

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.

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