

The Report on the Survey in Syria
Of Children's Literature and the Promotion of
Reading among Children

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Introduction:

The Report is concerned with the presentation of the results of a survey regarding children's literature and the promotion of reading in Syria. The survey was undertaken with emphasis on the following axes:

First : Policies

Second: Libraries in Schools and Kindergartens

Third : Public and Private Libraries

Fourth : Universities

Fifth : Civil Institutions Active in the Field of Children's Literature

Sixth : International and Local Exhibitions and Prizes

Seventh: Information

Eighth : Trends as to Children's Literature

Ninth : The Problems of Children's Literature

Tenth : Proposals for the Development of Children's Literature

Eleventh: Annexes

Twelfth : Attachments

First: Policies

The parties concerned with children's literature in its various forms in Syria are so diverse that they include the Ministry of Culture, the Vanguard Organization, the Association of Arab Writers, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Education and the Syrian Institution for Family Affairs. These parties formulate policies and map out the plans and programs directed towards children by emphasizing the cultural aspect. Against that there is the limited role undertaken by the private sector in this field and its restriction to the publishing and distribution firms concerned with literature in general, including children's literature.

Within the framework of the policies approved by these parties and directed towards the cultural development of the child, we have dealt with the policy axes as follows:

- The policy and strategy approved by the Syrian Ministry of Education;
- The policy and strategy approved by the Syrian Ministry of Culture.

1- The Policy and Strategy Approved by the Syrian Ministry of Education:-

- The Syrian development strategy since 1963 has pursued a policy of development through the expansive cumulative method which is based on the mobilization of the factors of production, land, labour and capital, in order to achieve the greatest possible qualitative leap under the leadership of the State. The State soon started to become the main motivator of all social, economic and cultural changes. Within the framework of this policy, the function of the educational system was defined as the provider of the requirements needed by the learning sectors for the development process; (The National Report on the development of Human Resources: Education and Human Development, Towards Better Efficiency, the United Nations Developmental Program, and the Premiership of the Cabinet of Ministers, the State's Agency for Planning, 2005);

- Law No. 35 for the Year 1981 provided for obligatory education at elementary schools for all Syrian children and children of like status between the ages of 6 and 12;
- Kindergartens in Syria used to be established in accordance to the Law for Private Education No. 106 for the Year 1985 and its Regulatory Bylaws issued under Resolution No. 20 for the Year 1959. As of 2004, however, they became subject to Law No. 55 pertaining to the regulation of private educational institutions for under-graduate education;
- Kindergartens include three age groups of early childhood for those at three, four and five years of age on the basis of gender equality
- The number of children aged 3-5 years registered for pre-school education in the academic year 2002/3 was 10.99 % compared to 9.66% in 2000/1 and 10% in 2001/2 out of the total of eligible children in the country.

Schedule No. (1)

Represents the ratios of registration in the various educational stages according to year:¹

<u>School Year</u>	<u>Percentage of Registration</u>	<u>Stage</u>
2002/3	8.32%	Secondary
2002/3	53.4%	Preparatory
2002/3	96.5%	Elementary
2001/2	93.9%	Elementary
2001/2	100 %	Preparatory

2- The Policy and Strategy Approved by the Ministry of Culture:-

The Ministry of Culture and its various Directorates took an interest in the subject of children’s literature in Syria. This can be noted by highlighting the following tasks allocated for the Directorates of the Ministry and which reflect its general policy:

¹ It was not possible to visit the Ministry of Education, kindergartens and schools. Therefore, we shall use the information pertaining to schools according to the source represented by:- The National Report on the Development of Human Resources: Education and Human Development, Towards Better Efficiency, The United Nations Developmental Program, and the Premiership of the Cabinet of Ministers, The State’s Institute for Planning, 2005;

First: The Directorate of Child Culture:

The Directorate of Child Culture was established by Ministerial Resolution dated 1/5/2001 and, since its activation, has realized a number of achievements concerned with the child's culture in Syria.

A document issued by the Ministry of Culture allocated the following tasks for the Directorate of Child Culture and specified the Departments subordinate to it and the tasks of each Department:²

1- To disseminate cultural output among the various categories and tranches of children;

2- To consolidate, cultural, educational and national affinity and, through the cultural output offered to children, introduce and provide an outlook on the cultures of other peoples;

3- To sponsor children's talents and make opportunities available for their development them and broadening their horizons;

4- To attain optimum utilization of local qualifications and experiences in order to offer the child a well developed cultural output;

5- To achieve the optimum possible utilization of available material potential for providing cultural services to children.

By reference to the tasks laid down by the Ministry of Culture for the Directorate of Child Culture, we can deduce the total programs and activities pertaining to children's literature from the context of the duties of the departments subordinate to the Directorate.³

Second: Cultural Centres⁴

- Cultural centres house libraries (book stations) subordinate to the departments of culture and sections for childhood and early childhood.

² cf. Attachment No. (1), document issued by the Ministry of Culture, The Tasks of the Departments Subordinate to the Directorate of Child Culture, Article 32, Chapter 15.

³ cf. Annex No. (1), The Tasks of the Departments Subordinate to the Directorate of Child Culture and the Programs and Activities Therein Pertaining to Children's Literature.

⁴ cf. Attachment No. (2), part of a document issued by the Directorate of Child Culture, the Ministry of Culture, under the title (Second: Study of the Present Status of the various Directorates Concerned with Early Childhood in the Ministry of Culture).

- Cultural centres run summer clubs for children to frequent and offer courses on subjects such as drawing, sculpture, music, foreign languages and the computer.
- The Ministry has commenced the provisioning of theatres for the child at cultural centres and, in particular, a puppet theatre.

Third: Theatres (The Directorate of Theatres)

There are a number of theatrical activities pertaining to children. These are supervised by the Directorate of Theatres in all Governorates and include:

- Holding a spring theatrical festival in all Governorates;
- Exchanging performances for children between Governorates;
- Presenting permanent performances at the puppet theatre;
- Participating in local and international festivals.

Fourth: The Cinema

The General Institute for Cinema approved a special item concerning children's cinema whereby:

- In the budget for cinematographic production, a part will be allocated for the production of a long cartoon film once every two years;
- The Institute is prepared to participate in any activity concerned with the child by the presentation of movie films;
- The General Institute has also pointed out its readiness to hold an international cinema festival exclusive to children's cinema.

Anyone who peruses the tasks charged to the Directorate of Child Culture in the Ministry of Culture, in addition to The Directorate of Theatres and Cultural Centres, can realize that these Directorates undertake many tasks which, one way or another, lead to the support of children's literature in Syria. These tasks are so varied that they include the field of printing and those cultural programs directed at children including, among other things, organizing reading and drawing workshops in addition to workshops for art, conversation with children and movie performances.

This coincides with naming Damascus as the capital of Arab Culture for 2008 and explains the matter of concentrating efforts on subjects concerned with childhood. On this occasion as well, according to the declaration of a competent official of the Directorate of Child Culture at the Syrian Ministry of Culture, there will be allocated a reading club for children and a competition will be announced for the best text written by a child.

Second: Libraries in Schools and Kindergartens

The axis pertaining to schools and kindergartens covers each of the following:-⁵

- The collection of documents and the statistics relevant thereto in respect to libraries;
- Reviewing some of the critical observations emphasized by some supervisors of public and private libraries that have been visited and some resources that have been obtained within the framework of completing the survey.

First: Statistics and Documents

- At the end of 2004, the total number of schools for basic education in Syria was 14,712 schools of which 13,721 schools were independent and 911 schools combined other educational stages;
- The total number of public secondary schools was 421 in urban communities and 719 in rural communities;
- The number of schools for industrial, feminine and commercial, i.e. vocational is presently 563 of which 124 are for industrial training, 323 are for feminine training and 116 are for commercial training;
- Within the framework of centralized planning policies and local decentralized execution policies, the latter in conformity with the system for local administration, the General Institute for

⁵ Due to an official holiday, it was not possible to visit the Ministry of Education, kindergartens and schools. Therefore, reliance has been on the information relevant to schools according to:- The National Report on the development of Human Resources: Education and Human Development, Towards Better Efficiency, The United Nations Developmental Program, and The Premiership of the Cabinet of Ministers, The State's Institute for Planning, 2005.

- Educational Buildings adopts four standardized types for school buildings in the various rural and urban areas;⁶
- The number of kindergartens was 1,052 in 1992 of which 43.7% belonged to the private sector, 4.4% belonged to the Women's Union, 3.42% belonged to the Ministry of Education and Teaching and 5.8% belonged other ministries. By 2004, this number had grown to 1,475 kindergartens of which 55.8% belonged to the private sector, 15.18% belonged to the Women's Union, 22.37% belonged to the Teachers' Association, 2.71% belonged to the Ministry of Education and Teaching and 3.79% belonged to other ministries.

Second: Critical Observations

This item includes a number of observations reached by undertaking field visits, interviews and reading some of the information available on existing private, government and civic libraries in Syria. These observations are as follows:

- Except for the largest of the Syrian school building types, available only in city centres, the other three lack a hall allocated as a school library (the largest type comprises 24 classrooms, 6 administration rooms, a laboratory and a school library);
- Although these types had been adopted, they have not been executed until the time when this report was prepared (2007) due to the high cost of constructing the hall;

⁶ - The first type:- (3+1) is used for small schools in the rural areas of a governorate or for single-teacher schools and combined classes where the number of actual forms does not exceed three, also for previous preparatory schools. This type lacks all activity halls, has no library, laboratory, computer room or any attached hall;

- The second type:- (6+2) is applied to elementary schools that have six actual forms, preparatory schools where the number of forms is from 3 to 6, and lacks a laboratory, a library, a computer room and an activities hall;

- The third type:- (13+2) is used in city and town centres for elementary schools where the number of forms exceeds six or for preparatory and secondary schools. It contains a laboratory and a library but lacks a multi-purpose hall. Instead, one of the classrooms has been recently used as a computer room;

- The fourth type:- (24+6) is executed in city centres for large schools. It contains a library and a laboratory. With some improvisation it responds to the requirements of the teaching concept; The National Report on the development of Human Resources: Education and Human Development, Towards Better Efficiency, The United Nations Developmental Program, and the Premiership of the Cabinet of Ministers, The State's Institute for Planning, 2005.

- There is a gap between the building model and the hypothetical model for the educational and learning process because all the previous models conform to a traditional indoctrination concept of teaching using the method of memorization by heart and do not comply with the transformation of the concept of a teacher from an indoctrinator to a facilitator;
- the specifications of all existing and executed models are inferior to the conditions and criteria of category four of typical teaching buildings laid down by the State for the structure of schools established by the private sector,,,the first and second types lack attached halls such as laboratory and computer halls.
- As to the school library in the last type which includes secondary schools and previous preparatory schools, it still suffers a common structural, institutional and functional weakness. The institutional weakness lies in its traditional nature as a store for books, a restricted resupply with books and new editions, the scarcity of funds allotted to it, the low efficiency of its librarian who is selected because of approaching retirement age or illness and is not a graduate or qualified as a librarian, and in the purely administrative regard of his functions;
- Consideration for qualification was exercised in 2005 for the first time;
- The low level of motivation exercised by teachers towards students for the use of the library even where the field of class activity is concerned, the weak awareness of the importance of the library as a source of knowledge outside the classroom equally among many teachers and students, and the lack of sufficient time to frequent the library, particularly in secondary schools with partial school hours. Against that, the projects for rural development have the experiment of mobile libraries and their employment to perform interactive and attractive plays;
 - ...its functional weakness can be demonstrated by the weak reaction between it and the classroom and the low level of its utilization.
- In 2005, Dr. ‘Īssa al-Shammās made a field study by way of a questionnaire for students and teachers in order to evaluate school libraries in public secondary schools in the City of Damascus in respect of school books, the degree of frequenting the library, the level of qualification of the library custodian, the extent to which he and the school encourage students to

frequent the library and the influence of the library over students;⁷

- 81.3% of students and 78.6% of teachers have stressed that the librarian does not hold a university degree as to his specialization. This limits his capability to activate the school library and encourage the students to make use of it.
- The study indicates that only 32.5% of students and 31% of teachers concur in respect of the library's role in developing the students' reading potential and self education;
- In respect of culture, although 78.57% of students and 62.27% of teachers agreed that various books are available, these books are not appropriately utilized by those who could benefit from them due to the lack of a reading hall;
- Kindergartens still suffer high density in classrooms, shortage in the number of female teachers and specialized principals, deficiency in the qualifications of staff and the unsuitability of most school buildings as to educational, health and safety requirements;
- There exist in the City of Damascus five cultural centres, namely: the Arab Cultural Centre in Mezza, the Arab Cultural Centre in Al-‘Adawi, the Arab Cultural Centre in Kufr Sūsā, the Arab Cultural Centre in Yarmūk and the Arab Cultural Centre in Jōbar;
- There is a popular cultural institute subordinate to each cultural centre. These offer courses for grown-ups in various fields such as drawing, sculpture and photography as well as lectures on aesthetics, art-related anatomy, the history of art etc.... In summer, they also give courses for children about drawing and ceramics;
- Each cultural centre presents a number of various cultural activities directed towards grown-ups and children. Activities for children concentrate on presenting film performances on Saturdays such as a film about wonder city, fable films, a film series of international tales and the film known as Streaks. These films are dubbed with Arabic;⁸

⁷ ...I have ended with a number of conclusions. Among the most important of these is that although 69% of students and 49% of teachers agreed that references in the school library are available, especially as regards the school curriculum, these are not well utilized because neither teachers nor the librarian encourage students to frequent the library and make use of what references it has.

⁸ Knowledge of the activities undertaken by cultural centres was obtained from a pamphlet about them and from an interview made with the library supervisor at the cultural centre of Abu Rummānah. cf. Attachment No. (10).

- A library supervisor with two and the half years of practical experience working at a children's library addressing children in the age group of 10-14 years and containing 19,000 books on science, history, religion and mysteries stressed that there is no electronic archive or classification for the children for these books but simply a manual listing;
- This library supervisor received no training except for a voluntary one week course organized by the Ministry of Culture at the Cultural Centre of Kufr Sūsā under the title "Library Seminar";
- In general, due to its small area, the hall containing the children's books is considered inappropriate for reading and serves only for borrowing books. Accordingly, the children take turns to follow up on their reading in a hall shared with various age groups. It is also apparent that the books in the library are old and arranged randomly relying on general numbering without classification so that a child cannot search along the shelves according to the topic he wants to pursue. Furthermore, there are no children's seats.
- By comparison with other types, borrowing by children concentrates on historic books and, in many cases, it is the child's parents who choose the books for him to read;
- Children frequent the library during the summer period and summer holidays. During school periods, however, there is no coordination between the school and the cultural centre except in a few individual cases;
- Children's parents are notified of cultural activities through the Ministry of Culture;
- The annual book exhibition in which local and sometimes Arab publishing firms participate over the period of one week is considered one of the most important means for supplying the library with books as publishing firms provide various books to the centre up to the value of Syrian Pounds 5,000 in exchange for its participation in the exhibition;
- The system for borrowing books at the centre is against an annual subscription card issued for the once only consideration of Syrian Pounds 200. After six months a card is issued in the child's name; and he is given a card to borrow against up to three books for a maximum period of two weeks. Encyclopedias and reference books are excluded from the borrowing system.
- Other than an annual internal exhibition, there are no external activities undertaken by the centre to encourage reading.

Third: Public and Private Libraries

This topic allocated for public libraries covers:

- Information about Al-Asad National Library (a government library);
- Information about a private library considered to be the first public private library for children and is subordinate to one of the civil organizations active in the various childhood fields in Syria, the Rainbow Institution (*qaws quzah*).

First: Al-Asad National Library

Within the framework of gathering data on public libraries in Syria, a visit was arranged to Al-Asad National Library. A tour of the Library was conducted, additionally the system for lending books was explained and an interview took place with the Manager of the Library. The following is the totality of information obtained within this framework:

- Al-Asad National Library was established by Resolution No. 145 issued by the Prime Minister on 20/4/1972 providing for the constitution of a committee charged with preparing a thorough study and supervising the execution of building a modern national library in Damascus. Work on this started in 1984;⁹
- The total area of the building is 22,000 sq. m. distributed over nine floors. Inside, there are two main halls between two spiral stairs that connect the first four floors. Above these stairs there are two domes in the shape of double cross arches to admit sunlight. The two domes are ornate with Islamic designs and, inscribed on them, there are four verses composed for President Hafiz al-Asad by the poet, Mohammad Mahdi al-Jawāhiri;
- The Library comprises nine floors which include reception floors, the part allocate for the Administration, the Indexation and Classification Section, the Computer Hall, the section for topics, internal lending, the documentary photography service then the warehouses and maintenance;

⁹ All information about Al-Asad National Library was obtained from a brochure issued by it; Attachment No. (3)

- The Library has a number of halls, lecture hall, reading hall, individual reading room and exhibition halls where book and art exhibitions are held;
- Al-Asad Library is open to all readers and researchers to make use of it. Keeping in mind the offering of its services to all citizens and safeguarding the good keeping of the cultural material it contains in order to preserve it for later generations, its regulations do not allow lending books outside the premises.
- Al-Asad Library has 176 titles relating to children's literature. These include 26 stories and 150 studies;¹⁰
- The Library employs a number of specialized librarians with university degrees in library work or in other specializations. Each employee obtains training on indexation, classification, the mechanism of handling books and the method of lending for one time only;
- The supervisor said, "There does not exist in Al-Asad Library a section for children's literature; it is part of the section for literatures. Nor is there a hall allocate for children's reading. Indeed, no person under eighteen is permitted to visit the Library."
- Activities: - An annual book exhibition has been held on library grounds for a period of 8-10 days since 1984. The Library is supplied with books through this exhibition which includes among its participants Arab states such as Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Libya, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco etc.. and some foreign states such as Britain, America, Spain, Russia, Germany, Korea, India, Belgium etc...¹¹ and international organizations;
- The exhibition is considered as one of the most important sources for supplying books to the Library as it obtains a number of copies of each item exhibited. The exhibition has explanatory aids and stories that are distributed to the cultural centres and schools according to certain criteria;
- The book exhibition is always accompanied during its period by cultural activities. The private sector participates through publishing firms;
- Whereas there are outside the Library no cultural activities that target schools, there is a number of activities that vary between poetic evenings, lectures and symposia;
- When all cultural activities held by Al-Asad Library were reviewed for the years 2004-7, it became clear to us that they addressed the older age groups and contained no cultural activity for children or about them.

¹⁰ cf. Attachment No. (4), a list of the titles relevant to children's literature available in Al-Asad Library.

¹¹ Attachment No. (5), a list of the number and names of states, civil institutions and publishing firms that have participated in the book exhibitions of 2006 and 2007.

- In general, we launch our activities on the basis of what we want and are concerned with culture in general terms. The choice is made so that the activity would be appropriate to a certain level of performance regardless of the subject and within the general planning and programs of the Library. We try to announce our activities through the publicity of the institutions performing them, in the Library and through available means of advertisement.¹²

Second: A Private Library in One of the Cultural Centres in Lattaqia

This is considered to be the only private library in Syria and the first civil library for children open to the public. It belongs to a civil organization active in the various fields of childhood in Syria and occupies an area of 250 sq. m.¹³ The following comprises the information on this library:

- This library is part of the Syrian Child's Cultural Project and the civil Rainbow Institution;
- The library is allocate for children and is concerned with the age group from 6 months until 15 years. It contains 4,000 titles and 800 transcriptions and is frequented by 250-300 children daily. The interior of the library consists of a hall for the projection of cinematic films, a hall for classical music and has huge numbers of CDs for choosing the film appropriate to the particular age group. For the age group 6 months to 3 years, it also has a multi-purpose section which offers games and story telling by the mother or a story-teller who reads a daily story. It is planned that the library will soon employ a narrator representing the character of the library. The library has no section for publishing but is working to nurture culture based on reading due to the war by television against the book so that the library will re-produce our cultural heritage in a beautiful style, attractive to children, with soft music played during reading. A workshop is held on a bi-monthly basis for various

¹² This information was obtained from an interview with the manager of Al-Asad National Library.

¹³ The library is located in the building of one of the cultural centres in Lattaqia. We have been unable to make a field visit to the library and were satisfied with a telephone interview with its executive manager and the library supervisor and with an interview with Mrs. Hadeel al-Asmar, the manageress of The Rainbow Institution which brought the idea of the library to life.

- subjects such as photography when people are trained in the technology of photography by hosting a specialist;
- The library also has sections each for a different age group. There is a section for parents, one for early childhood, another for medium and late childhood, one for languages for reading and listening to a story and, additionally, a section for specialists and people researching in the field of children's literature;
 - The library applies the method of lending for a three week period and every child can borrow two or three books;
 - This library takes children's needs into consideration even in respect of public amenities which had been designed to suit the children within the targeted age group, for example as to height. An Internet connection is also available to children;
 - Children and their parents are attracted to the library through meetings with people when the role and services of the library are explained. Pamphlets introducing the library are distributed in marginalized areas and children who still cannot read are attracted to sessions when a volunteer teaches them reading and a story is read daily and followed up with a discussion to draw an idea of the children's comprehension of it;
 - The library has future projects to attain admission to schools through spreading the idea of having a story read by the teacher, particularly in the first stages, and by holding exhibitions of children's own drawings, both in the library and outside it.
 - Work at the library is undertaken through and by the child by enabling him/her to acquire some skills in order to ensure his cooperation in developing his skills farther. The library also applies the policy of reward and penalty which is promoted by the Rainbow Institution. Meanwhile, the children are rewarded or penalized, as the case may be, without being conscious of that;
 - The library has been open since July 2007 and charges no fees except in the case of borrowing books when registration at the library is required accompanied by the payment of Syrian Pounds 100 once a year. Within 58 days, 1158 persons had subscribed to the library and the average rate of borrowing books is running at between 50 and 60 a day;

- The library custodian is a 1980 graduate in the Arabic Language and its Literatures and has a long working experience as an actor, a director of plays and a teacher at government schools. He has a computer centre and a bookshop in the Consulate Building specialized in the French books that are taught at the French library in the French Institute. He has worked as a technical manager, at the magazines *shams* and *fairūz* and has also authored a short story which is found on the Internet.

Fourth: Universities

This item has been addressed by concentrating on the data relative to the course of children's literature at the University of Damascus in addition to the specialization of libraries.¹⁴

Children's Literature is taught at the University of Damascus as an obligatory course, usually in the third year, within the curriculum for specialization in kindergartens. This subject had been introduced in 2006, three years after the start of the kindergarten section at the Faculty of Education at the University of Damascus. The text book which students have to study on this subject has the title *kitāb 'adab al-'atfāl wa thaqāfat al-ṭifl (The Book on children's Literature and Child Culture)*. Students studying Arabic Language are taught the practical side of the subject of Children's Literature. One of the officials interviewed in this respect indicated that the course of Children's Literature is taught not only at the University of Damascus but also at the following universities, the Ba'ath University in Homs and Tishrīn University in Lattaqia and Aleppo.

Specialization in Libraries is undertaken at the Faculty of Literature at the University of Damascus. The subject of "The School Library and Educational Documentation" is taught to first year students specializing as class teachers in the section on the Methods and Rules of Teaching at the Faculty of Education. As to working as a librarian, the graduate usually sits for a qualification test and, following a

¹⁴ In acquiring the information relevant to the course of children's literature, The University of Damascus alone was visited as it was not possible to visit other universities.

positive result, he gets appointed to a library in one of the Government's cultural centres.

Fourth year students specializing in kindergartens study a subject that includes specialization in libraries, the Child's Museum and Library. The course of Children's Literature and the Child's Culture covers the following items:¹⁵

Part One:

- An Introduction to Children's Literature;
- Literature and Childhood Stages;
- The Development of Children's Literature, Arabic and International;
- The Arts of Children's Literature;
- Children's Literature and Educational Values;
- Samples of Arabic and International Children's Literature;
- Children's Books in Our Contemporary World.

Part two:

- The Child's Education;
- Cultural Communication with Children;
- The Role of Language in Cultural Communication with Children;
- The Role of Children's Literature in Cultural Communication;
- The Role of Communication Means in Developing Children's Culture.

Fifth: Civil Institutions Active in the Field of Children's Literature

This axis on civil institutions active in the field of children's literature deals with the following:¹⁶

- Information on the Society for Children's Literature particularly that pertaining to the encouragement of reading in the Society;

¹⁵ cf. Attachment No. (6) for viewing the detailed itemization of the plan for the course Children's Literature and the Child's Culture.

¹⁶ Within the framework of the partial survey of civil institutions active in the field of children's literature, discussion was restricted to the two institutions, the Society for Children's Literature and the Rainbow Institution, due to the unavailability of any other information confirming the existence of any other civil institution acting in the field of children's literature, especially in respect of encouraging the reading habit. This is what materialized from conclusions deduced from interviews with those concerned in this field.

- Information on the Rainbow Institution particularly that pertaining to the encouragement of reading in it.

First: The Society for Children's Literature¹⁷

The Society for Children's Literature was established in 1994 and is subordinate to The Association of Arab Writers. Its target is to take interest in all the activities pertaining to children's literature.

The Society's Activities:

- To hold a series of monthly meetings or discussions between writers to discuss the material presented;
- To evaluate creative activities and accordingly hold an annual celebration to honour those who introduced them;
- To offer intensive lectures to children;
- To hold festivals in Quneitra, Al-Riqqa, the Damascus Suburbia and the Capital;
- To hold symposia about children's literature;
- To project the light on writers of children's books and motivate them;
- To highlight children's literature as it is not inferior in importance to other genres of literature;
- Within the framework of encouraging reading among children, work is currently in process to shoot a television program carrying the title "Let Us Read". The concept of the program revolves around performing a theatrical play to encourage children to read. During the program, children's creative works are listened to, a child reading a story and the writer discussing it with him. It is a condition that the story has an acceptable aim and be open to having a dialogue. The program aims at reaching remote areas. Also, it is seeking access to outside Syria to Jordan. Presently, it has been agreed to broadcast a pilot of the program.

Second: The Rainbow Institution¹⁸

¹⁷ The information concerning the society for Children's Literature was obtained in an interview with the gentleman in charge of the Society, Mr. Şubhi Said.

¹⁸ Information regarding the Rainbow Institution was obtained in an interview with its manager, Mrs. Hadeel al-Asmar.

Established in 2003 and registered at the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Rainbow Institution is a civil institution working with children and is responsible for the project “The Culture of the Syrian Child”.

The Institution’s Activities:

The Rainbow Institution works along three axes:

- The first axis is caring for children who have been deprived of family care (orphans, children of imprisoned mothers, mothers incapable of giving care to their children or ill mothers). The Institution has a housing compound for this purpose.
- The second axis is the plan for the protection of the Syrian child for which there is a protection centre.
- The third is the culture acquired by the Syrian child. This last axis follows a number of routes:
 - The rooting of culture takes place by linking Syrian children with their history. To this end, laboratories have been set up in national museums. The study of the items exhibited in the museum takes place in these laboratories and imitation items are made.
 - Acquainting children widely with various cultures by resort to libraries of which four were established in Lataqia,¹⁹ Homs, Deir al-Zour and Damascus, in that order. These libraries contain books in many languages and have halls for reading and listening to world music, a cinema projection hall where diverse films are shown and a hall for workshops.

As to the library custodians, qualified trustees with a degree in the field of libraries have been employed. Sometimes the specialization varies to include English Literature, the Arabic Language, History, Administration and Sociology. Training symposia are held for the trustees on varied subjects such as clauses of Syrian Law, administration, the art of dealing with children, how to invest in children, its importance and future returns and how to deal with the problematic behaviour of children.

¹⁹ cf. the section about Public and Private Libraries, previously discussed, for further information about the library in Lataqia.

- Work at the Institution is based on the concept of starting with care and protection (relief axes) followed by the move to culture;
- There are partnership relations between the Rainbow Institution and the Government as there are dealings with the national museums and cultural centres which are considered part of the Government sector;
- The Institution accomplished the inauguration of two kindergartens, the Rainbow Montessori Kindergarten which falls under the Rainbow foster homes, and another kindergarten in one of the villages of Quneitra
- The Rainbow Institution undertakes seasonal activities on a number of occasions such as Children's Rights, International Children's Day, the launching of the plan for child protection and interactive cultural activities such as drawing, paper kites, experimental and sports games;
- The Rainbow Institution cooperates with The Syrian Institution for Family Affairs to promote the agreement on children's rights;
- The Institution works to promote the idea of a children's parliament;
- The Institution supports cultural and informative programs in the Governorates.

Sixth: International and Local Exhibitions and Prizes

International and Local Exhibitions

The Directorate of Child Culture at The Ministry of Culture participated in organizing the following exhibitions:

- A one-week national exhibition for children's books at Al-Asad Library in 2002 in cooperation with the Library;
- An exhibition for children's books on the occasion of celebrating Arab Child Day in 2002;
- Art exhibitions for children's drawings with participation by children with special needs;

- An exhibition for children's books and one for children's drawings within the framework of celebrating International Children's Day in 2003;
- Exhibitions on the occasion of celebrating International Children's Day in 2004 (for books, children's drawings, photography and a joint exhibition for the covers of children's books);
- Participation in the exhibition on childhood summer in 2005 (an exhibition for children's books, one for children's drawings and a workshop on drawing);
- Within the framework of celebrating International Children's Day, organizing an exhibition on heritage for embassies and an exhibition for children's books;
- Within the framework of celebrating Arab Child Day, the inauguration of an exhibition for children's drawings;
- Organizing an exhibition for the drawings of children who had won at previous competitions and for the drawings by children with special needs;
- Within the framework of celebrating International Children's Day, organizing an exhibition for children's books in Aleppo on the occasion naming it the capital of Islamic Culture for 2006;
- Organizing an exhibition for drawings by Lebanese children who stayed in Syria during the Lebanon war in 2006;
- Organizing exhibitions for children's books locally and elsewhere in the Arab World in 2006.

Prizes

The Directorate of Child Culture at The Ministry of Culture organized some competitions concerned with child culture. These include:

- The first national competition for children's drawings under the title, "Syria As I See It", on the occasion of celebrating Arab Child Day in 2001;
- The first national competition for children in the arts of story and poetry under the title, "The Junior Author", on the occasion of celebrating Arab Child Day in 2001;
- On the occasion of celebrating Arab Child Day in 2002 and in cooperation with UNICEF, the Directorate of Child Culture

- organized a competition for children's literature under the title, "The Role of the Author in Formulating the Child's Awareness";
- Holding a competition for drawings and scenarios for the magazine, *Usama*, in 2003;
 - Holding a competition for literary and art work by children under the title, "A World Worthy of Children", within the framework of celebrating International Child Day in 2003;
 - Holding a competition for children's drawings in 2003 under the title, "The Future in Our Hands";
 - In cooperation with UNICEF in 2003, holding a literary competition for writers of children's literature (story, poetry, novel and play) under the title, "The Role of the Author in Formulating the Cultural Awareness of the Syrian Arab Child";
 - Holding art competitions for children in 2004;
 - Holding a literary competition for children (story, poetry and essay) in 2004;
 - Literary and art competitions in 2005;
 - Holding literary and art competitions for children in 2006 (poetry, story, essay and drawings);
 - Competitions in 2006 for authors of children's literature (story and poetry);
 - In 2007, literary and art competitions: for children (poetry, story, essay and drawings), for authors of children's literature (story, poetry, children's lyrics and drawings concerning the environment) in cooperation with the Project for the Protection of Animals in Syria, a drawing competition for the Centre for Male Juniors in Homs, a competition targeting the three age groups of children for drawing by use of the computer and a competition for Arab authors of children's literature. The results will be announced in 2008 as Damascus then is the capital of Arab Culture.

Seventh: Information

First: Magazines

There are two magazines in Syria. The first, *Usama*, is government owned; the second is privately owned and is called *Nilufar*. A

third magazine which is not usually available in shops is issued by the Vanguard Organization but faces publication problems and is not issued on a regular basis. In addition, there is a magazine licensed in Lebanon, *Al-Fāris*, but its subject matter is prepared in Syria.

1. The magazine *Usama*

The first edition of *Usama* came out in February, 1969 and it is considered to be the only government magazine in Syria. Issued by the Ministry of Culture under the supervision of the Writers' Commission, it used to be supervised previously by the Directorate of Child Culture.

This magazine sells at Syrian Pounds 10. It had been a bi-monthly publication but is presently issued on a monthly basis although there is currently an inclination to revert to bi-monthly publication.

Usama usually publishes literary books, simplified versions of international stories and translations of some stories in addition to publishing the magazine. In general, *Usama* is considered to be a variety magazine that covers many topics on science, literature, history, entertainment and competitions.

In 2003 the magazine allocated four pages for early childhood containing stories and poetry to be read by adults to young children, in addition to illustrative drawings and simple entertainment.

Usama had ceased to be issued for short periods due to political conditions. It is distributed by the General Arab Foundation for the Distribution of Printed Material.

2. *Nilufar* Magazine

- *Nilufar* is considered the only private magazine in Syria targeting children and youths. It was licensed in 2002 and is supervised by the Ministry of Information. Its first edition, No. zero, came out in 2003. It is a monthly magazine of which 10,000 copies are printed. The magazine addresses the age

groups from 7 to 12 years. At one stage, however, it had taken an infantile inclination but was then raised to a level of production suitable to a higher age.

Nilufar is considered a serious magazine, addressing cultural, social and educational topics. It contains a collection of stories inspired from the real world of the Arab child, thus seeking to realize sublime aims and refined social and individual ethics.

- The process of sales is carried out either through individual subscriptions or through the General Institute for the Distribution of Printed Material. Bulk sales take place usually at Syrian Pounds 45 whereas individual copies are sold to shops at Syrian Pounds 65 per copy.
- The magazine has published some booklets.²⁰

The supervisors of the magazine have undertaken the function of encouraging reading; they showed a play for children with its main aim being to encourage them to read.

Second: Television Programs:- as to (a program season from a previous year)

Program Seasons:-

- Upon reviewing the program season approved by the General Institute for Syrian Radio and Television for Channel One for the year 2006, it was found that this season included many programs and items. These varied from cultural and educational programs such as “A Letter from ‘Tartous’ ”, “Cities and Cafès” to entertainment programs such as a play and youth programs in addition to a number of local and Arabic serializations. As to the children’s item, according to the season of 2006 it took place between 1:50 p.m. until 3:00 p.m. and contained a number of items such as Children’s Messages, a cartoons item with the title “Bashshoura and Zakzak” and an item for cultural news.;²¹

²⁰ cf. Attachment No. (7), a list of the publications by the *Nilufar* magazine since its establishment, some of which are still under print.

²¹ This information was obtained during a field visit to the Children’s Department at Syrian Television and a meeting with the head of the Realization Section to obtain a copy of the 2006 season programs.

- Various prizes have been awarded to a number of Syrian programs and serializations produced by the Directorate of Television Production and the Children's Department at the General Institute for Radio and Television;
- A number of television programs produced by Syrian Arab Television and addressing children have been awarded various prizes. These programs included "The Fifth Wish", "The Flowers of Friendship", "The Adventurer" and the serial, "The House of Glory".
- The field of childhood is considered to be violable for every person who wishes to present a television program is allowed to do so regardless of the level of his qualification or knowledge. This is one of the greatest challenges that face the programs addressing children in view of the fact that there is no letting up of criteria in respect of programs addressed towards adults;
- The problem is that, in respect of local production, Arab televisions have no clear policy or plans or distinct sections for children. Quite often, we would have good script but lack an efficient director willing to direct a program where the script addresses the child because addressing adults realizes greater profit and fame than the former;
- The image of the child:- Those who participate in television programs are merely recipients of both question and answer. Even the introduction to the program sometimes answers the question for the child. An active role for the child in programs produced for him is almost rare and, when children do participate, they are merely recipients with no spontaneity because that requires greater effort and funds.

Third:- Radio Programs:- as to (a program season from a previous year);²³

Fourth: Internet Sites:- as to (their specialization in children's literature).²⁴

Eighth: Trends As to Children's Literature

This axis which is concerned with the trends among parents, children, teachers and writers towards children's literature covers the following:

²³ The research team could not visit the Broadcasting Institute; accordingly no radio programs are available.

²⁴ The research team could not obtain them.

First: Parents' Trends towards Children's Literature and Encouraging Reading;
Second: Teachers' Trends towards Children's Literature and Encouraging Reading;
Third: Children's Trends towards Children's Literature and Encouraging Reading;
Authors' Trends towards Children's Literature and Encouraging Reading.

Within the framework of discerning trends among parents, teachers and children towards children's literature, three groups of concentrated discussions were held as follows:

- A set of concentrated discussions with two mothers;
- A set of concentrated discussions with three female teachers;
- A set of concentrated discussions with six children within the age group 4-12 years.²⁵

First: Parents' Trends Towards Children's Literature and Encouraging Reading²⁶

Parents' trends were discerned through the following axes:²⁷

Things, books and television programs that attract children's attention:

- A lady participating in the discussions indicated that her children devour scientific and religious books whereas the other lady asserted that her children desire to read books containing information about historic, scientific and religious characters in addition to science and history stories and books explaining the parts of the human body;
- As regards the preferential attitude children have in respect of reading books and watching television, one of the two ladies asserted her children's desire and self-generated devotion to read books. On the other hand, the second lady indicated that her children's desire to read books does not issue from a self-

²⁵ The sets of concentrated discussions with parents, teachers and children were held on Wednesday the 29th August, 2007.

²⁶ cf. Attachment No. (2), the page of approved axes for the discussion groups (with parents, teachers and children) and the interviews.

²⁷ The set of concentrated discussions was held with two mothers who have children within the age group 4-12 years; one mother had two children and the other had three.

generated desire but is brought about by encouragement from their mother who sits by the child and shares the process of reading with him. Should she not do that, her child would rather play computer games or watch television.

The Role of the Family in Encouraging Reading/ The Presence of a Library at Home/ A Shelf for Children's Books/ The Availability of a Computer at Home/ The Books They Choose for Their Children/ How They Encourage Their Children to Read/ How Families Regard the School's Role in Encouraging Reading/ The Family's Opinion As Regards Children's Literature:-

- The two ladies who participated in the discussions confirmed their possession at home of a library containing books on varied subjects, scientific and religious, as well as cultural stories and magazines and an independent shelf for books addressing children;
- Both ladies emphasized their continuous concern to encourage their children to read by ensuring that the home library is supplied with a variety of books targeting children. One of the two ladies asserted that she seeks to obtain books of a well considered fictitious nature, devoid of trivia and silliness, whereas the other lady said she was concerned with acquiring books containing ideas that provoke thinking;
- The complementary methods applied at home to encourage children to read are varied and include:
 - Sitting with the child for an hour and the half daily to read to him and with him;
 - Both parents exercising the habit of reading within sight of their children as it is acknowledged that a child emulates his parents;
 - Giving the child a book as a present on various occasions;
 - Encouraging children to acquire hobbies through books meant to promote that.
- As to the role of the school in encouraging children to read, both ladies stressed the role played by the school in encouraging their children to read through the variety of the books available in the school library, the school's observance of participating in competitions in the Arab World for the encouragement of reading such as the competition known as

- “The Train of Knowledge” in addition to offering the service of book lending and search by use of the Internet;
- Both ladies indicated their possession of a computer at home. One lady stated that she owns three computers whereas the other stated that she owns two. Both of them stressed the importance in the present days of families owning a computer as it enjoys a number of merits particularly in serving educational aims for students in addition to providing entertainment and amusement during their leisure time;
 - Both ladies concurred on the matter of the weakness of children’s literature in Syria and considered that it has not progressed well. One lady attributed that to a deficiency in the author’s ability and his incapability to produce. When he does produce he is unable to liberate himself from the strictures of the old spirit which is devoid of the modern method required by our contemporary status as our societies are still in the stage of development. Whereas there are attempts in respect of the theatre in Syria, they lack financial support. The other lady stressed the lack of literary material that attracts the attention of parents and that this indicates the weak level of those who produce children’s literature in Syria.

Family Trends Towards Reading/ Love for Reading/ The Favourite Book/ The Last Book That Has Been Read:-

- One of the two ladies asserted her desire to read books that fall within her preferable hobby whereas the other lady indicated that her reading habit is not based in the first degree on a hobby that she endeavours to develop;
- The books that both ladies read varied from Agatha Christie stories on the one hand to religious books on the other;
- The last book that one lady had read is *al-baṣar wal baṣīra (Sight and Insight)* by the writer Reem Hilāl. The other lady’s last book read is *mawsū‘at al-ṭifl (The Child’s Encyclopedia)* by the writer Pōlō Ḥarīqa.

Suggestions to Promote and Encourage Reading by Children:-

The two ladies made a number of suggestions to promote and support reading by children. These were as follows:-

- Encouraging children to borrow at least one story a week from the school;
- Selecting one of the children to read his story to his comrades;
- Fixing one hour of theatre weekly at school;
- Encouraging parents to prepare at home a library allocate for their children and ensure its variety; following up on families within the framework of promoting their interaction with their children in respect of reading books and discussing their reading with them;
- Encouraging the child to write for the school's bulletin board and to collect various articles from magazines and books;
- Working towards the production of good target-orientated plays;
- Working towards the arrangement of competitions offering valuable prizes that support the reading habit;
- Working to hold training sessions for parents on how to promote reading among children;
- Working to present target-orientated films for children to teach them about principles, freedom, reward, punishment and ethics, such films to be distributed gratis to television channels with documentation as to source or book.

Second: Teachers' Trends in Regard to Children's Literature and the Encouragement of Reading²⁸

The Role of the School in Encouraging Reading As to Curriculum/ The Plan for Reading at School/ The Most Important Subjects That Should Be Proposed As Recommended Reading:-

The ladies participating in the discussions all concurred that that the school curriculum should encourage children to read as follows:

- The school curriculum should have selected texts from the local environment that encourage the child to read;
- There are in the English subject of the curriculum stories that students should be asked to read and summarize;

²⁸ A concentrated discussion group was set up with three female teachers working at a private school in Syria. They are specialized as a teacher of French, a teacher of Arabic and the manager of the elementary section. Their years of experience varied from three to seven years.

- Before the school lesson in music periods, the teacher should read the biography of a composer;
- Every week, there is a library hour in addition to borrowing for outside reading;
- At the end of the lesson, the teachers should present a number of questions and ask the students to visit the school library and search for answers in available books.

The matter of encouraging students to follow a certain type of reading is achieved in harmony with lessons as per the curriculum in addition to try varying the scope of reading so that it covers all types of literary arts.

Non-Curriculum Activities Applied by the School in Order to Encourage Reading:-

- There are entertainment activities that encourage reading such as taking the students on a trip to an archeological or touristic site then asking them to write a report on the site they have visited;
- The school participates in the “Train of Knowledge” competition whereby winning students will be honoured on a pan-Arab World basis;
- The school library provides various types of books for its students;
- There is a new experiment whereby a student reads a particular story. Then a date is appointed for him to go to a class other than his and relate the story in front of its students who would discuss it with him;
- Together with the books that the student buys at the beginning of the school year, he is asked to buy a small note book to use in summarizing the stories that he will read by noting down the following elements: the writer’s name, the art drawer’s name, the publishing firm, the major and secondary characters, the plot, the resolution, the wisdom deduced and the sentence that the student liked;
- There is in every class room a small library from which the students of that class are permitted to borrow books;
- Each student buys a satchel to keep the book he has borrowed from the library until he returns it;

- A teacher would read to the students the daily news from the newspapers or the item with the title “Happened on a Similar Day”;
- Students’ time on the bus during recreational or educational trips is exploited for reading.

Teachers’ Opinion about Current Children’s Literature/ The Title of the Last Book Read:-

The opinion of the ladies in the discussion about children’s literature in Syria was stated as follows:

- Interest in children’s literature started recently accompanied by a trend to select the subjects that touch the child’s life and his psychological, emotional and social needs. However, it is still weak and needs to reach all social classes;
- The quality of literary output has improved and the prices are reasonable;
- Literary material requires linguistic editing;
- As to children’s literature presented through the cinema, some films have tried successfully to study some aspects of the life and daily happenings of children such as the film “*Kafrūn – The Young Parents*” which is a good experiment but insufficient;
- As to children’s literature presented through the theatre, it is still very poor, lacking in children’s plays which, if available, rely on foreign novels although Arab heritage is rich with important subjects and characters that deserve to be employed in this work;
- In respect to children’s books, there are many translated books that attract the interest of writers in a manner that surpasses writing for children and which require good language and writing;
- The past few years have seen the emergence of some authors and art drawers who have an interest in writing a variety of short stories.
- In general, printed material is somewhat costly relative to the standard of income for the individual and the family. Accordingly, a large group of individuals prefers to buy a toy as a present or even sweets to the purchase of a book due to material reasons in the first degree in addition to low cultural and social consciousness in the second degree.

Regarding the last book read by the ladies in the discussion, they are *marāsī al-ayyām (The Moorings of the Days)* by Haidar Maḥmūd, *al-khīmyā'ī (The Chemist)* by Paulo Colio and *mawsū'at 'ajā'ib al-dunya al-sab'a (The Encyclopedia of the World's Seven Wonders)*.

Third:- Children's Trends in Respect of Children's Literature and the Encouragement of Reading:-

Children's Trends Towards Reading/ Love for Reading/ Who Reads to You?/ Where Do You Read/ Favourite Stories and Why/ The Favourite Reading Language/ When Do You Read?/ Participation in Reading Competitions/ Preference between Reading, Television, the Computer and Why:-

- The children interviewed were unanimous on their love for reading and their embarking on reading varied stories, particularly of the fictitious and scientific types. Some stressed their desire to read literary and fable stories for reasons attributed to the excitement generated in the reader, the variety of stories and pictures they have, the benefits a student can gain in respect to enriching his vocabulary, knowledge of language and developing his style of expression. One of them pointed out that these stories are entertaining, enjoyable and useful. Another student said that they are enjoyable because of the adventures they contain;
- The interviewees stated that they read both at home and at school. The languages they read in are Arabic, English and, sometimes, French.;
- Some of the interviewees affirmed that they had participated in the "Train of Knowledge" competition, based on the concept of reading and summarizing 50 stories. One student affirmed that he had participated in the competition of memorizing the thirtieth chapter of the Quran and was the winner;
- Some of the interviewees expressed preference to use the computer instead of spending their time reading on the basis that the benefit realized from the computer is greater in addition to its usages as represented by the ability to achieve research. All those in the research preferred watching television, particularly children's films and amusing programs, to reading books;

- Most interviewees confirmed that the period they employ for reading is greater on official holidays and in the summer holiday whereas it is less during the school year. In general, however, most of them indicated that their reading of stories is once every two weeks;
- As to the story that the interviewees prefer to read, it is The Donatello Ring, Disney, David Copperfield, The Prince and the Pauper and The Mermaid.

Children's View of the Role of the Family in Encouraging Reading/ Who Encourages Reading?/ Who Chooses the Stories?/ Who Brings the Stories?/ Who Helps with the Reading/:-

- Most interviewees confirmed that they do their reading themselves. Some indicated that one of the parents or grandparents helps them with their reading;
- The interviewees were unanimous as to the role of their families and school in encouraging them to read;
- Most interviewees stressed their role in choosing the stories which they read but sometimes with the assistance of one of the parents, brothers or the class mistress.

Fourth: Trends among Authors Towards Children's Literature and Encouraging Reading:-

In order to complement the exploration of trends towards children's literature in Syria, a series of interviews were held with a group of authors, art drawers, artists, producers and journalists working in the field of children's literature in Syria. The interviews resulted in deducing the opinion of the interviewees as to children's literature in Syria. This can be presented as follows;

- A writer for children: "Children read Arabic not foreign books. However, there are signs presently that children are taking up reading in English, especially after introducing English as of the first elementary".
- We are not satisfied with the status of the book in Syria, whether at the Writers' Association or at the Ministry of Culture;
- Many books have been produced in good format but their content is not suitable;
- Children's books are expensive due to the cost of paper, colored ink and other factors;

- Children's programs in Syria are fabricated and unsatisfactory; they need specialists to criticize them as to content and format;
- An illustrator for children: "There are in the West freedom and professionalism in respect of drawings addressing the child who is dealt with as an intelligent being capable of understanding whereas the art drawers for children in Arab societies take no interest in that direction."
- The market for children's literature is open to all and sundry of those who make literature a trading matter not subject to any educational, behavioural or literary evaluations;
- A writer for children: "Most children's parents have no interest in reading...let alone that they are busy for long working hours...This is where the (absent) role of the school comes in to incite children to read...Regrettably, all the budgets of our schools, public and private, have no item allocate for a library budget".
- Children's literature in Syria has started to develop, the beginnings for this considered to have been with the start of publishing the children's magazine, *Usama*. That was when the phenomenon of writing for children started and books for childhood started to appear;
- A cinematic film director (who produced some work for children): "The recession of reading among children is caused by the recession of reading among adults...In my opinion, children's literature is not relating a tale to children...Dealing with the child is supposed to be in the child's language not in that of the adult... This means a change in the educational curricula in the Arab World".
- Children's programs shown by Syrian Television rely on dubbed material as good local production is sold to Gulf states;
- Children's programs in Syrian Television and Broadcasting are trivial and superficial due to the absence of specialists and the meager budgets allotted to them;
- A female art drawer for children: "Children's Literature had its golden age during the seventies...There are at present good writers and illustrators but there is no cultural exposure...Until now, we are unable to get out of the moulds we had been placed in...It is difficult to attain the wild imagination such as portrayed in Harry Potter".
- A female writer of children's television programs: "The description that applies to children's literature in Syria is that of experimentation and adventure...as there is no scientific work or organized work... because we have no institutions concerned with children's literature...as children's literature is individualistic and under experimentation...Each experiment speaks for itself..."
- A female writer for children: "Children's programs in Syria make little of the child...There is no real understanding of how to present a work to the child."

Ninth: The Problems Faced by Children's Literature:-

The following presents a number of problems facing children's literature in Syria as viewed by writers, art drawers, producers and directors:

- The weak awareness among authors of the age groups to which a literary work is addressed. Mostly, the concept of the literary work is the fundamental matter and, when the work is finished, the author makes a decision as to what age group he can ascribe his literary work;
- Scarce attention to writing for the age group 1-3 years, the pre-school stage;
- Weak publicity directed towards emphasizing the importance of reading by children;
- The weak level of involving children in the literary works addressed to them;
- Publishing firms are concerned with the commercial aspect in the first degree and do not stress quality;
- It is difficult to acquire children's books because of their expensive prices;
- There is a drop in the interest children take in books especially that the options offered to the child are cheaper, such as the purchase of CDs; in addition there is a recession in the level of reading among children. Such reading as there is addresses Arabic books;
- There is insufficient support as the State does not realize the importance of children's literature;
- There is a huge gap between writer and art drawer as the art drawer cannot reach the writer's imagination;
- Commercial companies seek to attract new children illustrators and freeze the development of their talents inasmuch as these companies endorse the process of imitating cartoon characters and using the computer to achieve the drawing. They refuse that the art drawer complete the drawing manually and refuse to have tableaux in children's books although that would develop the artistic taste of the children;

- It is seldom possible to locate an illustrator for children who would take age groups into consideration when making a drawing for children;
- Within the framework of encouraging reading, campaigns were launched which involved visits to private schools as it is difficult to have access to public schools;
- There is no governmental support for private magazines. Officials of the Ministry of Culture are invited to attend the inauguration of and sponsor the activities of the Society but do not participate in attending these activities;

The manager of Al-Asad National Library confirmed that children's literature is considered one of the tedious industries because it addresses an important stage of life. Hence, everything produced for the child ought to be attractive and amusing. The proportion of imported products is very high. Therefore, what we have today is produced abroad and is at odds with our culture. Accordingly, when any work is produced, the degree of its appropriateness to the realities particular to us is not taken into consideration. Additionally, there is a high amount of competition in this field.”);

Furthermore, there is no educational party or institution concerned with spreading and bringing about awareness of children's culture, let alone that there is no real connection between what is written and the contemporary child in the whole world, meaning that educations and cultures cannot be enriched except by universal interaction. However, there is no contact or knowledge with the genre of literature and its route”.

- There is no connection between the content available in the library and what is presented in the curricula. There are no periods allocated for reading nor are there extra curricular activities to encourage reading. Hence, the teacher falls under pressure as does the school. The only parties that undertake this role are private schools which are the schools for the cultural, social and economic elite;
- Scarcity and difficulty are manifest in drama productions. In view of the high cost, we need sufficient funds and good scripts. Regrettably, Arab televisions do not allocate sufficient funds for expending on work addressing children;
 - The period allocated for children's programs at any station is considered as a violable period; it can be reduced, advanced and even cancelled in favour of programs for adults.
- The problem of television production addressing children rests in the script and this is the fundamental problem in many television channels. That is in addition to the absence of a clear vision as to what we want of children's programs and what we want for the child. Here we must talk of two types of production:- the production of programs and the production of drama work. In the area of producing programs we note that the writers of television

programs are from the television staff and are charged to prepare these programs and do so without any sufficiency of training or experience. They had not attended any special training sessions. What technical and artistic potential and funds are allocated does not aid the improvement of performance or the standard of its quality. It is possible to exercise greater control over programs that follow the system and method of producing drama work. It is possible here to work with the organizer or writer within a small workshop in order to reach an acceptable version which makes it possible to acquire good script that has been studied as much as possible;

- The writer for children faces problems relating to the cost of publication and distribution...whereby the writer for children reaches a degree that does not encourage him to work and write.”
- Who writes literature for children? “The practical reality in the past few years has indicated that most of those who write script for children are beginners trying to write for the first time in this field. They use their love for children as a pretext as well as their concern for them in respect of the ‘other’ influence and the scarcity of local production. It is seldom that we come upon script that addresses the child and addresses his spirit, entering his world, speaking in his tongue about his feelings, fears, anxiety and dreams, and admitting his little mistakes, negative feelings, stumbles, weakness and curiosity to discover the world around him”,²⁹
- Writers of children’s literature suffer from the problem of marketing as the books published in Syria are not exported outside it. This is a problem...There is no distribution; instead, there are outlets, i.e. centres for selling the books but only in the Cultural Centres ;
 - The owner of a private children’s magazine: “We passed through a period of about 15 years when children’s magazines were absent. We used to read magazines from Arab countries with no Syrian magazines except for *Usama*...We are thirsty for magazines”.
 - “...The timing of children’s programs might be subject to many considerations that can be dictated by each station aside from the consideration of and respect for appropriate times for the children and their various age groups.

²⁹ Atassi, Hala, Children’s Programs in Local and Arab Television Stations, The Practical Experiments in Television Production for Children and the Problems of Production, The First Conference on Children, Sharjah, 2000.

Tenth: Proposals and Recommendations for the Development and Improvement of Children's Literature

- The role of the mother in encouraging her children to read must be highlighted;
- It is essential to activate the role of the school with the Society for Children's Literature in addition to activating the role of other societies;
- Schools should not shut their gates in the face of students after official school hours as it is imperative that activities be held to secure the exploitation of the students' free time thus obviating spending it loafing in the streets. It is suggested here that a teacher be on call with the students. This suggestion has a number of positive elements including fostering talents, reducing financial burdens and mitigating ethical flaws;
- Children's literature in Syria is in need of interested critics;
- A writer of children's literature should be cognizant of the information relative to children in respect of biological, social and psychological aspects in order to succeed in reaching their minds;
- The interests of children have changed with the change of contemporary living. Therefore, it is imperative to dispose of the old method of presenting literary material to children;
- Interest should be given to the financial return for writers of children's literature because that would prompt them to persist at their work;
- Children's literature must be sponsored by a Governmental body such as the Ministry of Culture or the Writers' Association;
- The Writers' Association should supervise publishing firms in order to secure the rights of writers and publishers;
- It is necessary to accredit a capable artist to peruse the literary material offered to Syrian Television;
- Experienced well established illustrators should sponsor young illustrators who can then apprentice with them. Sincerity should be observed in passing and exchanging information which ought not to be monopolized;
- It is necessary that those involved in children's literature should be specialized. The illustrator, per example, ought to work within his specialization, i.e. he should specialize in drawing for a specific age group;

- There should be a greater number of publishing firms as the present number is small relevant to the volume of material produced;
- Editors responsible for the evaluation of literary work addressed to children should enjoy a high standard of education, knowledge and culture;
- Terms and conditions should be established for publishing firms especially in dealing with translated work which can sometimes have values contradictory to our values, identity and culture;
- It is necessary to have a communal management company to protect the rights of authors;
- A drive should be made to politicize work on children's literature;
- The State should support publishing firms financially as is the case in foreign states;

- “In every school, halls should be allocated for library use and reading, both furnished with the necessities required to ensure useful utilization. Present library and reading halls should be improved in line with the criteria of their new functions;
- “The school library must be supplied with the new and necessary books, particularly references and encyclopedias that are appropriate for the school curriculum and respond to the needs of students, teachers and other users in reading and self education;
- “School text books should be improved and designed to motivate both student and teacher to use the school library in order to enrich his store of knowledge and prepare the subjects appropriate to his own activities. The library should be a source for information and experiences which support text books of the curriculum and self education;
- “There must be firm criteria for the appointment of the library custodian who should be a university graduate preferably specialized in library work to be best capable of executing his functions effectively. Library custodians who are not presently qualified should attend specialization training courses in library work to become qualified;
- “Work in the school library should be developed to be compatible with the fast development of information technology. This should be accomplished by increasing the

finances allocated for school libraries in order to supply them with the equipment required for modern library technologies. Educational plans concomitant with school plans should be activated;

- “The services provided by the school library should be activated through holding periodic cultural and intellectual weeks in which students, teachers and parents would participate. Fixed hours should be established for making the library available to users whether during official working hours or official holidays;
- “In cooperation between educationalists and parents, cultural contests and scientific competitions can be added to what preceded above. Friends of the Library groups can be set up to undertake explanations of the importance of the school library, its benefits and activate its role in serving the school and the local community.” Dr. ‘Īssa al-Shammās, magazine of the Association of Arab Universities for Education and Psychology, 1st edition, Volume III, January, 2005.

- It is necessary to have literary criticism of material written for children for this is a new genre that has appeared in the arena and is important because it lays the foundation for a future generation;

