# The Power of Public and School Library Collaboration During the Covid-19 Pandemic: The Jamaican Experience

**Maureen Thompson**
Director General,
Jamaica Library Service
maureen.thompson@jls.gov.jm

**Kishma L. Simpson**
Senior Director,
Jamaica Library Service
kishma.simpson@jls.gov.jm

**Natoyna Garwood**
Regional Director (Region 1),
Jamaica Library Service
natoyna.garwood@jls.gov.jm

**Lorraine McLean**
Regional Director (Region 5),
Jamaica Library Service
lorraine.mclean@jls.gov.jm

**Abstract:** *Public and school library collaboration offers mutually beneficial opportunities that became increasingly important during the global health crisis. The purpose of this paper is to provide insights into the collaborative efforts of the Jamaica Library Service (JLS) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main goal of the study is to highlight what constitutes collaboration, showcase collaborative strategies implemented and to assess the opportunities gained and challenges associated with executing these collaborative initiatives during the pandemic. This study is grounded in the Teacher and Librarian Collaboration (TLC) model and employed a mixed method research design to collect data from schools and librarians directly involved in collaborative activities. The findings revealed that public and school collaboration played an integral role in teaching and learning activities during the pandemic while also increasing awareness of the resources and services offered by the public library.*

**Keywords:** *Collaboration, Public Libraries; School Libraries, Covid-19, Jamaica Library Service, Pandemic*

# Introduction

Public and school libraries have long engaged in authentic collaborative programming aimed at stimulating student learning while promoting the services of the public library. However, the COVID-19 pandemic triggered increased responsiveness through active collaboration between public and school libraries as a means of combating learning loss. The Jamaica Library Service (JLS) has the unique position with a mandate to provide both a public and school library service to the Jamaican populace allowing for rapid and island wide reach of collaborative initiatives undertaken during the pandemic. This study therefore seeks to assess the nature and effectiveness of public and school library collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Jamaican context.

## Research Questions

The paper will seek to provide appropriate responses to the following research questions:

1. What constitutes collaboration in relation to public and school library partnership?
2. What were the strategies implemented to enable successful public and school library collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What are the opportunities gained from public and school library collaboration during the COVID-19 Pandemic?
4. What were the challenges to public and school library collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic?

## Purpose and Significance of the Study

Collaboration between public and school libraries offers mutually beneficial opportunities that became more significant during the global health crisis. Breeding purports that "partnerships with schools represent an important channel of outreach for the public libraries" (2015, p.14). The purpose of this paper is to provide insights into the collaborative efforts of the Jamaica Library Service (JLS) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, this research focuses on defining "collaboration" as it relates to the localized context as well as displaying the benefits and challenges of various collaborative initiatives executed in response to the pandemic. This study will also fill existing gaps in the literature as it relates to public and

school library collaboration in the Caribbean region, while providing useful recommendations as a foundation for future research on similar topics.

## Theoretical Framework

COVID-19 instigated rapid and unexpected changes to teaching and learning structures, which fueled increased public and school libraries collaboration in order to maintain their relevance. This study is grounded in the Teacher and Librarian Collaboration (TLC) model formulated by Patricia Montiel-Overall to assess the collaboration process between teachers and librarians (Montiel-Overall 2005). Kammer and Moreland (2020b, p. 32) suggested that the TLC model "could be applied to collaboration across libraries." In accordance with the TLC model, Teachers will be considered as Teacher-Librarians or Classroom Teachers in schools and Librarians as Librarians in public libraries. The four models of collaboration outlined in the TLC design will be used to gain insight into this collaborative process and efforts of public and school libraries during the pandemic.

# Literature Review

## *Collaboration Defined*

Discussions regarding public and school library collaboration dates back to the late nineteenth century and is traditionally based upon a shared interest in the provision of specialized services for students (Leung et al., 2020, p.2). During the COVID-19 pandemic collaboration between public and school libraries played an integral role in the teaching and learning activities within schools while promoting the resources and services offered by the public library. Public Librarians have long been expected to collaborate with various community partners in the delivery and development of services (Saunders 2020, p. 653). Equal collaboration is not expected between librarians and school teachers because of the difference in education (Tikkinen and Korkeamäki 2021, p. 14). Kammer and Moreland further suggest that the collaborative process between public and school libraries is somewhat different because it included promotional activities done by public librarians at school libraries which consisted of resources for children, programming, books and electronic resources (2020b, p. 44).

*Collaborative Strategies*

The importance and benefits of collaborative strategies between public and school libraries predated the pandemic. Yuen & Liew stated that outreach programmes were designed to encourage public libraries to liaise with schools in the promotion of creativity and learning through the use of innovative technologies and programmes (2022, p.6). During the pandemic, public and school libraries in Hong Kong collaborated to train student ambassadors to help school libraries; public libraries offered block loans and access to digital resources to students through their school libraries; and school librarians promoted public libraries in their lessons (Leung et al., 2020, p.7). In Central Missouri public and school libraries collaborated in sharing resources where "public libraries shared access to their digital collections with school libraries" (Moreland and Kammer 2020 a, p 42). In New Zealand and Australia, public libraries with established makerspaces collaborated with schools to teach staff and students how to manoeuvre various software and applications (Yuen & Liew, 2022, p.6). These collaborative activities supported Breeding's view that "sharing materials is one of the most obvious ways that public libraries can assist their colleagues in the schools" (2015, p.15).

*Opportunities Gained*

Moreland and Kammer (2020b) posits that "Collaboration between school and public librarians has many benefits for the institutions, the communities they serve, and the librarians themselves" (p.31). It offers a myriad of mutually beneficial opportunities to the parties engaged, as collaborative initiatives are usually driven by the need to make the best of scarce resources (Breeding 2015, p.14). Moreland and Kammer (2020a) furthers that collaboration between public and school libraries helped to improve the services for each library by making them more efficient (p. 44). Public and school library collaboration creates friendships, inspires new ideas, and develops supportive advocacy networks (p.41). School and Public librarians can also work together to co-teach programs, benefit from shared funding, collaborate on projects, and build shared collections (p.44).

*Challenges Encountered*

Public and school and librarians have long expressed that challenges stemming from differences in their working environment impedes collaboration. These include variances in

library budgets; unfamiliarity among the librarians with the system in which the other worked; and the busy schedules of school librarian's which impacted their participation in school and public library programming (Kammer and Moreland 2020b, p. 44). Yuen and Liew echoed that the Covid-19 lockdown halted school and public collaborations significantly in early 2020 (p.7-8). Other challenges experienced include operational adjustments in accordance with pandemic preparedness policies, information provision, digital migration of services, workplace arrangements and concerns, health concerns, countering misinformation, partnerships with industry, and creativity in the organization (Ashiq and Mahmood 2022, p. 6-8).

## Methodology

The mixed method approach which employs aspects of both quantitative methods and qualitative procedures (Creswell 2009) was used to collect data from select groups of public library staff, teachers and teacher librarians. Quantitative data was obtained from online questionnaires distributed to participants involved in the coordination of collaborative initiatives. Semi-structured virtual interviews were used to collect qualitative data to furnish the study with diverse viewpoints. Permission was sought from the principal of each school for the teachers and teacher librarians to participate in the research. The researchers uses pseudonyms to disguise the name of the schools and the responses given will be kept in confidence and only be used for the purpose of the research. Data collection span one month with the online questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The virtual interviews will consist of open-ended questions and last approximately fifteen (15) minutes. Participants were required to sign a consent form to have their responses recorded. The presentation of data is structured according to the research questions. The software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) aided in conversion of the findings into percentages collated in the form of tables, graphs and figures to make the data presentation meaningful and ready for analysis. The researchers used the qualitative responses to develop themes (Creswell 2009) and tabulated on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet in preparation for analysis. See pictorial illustration of the procedure of the study:
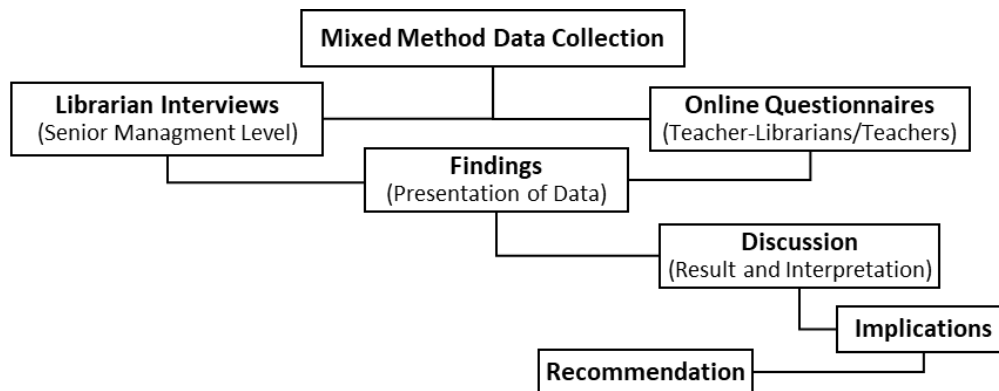
**Figure 1.** *The Procedures of the Study*

**Population and Sampling**

The population of the study consists of seventy-seven (77) schools at the infant, primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The schools that were involved in the collaborative activities were located in both the urban and rural areas. Because of the small number of schools in the population, all the schools were included in the research. Purposive sampling was used to select fifteen (15) librarians at the senior management level who participated in the collaborative process to collect the qualitative data.

**Data Collection Instruments**

The online questionnaire consists of five (5) sections with fifteen (15) closed-ended questions to provide objective and reliable responses (Creswell 2009). Section 1 collects demographic data and the other sections collects data based on the research questions. The interview schedule contains five (5) sections with sixteen (16) in-depth exploratory interview questions to collect detailed views from participants (Creswell 2009).

## Preliminary Findings & Discussion

This section presents tabulated representation of public and school library collaboration based on school representatives and public librarians surveyed and interviewed respectively across all fourteen (14) parishes. The findings are produced from Forty-seven (47) respondents representing 61% of the total Schools surveyed and thirteen (13) Public Librarians at the

senior management level including: a Director, Regional Directors and Senior Librarians interviewed. Six themes emerged from the findings (communication methods; purpose and reasons for collaboration; collaborative strategies; opportunities gained; and collaborative constraints) are summarized in Tables 1-7.

The discussion offers analysis of data which includes the merging of the quantitative and the qualitative results to support and corroborate the findings. The section provides descriptions of the quantitative findings embedded with narrative from the interview responses to provide richer and fuller analyses. The researcher provides objective analysis and uses the literature to note any similarity or differences in the findings. Photographs with the permission of those involved are used to support the findings and give the reader a clearer view of the collaborative initiatives carried out.

## Implications and Conclusions

The Jamaica Library Service (JLS) is uniquely mandated to provide both a public and school library service islandwide. The Jamaican public and school library system adapted global best practices by expanding online services to remain connected with the communities they served while charting a path towards the new normal. During the COVID-19 pandemic collaboration between public and school libraries was integral to teaching and learning activities while face-to-face classes were suspended and also aided increasing awareness of the resources and services offered by the public library. Public and school libraries collaboration during the pandemic was extremely important and served as a means of reinforcing the relevance of public and school libraries in support of the education system. This was achieved through provision of resource materials; spaces for teachers and students to access classes and islandwide distribution of ICT devices.

### Recommendations

It is recommended that the Jamaica Library Service and other public and school libraries in the Caribbean region increase collaborative efforts to strengthen support for teaching and learning and the overall education process. This section details six major recommendations to achieve this goal.

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## Biographies

**Maureen Thompson** holds the position of Director General, Jamaica Library Service.

**Kishma L. Simpson** holds the position of Senior Director, Jamaica Library Service. She has a wealth of experience which spans over 25 years in several positions within the organization such as Senior Librarian, Director-Special Projects, Director, Public Library Network, Director, and Events & Conference Management. She has worked extensively in marketing and programme and events planning and general management. Miss Simpson is a graduate of the University of the West Indies (UWI) with a Master of Science degree in Human Resource Development and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Library and Information Science. Miss Simpson is certified in Business Administration, Enterprise Risk Management, Change Management and Supervisory Management.

**Natoyna Garwood** holds the position of Regional Director, Region 1 at the Jamaica Library Service. Currently serving as Chair of the organization's Research and Publication Committee. Mrs. Garwood has worked in various capacities within the library and information profession for more than a decade. She is the Honorary Secretary of the Library and Information Association of Jamaica (LIAJA) as well as the Assistant Administrator and Facebook Assistant Manager for the Government Libraries Information Network of Jamaica (GLINJa). Mrs. Garwood is a graduate of the University of the West Indies (UWI) with a Masters in Library and Information Studies and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Language Communications and Society.

**Lorraine McLean** holds the position of Regional Director, Region 5 at the Jamaica Library Service. She also serves as Vice Chair of the organization's Research and Publication Committee. Miss McLean is a graduate of the University of the West Indies (UWI) with a Masters of Arts degree and Bachelor of Arts degree in Library and Information Studies. She has been a librarian with the Jamaica Library Service for the past 31 years.