

# **Combined School-Public Libraries in Israel at the Elementary School Level: An Evaluative Study/ Karelitz Tzipi**

## **Abstract**

The term “combined library” refers to a double functioning model of library, which is a school library and a public one.

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 dozens of opinion articles as well as research papers reporting empirical field studies, especially in the US, Canada, and Australia, which attempt to determine the advantages and disadvantages of this model, and possible factors associated with its success in practice.

The study aimed to empirically investigate the combined school-public libraries existing at the **elementary** school level in Israel, compared to regular school libraries. The main research tools were three different written closed questionnaires sent to the school librarian, school principal and one of the school teachers. In 1996 questionnaires were mailed to all 130 elementary schools which, according to official government records, had some type of combination libraries. Response rate was about 70%.

Questionnaires were also mailed to 33 randomly-chosen schools, having a ‘regular’ (i.e. not combined) library, to serve as a control group. Response rate was about 48%. The final sample included **86** libraries.

Main findings : The number of combined libraries has risen constantly over the decades. Regarding space, seats and collection size, the situation in the main regional combined libraries (typical to rural areas), excluding branches, was much better than in the urban ones, whether combined or not. It is uncertain, however, whether the full potential of these larger dimensions was actually utilized and to what extent elementary school students truly benefited from them. Concerning pedagogical material, only 14% of the combined libraries held both pedagogical and audiovisual material, and can be considered real media centers. Regarding librarians’ education it was found that those in the control group had better education compared to other groups. The advantage of the combined libraries is manifested also in the professional searching tools, which is higher than in the control group.

Regarding an overall evaluation : About of half the librarians of the combined libraries rated them as 'very successful' and recommended the model to other schools, while the rest (47%) rated it as only 'partially successful' or expressed dissatisfaction due to serious problems, and would recommend it 'with reservation' (36%) or not at all (11%).

Findings indicated that the combined model is more likely to succeed in a regional library than in an urban one, and that in most indicators it rates high above the regular libraries included in the control group. However, 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.

### Conclusions

1. Most combined libraries in elementary schools in Israel use resources which are intended for the local public library. Since elementary schools lack funds and standards there is no amalgamation of resources, because, officially, there are no resources to amalgamate. Therefore, the combined library solution may be considered the 'less of two evils', for elementary schools.
2. Findings indicate that the combined model of school and public library, is more likely to succeed in a regional library than in an urban one, and that in some parameters it rates high above the regular libraries included in the control group : professional management, large collections, space, and opening time, especially on school vacations.
3. The disadvantages of the combined model in elementary schools in Israel seem to be : charging money for borrowing (in some libraries), limitations on free use of the library, procedures not adjusted to school needs, lack of coordination between librarians and school staff, and little practical application of the library-media center philosophy.
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.
5. Combining libraries should be considered very carefully, with deep comprehension, and with full understanding of the criteria for the success of this model.

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