



## *The Dilemma of Children's Literature in Light of the Digital Age's Changes*

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### Abstract ;

*Children's literature is currently confronting several formidable challenges. These include issues in communication between authors and young readers, exacerbated by a notable scarcity of available books and magazines tailored for children. This scarcity is not merely a matter of limited quantity; rather, it reflects a restrictive publishing ecosystem where only a handful of writers are catered to by children's magazines, and where both public and private publishers frequently decline new submissions. Moreover, the genre of children's literature has struggled to evolve in ways that adequately reflect the cognitive and developmental shifts occurring in today's children, who are increasingly influenced by daily interactions with digital technologies. Private publishing houses often limit their collaborations to a select group of established, often award-winning authors, prioritizing a perceived assurance of quality.*

*Simultaneously, the rapid advancement of technology and the intuitive ease with which children engage with digital interfaces have significantly diminished familial interest in traditional, physical books. Paper-based children's literature is steadily losing its footing to digital platforms that not only attract young readers but also divert their attention from traditional literary forms. Thus, authors and stakeholders in children's literature must address and adapt to this pivotal transition from print to digital media, recognizing the ongoing metamorphosis within the industry.*

### Article info

Received  
July 25 ;2024

Accepted  
August 28 ;2024

### Keyword:

- ✓ Children's Literature:
- ✓ Digital Age:
- ✓ Digital Age's:

## 1. Introduction

Literature occupies a crucial role in the cultural life of nations and their peoples, manifested through its diverse forms and engaging narrative styles. It plays an indispensable role in refining the human spirit and enriching intellectual pursuits. Children's literature, in particular, holds a special place as it targets a unique demographic. It adopts a simple yet captivating narrative style designed to resonate with young minds and hearts.

This genre not only seeks to purify and inform but also to prepare children for future challenges by enriching their knowledge and experiences. Children's books are characterized by simplicity in their use of imagery, imagination, and vocabulary. They captivate their audience through vivid storytelling that animates objects, inanimate things, and even flora, leveraging visual strengths tailored to the unique perceptual and emotional needs of children. The narrative technique is crafted to evoke emotional responses, making it a vital tool in childhood development. (Abdel Raouf, 1994)

Literature, fundamentally, serves as an imaginative reflection of life, encapsulating ideas and emotions through structured language. It is a vital branch of human knowledge dedicated to articulating emotions, habits, opinions, values, hopes, and other elements of culture in an artistic manner. This broad definition naturally encompasses all forms of literature, including that which is designed for children.

Specifically, children's literature is multifaceted and has been characterized in numerous ways: it is seen as eloquent

discourse that stirs artistic delight in young readers and listeners, whether through poetry or prose, and whether it is conveyed orally or in writing. This genre spans stories, plays, and songs tailored for children. Another perspective defines children's literature as artistic works that are communicated to children across various media, encapsulating ideas and images that resonate with their emotional and developmental stages. (Al-Hadidi, 1976)

Furthermore, children's literature entails writings that are specifically crafted for children, adhering to standards that are appropriate for their developmental level and needs. It is described as a "linguistic experience in an artistic form, created by the artist especially for children between the ages of two and twelve or slightly older, with whom they live and interact.

This literature provides enjoyment and entertainment, brings joy and fun to their hearts, develops their aesthetic sense and appreciation, strengthens their affinity for goodness, unlocks their imaginative and creative energies, and builds their humanity." Moreover, children's literature is recognized as a unique literary expression, governed by its own rules and methodologies.

These pertain to the language and style, ensuring compatibility with the child's vocabulary and stylistic repertoire for the age it targets, as well as to the content and its suitability for different stages of childhood, or to issues of taste and narrative techniques in crafting stories or in the art of storytelling for auditory experiences.

## **2. Definition of Children's Literature:**

Literature, in general, from a conceptual standpoint, is an imaginative depiction of life, ideas, and emotions through linguistic structures. It represents a branch of human knowledge concerned with expressing emotions, habits, opinions, values, hopes, and other cultural elements in an artistic form. This concept encompasses all literature, including children's literature. (Abdel Wahab, 2009)

Children's literature, in particular, has been defined in various ways: as eloquent discourse that evokes artistic pleasure in children, whether in poetry or prose, whether oral or written. This concept includes children's stories, plays, and songs. Another definition sees it as artistic works communicated to children through various media, containing ideas and images that express emotions and feelings appropriate to their developmental stages. Furthermore, children's literature includes writings specifically crafted for children, considering standards suitable for their developmental level and needs. (Ta'ima, 1998)

Children's literature can be defined as: "A linguistic experience in an artistic form, created by the artist, especially for children between the ages of two and twelve or slightly more, with whom they live and interact, providing them with enjoyment and entertainment, bringing joy and fun to their hearts, developing their sense of beauty and appreciation, strengthening their love for goodness, unleashing their imaginations and creative energies, and building their humanity."

Children's literature is also recognized as a form of literary expression with its own rules and methodologies, whether related to its language and compatibility with the child's vocabulary and stylistic repertoire for the age it is written for, or to its content and suitability for different childhood stages, or to issues of taste and narrative techniques in story crafting or in the art of storytelling for heard stories. (Rafi', 2001, p. 18)

Children's literature is generally defined as a collection of artistic works that carry sensory and imaginative creativity aligned with children's perceptions and conform to their ideas. (Al-Hiti, 1986) These works come in various forms, including stories, plays, articles, and songs. The view of Heti on the necessity of tailoring these works to suit children's mental, imaginative, and emotional capacities highlights how children's literature differs from adult literature due to the distinct characteristics of its young audience. (Mahmoud, 2001)

The critic and author Leah Goldberg has written about children's literature in detail, adding further elements and foundations. She defines children's literature as literature that suits the content and style to the understanding of children aged approximately five to thirteen.

The style of this literature is simple, clear, devoid of complexity and an overload of problems, and it does not exceed the general concepts understandable to a child at various developmental stages, thus considering the child's capacity to absorb the creative content, whether it is poetry or prose. A child's perceptions at the early stages of intellectual development are

linked to physical growth, which influences their awareness of the world.

Despite most modern studies indicating that written children's literature first appeared in France and then spread to other European countries, America, and China, the Arab world has long had children's literature, initially in oral form. Folktales were first, followed by hero and adventure stories told to children for educational or moral purposes. However, the modern form of writing stories for children in Arabic truly began in the nineteenth century, initially through translations and then by writing poems for children similar to Western poems, eventually leading to what it is today.

Kamel Kilani is considered the "founding father of children's literature in Arabic and the leader of the young writers' school across all Arab countries (Barighech, 1998, p. 84)," though there is some variation in leadership at the country level, such as Abdelhamid Ben Badis in Algeria and Suleiman Al-Issa in Syria, among others.

### 3. *Types of Literature:*

Rafik Yahya has categorized literature into two primary types:

- **Literature in its General Sense:** This encompasses the aggregate of intellectual outputs that have been documented in books, representing a broad spectrum of knowledge.
- **Literature in its Specific Sense:** This pertains to eloquent discourse that elicits artistic pleasure in its recipients, encompassing both the

written and spoken forms. (Barighech, 1998, p. 84)

Expanding on these definitions, children's literature can be understood in two distinct contexts:

- **Children's Literature in its General Sense:** This refers to the intellectual content specifically designed for children, documented in books that span various branches of knowledge. This includes simplified scientific books for children, illustrated storybooks, informational texts, and encyclopedias tailored for young readers.
- **Children's Literature in its Specific Sense:** This involves the eloquent and artistic discourse that captivates children, whether through poetry or prose, and whether delivered orally or in written form. This category includes children's stories, plays, songs, and other similar forms.

It is crucial to note that the term 'books' is used here in a comprehensive manner, embracing the written, spoken, and visual forms, adapting to the dynamics of modern technological advancements. This distinction is vital in segregating the intellectual output regarding childhood from literary productions aimed specifically at children. Such differentiation is essential both in the creation of texts for children and in their evaluation.

Children's literature plays a pivotal role in influencing children's developmental, character building, and equipping them to

become future pioneers. Given that a child is in the most delicate and crucial stages of development, the focus should be predominantly on the emotional aspects of their upbringing.

Consequently, children's literature serves not only educational and informational purposes but also fulfills functions related to aesthetic and moral education, contributing significantly to the linguistic, intellectual, physical, and behavioral development of children. (Barighech, 1998, p. 84)

#### **4. Language and Style in Children's Literature:**

The consensus among authors and researchers who delve into the language and style of children's literature is the necessity of tailoring the language and vocabulary to the age and developmental stages of the child, with a concerted effort to progressively enrich this language. This philosophy impacts the literary approach in the following ways:

##### **4.1 At the Level of Words and Linguistic Structures:**

- Employing simple words and structures, steering clear of the arcane and unfamiliar.
- Minimizing the use of metaphorical language unless it emerges naturally within the context, alongside a strategic use of repetition to reinforce understanding and familiarity.

##### **4.2 At the Sentence Level:**

- Crafting sentences that are succinct to moderately long, consciously avoiding overly complex sentence structures.

- Prioritizing the use of words and phrases that evoke sensory experiences over those that convey abstract moral concepts.

#### **4.3 On the Level of Styles:**

In children's literature, it is paramount to strive for clarity, beauty, and precision while eschewing excessive embellishment, ornate language, and complex linguistic constructs. Authors should avoid subtle implications and intricate metaphors, instead aligning more closely with the characteristics of everyday speech. The style of narrators and storytellers, reminiscent of oral folk tales, can be profoundly captivating for young listeners and engage their full senses. (Barighech, 1998, p. 84)

However, this approach should not undermine the integrity of the narrative style that is essential for nurturing the storytelling impulse and enhancing narrative creativity, fostering proper linguistic expression in children. This skill is typically acquired initially through listening and imitation, and later through emulation, once it has become embedded in the child's consciousness and memory.

Writing for children is often more challenging than writing for adults due to the educational and cultural stipulations that writers must adhere to, along with the continual and precise consideration of the young recipients' mental and psychological levels.

It is recognized that children's literature might include any literary work specifically written for children, as well as any literary work that children find appealing and engaging, even if not



originally intended for them. Over time, many literary works not initially crafted for a young audience have, through appropriate modifications, become beloved reading materials for children.

Examples include "Robinson Crusoe" by Daniel Defoe and "Gulliver's Travels" by Jonathan Swift, both of which incorporate satirical elements initially aimed at adults but have since been adapted for younger readers. Additionally, myths and folk tales such as "One Thousand and One Nights" and the "Epic of Antar," along with "Kalila waDimna" by Ibn al-Muqaffa (Barighech, 1998, p. 84), have been transformed to feature animal protagonists, thus becoming suitable narrative materials for children and fitting well with their primary perceptual stages of mental development.

These stories form a crucial part of educational and artistic offerings for early age groups. Similarly, the globally renowned "Fables" by La Fontaine, inspired by Indian narrative traditions, were initially known as La Fontaine's Fables and have found a significant place in children's literature.

### ***5. Children's Literature in Light of Modern Changes:***

In recent decades, there has been a significant expansion of interest in children's literature in the Arab world, compensating for previous periods of inactivity. This field has seen major advancements, particularly through the diversification of children's literature via magazines and a variety of books, ranging from stories and theater to poetry and puzzles.

A notable leap has occurred in the visual media domain, especially through television, which has started to introduce Arab characters rooted in the Arab-Islamic heritage, moving away from mere reliance on translations and imitations of characters unrepresentative of our culture. (Mohammed, 2011, p. 12)

A critical issue at the forefront is the need to establish a model for the Arab child that can serve as a common denominator in children's literature. By 'model,' I refer to the creation of characters with Arab roots who will serve as heroes in stories, theatrical productions, poetry, and dramatic works aimed at the Arab child and are intended to be highly influential.

It is insufficient to merely admire characters like Tom and Jerry or translate successful Western works. There exists a significant task for Arab children's writers to create this model, adhere to it, and replicate it across various works, ensuring that it resonates with and accurately represents the cultural and moral framework of the Arab world. (Najib, 1994)

Dr. Amel Kebir has underscored the critical role that illustrated stories play in shaping the awareness and behavior of Arab children, both positively and negatively. She has also raised concerns about the proliferation of satellite channels targeted at children within the Arab world. These channels, according to Dr. Kebir, have compounded the worries of parents and educators who are increasingly uncertain about the content being presented. Often, these channels promote Western products and propagate behaviors and values that are foreign to our society, negatively influencing our children.

Dr. Kebir notes that the expansion of these channels has not effectively contributed to the management of childhood education and upbringing through art. (Kebir, 2023, p. 180) Instead, most have utilized this demographic to disseminate alien ideologies, perpetuate narrow-minded thinking, or exploit the platforms solely for commercial gain. Her choice to highlight the series "Bakkar" in her article serves as a commendation of media products that positively impact Arab children and counter the overwhelming influence of Western cartoon products. (Kebir, 2023, pp. 184-185)

There is a pressing need to focus on producing dramatic works derived from Arabic texts specifically written for children. Some Arabic television programs, particularly those produced in Saudi Arabia and Qatar that utilize Classical Arabic, have made commendable progress in this area.

This has led to a new generation of children who incorporate Classical Arabic into their daily conversations. Additionally, there are products from the Gulf that aim to promote the Gulf dialect while introducing regional customs and traditions, coinciding with the significant openness and development in these areas and their integration into global tourism. Examples of such series include "Freej", "Shilla Dana", "Mansour", "KhoosaBoosa", and "Al Mandous."

Just as science is simplified for educational purposes, it is crucial to simplify our Arab and Islamic history for children. In the early twentieth century, Charles Dickens, who gained global recognition for his novels, was commissioned by the English

to simplify English history for children, resulting in "A Child's History of England".

This book, crafted in an engaging narrative style, became a staple in early education. Similarly, there is significant value in simplifying the works of pioneers in Arab creativity and thought. Efforts by institutions and associations dedicated to children's literature should prioritize this over simply translating works from other cultures. While translation remains important, it is essential to highlight our rich heritage to create works that the West might seek to translate, as they have done with "One Thousand and One Nights" for both children and adults. (Al-Houli, 2004)

Critiquing children's literature is an essential endeavor that has not received sufficient attention in the Arab world. Critics in this field must understand whom they are addressing, as their role differs markedly from those who interpret and analyze creative works for general readers. (Al-Houli, 2004)

Regrettably, any production from Arab libraries is readily accepted by the young Arab reader or those responsible for them, as the crucial feature of selection is often absent. This oversight has led to productions that either blindly mimic foreign cultures, oversimplify content to the point of triviality, or do not consider the profound impacts of global changes, technology, and secularism on the awareness of the young.

Consequently, we must reflect on why children are increasingly disinterested in reading and why books no longer seem to resonate with them, acknowledging that their new 'friends'—digital and media

influences—are more aligned with their advanced, daring, and objective mental development, which adults may have failed to adequately acknowledge.

### **6. *The Future of Children's Literature Authors in the Face of Modern Digital Media Competition***

As the Internet generation's interest in politics grows, they are displacing the traditional models of politics that relied heavily on speeches and indoctrination. Their upbringing, deeply influenced by their interactions with the Internet and its myriad features, along with various social media platforms, has shaped their expectations towards "collaboration" rather than passive listening.

#### **6.1 *The Impact of Digital World Interaction on Children's Stories and Literature***

The interaction and communication facilitated by the digital world, predominantly among youth and often beyond adult supervision, have significantly influenced young people's speech, writing styles, learning methods, and their perceptions of adult understanding. These changes have profound implications for the themes of children's literature and the manner in which these themes are addressed. (Kan'an, 1999, p. 24)

The Internet has not only influenced our youth but has also become a fundamental source of empowerment for them, providing unprecedented freedom of expression and the ability to communicate

across large groups without adult suppression or domination. (Al-Hurr, 1984, p. 16) This new dynamic forces adults, who traditionally viewed young people as too immature to think or know, to acknowledge and respect the expanding capabilities of children and young adults. (Ismail, 2011, p. 46)

Traditionally, adults believed that children were in perpetual need of protection. However, a significant shift has occurred, with adults now finding themselves reliant on children and youth to bridge the digital educational divide. This divide is driven by the younger generation's deep engagement with digital technologies, often facilitated by adults who provide devices like tablets without fully grasping the advanced technology within.

This has led to a noticeable separation between the worlds of children and adults, where digital devices have contributed to social disconnections, declines in psychological, linguistic, and educational performance. Consequently, a virtual intellectual structure has developed in children, which is often incapable of integration or natural development within the societal contexts to which they belong.

This detachment has also led to weakened emotional relationships between parents and their children, pushing children towards more introverted behaviors, engaging with devices, and immersing themselves in the realities these devices present. (Gouider, 2012)

This digital immersion has caused children to lose the ability to confidently communicate with their real-life peers, leading to severe neurological and



psychological disorders such as epilepsy and autism in extreme crisis situations. However, some researchers argue that digital media, by allowing children to participate in game creation, produce stories, and build virtual communities, has contributed to a shift away from paternalistic dominance.

The creative capacities of youth have been unleashed, previously constrained by traditional boundaries, and it is becoming evident that authoritarian societies are transitioning towards more democratic forms. This is a relative judgment that may apply to some societies but not others.

While societies that developed these technologies are working to understand their identity and seek social and intellectual reintegration, acknowledging a shared destiny amidst rampant capitalism, societies that are merely recipients of these technologies often experience a negative digital transformation (Abu Khadra et al., 1995, p. 32). This transformation tends to relegate them once again to merely consuming roles.

Despite appearances that children and youth are taking initiative and engaging actively, when they step back into their actual reality, they face traditional levels of knowledge and social and educational understanding that are incapable of assimilating changes or integrating into new levels of change.

This remains confined to the consciousness of these young individuals, making their new ways of thinking about the world and humanity seem aggressive towards adults, thereby exacerbating conflicts and widening gaps. Instead of

fostering a cohesive society, which was once maintained by traditional Arab and Islamic organization, Arab societies are now trending towards individualism and pathological human isolation, leading to a loss of identity that once denied ethnic and cultural partners and even diminished the importance of familial bonds.

Children are currently navigating a serious tug-of-war between two opposing consciousnesses, a conflict that becomes evident when the two sides interact. This challenge is not merely about rebalancing through stories and arts; it is predominantly viewed as a multifaceted intellectual endeavor encompassing political, scientific, and humanitarian dimensions.

All stakeholders are called upon to devise methods to organize and envisage a positive future, one that involves creating scientific, educational, artistic, and cultural frameworks that support and integrate the sweep of digitization, allowing children to harmoniously embody their digital experiences in a society that neither rejects nor combats this new awareness.

Our focus here is to elucidate the nature of the impact that digitization and contemporary technological media have on children, specifically within the realms of literature and arts. Digital stories, which make use of digital media such as animated images or videos combining movement and sound (including music and speech), often feature people, natural landscapes, or artificial or real cosmic phenomena, and aim to convey specific messages to children.

Digital media create a multifaceted environment that is educational,

entertaining, and influences behavior, capable of delivering information swiftly, effortlessly, and with substantial impact. The significance and the potential danger of these media lies in their features which, aligned with the fast-paced global movement, have captivated children's attention more effectively than any other educational or entertainment tool. (Al-Ajrami, 2024)

This influence often limits their intellectual activity, turning it consumeristic, especially in the Arab context where the secondary pole of digital development, production and innovation, is lacking. This should ideally parallel the consumer activity of the digital content presented.

Pierre Levy, Canada Research Chair in Collective Intelligence at the University of Ottawa and a member of the Royal Society of Canada, articulates a critical reflection on the motives behind the development of the algorithmic medium, questioning whether its purpose was wealth accumulation, enlightening oppressed peoples about the significance of 'social media marketing,' or enabling various entities, from school children to powerful armies and corporations, to monitor, crush, and discredit their adversaries with unparalleled efficiency. (Vial, 2018, p. 20)

This introspection reveals that the shift in digitization usage has allowed its negative impacts to overshadow the potential positives that the producing countries had initially envisioned.

## ***6.2 The Positive Alternative to Children's Interaction with Digitalization***

Despite the dominance of computer screens and digital tools which offer various

opportunities for interaction and participation, children's book authors have not retreated from this challenge. Instead, they have evolved the role of children's books to foster positive interactions, aiming to balance the child's relationship with both the book and the computer screen. (Vial, 2018, p. 12)

The adaptation to digital interactions has been facilitated by providing children the opportunity to engage with digital media for reading. While this adaptation is not a comprehensive solution, it presents an opportunity for children to engage in objective thinking about the ideologies propagated by adults through these platforms. This adaptation is a crucial step towards ensuring that children's literature remains relevant and engaging in the face of digital transformations.

To effectively navigate the challenges presented by the modern digital landscape, interactive children's literature has emerged as a significantly supported and popular field among both children and their caregivers. This genre aims to enhance artistic expression and explore new methods of thinking, addressing how children interact with reality, imagination, and the language that shapes their identities and free personalities.

However, a pivotal question arises: Is interactive literature merely the initial step towards fostering a creative childhood, or is it a crucial subsequent phase that reconnects with a previously overlooked foundational stage? This foundational stage is critical for organizing the "inner house" of childhood, establishing a robust foundation based on smooth logical

reasoning that facilitates easy and creative interaction.

Digital interaction in children's literature requires that children engage positively, which not only ensures the accuracy and safety of their responses but also aids in developing their self-learning capabilities. This is vital for preparing them for a future where they are both capable of and eager to seek answers to their questions, often turning to primary sources like encyclopedias, dictionaries, and atlases for information. (Kanawi, 2003, p. 45)

The advent of new technology in young children's books has brought about multisensory reading experiences that offer more than just stories and images. These books include a variety of concepts and informational content presented in innovative styles specifically designed for children who may not yet be able to read words but possess the mental readiness to recognize, search, compare, and deduce information through their senses and positive interaction with the book.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The insights gained from this approach underscore several key conclusions:

- Writing for children is a complex endeavor, far from straightforward, because a child is not merely a passive recipient capable of understanding everything presented to them. Children require meticulous psychological study at various developmental stages. In their early years, they are acquainted only with the vocabulary of their immediate environment and reality. By the time they reach

primary school, their interests shift towards fantasy and a burgeoning curiosity about the world. This inclination towards fantasy persists until they reach the ages of 12 to 17, at which point they return to a focus on reality, striving to understand real-world issues and methods for addressing them.

- The awareness of a five-year-old child today is markedly different from that of a child of the same age at the close of the last millennium. The explosion of communication methods and the accompanying technological revolution have not diminished the role of reading in a child's life. Rather, these advancements have opened up vast new sources of knowledge, creating a state of randomness in their understanding. This scenario necessitates a collaborative effort among publishers, writers for children, and child psychologists to consider the issue and explore ways to rationalize children's knowledge in a manner that aligns with the nature of their developmental stages and needs.
- However, the challenges do not end here. The significant transformations in recent years have had clear impacts on everyone, including children, who cannot be considered in isolation from the wars, revolutions, and perhaps chaos in their countries. A child's psyche, being highly receptive, retains everything it encounters, requiring a nuanced intellectual and psychological approach different

from that of their peers in other countries. This places the children's writer before a multitude of challenges, the foremost being the need for continued serious and genuine writing in the face of consumerist writings pursued by many commercial publishing houses. Additionally, there is a pressing need to develop the competitive abilities of the children's literature writer against digital tablet applications, which dazzle with their auditory and visual splendor and animations. Recent popular translations also present a challenge, often conveying values that do not align with the cultural and moral values of the Arab child.

These challenges have placed children's literature in Arab countries at a critical crossroads, from which there is no escape without well-planned preparation for the future of the child. This involves caring for their special activities, altering school curricula to foster critical thinking and the capacity for inquiry and wonder, rather than mere rote learning and transmission. Such an approach nurtures their creative capabilities.

This does not mean, however, that there should be a complete abandonment of our rich intellectual and literary heritage. Arab heritage is replete with myths and literary narratives that can captivate children and stimulate their imagination while providing them with the necessary cultural values to foster a spirit of tolerance and

acceptance of others. This heritage can be re-presented in a manner that aligns with modern technologies and their new applications, ensuring that Arabs remain integral to the equation of children's literature without relinquishing the best of their great legacy.

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