# Combined School-Public Libraries in Israel at the High School Level an Evaluative Study

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### Abstract:

The issue of combined school-public libraries has long concerned researchers and practitioners in the field and is well documented in literature. A literature survey reveals opinion articles as well as empirical field studies, especially in the US, Canada, UK, Australia and the Scandinavian countries, which attempt to determine the advantages and disadvantages of this model, and possible factors associated with its success in practice. Despite the importance of the topic and its potential of budget saving and greater efficiency in use of resources, no large-scale empirical study of the extent and performance of combined school-public libraries in Israel has been conducted.

## Purpose of the study

The study aimed to empirically investigate the combined school-public libraries on the **high school level** existing in Israel, or more specifically:

- 1. To establish the scope of this phenomenon.
- 2. To discover the specific problems faced by these libraries.
- 3. To determine the unique features distinguishing them from other high school libraries.
- 4. To determine the level of service they provide to their users, compared to regular school libraries.

## Methodology

The main research tools were three different written closed questionnaires sent to the school librarian, school principal and one of the school teachers. The librarian's questionnaire was the most detailed one, asking about various aspects of the library's daily operation, while the other two questionnaires

were much shorter, focusing mainly on school's contribution to the library, its use and its success, as viewed by principal and teachers working at that school.

In 1996 questionnaires were mailed to all 65 schools known to have some type of combination libraries. Response rate was about 50% and the final sample included 51 libraries: 18 – combined, 11 – Not combined 'branches', and 22 – 'regular'.

## Main findings

The **number** of combined libraries has risen over the decades, mostly in the rural **areas**. It seems to be an interesting trend, especially in view of the recent decline reported in the US and Canada.

Regarding **space**, the regional combined libraries (typical to rural areas), whether main or branches, were much better off (50 to 60 percent **beyond** the recommended standard), than all other groups, combined or not. Concerning **opening hours** the urban combined libraries were open longer than the regional combined ones and the control group. The combined libraries, mainly the urban ones, were open for more afternoon hours, all of them were open during school vacations, and they had a higher average number of weekly librarian hours per school.

The regional combined libraries sub-group had a much larger **number of books per student**, it's mean is 47.4 vs. only 13.5 in the combined ones located in towns or local councils; the regional combined branches' mean is 34.3 vs. only 1.7 (!) in the town/local ones; and the regional control group's mean is 17.7 vs. only 10.4 in the non-regional libraries of the control group. Regional combined libraries had as well a larger number of periodicals and computers per library, then the urban combined ones and the control group.

The mean number of **users of the reading-room** was about the same (usually low) in all types of libraries in afternoon hours, but differed considerably in the mornings, especially in the combined regional libraries, probably due to different teaching methods.

The figures regarding **librarian education** do not support the assumption that one of the positive results of combining both types of libraries is upgrading the professional qualifications of the staff. A comparison of figures for the three types of libraries sampled shows a similar level of academic education as well as professional education in librarianship.

**Library use and activity**: the mean number of users of the reading-room was about the same (usually low) in all types of libraries in afternoon hours, but differed considerably in the mornings: 170 students daily in the regional subgroup vs. only 90 in the other two groups. Activities of library **instruction and reading encouragement** were found in most regional and control-group libraries, but only in a few urban combined ones.

About half the librarians, the school principals and the teachers in the combined libraries **rated** their combined library as 'very successful', while the rest rated it as only 'partially successful', or expressed dissatisfaction, pointing out serious problems. Regional librarians were much more satisfied with the combined model, compared to their urban colleagues. Findings indicated that the combined model is more likely to succeed in a regional library, in a rural setting, than in an urban one.

#### Conclusions:

- 1. The combined model at the high school level in Israel has succeeded mainly in regional libraries serving the rural sector, and less in urban libraries and those belonging to local councils. In most parameters regional combined libraries rated high above other libraries studied: professional management, large collections, space, and opening time, especially on school vacations.
- 2. The combined model in urban settings was less successful, has faced various difficulties and rated worse concerning common parameters of input.
- 3. There are indications that the larger resources owned by the combined regional libraries are not being used to their full potential.
- 4. The relatively high proportion of librarians and principals who avoided rating their combined model as 'very successful' calls for further and more detailed investigation of the reasons to this finding.

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