

The Role of the High-School Library Media Specialist as Perceived by Israeli High-School Librarians, Teachers and Principals - Vision vs. Reality / Ansenberg Dania

Abstract

This research examined role perception of the high-school library media specialist in Israel, as perceived by school library media specialists (hence: school librarian), principals and teachers. Role perception was studied from two perspectives: the vision – that is the ideal role to which teachers, principals and school librarians aspire, and the reality – the implementation of that role in the field. This research attempted to define those variables which characterize school librarians whose work is perceived, both by themselves and their colleagues, as close to the model of ideal practice. In addition, this research attempted to identify the major obstacles to the implementation of the ideal role of the school librarian.

The research tool used was a survey, developed by the investigator, in the light of the research questions, and based on the findings of both editions of Information Power, the American guidelines to the management of the school library media center. A separate questionnaire was designed for each sector (teachers, principals and school librarians). The research sample included one third of the total number of high-schools in Israel in 1998/9 and was chosen by a random sampling from the list of educational institutions of that year. The response average was 58.5% of the total sample. In almost 20% of schools personal interviews were conducted.

When considering the ideal role of the school librarian, all sectors agreed on the importance of the clerical – management aspects of the librarian's role. In addition, all sectors attributed great significance to the role of the school librarian as information specialist. By contrast, the role of the school librarian as instructional consultant and as a teacher were considered important by only a small percentage of respondents. Teachers expressed reservations about those roles that were perceived as encroaching on their own areas of responsibility.

The greatest disparity between vision and reality, according to all sectors, was identified in the roles of the school librarian as instructional consultant and teacher. This indicates that school librarians are not considered either by themselves or by teachers and principals, as full partners in the educational process of the school.

School librarians point to the greatest disparity between vision and reality in three areas: The school librarian's responsibility to introduce new technologies to the school staff, to facilitate the connection of users to sources of information outside the school, and to participate in the development of school curricula. Examination of the correlation between the school librarians' perception of their most significant roles, and the implementation of roles other than the most elementary, indicated that where school librarians' definition of the ideal role is broadest, the extent of implementation is greatest.

Amongst school librarians the degree of satisfaction with their own level of performance was high. However, the level of satisfaction with the school librarians' performance was low amongst teachers and lower still amongst principals. Therefore, the research did not support the initial hypothesis of a direct correlation between the school librarians' level of satisfaction with job performance, and that of his colleagues. A possible explanation for this finding lies in a lack of awareness on the part of the school librarian, of his colleagues' expectations, and a lack of adequate communication between them. Other possibilities are that principals and teachers are not sufficiently aware of the functioning of the school library media center, and that the absence of initiative and activism on the part of the school librarian, contributes to dissatisfaction amongst the educational staff.

The research did not validate the hypotheses that posited a direct correlation between satisfaction with the performance of the school librarian and the following variables: The education of the school librarian, the size of staff, familiarity with professional literature, that is guidelines for the management of the school library media center, and a sense of work commitment (It is worth noting that most school librarians—above 80% - were awarded a high grade for work commitment).

The research does support the hypotheses that posited a direct correlation between satisfaction with the performance of the school librarian and the following variables: The number of professional courses taken by the school librarian during their career, regular reading of professional journals, a high degree of co-operation between the school librarian and other groups of educators in the school, and leadership and pro-activism on the part of the school librarian.

All three groups identified the following factors as the major obstacles to the implementation of the school librarian's role: A lack of resources and sufficient staff, the absence of professional training especially in the field of information technology,

a lack of awareness and appreciation, on the part of management and staff, of the library and its ability to contribute to the educational process. Other difficulties noted were the physical conditions in the library and the personality of the school librarian.

In the light of these findings, five recommendations were offered:

- (1). The publication and distribution in Israel of guidelines for the management of the school library media centers, that would clarify the role of the school librarian today for principals, teachers and school librarians themselves.
- (2). Inclusion of the subject of the role of the school librarian in educational programs for the training of teachers and principals.
- (3). The introduction of changes in the training of librarians, especially school librarians, that would reinforce knowledge of technology, and teaching methods, improve interpersonal communication, and increase the school librarian's awareness of his role as leader and pioneer.
- (4). The encouragement of continuing education of school librarians throughout their professional life.
- (5). The advocacy of increased number of posts for school librarians in school library media centers.

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