

Reading and culture of Syrian youth;
Basic factors effect in promote or reluctance to reading?
(Empirical study on a sample of Damascus University students)

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I. Theoretical framework

Introduction:

Much attention has been given to youth issues over the past ten years by researchers in human sciences, especially in social sciences, education, psychology and journalism. The importance of culture stems from the fact it represent the source from which the young generation derive their ideas to organize their behaviour and human relations, promote their various abilities and satisfy their physical and spiritual needs, understand what goes around them in the world and the role they can play in the political and social changes that could be made. Because it is quite difficult to separate thought and data from culture and its social context, the means of accessing ideas and information through reading have now become more diverse, quicker and easier than ever by virtue of the developed means of communication and the internet and the emergence of a new youth culture. Moreover, because it is difficult to comprehensively deal with this historical process which is still being developed, I have confined myself in this research to studying a small sample of Damascus University students whose ages range between 18-24 with a view to detecting the reading strategies and the ways of accessing culture on the part of the young generation. Another objective is to investigate the youth's reluctance to read after the emergence of the multi-media of satellite channels which constitute a new source of information that can be a rival to reading.

1) The youth's culture:

The most urgent questions seem to be those which are related to understanding human behaviour in all its types which are governed by certain cultural systems. The concept of culture itself is not a simple one, for it is rather comprehensive context implying a diversity of meanings which provoke a lot of debate in sociology because the concepts of culture and civilization often overlap. For this reason, some researchers detected 150 definitions of culture. Among these early and comprehensive definitions is that which Edward Taylor provided in his book "Primitive Culture" where he defined culture as "the overall vehicle which encompasses knowledge, doctrine, art, literature, morality, law, conventions and other abilities and habits man acquires in his capacity as

a society member"¹. Dr. Nabeel Ali defines culture as a system of values, beliefs, knowledge, arts and literature in addition to ideology, belonging and a means of communication and dialogue². So, because of the impossibility of giving a final and decisive definition of culture, it is necessary to adopt a procedural definition that sounds compatible with the peculiarity of the societies to be examined and studied.

2) A procedural definition of culture and youth:

Culture is closely linked with its social carrier, i.e. people and individuals to whom it represents options for certain kinds of behaviour. In this connection, Riad Al-Jaberi believes that the individual takes from culture what satisfies his needs in terms of attitudes and inclinations, and that knowledge of a certain culture remains horizontal when we talk about public culture and the diversity of its sources³. Relying on this rich intellectual background, we can define culture as follows:

a) **Culture:** (it is a system of knowledge which embodies all that has been produced by a local human group or a civilization in terms of experiences, knowledge, sciences, ways of thinking, social organization. In addition, it is a set of values which helps individuals possess the tools of earning their livelihood and on the basis of which people organize their behaviour in dealing with other people, and develop priorities to have access into available resources with a view to satisfying their physical spiritual needs).

b) **The youth:**

Researchers differ on whether the youth represent one homogenous social group or not as far as the age group is concerned. They draw a distinction between the adolescence period and maturity age. However, there is some unanimity on considering the youth group as those age(18-24)years with reservation on the issue of age which may be extended till the age of thirty years. Moreover, the question which should be raised in this regard is: from where do the youth derive their culture? In answer to this question, it can be said that the cultural resources for the youth are diverse: family, school, university, religion, political doctrine, the TV and communication and mass media in a space open to all kinds of local cultures. Some researchers focus on religion, doctrine and the set of

¹ - Dr. Riad Al-Jaberi, Contemporary Culture, The Youth Worries, Dar Al-Ma'aref, Homs, Syria 1995, p. 23.

² - Dr. Nabeel Ali, Arab Culture And The Age Of Information: A Vision Of The Arab Cultural Speech, A'alam al-Ma'refa, issue 267, second edition, December, Kuwait 2001, p.126.

³ - Dr.Riad Al-Jaberi p. 23.

values in the culture of the youth and their bringing up with a view to highlighting the role of cultural specificity in shaping the character⁴.

On the other hand, educational institutions play an important role in the cultural domain especially in the state-run education in age where specialization is increasingly playing a crucial factor in determining the culture and the behaviour of the individual and the way he understands the world. On the other hand, the spread of the international and satellite media has diversified the sources of the youth culture which are now no longer confined to family, traditions, conventions, educational institutions and publications. In such a context, the youth experience a lot of conflict which manifests itself in the diversity of cultural references, for the local culture calls for the preservation of social values, doctrines, conventions and traditions while the culture which is brought along with the new media urges them to imitate other cultures. Garrid Hajjar says in this regard "concepts, values, conventions and traditions have begun to change so rapidly and the youth begun to experience a lot of conflict resulting from the influence of the culture brought from the outside and Traditions and creating a situation of value and psychological confusion and restlessness on the part of the youth who look so worried about their future"⁵.

3) Arab youth and cultural practices:

In today's world, the youth generation is about one billion inhabitants that is one sixth of the world's population. This figure varies in developed and developing countries. In the Arab countries, the youth generation that old (16-29 years) represents more than 40% of the population, for Arab societies are characteristically young. However, , drastic changes have taken place in food, residence, clothing, and entertainment habits in last tenth years, with this capriole in multimedia, however number new Arab T.V.channels satellites have been arisen throw period(2001-2006) from 20-220 and T.V programs hours(400-3200) h\daily. So, cultural and reading practices as well as cinema and theatre going have declined both in quality and quantity on the part of the young, cinema attendants have dropped in Syria between years (1985-1998) from 15-3 millions, in Arab World 250-120 millions⁶, that associate with wide-spreading C.D ,internet, information and Communication Technology, while rate

⁴ - Dr. Ali Al-Kasimi, The Youth Education: Between Knowledge And Directing, Al-Nubalaa publication house 1996, p. 276.

⁵ - Garrid Mohammed Tawfiq Al-Hajar, The Youth Problems, Damascus, 1992 pp. 121-122.

⁶-UNESCO,STATISTICAL YEAR BOOK;1986,1999

suffusion computers between Arab population throw period (2001-2004) increased from 1-4,5% ,Interne from 2-18% and mobile from 5-25%⁷.

4) The youth culture in the globalization age and the revolution in the information and communication field:

The terminology and the cultural components of the 21st century are diametrically different from those of the previous period. we live in period globalization That describe with opening international markets, to become one global free market, mergence and economic integrations between geographic regions, a great and qualitative roles for multinational corporations in world trade and (G.D.P),and appearing kind of cultural globalization with new telecommunications revolution. where today's world is witnessing a qualitative change and a wide-scale cultural invasion through knowledge highways and the infinite satellite media channels, for the number of satellites that go round the earth continuously sending various data and pictures have exceeded 500 in number. That true have been than more chooses fore attendants to view and listen deferent mass information that he want and need, but also we must carefully TV viewers they aren't allays critical media skills, but they often are essentially passive recipients, it is quite easy for this set of picture, colour and movement to infiltrate into the sub-conscious of people when relaxed where the transfer process of ideas, modes of consumption and behaviour as well as the new habits becomes equally easy. Under such circumstances, therefore, the family and school have lost control in combating this new danger which has infiltrated into the lives of the youth⁸ and dominated their minds and tendencies. Abdul Elah Bal Kazez, also, describes the cultural impact of globalization as "the production of what exceeds the physical needs in terms of sound effects and pictures. He says that this kind of production kills the spirit and destroys the moral and humanitarian content of human behaviour."⁹

5) The youth culture and reading between the internet and the book industry:

Some publishers believe that the age of the paper book and publication is receding because of the spread of reading through CDs and the easy accessibility into the internet. In fact, the world has witnessed great acceleration in the number of the web pages, for the number of the pages in 1997 did not exceed one million, while in 2002, the number reached

⁷ -Samir Alshikh Ali, Politic-Economy of Arab and Developing Countries, Damascus University Puplicsurea, 2006-2007, pp.574-576

⁸ - Dr. Kareem Abu Halawa, "Cultural Impact Of Globalization", Aalm al-Fiker, vol. 29 March 2001, p. 187

⁹ - Abdul Elah Bal Kazez, "The Globalization Of Culture Or The Culture Of Globalization" Al-Mustaqbal Al Arabi, issue 229 March 1998, p. 97.

more than one billion and a half pages, and 2006 the number was six billion pages every day¹⁰.and in 2004, the worldwide sales of CD Reached about 30 billion discs. By 2007 were 200 billion CDs had been sold worldwide?¹¹

6) **The Arab youth culture in the age of information:**

The Arab world is still suffering from two kinds of illiteracy, for 27% of the youth suffer from reading and writing illiteracy while 88% suffer from the information illiteracy or the illiteracy of using the computer and the internet. In fact, despite the enthusiasm displayed by the Arab youth in Syria, the rich and the medium-income Arab countries to utilize the personal computer and the internet, the percentage of those who have access to these tools is still meager. This indicates a digital gap between the Arab world and the developed countries, and, even between India which has entered this domain quite strongly. What substantiates the existence of this gap is the fact that the spread of the computer and the internet use is still low and does not exceed 4% for each Arab countries compared with the world average: 12% for the computer and 13 % for the internet¹². In Syria, and in spite of the great efforts the government exerts to narrow this gap, the spread of the computer use in 2005 did not exceed 4.50% and the internet 6%. There is an ambitious plan to raise the percentage of the internet use to 20% and the computer to 30% ¹³. Moreover, the number may rise in the coming ten years to a million users. However, the Syrian youth are suffering from negative attitudes towards reading and education ,and they show dangerous reluctance to read and learn, for satellite channels and the computer have replaced the traditional paper means, books, newspapers and magazines as new sources for the youth culture in a world suffering from an American cultural invasion of thoughts, values and consumer modes. This will be examined and investigated in the section II.

II. The field section:

- 1) **The research problem:** At the beginning of the third millennium, humanity began to witness rapid development in all aspects of the economic and cultural fields thanks to the development of communication tools and the multi-media means which helped remove

¹⁰ - Al-Etehad, Abo Dhabi 27th April, 2006.

¹¹ -<http://www.shawati.com/vb/showthread.php?t=41411&page=3>

¹²- ESCWA, Regional Features Of The Information Community In South Western Asia Countries, U.N., New York 2005, pp 33-39.

¹³- ESCWA, Guidelines For The Formulation And Implementation Of The Policies And Strategies Of Information And Communication Technology. The UN. New York, 2007.

the barriers between nations, cultures and peoples. Information had begun to intensively flow both qualitatively and quantitatively with the spread of the computer, the internet and the multi-function satellite channels. In such a context, the problem of reading developed into a crisis on the part of those individuals and peoples who failed to get involved and participate in the age of knowledge-based economy and information society. On the other hand, for other people the opportunities of knowledge and reading increased with the appearance of thousands of books, magazines, newspapers through the internet. Needless to say, reading has been and still is one of the most important means of formulating the individual's culture and his awareness of what goes around him in the world. However, the quality of reading and the opportunities to access its resources vary from one individual to another according to the level of education, profession and the cultural carrier. In addition, it is determined by several socio-economic and cultural factors such as social bringing up, the level of the parents' education, profession, specialty, inclinations and attitudes ...etc. Moreover, local (or national) society and the cultural environment play important roles along with the school and social organization in either encouraging or retarding the individual's ability to read.

Reading, in fact, is an acquired stimulus which is greatly influenced by the surrounding social and cultural environment. The set of values and the attitude of a certain society towards reading may either promote the frequenting of reading of reading centers such as public libraries and cultural centers and boost the various types of reading such as the reading of magazines, newspapers and periodicals or make people reluctant to read and develop negative attitudes towards it.

Reading, which is considered as one of the basic traditional means which contributed to the formulation of the individual's culture and his consciousness of his own being and the world around him, is now being rivaled in the globalization age and the spread of satellite multi-media organs by pictures and sound and the diversity of the satellite channels which all now compete with books and paper means in formulating the youth culture. In Syria, for example, early estimates show that the role of reading in shaping the culture of the young generation has begun receding. On the other hand, consumer culture which glorifies the accumulation of wealth through illegal ways without exerting efforts and acquiring knowledge has begun to spread on a large scale. This kind of culture is very dangerous for the Syria society and the values and attitudes of the Syrian youth towards knowledge, culture and work. It has, therefore, become imperative for researchers and decision makers in the

cultural field to view this challenge quite seriously. It is imperative for them, too, to diagnose the root causes of this problem, put national strategies and practical policies with a view to restoring the right status of culture and cultural identity and to concentrate on the ways that help promote reading. Hence the choice of the topic of this research which aims at investigating the dimensions of the problem of reading as well as the encouraging and retarding factors for reading through studying a representative sample of all the faculties and departments of Damascus University. To achieve this, a questionnaire mechanism has been utilized to determine the percentage of those who read and the kind of material they read, the role of the family in promoting reading, the number of the topics of reading and the time allocated on a daily or weekly basis, the favourite means of reading such as books, magazines and scientific magazines, and the books which are closely related to students' curricula. In addition, the study aims at exploring the encouraging and the retarding factors of reading, the role of the family and other cultural institutions such as the house bookcase, public libraries, periodical book exhibitions, university libraries and publication houses...etc. Yet another objective is to investigate whether TV and satellite media negatively affect reading. The research will also try to explore these indicators according to the class distribution of the sample. It will also try to examine the impact of specialization, age, gender, the family's level of education, the parents' profession on the quality of reading and their role in formulating the culture of the youth in addition to diagnosing the causes of the youth's unwillingness to read. At the end, the research will propose some practical solutions to promote reading and restore its right status.

- 2) **The importance of the research:** The youth sector represents a substantial and vital energy in the social development process. The Syrian society is ranked young, for the percentage of age-groups between 15-60 rises to 47.8% of the population, while the number of people whose ages are between 15-24 reaches 4 million inhabitants who constitute a percentage of 22%. This group is currently give much attention by governments and international organizations. However, Arab studies and researches in this field are characteristically theoretical and, therefore, the components of the youth culture and reading, in particular, which is one of the most important means of self-education have not been given adequate attention in terms of field studies. Under such situation of intensive flowing of satellite programs over 24 hours, book and other paper means are no longer means of self-education as it was the case in the previous centuries. Moreover, we have begun to witness a period of unwillingness to read because of various economic, social and psychological considerations. With the spread of the internet, the

situation has become more complicated, for this tool has a variety of functions: it is a means for entertainment and intellectual and economic exchange in addition to being a tool for education and obtaining information in a limitless space.

3) Objectives and motivations of the research:

The research is prompted by knowledge and practical motivations at the same time, for the diagnosis of the problem represents a very important source of knowledge for decision makers to find solutions. The practical motivation is mainly professional, for early results show that the students of the faculty of humanities go to the library (some seek the help of the internet in research of references) only when they need to write seminar papers while their reading for specialty and knowledge is still modest. This manifests itself in their literal commitment to the texts of the university curricula or the summaries during exam time. The same applies to seminar paper work during interviews and oral exams.

4) Previous studies:

Fields studies on this issue are nearly modest in Arabic compared with the theoretical studies. Similarly, field studies on the relationship between culture and reading are few compared with other variables such as the discussion of youth culture, values and identity in the Globalization period or the youth problems and their attitudes towards certain issues. Field studies, therefore, suffer from selectivity and dependence on big-size and uncontrolled random samples of young people specially in the pre-university stages of education or on samples made on a selective basis as it is the case in the university education stage or the postgraduate stage. Among these studies are:

- Ahmad Ali Kana'an, 2004 (University Students: Their Culture And Values In A Changing World)
The study was made on 500 students (males and females) from Damascus University. The researcher concentrates on the concept of identity and the influence of Globalization on the youth and their values. He also studies the major economic, social and psychological problems university students suffer from in addition to the role of the family and the official educational institutions in shaping the values and culture of the youth.
- Dema Al-Jarf, 2004 (What The Youth Read In The Globalization Age – A Theoretical And Field Study)
The study aims at examining the topics of interest for Saudi girl students during their pre-university education (intermediate and secondary) and

their university study. The sample was taken randomly and each student was given more than one option. The researcher classified her results in accordance with the education stage. She found out that the students who read entertainment magazines, during their university study, depending on the topics in the magazines were: 77% costumes and fashion, 66% art, 24% poetry, 20% public health and 3% only read educational and computer materials. During the pre-university education, student read religious books 60%, Islamic history 29%, general topics 13% and stories derived from heritage 11%. The study shows discrepancy between what these students read during their pre-university education and the university years. The researcher attributed this contradiction to the influence of satellite channels and advertisements. The researcher called for developing policies which promote reading and give much attention to culture.

- Salman Al-Haji 2002 (Factors That Influence The Youth's Reading Practices)

The researcher concentrates on the social, family and school factors which influence reading depending on a random sample taken from secondary school students in the Gulf Cooperation Council states consisting of 4909 male and female students. The researcher came out with the conclusion that 156 of the sample like reading newspapers and magazines, 11.6% read poetry, 9.5% read imaginary stories, 9.3% read religious topics, 9.5% read adventure stories, 8% read puzzles and riddles, 57.2% read sport topics, 7% read tales and legends, 6% read historical novels, 4.7% habits and traditions of people, 4.5% read science, 3% read history. The researcher also talks about statistically significant differences between free reading and personal incentives, on the one hand, and the role of the family and social trends and students educational trends, on the other.

- Mohammed Ayoub, 1999 (Reading In The Palestinian Society)

The researcher studied a sample consisting of 137 students in the third preparatory classes through the questionnaire methodology. He found out that 57% only of the students' families have computers and 2% only of these families use them for practical purposes while 6% only buy a newspaper to follow up sport news, job vacancy announcements and university announcements. Those who own modest family bookcases, the researcher found out, represent 9% only, while 22.5% only of the students read a book beyond assigned curricula. Other results run as follows: 2% buy one book every month, 9.5% have books designed for children, 2% only use school library, 18% go to school library once a week, 7% read religious books, 22% read puzzle books. The researcher, moreover,

outlined the constraints as being caused by family, school, curriculum, local authorities and the technical production of school books.

- Mohammed Khudeir, 1988 (students' reading habits in the Baghdad intermediate schools)

The researcher selected 12 schools in Baghdad from which he took a sample consisting of 658 male and female students using the limited questionnaire methodology. He arranged the results of his research according to reading preferences. Literary topics, accordingly, ranked highest with a percentage of 68.5%, followed by religious topics with a percentage of 57.7%, social changes and problems 50%, mathematics and inventions 19%, psychological health 17%, sexual topics 16.5%, history 14.5%, war topics 11%, politics 11% and geography 8%.

- Batshmo Tskaya and Yanakova, 1996 (reading and the youth cultural interests)

This study shows that 70% of the people who frequent Russian libraries in Moscow are students who come to these libraries to complete their study requirements and write topics and researches related to their study duties. Their free reading, the researchers found out, centred on three cultural interests, namely human and democratic sciences, human rights, and history.

IV. The approach:

The research depend on the comprehensive survey approach to test hypotheses and basic aspects of the research by using the limited questionnaire methodology and adopting analytical approach for field findings in addition to the comparative approach.

V. Hypotheses and questions raised:

The research is prompted by hypotheses and general questions in addition to subsidiary questions which are more specific. Among these hypotheses and general questions are:

1. The relation between specialization and attitude towards reading or reluctance to read.
2. There is a relationship between kind of reading and culture of the youth.
3. There are differences as far as topics are concerned between university faculties.
4. There might be a difference in the degree and quality of reading in terms of the sex variable.
5. The family plays an important role in encouraging children to read.

- a) The higher the educational level of the parents is, the greater the encouragement for their children will be.
 - b) The availability of a bookcase in the house is one of the factors that prompts the youth to read and promote their culture.
 - c) A working mother prompts her children to read more than a housewife.
6. Social context of the youth either motivates or retards reading.
 7. Satellite media is competitive to reading in formulating the youth culture.
 8. High prices or low prices of books and printed materials affect the youth's willingness or unwillingness to read. For this reason, book exhibitions and reduced prices play a motivating role to buy books and promote reading practices.

VI. Premises and procedures:

Among the most controversial premises for researchers are the youth, reading or reluctance to read. For this reason, some procedural premises have been formulated in order to fit the nature of the research and the society studied. Among these are:

- a) Unwillingness to read: this concept applies to every university student who, for various reasons, does not read any cultural source other than the university curriculum.
- b) The youth: social homogeneous group that their age-groups between 17-25 years old and they differentiated by (sexual, level education, specialization or profession, social status, class and others)
- c) Cultural resources: this concept applies to all available paper resources (books, newspapers, periodicals) as well as digital resources available on Arab and world nets.
- d) Degree of reading: this concept means the number of hours of reading on a weekly or daily basis.
- e) Theoretical university faculties: this term is used in Syrian universities and applies to those faculties which consist of the departments of social and human sciences (literatures, human sciences, education, economics, law, religious studies and formative arts).

VII. Society under research:

This will be confined to studying Damascus University students who attended theoretical and scientific faculties during the academic year 2006-2007.

VIII. sample studied:

A class clustered sample with one per thousand will be drawn from students registered in the scientific and theoretical faculties in Damascus University. The questionnaire is made on students who are present at the

faculties during the data collection process quite randomly taking into consideration the accuracy of representations of the original society in the sample size for all theoretical and scientific faculties and departments.

IX. Findings of the field research (see attached table)

Before talking about the findings of the research, it should be noted that the questionnaire was tested with a view to determining the precision of the questions. This was done on a random sample and the test reflected an error percentage of 4% in measuring variables. The questionnaire was amended before starting the data collection.

The questionnaire items (the number of forms) reached 151 distributed between theoretical faculties (45%) and scientific faculties (46%). The percentage of females reached 45%, males 55%, married 11%, divorced and widowed 2%. The role of husbands and wives in promoting reading was neglected because of the low percentage.

The findings of the research are divided as follows:

1. Reading and the sources of the youth culture:

a. Reading rate: the first hypothesis, namely reluctance to read, has proved to be true, for the percentage of those who never read anything apart from university curricula reached 20% out of the total number of the sample. The percentage who read for more than three hours did not exceed 5% and those who read for between 1-2 hours 19%. The reading rate among females rises to 84% compared with males 77%. There is also statistical significance manifesting itself in the differences between faculties in this regard, for the percentage of those who read for more than 3 hours reached 58.5% in scientific faculties while the percentage drops to 51% in theoretical faculties. The percentage of those who read between 1-2 hours rises to about 25% in theoretical faculties compared with scientific faculties where it drops to 13%.

b. Main cultural sources for reading:

Every student studied was given the freedom to choose more than one preference. The number of those who read books reached 64% with statistically significant differences in favour of females where the percentage reached 70.5% compared with 59% for males. The percentage of reading newspapers reached 52.2% with differences in favour of males 55.4% whereas the percentage dropped to 48.5% for females. In theoretical faculties it was 55.5% while in scientific faculties it dropped to 48.5%. On the other hand, the findings do not reflect statistically significant differences in terms of sex and the kind of faculty regarding

the reading of magazines (scientific and psychological). The percentage of those who read magazines reached 55% while in using the internet for reading, the percentage did not exceed 19.2% with differences in terms of sex and faculties: males 21.7%, females 10.3%, scientific faculties 22.8% compared with theoretical faculties where the percentage dropped to 16%.

c. Number of reading materials (magazines on a weekly basis, books on a yearly basis)

The percentage of those who read more than seven newspapers weekly (one newspaper daily) did not exceed 4%, those who read 4-7 newspapers weekly 16%. About 40% read 1-3 newspapers weekly. Regarding book reading, it was found out that 12% do not read books at all and the percentage of those who read more than ten books annually did not exceed 8% taking into consideration statistically significant considerations in this regard. For those who read between 5-10 books yearly, the percentage did not exceed 16% whereas for less than 5 years annually it was 55% with a rise for females 55% compared with males 39%.

d. Reading (according to place)

- **House:** for 60% the house is the favourite place for reading with significant differences in terms of sex and faculty where the percentage rises in scientific faculties to 86% and drops to 53% in theoretical faculties; it also rises to 72 for males compared to females 60%. For those who read more than three hours daily, the percentage was 6% with differences in terms of sex, 9% for males and 2% for females. For those who read between 1-2 hours daily, the percentage did not exceed 12% with differences in terms of sex and university faculties: 16% for scientific faculties and 9% for theoretical faculties. For those who read for less than an hour, the percentage was 42% with significant differences in terms of sex and university faculties: 60% for scientific faculties compared with theoretical faculties 49%, 52% for males compared with females 42%.
- **Public libraries and other places:** the percentage of those who go to public libraries for reading reached 24% and other places 2% with significant differences in terms of university faculties where the percentage of students from theoretical faculties who go to libraries for reading reached 43% but it drops to 12.5% in scientific faculties; 31% for males compared with 24% for females. For those who read in public libraries for an average between 7-14 hours per week (two hours per day), the percentage did not exceed 1%; for more than 15 hours per

week (3 hours per day) 2%; while 21% read less than seven hours per week. There are significant differences in terms of university faculties, for theoretical faculties spend a longer time to perform their practical obligations in the libraries where 12% of them spend more than 15 hours per week; 29% of them read for an average less than 7 hours; 2% of them read for an average of two hours per day. However, in scientific faculties, only 3% spend 15 hours weekly (3 hours daily) while 8.5% spend less than 7 hours weekly (less than 1 hour daily).

e. Preferable cultural topics for reading:

A scale has been designed to measure preferences for cultural topics which attract readers of newspapers, books and magazines. The topics have been classified into seven subjects, and each item of the sample has the right to choose more than one preference. The topics of cultural reading have been arranged from top to bottom on the preference scale where the findings according to resource considerations were as follows:

- **Newspaper culture:** members of the sample gave top preference to political topics followed by general subjects and literary topics successively, while for females these were: literary topics first, followed by social subjects, while political topics occupied the fifth rank. Specialized topics, on the other hand, ranked fourth for males, females, and scientific faculties, but third for theoretical faculties. Sport topics ranked second for theoretical faculties students, the fourth for scientific faculties students, but the last for females.
- **Magazine culture:** no gender differences in terms of reading preferences have been found. Specialized topics ranked first for all the sample members with no statistical differences; art and social topics ranked third with the exception of students from theoretical studies for whom second preference is sport; economic topics ranked third for all sample members, sport ranked fourth for males; literature ranked fifth, and at the level of books, literary topics ranked fourth.
- **Culture derived from book reading:** reading books which include specialized topics ranked first in terms of sex and faculties with no differences at all. This is logical enough because preparation of seminar papers and graduation projects cannot be achieved without consulting references available in public libraries. Literary topics ranked second; general topics ranked third and political topics ranked fourth with differences in terms of sex in the first four preferences because females read books of general topics as first preference, but specialized topics as a second preference while other

topics are hardly noticeable. As for males, general subjects ranked second, political topics ranked third, literary topics ranked fourth and economic topics ranked fifth.

2. The role of the family in motivating reading:

The quality of bringing up the family achieves can play a very important role in either encouraging or retarding the incentive for reading. This is a general hypothesis from which sub-hypotheses emerge such as the educational level of parents, the profession of each, and the social, cultural and economic situation of the family. It is noticed that the percentage of reading encouragement is low amongst the youth families, for it did not exceed 38% with differences in terms of university faculties: the families of students studying at theoretical faculties give more encouragement 37% while in scientific faculties this percentage drops to 24%. Male students get more encouragement than female students do, for 33% get encouragement compared with 27% for female students. As for the level of education, it has been found out that the higher the parents' level is, the more encouragement students get and there are differences in terms of profession, sector and practical situation:

a) The relationship between the parents' educational level and the encouragement given to students for reading:

Educational levels of parents for the sample as a whole reached the following percentages:

- Mother's educational level: 45% of them are of preparatory education level and below; 31% secondary education; 17% university and intermediate institutes, 7% MA and Ph.D degrees with significant differences in the educational level of mothers in terms of faculties. In scientific faculties, the educational level of mothers is higher at secondary school level with 10%; at university stage 7% and 1% in postgraduate studies.
- Father's educational level: Father's educational level is higher than that of mothers. Father's educational at preparatory education level and below was 30%; secondary education was 32%, university level 26%, postgraduate level 12% with differences in terms of university faculties. In scientific faculties, father's educational level was higher at the secondary stage by 4% and university stage 6% while in preparatory education and below it dropped by 7% and in postgraduate faculties, the difference was in favour of theoretical faculties by 3%.

Certainly there is a relationship between mother's high educational level and encouragement given to promote reading, for the

percentage of reading promotion dropped in the case of mothers whose level is confined to preparatory education and below to 2% for fathers and 8% for mothers. At secondary education 31% for fathers and mothers, while at university level it rises to 56% for fathers and 59% for mothers, and at an MA and Ph.D levels it reaches 80% for mothers and 82% for fathers. It is noticed that the percentage of encouragement in theoretical faculties is higher than that in scientific faculties at all levels of education, but they are equal in higher education (MA and Ph.D).

- The relationship between parents' profession and reading promotion: The economic and practical situations of the parents reflect the level of reading promotion. It is noticed that government employees give encouragement to their children more than employees in the private sector. Mother employees give encouragement more than housewives. The percentage of fathers working in the public sector reached 48.5%, in the private sector 38% and 15% unemployed. 29% of the mothers work outside the house, 71% is housewives with differences in terms of university faculties, the percentage of fathers working in the public sector is higher than 14% while in the private sector, the percentage drops to 21%, but that of the unemployed is higher by 7%. The percentage of mothers working outside the house is higher by 5%. Moreover, of 38% of the families that encourage reading, 19% concentrated among those who work in the public sector. It has been found out that the percentage is highest amongst government employees, for out of every two employees one does this encouragement. In the private sector, on the other hand, there is only 12% and amongst the unemployed this drops to 0.6% although they represent 15% of the sample. There are differences in fathers' encouragement in terms of university faculties in favour of theoretical faculties where out of every two fathers one does encourage, while in scientific faculties, one out of four does this encouragement. As for mothers, in faculties mothers encourage reading by 58% and in theoretical faculties 75%, while for housewives there is only 25% which drops to 10% in scientific faculties.
- The house library: those who have a library represent 70% with significant differences in terms of faculties in favour of theoretical faculties 68% compared with 63% for scientific faculties. There are also differences in terms of male and female distribution: females 81% compared with 69% for males. As for the size of the library, it has been found out that 44% of these available libraries contain more than 50 books, 19% contain between 30-40 books and 10%

with 10-20 books. As for the quality of books, it has been found out that in scientific faculties, first preference was for literary books followed by political books while specialized topics in science ranked third followed by books of general topics. In theoretical faculties, on the other hand, general topics ranked first, specialized topics ranked second; literary topics ranked third; political topics ranked fourth and children stories came last. In general, literary topics came first, general topics ranked second while specialized and political topics ranked third. In terms of sex, literary topics ranked first for both males and females while specialized topics ranked second and general topics ranked third for the males. However, for males general topics ranked second, specialized topics ranked third while children stories came last.

3. The role of book exhibitions in the promotion of reading:

Book exhibitions and reduced prices help promote reading and buy books. However, it is noticed that 37% of the members of the sample never frequent book exhibitions with significant differences in terms of university faculties. Those who do not go to book exhibitions represent 52% in theoretical faculties and 33% in scientific faculties. However, going to book exhibitions does not necessarily mean buying books. 24% of those who go to these exhibitions do not even one single book. This rises to 28% amongst female students but drops to 21% amongst the males. There are also differences in terms of faculties. Students in scientific faculties buy more books 46% while in theoretical faculties this drops to 31%. There are also differences in terms of sex in this regard: 42% for males and 35% for females. Those who can buy more than four books represent 14.5% only of the total number of the sample, 10% of the females and 17% of the males. However, the purchase capability scientific faculty students is higher (19%) which drops in theoretical faculties to 10%.

The majority of those who can buy books because of reduced prices and exhibitions usually buy 1-3 books and these represent a percentage of 25% (males and females) out of the totality of the sample and 23% of the size of the total sample.

4. Motivating factor for reading noticed in the sample:

- **Cultural motivation:** Ten options were given to each member of the sample to choose more than one preference in terms of incentives. Findings of the preference scale show that the first incentive for reading is to **promote the cultural level** while promotion of knowledge ranked second; entertainment ranked third with the

exception of the students of scientific faculties for whom entertainment ranked second and knowledge promotion ranked third. For students of theoretical faculties, **better chance for success in study** ranked third, while **entertainment** ranked sixth and **the desire to keep abreast with modern life** ranked fourth for all members of the sample. There is also identity in incentive arrangement (the first four ones) for males and females. On the other hand, **entertainment** and **a better opportunity for success** are equal in rank for males, while for females a better opportunity for success ranked fifth as well as for the total number of the sample members. As for psychological satisfaction as an incentive for reading, it ranked fifth for males and seventh for females.

- **Moral incentives:** The role of reading in **cultural cultivation** ranked sixth with no differences in terms of university faculties and ranked seventh for both males and females. On the other hand, the role of reading in **promoting modesty** ranked ninth for the total number of the sample members, the total number of females and students of theoretical and scientific faculties, while it ranked sixth for males and students of scientific faculties.
- **Social incentives for reading:** The phrase "**gives me a social status**" ranked seventh for the total number of the sample, but it ranked fifth for students of theoretical faculties, while it ranked ninth for students of scientific faculties; the sixth for females; the seventh for males. The phrase "**gives me a status in the eyes of the other sex**" ranked last for the totality of the sample and students of the scientific faculties, but it ranked eighth for the two sexes and students of the theoretical faculties.

5. **Reasons of unwillingness to read:**

Ten possibilities were developed to diagnose the reasons behind the unwillingness to read on the part of those who show reluctance and every member was given three options: the arrangement of the reasons came as follows:

- **Watching TV and satellite channels:** all members with no differences in sex and faculty.
- **No time for reading:** all members of the sample with any differences of sex, but ranked third in terms of faculty with any differences in terms of sex.
- **No reasons:** all with the exception of females and theoretical faculties where it ranked second.

- **No desire to read:** all and males, while for females it ranked third, but second for students of scientific faculties and fifth for students of theoretical faculties.
- **High book prices:** all but ranked fourth for females and students of scientific faculties.
- Many reasons such as **lack of encouragement from surrounding environment, uselessness of reading, uselessness of culture, unavailability of valuable books** ranked sixth with insignificant differences in the arrangement of these reasons.

6. Proposed solutions to promote reading:

Proposed solutions have been arranged in nine possibilities according to preference scale and every member should choose four possibilities. The findings are as follows:

- **Reduction of the book prices:** no differences in terms of faculty and sex.
- **Government should support book industry:** no differences in terms of faculty and sex.
- **Promotion of reading through mass media and advertisement:** all and males and students of scientific faculties, while for females and students of theoretical faculties it ranked fifth.
- **Government should give incentives for publishers:** males and all members of the sample. For students of theoretical faculties it ranked third, while for students of scientific faculties it ranked sixth.
- **Giving attention to quality in book industry:** for all and males, while it ranked fourth for scientific faculties and sixth for theoretical faculties.
- **An Arab common market for books and newspapers:** this ranked fourth for females and fifth for males and scientific faculties.
- **Organization of symposiums and open dialogues for the promotion of reading:** this ranked ninth with the exception of students of theoretical faculties.
- **Availability of a hall for reading in every school:** in the opinion of the total number and males, while for females it ranked sixth; for theoretical faculties it ranked fourth, and ninth for scientific faculties.
- **Joint Arab committees to organize book exhibitions:** with the exception of females who ranked it eighth, while for students of scientific faculties it ranked fifth.

X. Summary of results and recommendations:

- 1) **There is a tendency of unwillingness towards reading amongst the youth. Those who never read anything beyond university curricula represent 20% of the total number of the sample** and those who read for an average of three hours represent no more than 5%.
- 2) A low rate of reading: **Those who read books represent 64% of the sample size** with statistical differences in favour of females with a rise of 70.5% in comparison with males where the percentage does not exceed 59%. **Those who read newspapers represent 52.2% of the sample size. Those who read more than one newspaper represent a percentage that does not exceed 4% of the sample size. Those who read magazines (scientific and art ones) represent a percentage of 55%. There is also a drop in the number of internet users by 20% of the sample size.**
- 3) **There are differences in terms of sex and specialization in all indicators and this confirms the hypothesis which assumes the existence of differences in terms of sex in this regard. The study has shown that the females read more in terms of the number of hours and quality of reading.** The females are more inclined to reading books than reading newspapers and subjects outside study requirements. Females, also, are inclined to reading art magazines. As for males, political topics are read more than newspaper and sport topics. In reading books, the males give priority to topics related to their study whereas literature and general topics come next.
- 4) **Preferable place for reading is the house:**
This represent a percentage of 60% with significant differences in terms of faculty and sex. Those who read more than three hours represent no more than 6% of the sample size with differences in terms of sex. **There is also a drop in the number of those who frequent public libraries for reading and these represent no more than 24% of the sample size. Other places 2%** with differences in terms of faculty, for there is a rise in the number of theoretical faculty students who go to public libraries and those who read more than three hours represent no more than 2%.
- 5) The role of culture in shaping the youth culture: **political topics are preferred to reading magazines, and specialized topics rank first** for magazine readers for all the sample members with no differences at all. Art and social topics rank second with the exception of students of theoretical faculties for whom the second preference is sport and the

third come economic topics. **Reading specialized topics rank first with no differences at all in terms of faculties and sex.** This is quite normal, for the preparation of seminar papers and graduation projects cannot be achieved without going to public libraries. Literary topics rank second; general topics rank third, and political topics rank fourth.

- 6) **There is no adequate encouragement for reading on the part of families: those who are encouraged by their families represent no more than 31% of the total number of the sample members.**
- 7) **Mothers' work outside the house contributes to encouraging students to read: At the level of faculties and at the level of the overall sample, the percentage of working mothers who do such encouragement reached 58% while this drops to 25% amongst housewives.**
- 8) **Book exhibitions play a big role in reading promotion:**
63% of the sample members go to book exhibitions but 24% of those who frequent these exhibitions do not buy any books, while the majority of those who buy books as a result of reduction in prices can only buy 1-3 books on the average.
- 9) There is a relationship between the kind of incentive and reading: cultural incentives came first and value and moral incentives ranked second, while **social incentives came last. This proves that the social environment in Syria does not motivate the youth in terms of reading.**
- 10) **The hypothesis about the role of TV in the youth's unwillingness to read has been confirmed for all the sample members with no exception or differences in terms of faculty and sex.** The lack of time for reading ranked second for all the sample members with no differences in terms of sex; no reasons ranked third, and high prices of books ranked fifth for the total number of sample.

Recommendations:

There is a big package of recommendations which aim at reinstating culture and promote reading amongst the youth. The solutions proposed by the students studied could be considered as recommendations for decision-makers in the cultural field. In addition to these proposed solutions, the following could be added:

- 1- Utilization of important events, art, literary and sport festivals as well as, national and religious events to promote reading.

- 2- Adoption of joint projects by the ministry of culture and the union of publishers aiming at providing useful books with low prices as it is the case in some Arab and foreign countries such as (Reading For All, and The Family Library).
- 3- Providing opportunities and accessibility to the internet and electronic resources (books-magazines-journals..etc.) in schools and universities and the utilization internet for translation and publication with a view to enabling the youth to have access to newspapers, magazines and books on foreign websites and resource.
- 4- Stressing the importance of national programs through public and private cultural institutions with a view to explaining the importance of knowledge and science in the age of knowledge economy and informatics and the importance of acquiring information technology which enables the youth to find job opportunities.
- 5- Cooperation between the government and the private and civil sector to promote programs and activities which concentrate on the importance of the mother language (in addition to foreign languages) in preserving the cultural identity in the face of cultural invasions practiced through satellite channels. Arab cultural and scientific programs could also be designed with a view to replace commercials and advertisements which propagate consumer culture.
- 6- Multimedia have been play great role in youth culture ,so their actual need to critical media skills and to learn it in School and family to training children critical media literacy

I. **Background of students studied:**

Table (1) Distribution of sample items cording to faculty, sex and marital status*:

	Distribution of sample members			
Scientific faculties	Total	Single	Married	Widower
Percentage	100%	97%	1.5%	1.5%
Theoretical faculties				
Percentage	100%	79%	19%	2%
Total	151	132	16	4%
percentage	100%	87%	11%	2%

* females 45%, males 56, scientific faculties 46%, theoretical faculties 54%.

II. **Reading and sources of youth culture:**

1) **Level of reading:**

Table (2) number of average reading hours per day:

	Read				Does not read
	Less than 1 hour	1-2 hours	3 hours and more	total	
scientific faculties	58.5%	13%	8.5%	80%	20%
theoretical faculties	54%	25%	1%	80%	20%
Total number of females	42	12	3	57	11
percentage	62%	18%	4%	84%	16%
Total number of males	43	17	4	64	19
Percentage	52%	20%	5%	77%	23%
Total number	85	29	8	121	30
percentage	56%	19%	5%	80%	20%

Table (3):

2) Main reading sources:*

scientific faculties	books	Newspapers	Magazines	Internet	Sample items
Percentage**	64.3%	48.5%	57.2%	22.8%	
theoretical faculties					
Percentage	64.2%	55.5%	53%	16%	
Total number of females	48	33	37	7	68
Percentage	70.5%	48.5%	54.4%	10.3%	
Total number of males	49	46	46	18	83
Percentage	59%	55.4%	55.4%	21.7%	
Total of sample	97	79	83	29	151
percentage	64.2%	52.2%	55%	19.2%	

* each reader has more than one preference in terms of reading sources.

** Percentage % is calculated out of the total number of the sample.

Table (4)

3) Number of newspapers and magazines read per week and per year:

	Read more than 1 newspaper per week				Read more than 1 book per year				Total sample items
	Does not read	1-3	4-7	More than 7	Does not read	Less than 5	5-10	More than 10	
scientific faculties	14%	43 %	17 %	6%	10%	48%	13%	9%	Percentage *
theoretical faculties	25%	38 %	15 %	2%	12%	41%	18%	9%	Percentage *
Total	30	61	24	6	17	67	24	12	151
Percentage	20%	40 %	16 %	4%	12%	44%	16%	8%	
Female total	19	31	7	-	8	35	11	3	68
Percentage*	28%	46 %	10 %	-	12%	51%	16%	4%	
Males total	11	30	17	6	9	32	13	10	83
percentage	13%	36 %	21 %	7%	11%	39%	16%	12%	

* Percentage % is calculated out of the total number of the sample.

Table (5)

4) Level of reading: number of hours according to preferred places:

	Distribution of number of readers and hours of reading*									Total number of sample items
	house			Public libraries			Other places			
	Less than 7 hours	7-14 hours	More than 15 hours	Less than 7 hours	7-14 hours	More than 15 hours	Less than 7 hours	7-14 hours	More than 15 hours	
scientific faculties	60%	16%	7%	8.5%	-	3%	4%	-	-	
theoretical faculties	49%	9%	5%	29%	2%	12%	1%	-	-	
Total	69	20	10	34	2	4	4	-	-	151
percentage	42%	12%	6%	21%	1%	2%	2%	-	-	
Number of females	41	10	2	18	1	9	2	-	-	68
Percentage	47%	11%	2%	20%	1%	10%	2%	-	-	
Number of males	48	10	8	16	1	11	2	-	-	83
percentage	52%	11%	9%	17%	1%	12%	2%	-	-	

* each reader has more than one preference.

Table (6): Reading culture according to main topics which attract newspaper readers: (3 preferences for each)

	Specialized	Political	Social	Literary	Economic	Sport	General
scientific faculties	4	1	5	3	6	4	2
theoretical faculties	3	1	2	1	4	2	1
Females	4	5	3	1	6	7	2
Total number of males	4	1	3	4	6	2	5
total	6	1	5	3	7	4	2

* each reader has more than one preference.

Table (7): Reading culture according to main topics which attract magazine readers: (3 preferences for each)

	Specialized	Political	Art & Social	Literary	Economic	Sport
scientific faculties	1	6	2	4	3	5
theoretical faculties	1	3	5	4	3	2
Total of females	1	5	2	5	3	4
Total of males	1	5	2	5	3	4
Total of sample	56	17	30	17	23	21
preference	1	5	2	5	3	4

Table (8): Main topics which attract book readers (3 preferences).

	Specialized	Political	Social	Literary	Economic	Sport	General
scientific faculties	1	4	5	3	6	2	2
theoretical faculties	1	4	5	3	4	6	2
Females	2	3	4	2	5	6	1
males	1	3	6	4	5	7	2
total	1	4	5	2	6	7	3

Table (11)

III. **Role of family in reading promotion and shaping of youth culture:**

	Does not encourage	Does encourage
scientific faculties	61,5%	38,5%
theoretical faculties	63%	37%
Total of females	50	18
Percentage	63%	37%
Total of males	54	29
Percentage	67%	33%
Total number of sample	104	47
Percentage	62%	38%

Table (12) **Relation between parents' educational level and encouragement:**

scientific faculties	Below preparatory	Secondary	College university	Above university	total
Father's education %	23%	30%	34%	13%	100
Encourage	.	6%	53%	41%	
Mothers' education %	30%	39%	24%	7%	100
Encourage	6%	11%	59%	24%	
theoretical faculties					
Fathers' level	37%	35%	18%	10%	
Encourage	3%	30%	43.5%	23.5%	
Mothers' level	58%	25%	11%	6%	
Encourage	17	43	27	13	100
Total of fathers' level	30%	32%	26%	12%	
Encourage	2%	21%	47%	30%	100

%					
Total of mothers' level	54%	31%	17%	7%	
Encourage %	13%	32%	38%	17%	

Table (13) Relationship between parents' jobs and reading promotion:

	Father's job									Mother's job		total of the sample
	Public sector				Private sector				No work	Works outside	housewife	
	Employee	Services	Worker	Total	Services	Industry	Farming	total				
Scientific	30%	11 %	16 %	56%	14 %	8%	5%	29%	14%	30%	70%	
Encouraging %	13%	3%	1%	17%	3%	3%	1%	7%	-	17%	7%	24%
Theoretical	22%	11 %	7%	40%	20 %	17 %	10 %	47%	13%	30%	70%	100
Encouraging %	14%	%	%	20%	%	%	%	16%	1%	22%	15%	37%
Total	26%	11 %	11 %	48.5 %	17 %	13 %	8%	38.5 %	13%	30%	70%	100
Encouraging %	13%	3%	3%	19%	7%	4%	1%	12%	0.6%	17%	14%	31%

IV. Role of house library in reading and youth culture:

table (14) number of students who have libraries (according to size of library and distribution of titles of books according to cultural topics)

Sample members	Preference in average number of books in library according to topics*					Percentage of students who have libraries :size and number				No library	Total of sample
	Specialized	Literary	Political	Children stories	general	10-20 books	30-40 books	More than 50	total		
Scientific	3	1	2	5	4	10%	19%	44%	63%	27%	100%
Theoretical	2	3	4	5	1	12%	31%	25%	68%	32%	100%
Total	3	1	3	4	2	11%	25%	43%	70%	30%	100%
Total number of females	2	1	4	5	3	18%	29%	34%	81%	19%	100%
Total number of males	3	1	2	4	2	7%	25%	37%	69%	31%	100%

* Every student has more than 3 preferences regarding the kind of books according to topics and regardless of the number of books.

Table (15): Role of book exhibitions in reading promotion amongst the youth:

Number of sample members	Sample distribution	Go to book exhibitions					Do not go to exhibitions
		Purchase			Do not	Number of visitors	
		1-3 books	4 books & more	Total			
scientific faculties	Percentage %	27%	19%	46%	31%	77%	33%
theoretical faculties	Percentage %	21%	10%	31%	17%	48%	52%
Total	Percentage %	23.5%	14.5%	38%	24%	62%	38%
Females	Percentage %	25%	10%	35%	28%	63%	37%
Males	Percentage %	25%	17%	42%	21%	63%	37%

Table (16) Positive incentives for reading (among readers only).
Answers are arranged according to preferences*.

	Entertainment	Upgrading cultural level	Psychological relief	Moral cultivation	Knowledge promotion	Feel more modest	More opportunity for success in study	Catch up with latest	More respectable and loved by the other sex	Help achieve a status in society
scientific faculties	2	1	8	7	3	6	5	4	10	9
theoretical faculties	6	1	6	7	2	9	3	4	8	5
Total	3	1	8	6	2	9	5	4	10	7
Total number of females	3	1	7	6	2	9	5	4	8	6
Total number of males	3	1	5	6	2	5	2	4	8	7

* Every student has more than 3 preferences

V. Unwillingness to read:

Table (17) reasons of reluctance (choice of three reasons and arranging them in terms of preference for each student studied)*.

	No reasons	Surrounding environment is not encouraging	Futility of culture	No time for reading	No desire	High prices of books	No valuable books worth reading	Futility of reading	TV watching
Scientific	3	6	5	3	2	4	-	5	1
Theoretical	2	4	6	3	5	5	4	6	1
Total of females	2	7	6	2	3	4	6	5	1
Total of males	3	6	7	2	4	5	8	9	1
Total	3	6	6	2	4	5	6	6	1

* Every student has more than 3 preferences

Table (18) proposed solutions to promote reading amongst the youth (four preferences for each)

	Reduction of book prices	Giving attention to book quality	Government should provide incentives for publishers	Government should boost book industry	A joint Arab market for books and magazines	Reading promotion through advertisement and media	Joint Arab committees for exhibition organization	Reading halls in schools	Cultural symposiums and dialogues	others
Scientific	1	4	6	2	5	3	5	9	7	10
Theoretical	1	6	3	2	7	5	9	4	9	10
Total of females	1	3	6	2	4	5	8	6	7	10
Total of males	1	5	4	2	5	3	9	8	7	10
Total of sample	1	5	4	2	6	3	9	8	7	10

• Every student has more than 3 preferences

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