# FOREIGN LIBRARIES

# The libraries
# of Syrian higher education institutions:
# Current state and ways of development

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**Abstract.** Syria is one of the countries that was in the process of development at all levels, including education, but the war that began in 2011 led to the decline in the level of education and academic libraries activities. The features of Syrian higher education institutions and their libraries are described, with the focus on the four largest state universities (Damascus, Aleppo, Tishrin and Al-Ba'ath). The main characteristics including library collections of 8 public and 22 private higher education institutions are given. The organization of the libraries of Syrian educational institutions differs: a universitywide library plus the faculty (college) libraries, while the private universities have only one library. Modified and Arabicized Dewey decimal classification used in all libraries for indexing, catalogs are maintained on paper cards, modern information technologies are not implemented, there are still unsuccessful attempts to introduce ALIS Koha and Horizon. The authors show the prerequisites for designing conceptual, information and functional models of networked information system of university libraries to upgrade library and information processes to the modern level.

**Keywords:** state and private Syrian higher education institutions, libraries, information technology, ALIS Koha, Horizon

**Introduction**

Syria is one of the countries that at the beginning of this century was in the process of intensive development at all levels, including education, but the war that began in 2011 led to a sharp decline in both the level of education and the activities of libraries [**1−4**, **14**].

More than 250,000 students are studying in higher education institutions in Syria today. The population of the republic can obtain higher education in a number of institutes and universities, which are available in various cities of the country. As a rule, each educational institution has its own library, actively helping educational and scientific processes.

The long-term goal of the development of libraries of higher education institutions (academical library, AL) is to turn them into network information centers combining traditional library technologies with information technology, i. e. providing users with a network of all information's forms and types on modern carriers [**11**, **13**].

AL is close enough to each other in its tasks and essence of activity. Moreover, AL's goal of being a center of integrated library and information support for educational and scientific processes can equally proclaim every modern library. However, the concept of the development of each specific AL is determined by the level of its initial condition, development trends, specifics of the educational and scientific processes provided, financial opportunities, the scale of the educational institution, its presence of branches, etc. [**15**, **16**].

AL 's tasks are entirely dependent on the interaction and coordination of its activities with the management of the educational institution, faculties (departments), chairs, research departments and service providers. However, it is not enough to argue that AL is only a structural unit of the educational institution. It is in close and continuous interaction with various external structures: exchanging accounting and reporting information, conducting its own research in the field of library and information technology, attracting various kinds of resources, providing services from information networks, developing cooperation with other libraries and information centers, professional and creative associations, receives funding [**12−17**, **19**]. On the other hand, the full functioning of all the structures of the educational institution largely depends on the effectiveness of its library.

The goal of the study is to find out the structure and features of the functioning of Syrian higher educational institutions and their libraries, the level of library and information technologies used as the actual basis for the subsequent development of conceptual, information and functional models of the modern network information system of AL.

The main method to achieve this goal is to analyze the published document flow, including the websites of all state and private universities in Syria. The comparison method made it possible to propose specific actions for the training and development of information technologies to connect libraries into a network.

**Features of Syrian educational institutions and their libraries**

The first university founded in Syria in 1901 was Damascus State University, which is the largest and oldest public institution in Syria and in the entire Arab world. It was born in the form of a small office of the Medical School with departments of medicine and pharmacy, which officially opened in 1903. First the language of instruction was Turkish, then Arabic. In 1913, the University opened the Law School (first in Beirut, and in 1914 transferred to Damascus), most of its teachers were Arabs, and the language of instruction was Arabic. In 1923, the school was renamed the Law Institute, which together with the Medical Institute, the Arab Archaeological House and the Institute of Law formed the Syrian University. After the evacuation of French troops from Syria in 1946, the Syrian University completed its transformation under the name University of Damascus, and in 1954 it opened the College of Engineering, College of Arts, College of Sciences and the Higher Institute of Teachers (Teachers House). The University of Damascus currently has more than 20 colleges and institutes in Damascus and other Syrian cities, as well as 9 university hospitals, where treatment is free for all Syrian citizens [**1–3**, **10**].

In addition to the university-wide library, each college and institute within the University of Damascus has its own library, which provides scientific and educational services. With the help of the library, the University is trying to create a comfortable environment for independent research and education, intellectual communication and knowledge exchange, as well as for professional and personal self-education of students.

The second university established in Syria is the University of Aleppo. The government decision to open it was made in 1958. The university is a state university, consists of 25 faculties in various fields of knowledge and 12 intermediate technical institutes, two higher institutes, the Open Research Center, radio and television center, six hospitals. The central library of the university is the largest in Syria (about 2 million units of storage) [6 – 8].

Tishrin University in Latakia is the third university established in the Syrian Arab Republic in 1971. The university has a state ownership form, contains 16 faculties by industry (engineering, medicine, humanities, economics and political sciences) and 7 intermediate institutes and vocational schools, as well as the University Hospital Tishreen, where treatment is provided free of charge to all citizens, and the Center for Learning and Rehabilitation, which provides students with services to help them develop their academic, research and professional skills [10, 14].

Al-Ba'ath University in Homs was founded on September 14, 1979 by decree No. 44 of Syrian President Hafiz al-Assad. The university has state status and trains specialists in 22 faculties and in 5 intermediate institutes. The university library fund included more than 63,000 books before the war.

Today, there are 30 public and private universities in Syria (table 1, 2), two branches of foreign public universities, and the network continues to grow, and after 2003 mainly at the expense of private universities. The structure of Syria's state universities is typical and similar to that of Russia. Usually they consist of faculties (colleges, institutes) and chairs (departments) in all leading specialties. Each faculty is usually located in its own building. The following faculties prevail: economic, legal, medical, pharmaceutical or dental, engineering, computer science, natural sciences, agricultural, political science, humanities and arts. Private universities are built on a simpler scheme and teach a small list of specialties. For example, the oldest private university in Cordoba (formerly Mamun University of Science and Technology) has only five faculties: engineering and technology, management and finance, philology and humanities, dentistry, architecture.

Table 1

**Syrian State Universities**

| University name | City | Founded | The volume of the library's stock, instances | Web site |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| University of Damascus | Damascus | 1903 | 1 000 000 | http://www.damascusuniversity.edu.sy/ |
| University of Aleppo | Aleppo | 1946 | 1 850 000 | https://alepuniv.edu.sy/ |
| Tishrin University | Latakia | 1971 | 147 918 | http://www.tishreen.edu.sy/ |
| Al-Ba'ath University | Homs | 1979 | 70 000 | https://albaath-univ.edu.sy/ |
| Syrian Virtual University | Damascus | 2002 | 20 000 | https://svuonline.org/ar |
| Al-Furat University | Deir ez-Zor | 2006 | 25 000 | http://alfuratuniv.edu.sy/ |
| Hama University | Hama | 2014 | 30 000 | http://www.hama-univ.edu.sy/ar/ |
| University of Tartous | Tartus | 2015 | 10 000 | http://tartous-univ.edu.sy/ |

Table 2

**Syrian Private Universities**

| University name | City | Founded | The volume of the library's stock, instances | Web site |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Private University of Cordoba | Aleppo | 2003 | 4 185 | http://main.cpu.edu.sy/ |
| University of Kalamoon | Deiratiah | 2003 | 11 107 | http://www.uok.edu.sy/ |
| Ittihad Private University | Raqqah | 2004 | 2 323 | http://www.ipu.edu.sy/ |
| International University of Science and Technology | Gabaguib | 2005 | 4 140 | http://iust.edu.sy/ar/ |

Table 2

| University name | City | Founded | The volume of the library's stock, instances | Web site |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Syrian Private University | Damascus | 2005 | 4 923 | https://www.spu.edu.sy/ |
| Arab International University | Gabaguib | 2005 | 7 634 | https://www.aiu.edu.sy/ |
| Wadi International University | Wadi al-Nasara | 2005 | 2 842 | http://wiu.edu.sy/wp/ |
| Al Andalus University of Medical Sciences | Al-Qadmus | 2005 | 6 736 | https://au.edu.sy/ |
| Al-Shahbaa University | Aleppo | 2005 | 6 851 | http://su.edu.sy/ar/ |
| Al-Wataniya Private University | Hama | 2007 | 7 753 | hppt://wpu.edu.sy/ |
| Yarmouk Private University | Jabab | 2007 | 6 087 | http://site.ypu.edu.sy/ |
| Arab University of Science and Technology | Hama | 2007 | 4 999 | http://aust.edu.sy/ |
| Al Jazeera Private University | Deir ez-Zor | 2007 | 5 248 | http://www.jude.edu.sy/ |
| Al-Rashid International University of Science and Technology | Gabaguib | 2007 | 2 340 | http://ru.edu.sy/ |
| Ebla Private University | Saraqib | 2008 | 4 340 | http://www.ebla.edu.sy/ |
| Al-Hawash Private University | Al-Hawash | 2008 | 6 751 | http://hpu.sy/ |
| Arab Academy for E-Business | Damascus | 2009 | 3 500 | http://araeb.org.sy/ |
| Bilad Al Sham University | Damascus | 2011 | 4 167 | http://aspu.edu.sy/ar/ |

| University name | City | Founded | The volume of the library's stock, instances | Web site |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Al-Sham Private University | Damascus | 2011 | 9 224 | http://aspu.edu.sy/ |
| Qasyoun Private University | Jabab | 2014 | 7 188 | http://qpu.edu.sy/ |
| Manara University | Latakia | 2016 | 5 705 | http://www.manara.edu.sy/ |
| Antioch Syrian University | Maaret Said-naya | 2017 | 2 150 | http://asu.edu.sy |

The organization of library services in public and private Syrian educational institutions varies.

All public universities use a single standard organization of libraries. Each faculty usually has its own specialized library, which serves students and teachers only of this faculty. Each university has a central library that serves all students, faculty and staff at the university; it usually functions as a cultural center, practicing workshops, seminars, educational courses, conferences, etc. [**6**–**8**]. For example, the University of Damascus has 26 faculties, each has its own library serving students, and a central library for the entire university [**15**, **16**]. The faculty library is usually located in one or two rooms inside the faculty building. The central library is located in a separate building, which is located next to the central administrative building of the university. The typical structure of the central library consists a conference hall, a workshop hall, a book fair, an open-access service department, which allows users to enter through the reader's card and independently find the right book (on the ground floor); the offices of the director of the library and staff, the reading room and the Internet hall (on the second floor); the department of periodicals and dissertation department (on the third floor). The funds of the four largest libraries (table 1) are quite voluminous and fully provide educational and scientific processes.

Until now, almost all Syrian AL uses traditional paper cataloguing. The reference-bibliographic tool includes card catalogues that reflect all

the documents available in the fund, as was the case decades ago in all the world's libraries. Outdated retrieval procedures take a long time. AL, as in all libraries in Syria, uses Dewey decimal classification, modified and Arabicized. Public university libraries do not have any local or global databases, so all the services they provide are traditional, local and not automatized. In addition, librarians do not know new technologies and do not accept this new reality because they are not specialists in modern librarianship and do not have the training or qualifications to use modern library and information technologies. There is no coordination between the library manpower of the various universities. Internet services are almost non-existent in public university libraries, despite the presence of rooms equipped with computers for users. The reason is the lack of servers, even local networks, not to mention the connection to www, as well as the surprising lack of interest of librarians in this modern technology. This fact leads to weak library attendance. There is also a technical problem associated with unsustainable Internet connectivity in the country as a whole. As a result, so far all AL do not have not only ALIS, but even electronic catalogs.

As for private university libraries, their organization differs from public ones, as each private university owns only one library, which serves all the university's specialties and provides its services to all students, staff and teachers [**5**]. Libraries of private universities also use Dewey's decimal classification system and the traditional cataloguing system, the paper card catalogue. The funds of these libraries are small and narrowly specialized.

Information technology in the libraries of Syrian state educational institutions is at the initial level of its development.

In recent years, attempts have been made to introduce the New Zealand free ALIS Koha, developed in 1999 by Katipo Communications and later translated into Arabic. Connecting MARC standard and the protocol Z39.50 to Koha, as well as combining it with the Zebra database, has made this ALIS international and promising for Syria. However, to date, its implementation is severely hampered by the lack of funding and clear models of informatization.

Attempts to create electronic catalogues on their own have been made at private universities (Kalamoon University, Syrian Private Univer-

sity, Al-Sham Private University and Manara University) based on ALIS Koha, as well as on the basis of the American ALIS Horizon (Arab International University), but so far they are at the beginning of the way.

The challenges of the digital revolution are forcing today to rethink of Syria's traditional AL functions and determine what characteristics it should have in order to effectively adapt to the new technological situation [5, 8]. First of all, new personnel who know library and information technologies are needed. Unfortunately, to date, no higher education institution in Syria has trained such specialists, so it is necessary: 1) the urgent opening of a bachelor's degree in library and information sciences in public and private universities (but there are no professors for this); 2) replacing library staff with young graduates of foreign universities; 3) remote retraining to modern library and information technology graduates of Syrian universities who have received similar education, for example, in the field of information systems (University of Aleppo).

To solve this personnel problem, a new technological base is needed: equipping AL with modern computers and related technologies, acquiring modern databases, developing information networks, establishing reliable communication through the Internet, etc. [13]; this requires support from the State and strong additional funding.

It seems completely ineffective to develop and implement such projects on the basis of AL alone. Therefore, the consistent development of two technologies is relevant: 1) system for AL coordination into a single librarian-information network; 2) a series of models to introduce modern information technologies into the libraries of this university network [9, 18, 20]. The aim of our further research is to develop conceptual, information and functional models of the AL network information system, capable of implementing librarian-information processes at the modern level.

**Conclusion**

The structure and features of the functioning of Syrian higher educational institutions and their libraries, the level of library and information technologies used are revealed. The information on 8 state and 22 private universities of Syria, including the volumes of the library's stock, is given.

The features of the organization of libraries in the universities of Syria, their typical structure, the reference and bibliographic apparatus used, which is still implemented on the basis of paper card catalogs, are described. The main shortcomings of library services are established.

Specific ways of transition of academical libraries of Syria to modern library and information technology are proposed: solving personnel problems, re-equipping the material base, developing models for creating a unified network information system of academical libraries.

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