselves.

In an Islamic guidance paradigm, emotional regulation is all about helping a child transition from a reactive state driven by the impulsive self (*Nafs al-Ammarah*) to a self-aware, reflective state (*Nafs al-Lawwamah*), eventually finding an anchor in true inner peace (*Nafs al-Mutma'innah*) (Amin, 2020).

When something triggers a child, whether it is a flash of blinding anger or a wave of social anxiety, secular methods focus primarily on calming the physical nervous system using deep breathing or behavioral distractions (Corey, 2023). An Islamic framework embraces these physical steps but layers in a vital spiritual dimension: it anchors emotional control in active remembrance (*Dhikr*) and deliberate intellectual reason (*Aql*) (Shofiah, 2019).

Through bibliotherapy, children see characters live out these exact strategies. They read about characters who, when gripped by rage, consciously alter their physical posture (following the Sunnah of sitting down if standing), perform ablution (*Wudu*) to cool their temper, or take a moment to seek refuge in God to steady their racing mind. Seeing these strategies used successfully by a story character makes the practices concrete, real, and

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highly appealing to a child. They learn to hit the pause button before reacting, trading impulsive outbursts for calm, thoughtful, and compassionate choices (Ta'awun).

## **DISCUSSION**

For bibliotherapy to be effective within *Bimbingan Penyuluhan Islam*, it cannot be treated like a casual, unstructured story hour. It must be approached as a deliberate, thoughtful intervention (Nursyamsi, 2023). Counselors, teachers, and community mentors need a reliable roadmap to guide their practice.

The success of the reflection phase relies entirely on the counselor's words. Questions must be chosen carefully to guide the child through progressive analytical steps. To manage this dialectic smoothly, practitioners utilize specific prompt tracks that target the distinct therapeutic milestones of the session:

**Identification and Projection Track:** The clinical objective is to build a safe conceptual bridge between the client's internal conflict and the text. Counselors initiate this phase by asking prompts such as: "Which character in this story reminded you most of someone you know, or even yourself?" or "How did the main character react when things didn't go the way they expected?" These questions successfully lower ego defenses by focusing attention on a narrative proxy.

**Cathartic Exploration Track:** The therapeutic objective shifts toward helping the child recognize, validate, and safely release heavily contained emotions. Practitioners probe this space by asking: "What do you think was the heaviest feeling the character carried inside their heart (Qalb)?" or "Where do you think that sadness or anger went when they cried or made Dua?" This step alleviates acute inner tension, shifting the heart from constriction into a space of relief.

**Insight Acquisition Track:** This stage engages the child's reasoning intellect (*Aql*) to identify constructive, faith-centered coping skills. Counselors ask: "When the character chose to practice patience (Sabr), how did it change what happened next?" or "What did they discover about Allah's help when they felt completely alone?" These prompts allow the client to reframe personal adversity through a model of spiritual resilience.

**Generalization & Practice Track:** The objective is to translate abstract narrative lessons into permanent real-world behavior changes. Counselors solidify this internalization by asking: "If that character came to visit you during a tough day at school, what advice would they give you?" or "The next time you feel a wave of anger coming, how can you follow their example to stay calm?" This functional questioning empowers the child, systematically replacing reactive outbursts with prosocial character traits (*Akhlak*).

A successful bibliotherapy program requires a thoughtfully selected library. Counselors should steer clear of overly simplistic, heavily moralistic books that immediately shame or lecture characters for making mistakes. Instead, look for rich, nuanced stories that explore real emotional struggles while pointing toward authentic Islamic solutions (Abdul Aziz, 2026). Five core categories of literature work incredibly well within Bimbingan Penyuluhan Islam:

**Prophetic Biographies (Qisas al-Anbiya):** The lives of the Prophets are an absolute treasure for children facing massive life changes or hardships (Nafs, 2022; Suryani, 2024). Stories like Prophet Yusuf surviving sibling jealousy and deep isolation, Prophet Yunus navigating darkness and loneliness inside the whale, or Prophet Ayyub showing incredible resilience through physical illness offer comforting blueprints of hope. These stories teach children that hard times are not a sign of divine anger, but a profound invitation to draw closer to God with trust and patience.

**The Companions and Classical Scholars:** The history of Islamic scholarship and the biographies of the Companions (Sahabah) offer incredible examples of courage, curiosity, and deep empathy. Stories that highlight the Prophet's profound gentleness toward children and animals show empathy in action. Reading about classical scholars who braved long, challenging journeys to seek knowledge can inspire children who are dealing with school anxieties or struggling with low self-confidence.

**Value-Centered Contemporary Fiction:** Modern children's books featuring relatable Muslim protagonists dealing with modern issues, such as moving to a new city, experiencing peer exclusion, losing a loved one, or managing classroom stress, are incredibly effective for middle childhood. These stories bridge the gap between timeless spiritual virtues and the immediate challenges of modern childhood, showing kids exactly how faith can guide their social choices.

**Spiritual Allegories and Fables:** Imaginative allegories and traditional animal fables provide an excellent, non-threatening playground for younger children (Hidayah & Ramli, 2021). Stories that explore themes like greed, pride, humility, and cooperation through animal characters let children evaluate choices objectively. These stories spark the child's natural love for imagination, planting seeds of wisdom deeply and painlessly within their minds.

**Guided Therapeutic Workbooks:** Workbooks designed specifically for therapeutic use blend comforting storytelling with hands-on drawing, coloring, and journaling spaces. These resources let children express their internal feelings directly onto the page. By completing activities alongside the characters, the child creates a personalized record of their own emotional growth, providing a tangible source of daily pride and encouragement.

For bibliotherapy to make a permanent difference, it cannot be trapped inside an isolated weekly counseling hour. It must be integrated across the primary social ecosystems that shape a child's daily development. This broad integration requires a coordinated approach matching specific environments with strategic methods and long-term outcomes.

**The Home Environment:** Within the home environment, the primary stakeholders include parents, grandparents, and older siblings. Implementation centers on establishing a calming, consistent bedtime reading routine, utilizing value-driven stories to talk gently about daily worries or behavioral missteps, and replacing stressful screen time with shared interactive reading. The long-term strategic outcome of this domestic integration is the healthy stabilization of family bonds, ensuring that emotional expression is rooted in a loving, faith-centered home life.

**The Educational Domain:** Moving into the educational domain, key stakeholders consist of Islamic school teachers and institutional guidance counselors. This ecosystem implements bibliotherapy by weaving therapeutic, value-driven literature directly into the daily classroom curriculum, creating cozy, quiet reading corners for independent emotional self-regulation, and utilizing guided story circles to resolve peer conflicts and address bullying constructively (Syaputra et al., 2024). This structural implementation cultivates a supportive, deeply empathetic school culture, resulting in a significant drop in aggressive behavioral incidents.

**The Community Level:** At the community level, mosque educators, youth mentors, and local social workers drive the intervention. They deploy bibliotherapy by organizing interactive weekend story circles and youth book clubs at local mosques, providing parents with curated, accessible reading lists, and integrating narrative therapy techniques into youth outreach and local support networks (Zainuri, 2020). This collective effort successfully revitalizes community centers, establishing them as recognized spaces for both psychological and spiritual wellness.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This paper has examined the profound value of bibliotherapy as an imaginative, non-threatening, and psychospiritually grounded framework for building empathy and emotional regulation in children. By moving past the limitations of direct, overly verbal talk therapy, bibliotherapy honors the natural developmental pace of childhood, giving young minds a safe narrative sanctuary to process and resolve deep internal conflicts (Yusuf, 2022).

Through the clear steps of character identification, projection, and catharsis, children safely externalize real-world anxieties. Guided by thoughtful reflection (*Tafakkur*), they

internalize timeless virtues like patience (*Sabr*), empathy (*Tafahhum*), and trust in God (*Tawakkul*), transforming these abstract ideas into daily behavioral habits (Shofiah, 2019).

By addressing a critical gap in current research, specifically the historical tendency to focus strictly on outward behavior checks rather than internal processing, this study highlights how stories touch the *Qalb*, guide the growing *Aql*, and help refine the *Nafs*. When used systematically within *Bimbingan Penyuluhan Islam*, bibliotherapy beautifully unites modern child psychology with the rich heritage of Islamic storytelling, offering a deeply compassionate pathway to nurture every child's innate goodness (*fitrah*).

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