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Bibliotherapy in Brazilian Higher Education: an overview of Library Science programs in the Northeast

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Bibliotherapy is understood as an interdisciplinary practice that uses reading for therapeutic purposes and to promote well-being, with the librarian acting as a possible mediator in this process. In Brazil, the Northeast region has ten on-site Library Science programs, covering all states in the region. Objective: This study investigated how bibliotherapy is addressed in the curricula of on-site Library Science programs at universities in Northeast Brazil. Specifically, it sought to identify the programs that include bibliotherapy in their curricula; analyze subjects, content, and methodologies; verify the workload and theoretical and/or practical approach, as well as point out the challenges and opportunities for strengthening the teaching of bibliotherapy. Methodology: This is an exploratory and descriptive study, with a qualitative and quantitative approach, which analyzed the websites and documents of ten universities in the region. Results: The results indicate that only three programs have courses with content related to bibliotherapy and therapeutic information. The study reveals an incipient presence of the theme in librarian training, which may be related to traditional curricula and the reduced number of specialized professors. Conclusion: It is concluded that regular updating of Library Science program curricula is essential, with the inclusion of courses that explore integrative practices, such as bibliotherapy. Furthermore, the importance of promoting research and outreach activities that strengthen the knowledge and practice of bibliotherapy in the academic and professional spheres is highlighted, preparing future librarians to act as agents of care and social transformation.

KEYWORDS

Bibliotherapy. Library Science. Higher Education.

Biblioterapia no Ensino Superior do Brasil: panorama dos cursos de biblioteconomia no Nordeste

RESUMO

Introdução: A biblioterapia é compreendida como uma prática interdisciplinar que utiliza a leitura para fins terapêuticos e para a promoção do bem-estar, sendo o bibliotecário um possível mediador desse processo. No Brasil, a região Nordeste conta com dez cursos presenciais de Biblioteconomia, abrangendo todos os estados da região. Objetivo: O trabalho investigou como a biblioterapia é abordada nos currículos dos cursos presenciais de Biblioteconomia das universidades do Nordeste do Brasil. Especificamente, buscou-se identificar os cursos que incluem a biblioterapia em suas matrizes curriculares; analisar

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disciplinas, conteúdos e metodologias; verificar de carga horária e abordagem teórica e/ou prática, bem como apontar os desafios e as oportunidades para o fortalecimento do ensino de biblioterapia. Metodologia: Trata-se de uma pesquisa de natureza exploratória e descritiva, com abordagem qualitativa e quantitativa, que analisou os *sites* e documentos de dez universidades da região. Resultados: Os resultados indicam que apenas três cursos apresentam disciplinas com conteúdos relacionados à biblioterapia e à informação terapêutica. O estudo revela uma presença incipiente da temática na formação do bibliotecário, o que pode estar relacionado a currículos tradicionais e ao número reduzido de docentes especializados. Conclusão: Conclui-se que é essencial a atualização regular dos currículos dos cursos de Biblioteconomia, com a inclusão de disciplinas que explorem práticas integrativas, como a biblioterapia. Salienta-se, ainda a relevância do fomento de pesquisas e ações de extensão que fortaleçam o conhecimento e a prática da biblioterapia no âmbito acadêmico e profissional, preparando os futuros bibliotecários para atuar como agentes de cuidado e transformação social.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE
Biblioterapia. Biblioteconomia. Ensino Superior.

CRediT

JITA: CH. Bibliotherapy
SDG 3: Good health and well-being

Article submitted to the similarity matching system.

1 INTRODUCTION

Bibliotherapy is a practice that uses reading and commentary as tools to promote well-being, self-knowledge, emotional transformation, and healing. The intentional and guided use of literature serves as a therapeutic and educational resource in various settings such as schools, libraries, and hospitals, among others.

It is worth mentioning that bibliotherapy does not replace clinical treatments, but it contributes to emotional strengthening through sensitive listening, promoting reflection and offering relief in situations of suffering.

In this scenario, the librarian emerges, especially due to their training, as a professional endowed with the skills and abilities to mediate this process. Given these initial considerations, the following question arose: how is bibliotherapy addressed in the curricula of on-campus library science programs at universities in Northeast Brazil?

Thus, the general objective of this research is to investigate how bibliotherapy is addressed in the curricula of on-campus library science programs at universities in Northeast Brazil. To achieve this objective, the following specific objectives were defined: a) to identify the on-campus library science programs offered in the Northeast region that include bibliotherapy in their curricula; b) to analyze courses, content, and methodologies related to bibliotherapy in the analyzed programs; c) to verify the workload and theoretical and/or practical approach dedicated to bibliotherapy in the curricula; and d) to point out the challenges and opportunities for strengthening the teaching of bibliotherapy in library science programs.

This study is justified not only by the incipient growth of theoretical discussion in the academic field, but also by the need to understand the potential of these discussions in the academic training of future librarians, given that bibliotherapy is a practice that uses reading, audiovisual media, images, and discussions about the impressions generated as an instrument for individual or collective emotional transformation. This action has proven useful in contexts of social, emotional, and psychological vulnerability.

In this sense, the librarian is the professional who stands out with the potential to act as a mediator; however, the presence of bibliotherapy in the training of this professional is still incipient and varies according to the institution and region of the country. In the Northeast region (NE), marked by social inequalities and rich in cultural diversity, it is important to understand the challenges and opportunities for training librarians, as well as to contribute to the curricular strengthening of the area and the appreciation of the professional.

This paper consists of six sections. The first presents the context of the studied theme, the research problem, the general and specific objectives, and the justification for the study. The second and third sections address the theoretical constructs: the second provides a brief history of library science education in Brazil, and the third discusses applications and concepts related to bibliotherapy. The fourth section describes the adopted methodological approach, while the fifth is dedicated to the analysis and discussion of the results obtained. The sixth section concludes with final considerations about the research.

2. TEACHING LIBRARY SCIENCE IN BRAZIL: A BRIEF HISTORY

Library science education in Brazil is celebrating its 110th anniversary. Although its official establishment was in 1911, the first program only started on April 10, 1915, in Rio de Janeiro, at the National Library (NL), the first in Latin America and the third in the world. The program had French influence and a humanist character; it was created with the intention of improving the skills of employees, but it sparked interest and, over the years, had a high number of students. In 1969, it was transferred to the Federation of Isolated Federal Schools of the State of Guanabara (FEFIEG) and, currently, it is part of the Federal University of the State of Rio

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de Janeiro (UNIRIO) (Pinheiro; Cataldo; Guerrero, 2015).

As early as 1929, the second Library Science program was created in São Paulo, at the Mackenzie Institute, following the American model, with a technocratic approach. In 1935, activities were interrupted, and a new program was created by the São Paulo city hall, which, in 1940, began operating as the School of Library Science at the Free School of Sociology and Politics (Pinheiro; Cataldo; Guerrero, 2015).

In the Northeast, the pioneering state was Bahia, where the Library Science program was established on March 12, 1942[1]; this was the third created in Brazil and the first outside the Southeast region. It operated within the School of Library Science of Bahia and, with the university expansion promoted in the second half of the 20th century, which fostered the strengthening of public higher education institutions, it was integrated, in 1954[2], into the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), where it remains active to this day.

From then on, other programs emerged in the region. In 1950, the Library Science program was started at the Law School of the University of Recife and currently operates at the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE) (Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, 2018).

In 1965[3], another program began operating in the city of Fortaleza, at the Federal University of Ceará (UFC). This was followed by the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB) and the Federal University of Maranhão (UFMA), which established their programs in 1969[4].

The undergraduate programs were created aimed at meeting the training and qualification demands of professionals to work in libraries and other information units, and have been fundamental for the consolidation of the field in the region.

After the creation of these programs, there was a long interval of approximately 15 years before new programs were implemented in private institutions and 30 years in public institutions.

According to Souza, Andrade, and Souza (2019), in 1984, in the state of Sergipe, the Tiradentes Integrated Faculties (FITS), currently Tiradentes University, considered the second private university in the Northeast, obtained authorization to operate the first Library Science program in the state. Due to a severe drop in the number of interested students, the program had its last class in 1994. It is worth noting that, after a 15-year interval, the state will return to the landscape of library science education and learning in Brazil.

In the public sphere, the pause was interrupted by the establishment of another program, at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN), which was implemented through Resolution 002/1996[5]. However, the e-MEC website indicates that the program began in 1997. Subsequently, the Federal University of Alagoas (UFAL) instituted the Library Science program, the first in the state, in 1999[6].

In 2003, 2006, and 2009[7], respectively, the State University of Piauí (UESPI), the Federal University of Cariri (UFCA), and the Federal University of Sergipe (UFS) began offering undergraduate programs in Library Science, expanding the coverage of training for information professionals, with an established presence in all states of the Northeast and thus becoming "the second region with the highest number of programs offered across the national territory" (Nascimento; Ferreira and Martins, 2017, p.12)[8].

Given this brief history, it is observed that the evolution of Library Science education is divided into phases. According to Tanus (2018), these cycles were marked by stages that

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[1] https://ici.ufba.br/.

[2] https://ici.ufba.br/.

[3] www.emec.mec.gov.br .

[4] www.emec.mec.gov.br .

[5] https://encurtador.com.br/l1Emx.

[6] www.emec.mec.gov.br .

[7] www.emec.mec.gov.br .

[8] All direct citations are free translations by the authors.

encompass European and American influences; the shift in the object of study from the book to information; the expansion of graduate programs; the advent of technologies; the end of the minimum curriculum; and the convergence with Archival Science and Museology.

3 Bibliotherapy: Concepts and Applications

The word bibliotherapy is formed from two words: biblio (books) and therapy (treatment), which is defined by the dictionary as "the use of selected readings as therapeutic adjuvants in the treatment of nervous disorders" (BIBLIOTERAPIA, 2025). The simple combination of these terms denotes the meaning of therapy through books; however, Ouaknin (1996, p. 11), recognized as one of the main theorists on the subject, warns that, although such a concept appears simple, it involves "complex issues" related to the book, reading, illness, therapy, and the healing process.

Bibliotherapy is an interdisciplinary practice that encompasses the therapeutic use of reading to promote well-being. According to Shrodes (1949 apud Caldin, 2001, p. 34), it is "a dynamic process of interaction between the reader's personality and imaginative literature, which can attract the reader's emotions and release them for conscious and productive use".

This dynamic nature of therapeutic reading allows for reinterpretations and reveals new perspectives with each interaction. By engaging with different life contexts, the text fosters the reinterpretation of experiences and contributes to strengthening the individual in emotional, existential, and social matters. These aspects demonstrate that bibliotherapy is an effective and transformative practice. In this sense, Pinheiro and Ramires (2020, p. 155) state that:

> Bibliotherapy is an activity that uses reading as an aid in the treatment of people with physical, mental, social, emotional, and educational problems, regardless of age. It can be applied in schools, daycare centers, nursing homes, hospitals, prisons, orphanages, and other places. One of the objectives of bibliotherapy is to provide moments of relaxation and leisure, creating a bond/dialogue between reader and listener, making them feel part of the story.

Based on Shrodes' studies, Caldin (2001, pp. 36-37) developed the concept of bibliotherapy as a process of "guided reading and group discussion that fosters interaction among people, leading them to express their feelings: fears, anxieties, and longings." For the author, the therapeutic effectiveness of bibliotherapy stems from the promotion of "bibliotherapeutic components," such as catharsis, identification (through projection and introjection), introspection, and humor, which manifest themselves through imagination, reflection, and the modulation of emotions.

Reading has the power to be used as an instrument of care, listening, and reinterpretation of experiences. According to Ouaknin (1996, p. 21):

> Bibliotherapeutic reading is an operation that restores life, movement, and time to the very heart of words; it is thus that it constitutes them as works of art and removes them from the risks of idolatry. Here, words are no longer finalized by meaning, but by meanings. Reading breaks the instance of meaning, and all the elements of the text, the words, the syllables, the consonants, the vowels, respond and speak to one another.

Discussions about bibliotherapy encompass the following categories: institutional, clinical, and developmental. According to Grieger and Pizarro (2023), while institutional bibliotherapy is generally directed towards behavioral problems, being promoted by an institution and mediated by education or health professionals; clinical bibliotherapy aims at clinical treatment for the relief of emotional or psychological symptoms, carried out by mental health professionals; developmental bibliotherapy, which is addressed in this study, seeks to assist in issues of emotional, social, and personal growth and can be applied by librarians,

educators, and teachers. Thus, "regardless of the typology of bibliotherapy practice, it is possible to perceive that this procedure provides diverse experiences to the reader and listener" (Leite, 2019, p. 49).

In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire (2001) presents education as a process of human development and social liberation, in which the practice of dialogue between educator and learner enables the shared construction of knowledge. This encounter of knowledge makes education an instrument of humanization, capable of stimulating critical questioning and, consequently, the transformation of reality.

According to Sousa (2018, p. 370), the inclusion of bibliotherapy teaching in Library Science programs favors "the awakening of humanization in the personal sense of future librarians, [...] in the collective sphere, contributing to a more humane society through the exercise of empathy, affection and listening".

In this context, the implementation of bibliotherapy as a subject in undergraduate Library Science programs constitutes a humanistic formative strategy, expanding the librarian's field of action and promoting the development of sensitive skills, such as listening and dialogue, essential to bibliotherapeutic practice.

4 METHODOLOGY

The methodology presents the roadmap to be followed in conducting research. According to Carvalho (2012), it provides perspectives for the critical analysis of science, as well as recommending criteria that enable the evaluation of scientific results.

From the point of view of its objectives, this study is characterized as exploratory and descriptive research, as it aims to detail, emphasize, and deepen knowledge about the topic. Gil (2010, p. 27) states that the intention of this type of research is "[...] to provide greater familiarity with the problem, aiming at making it more explicit [...] [...] and the description of the characteristics of a given population".

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As it proposes practical actions, the nature of the study is applied. From the perspective of the problem, the approach is both qualitative and quantitative, as it is a set of methods that allows for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. According to Schneider, Fujii, and Corazza (2017, p. 582), while the first method presents the analysis of subjective, descriptive, or symbolic data, the other works with the analysis of numerical data. Thus, qualitative and quantitative approaches provide "the enrichment of the investigation, through complementarity in the analysis of the objects of study."

To outline the research regarding technical procedures, the following were carried out: a) bibliographic research in the Information Science Database (Brapci) and in the Brazilian Digital Database of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD), for the collection, reading and summarization of publications that address the topics in order to provide theoretical basis and understanding of the practices; and b) documentary research on the websites of Library Science programs.

The research encompasses on-campus Library Science programs in Northeast Brazil (websites and curricula).

According to Marconi and Lakatos (2010, p. 151), "the importance of data lies not in the data themselves, but in providing answers to investigations." Therefore, data collection was carried out according to the steps described below: 1) consultation of the e-MEC website to identify on-campus programs in the Northeast region of Brazil; 2) consultation of program websites to collect curricula and syllabi; 3) transfer of data to a spreadsheet; 4) quantitative analysis of the retrieved data. The results from the application of the procedures presented are discussed in the following section, aiming at generating practical contributions.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

In this section, the results and analyses of the survey carried out will be presented. Initially, a consultation of universities was carried out in the e-MEC - Higher Education Regulation System[9] to identify universities in Northeast Brazil that had an active on-campus Library Science program, and ten (10) programs were found, as shown in Chart 1.

Chart 1. On-campus Library Science program

Year of creation	State	University
1942	Bahia	UFBA
1950	Pernambuco	UFPE
1965	Ceará	UFC
1969	Paraíba	UFPB
1969	Maranhão	UFMA
1997	Rio Grande do Norte	UFRN
1999	Alagoas	UFAL
2003	Piauí	UESPI
2006	Ceará	UFCA
2009	Sergipe	UFS

Source: by the authors.
Description: Chart 1, entitled "Undergraduate Librarianship On-site", organizes data in a table of three columns and ten rows. The first column lists the year of creation of the courses (varying between 1942 and 2009); the second indicates the federative unit (State); and the third has the acronym of the respective university.

Following the methodological approach for mapping the programs, a survey of the curricula, syllabi, and Pedagogical Project of the Program (PPC) was carried out by consulting the websites of the institutions. However, due to problems such as unavailable websites, pages with disabled links, and inconsistencies in data and documents, a search for the documents on the websites of the Integrated Academic Activities Management System (SIGAA) of the institutions was deemed necessary.

Therefore, a search was conducted in the aforementioned documents of the courses and their respective descriptions, considering content that addressed the concepts and practices of bibliotherapy or that was related to the theme. Thus, not only were courses that explicitly contained the term bibliotherapy analyzed, but also those related to therapeutic information, such as: information mediation, mediation and reading, storytelling, extension projects, and extracurricular activities.

After analyzing the information, out of the ten (10) undergraduate programs in Library Science in the Northeast, only three (3) programs, equivalent to 30%, had subjects with content focused on bibliotherapy or therapeutic information, as shown in Table 1 and illustrated in Graph 1.

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[9] https://emec.mec.gov.br/emec/nova

Table 1. Bibliotherapy course in Library Science undergraduate programs in Northeast Brazil.

Course	Number	%
It has the course.	3	30
It does not have the course.	7	70
Total	10	100.0

Source: by the authors.
Description: Under the heading 'Bibliotherapy discipline in undergraduate Library Science NE', table 1 organizes the data in three columns and three rows. The column headers are, respectively: Discipline, Quantity, and Percentage."

Graph 1. Bibliotherapy course in Library Science undergraduate programs in the Northeast.
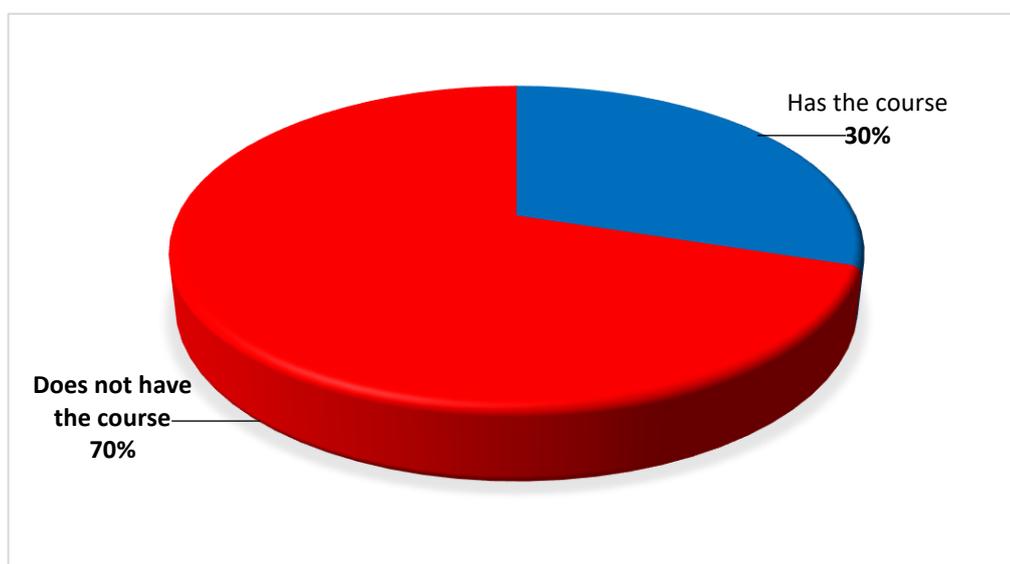
Source: by the authors.
Description: Graph 1, entitled 'Bibliotherapy discipline in undergraduate Library Science NE', is a pie chart. Most of them, represented by the red slice (70%), indicate the category 'Does not have discipline'. The smallest part, represented by the blue slice (30%), corresponds to the category 'Has discipline'.

Chart 2 presents a detailed breakdown of the collected information regarding bibliotherapy-related courses, including the name, workload, type of program assigned, and the university to which it belongs.

Chart 2. Data from courses on bibliotherapy.

Nomenclature	Workload	Type	University
Special Topics in Library and Information Science I - Bibliotherapy: Theory & Practice	60h	Complementary inflection	UFPB
Storytelling	54h	Elective	UFAL

Bibliotherapy	6oh	Optional	UFS

The data collected in this study show that bibliotherapy is still underexplored in higher education in the Northeast region of Brazil. This scarcity of the course may be related to several factors, such as a lack of knowledge of the practice, a lack of specialization among faculty, and low local academic production. It is worth noting that the topic needs greater dissemination among scholars and researchers to increase the visibility of the social role of library science.

It can also be observed that many curricula remain centered on more traditional structures, and that the humanistic and interdisciplinary approach of bibliotherapy seems to be seen as complementary. This finding highlights a gap in librarian training, especially regarding integrative and interdisciplinary practices involving therapeutic use of information and reading. Furthermore, it corroborates the data presented by Sousa (2018) indicating that the predominance of a technical character in Library Science programs contributes to the limited inclusion of this theme in the classroom by teachers.

Conversely, the existence of courses in some institutions demonstrates a renewal of the field, which may indicate a movement towards promoting a socially committed librarianship, focused on the mediation of therapeutic information, thus contributing to the expansion of the librarian's role as an agent of care, listening, and social transformation. In this perspective, Sousa (2018, p. 369) emphasizes the relevance of considering human diversity in "education and professional training," preserving what is sensitive and humanistic, instead of prioritizing only technique and market demands.

6 CONCLUSION

An analysis of on-campus undergraduate Library Science programs offered by universities in Northeast Brazil revealed an incipient presence of bibliotherapy as a component of these programs' curricula.

The finding that only three (3) out of the ten (10) institutions surveyed address the therapeutic use of reading and information points to a gap in the training of future librarians. Factors contributing to this gap may be the prevalence of traditional curricula, coupled with a shortage of specialized teachers.

Thus, programs that incorporate this theme into their pedagogical projects indicate a perspective of progress, in which Library Science demonstrates a constant expansion of its field of action and greater sensitivity to social issues. In this sense, the importance of including bibliotherapy in programs stems both from a social demand related to mental health and from the opportunity for a new field of action for librarians.

Therefore, this study reinforces the importance of continuously updating the curricula of Library Science programs, with a view to including courses that explore integrative practices such as bibliotherapy. Furthermore, it highlights the need to promote research and outreach activities that strengthen the knowledge and practice of bibliotherapy in the academic and professional spheres, preparing future librarians to act as agents of care, listening, and social transformation.

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