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Ethiopian National Project: Evaluation of the Impact of the Scholastic Assistance Program on Achievements, 2008-2010

Dalia Ben-Rabi◆Ruth Baruj-Kovarsky◆Viacheslav Konstantinov

The study was initiated and funded by the Ethiopian National Project

The Ethiopian National Project (ENP) is a partnership between the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA), the Government of Israel, representatives of Ethiopian Jewish community organizations, the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in Israel and Keren Hayesod-UIA

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RESEARCH REPORT

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Related Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute Publications

Evaluation Reports on the ENP:

Ben-Rabi, D.; Baruj-Kovarsky, R.; Konstantinov, V. 2011. ***The Ethiopian National Project: Scholastic Assistance Program – Evaluation Study***. RR-577-11 (Hebrew, with English abstract).

Baruj-Kovarsky, R.; Cohen-Navot, M. 2009**.** ***The Ethiopian National Project: Youth Centers 2008, Second Evaluation Report.*** RR-531-09 (Hebrew, with English abstract).

Baruj-Kovarsky, R.; Cohen-Navot, M. 2009**.** ***The Ethiopian National Project: Program for the Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Abuse 2008 – Evaluation Study*****.** RR-544-09 (Hebrew, with English abstract).

Cohen-Navot, M.; Baruj-Kovarsky, R.; Levi, D.; Konstantinov, V. 2007. ***The Ethiopian National Project: An Evaluation Study of the SPACE Program Scholastic Assistance, Youth Centers 2005/6-2006/7*****.** ES-27-07 (English).

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Cohen-Navot, M.; Levi, D.; Konstantinov, V.; Awadyeh, I.; Baruj-Kovarsky, R.; Hasin, T. 2009. ***National Study of Primary and Junior High School Practices to Advance Low-Achieving Students: Final Report.*** RR-509-09 (Hebrew).

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Executive Summary

The Ethiopian National Project (ENP) was established in 2004 with the goal of enabling Ethiopian-Israeli youth to fulfill their potential and increase their chances of social mobility and future integration into the labor market. The project comprises a variety of interventions, the most significant among them being the scholastic assistance program, which is the subject of this report.

The Ethiopian National Project (ENP) is a partnership between the Jewish Federation of North America, the Government of Israel and Jewish communities in the Diaspora, representatives of Ethiopian-Israeli community organizations, the Jewish Agency for Israel, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in Israel and Keren Hayesod-UIA. The project is jointly funded by the Government of Israel and the Jewish communities.

The project is distinctive in that it involves members of the Ethiopian-Israeli community in all aspects of its work, including implementation, supervision, strategic planning and decision-making as well as in the overall governing board.

The program includes a number of complementary components: a scholastic assistance program, youth outreach centers (programs), leadership training and developing local steering committees and municipal involvement. This report focuses on SPACE – the scholastic assistance program.

The program provides scholastic assistance to Ethiopian-Israeli students in junior high and high schools (grades 7 through 12) and is designed to improve their scholastic achievements and reduce the gap between their achievements and those of the non-Ethiopian students, with a special emphasis on matriculation exams. To address these goals, the program provides scholastic, emotional and social interventions based on a culturally sensitive approach that takes account of their unique needs. The program has been implemented over the years through leading non-profit organizations that specialize in academic assistance.[1]

In 2011/12 the program was implemented in 19 localities and some 3,800 students participated, so it remains the largest single intervention program for Ethiopian-Israeli secondary school students. It reaches some 22% of all Ethiopian-Israeli students from grades 7-12. The extent of the participation in the program reached its peak in 2007/8. In that year, the scholastic assistance program was implemented in 26 localities, and some 6,700 students in grades 7 through 12 participated. Since 2008/9 there has been a decline in the total number of participants, due to a significant decrease in the funding available to the program.

[1] In 2005, Branco-Weiss was the only program implementer; in 2006, it was joined by ORT-Israel, the Israel Association of Community Centers and Maksam (an Ethiopian-sponsored NGO). In 2007, Beit Tsippora joined the project and Edusystems joined the program in 2011.

Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute (MJB) has been carrying out an extensive ongoing evaluation of the project since it began, focusing on the scholastic assistance and other programs (such as youth centers).

The current report is one in a series that examines the scholastic impact of the program. In previous reports, we presented evaluation findings about the implementation of the program, the satisfaction of students and school principals with the program, and their assessment of its contribution. We found that the principals and students were very satisfied with the program, and that most of them felt that the program contributed to a great or very great extent to the progress of the students, in both scholastic and social-emotional aspects. We also reported on the impact of the program on the success of the Ethiopian students on the 12th grade matriculation exams in three previous reports as the program developed.

This new report is particularly important because for the first time we are able to present data for a significant number of schools at which the 12th graders have participated in the program for at least three years (2008-2010). This is significant because it is expected that the longer the students participate in the program, the greater the impact. In this report we also examined the work carried out by the program to advance junior high school students to higher study tracks in English and math, as well as some evidence of the impact of those efforts on the students' achievements. Overall, the findings are very positive and indicate an improvement in the key indicators over time.

The Impact of the Program on the Achievements of 12th Grade Students in Matriculation Exams in 2009/10

The measurement of the impact of the program focuses on two major indicators: the rate of eligibility for matriculation certificates (including certificates that meet university admission criteria), and the ability of the Ethiopian students to integrate into higher level study tracks in both junior high and high school.

The achievements are measured by the success in matriculation exams based on data from the Ministry of Education. These exams are taken in Israel at the end of high school and are used to measure the level of achievement of high school students and also serve as the basis for the determination of eligibility for higher education.

In presenting the achievements we use several measures to represent different levels of success on the matriculation exams:

- Eligibility for partial matriculation certificate – which enables admission to advanced professional studies
- Eligibility for matriculation certificate
- Eligibility for matriculation certificate with a high level of English (academic matriculation) – a pre-requisite for universities

On all these measures, the achievements of the program participants were much better than those of the non-participants. However, in order to estimate to what extent those higher achievements reflect the impact of the program we carried out two analyses that enable us to isolate the program impact:

1. A comparison of the progress of the ***Ethiopian-Israeli students*** in the program with that of the ***non-Ethiopian*** students who study at *the* ***same schools***. This comparison can be used to separate the program's impact from that of other factors affecting all students in the education system, and these specific schools in particular, such as changes in the level of exams, or changes in school staff.
2. A comparison of the progress of the ***Ethiopian-Israeli students*** in the program with that of ***Ethiopian-Israeli*** students with ***similar characteristics*** in ***similar schools***, who did not participate in the program. This comparison enables us to separate the program's impact from other factors affecting the achievements of Ethiopian-Israeli students nationally.

The analysis was carried out for the 28 schools which participated in the program for at least 3 years, and examined the changes in the differences between participating students and comparison groups over the period 2008/10.

An increasing difference between program participants and non-participants, and a reduction in the gap between program participants and non-Ethiopian students are both indicators of the growing impact of the program over the years.

1. Changes in the Differences in Achievement between Program Participants and non-Ethiopian Students at the Same Schools, 2007/8-2009/10

As we can see in both figures, the achievements of the non-Ethiopian students have not changed over the years while, by contrast, there was a significant improvement in the achievements of the program participants for both matriculation certificates and academic matriculation certificates. The improvement grew over time as the number of years of exposure to the program increased. Thus the gap between the Ethiopian-Israeli and non-Ethiopian students was significantly reduced.

- The percentage eligible for a matriculation certificate among Ethiopian-Israeli participants increased from 49% to 62%. In contrast, the non-Ethiopian students did not improve, and thus the gap declined from 20 to 7 percentage points. (Figure 1a).
- The percentage eligible for an academic matriculation certificate among Ethiopian-Israeli participants increased from 29% to 44%. In contrast, the non-Ethiopian students did not improve, and thus the gap declined from 31 to 14 percentage points. (Figure 1b).

Figure 1: Percentage Eligible for Matriculation among Ethiopian-Israeli ENP Participants and Non-Ethiopian 12th Graders in 28 Schools that Participated in the Program since 2008, by Year

Figure 1a: Matriculation

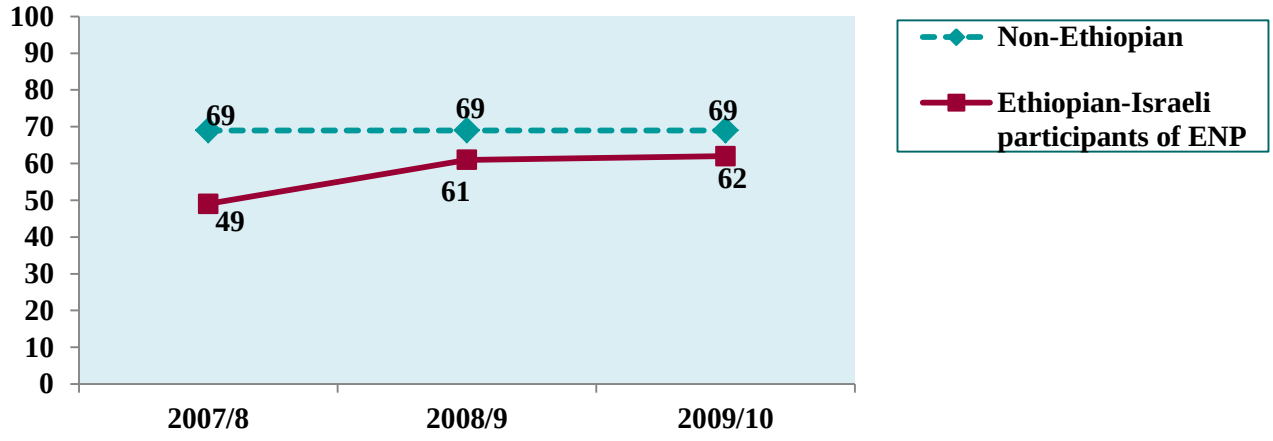
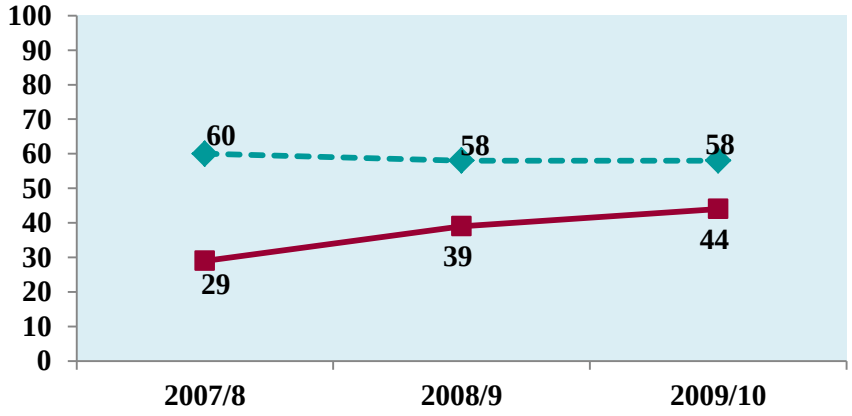


Figure 1b: Academic Matriculation



2. Changes in the Differences in Achievement between Program Participants and non-Participant Ethiopian-Israeli 12th Graders with Similar Characteristics, 2007/8 – 2009/10

The second analysis of the impact of the program examined the difference between the achievements of program participants in the 28 schools and those of non-participant Ethiopian-Israeli students, with similar characteristics and from schools in which the Ethiopian-Israeli students had similar achievements prior to the program.

Using the Ministry of Education data on all secondary schools in the system, we created a comparison group, in which each participating student was matched to a non-participating student from a school without the program.

As we see in the figures below, we found a significant increase over time in the program impact on the percentage of those eligible for both matriculation certificates and academic matriculation certificates:

- In 2008,there was no significant difference in achievement between the participant and non-participant students on the matriculation exams
- In 2010, after 3 years in the program, the advantages of the participants in the program were as follows:
  - ***Eligibility for matriculation certificate:*** the percentage eligible rose from 49% in 2007/8 to 62% in 2009/10 among program participants. By contrast, the comparison group of non-participants did not make any progress over this period. Thus, the program participants had an advantage of 20 percentage points over the non-participants in 2009/10 (62% vs. 42%). (Figure 2a).
  - ***Eligibility for matriculation certificate that meets university admission criteria:*** the percentage eligible rose from 29% in 2007/8 to 44% in 2009/10 while the non-participants did not make any progress. Thus, in 2009/10 the participants had an advantage of 17 percentage points over the non-participants (44% vs.27%). (Figure 2b).

Figure 2: Percentage Eligible for Matriculation Certificates among 12th Graders in the Program in 28 Schools Participating in the Program since 2008, and in the Comparison Group, by Year

Figure 2a: Matriculation

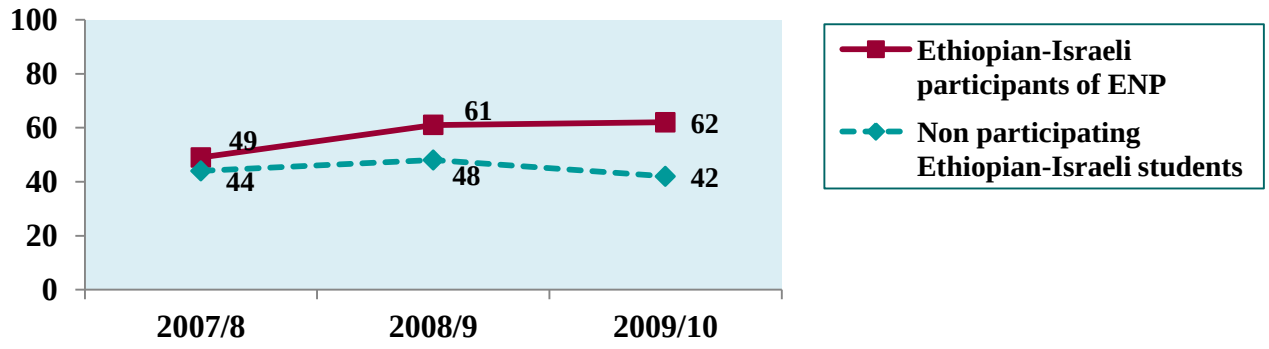
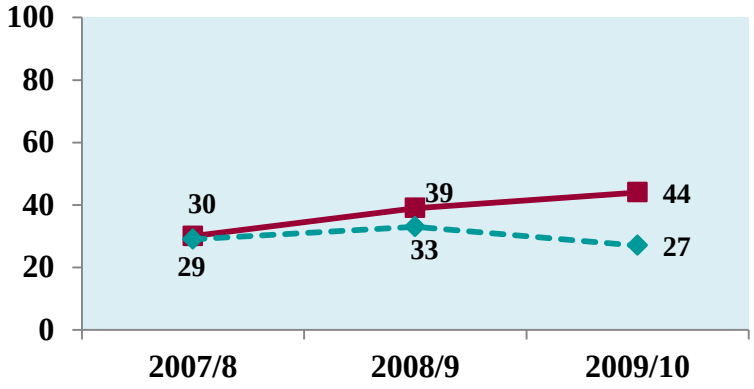


Figure 2b: Academic Matriculation



Scholastic assistance programs can have a differential impact on students with varying levels of scholastic ability. We divided the students into three groups, according to their achievements on national exams taken in 8th grade (GEMS – Growth and Effectiveness Measures for Schools – *Meitzav* exams). We compared all program participants from 2008 to 2010 who took the GEMS exams in eighth grade and got the lowest scores, with students having similar scores who did not participate in the program. The impact of the program is particularly evident among students with the poorest results.

- As expected, the matriculation achievements of these students were much lower than those of the total program participants
- However, the program impact (i.e. the difference, in percentages, between their achievements and those of a comparison group with similar earlier achievements) was greater than the average impact on the total participating group on most measures
- Especially impressive is the impact on eligibility for an academic matriculation certificate – only 6.5% of the comparison group achieved that, compared with over twice that – 13.5% – of program participants

Summary

In conclusion, the study findings show that the program has had a major impact on the eligibility for a matriculation certificate among the Ethiopian-Israeli participants and the gap was almost eliminated. There was also a very significant impact on eligibility for matriculation certificate meeting university admission criteria where the gap was dramatically reduced. This is in addition to the program's contribution to the wellbeing of the students and their scholastic achievements throughout junior high and high school that was found in earlier reports.

The two methods used to examine the impact of the program led to similar results. Moreover we saw that the greater the number of years that the students were exposed to the program (i.e., they started receiving assistance when they were in lower grades), the greater the impact. All of this enhances our confidence in the findings.

It must be remembered that in earlier years, a greater number of students participated in the program and some of the former participants had to leave the program due to budget cuts; nevertheless, it is possible that their partial participation in the program, in junior classes, contributed to their results in 12th grade.

The program has not yet reached its full potential. It was only in the last academic year that students who had received assistance through the program from the start of junior high school graduated from high school. Moreover, some of the program's efforts (e.g., placing students in higher ability groups in English and Math in junior high schools, which contributes to their achieving higher levels of matriculation certificates) were only developed in recent years. In the

coming years, it will be possible to continue to examine the impact of the program on students who were able to take maximum advantage of all that the program could offer.

As noted in the introduction, only 22% of the students in grades 7-12 participated in the program in 2011/12 and a somewhat higher percentage in 2007/8. As shown in the report, even when we look at the total population of Ethiopian students – participants and non-participants, we find that in the years since the program has begun, there has been an improvement in the matriculation results of all Ethiopian-Israeli students. The improved achievements of the students participating in the program contributed significantly to this.

However, there remain significant gaps between the achievements of Ethiopian students as a whole and of those of all Jewish students. Moreover, we also show in the report that the gaps are much greater for Ethiopian boys than Ethiopian girls. Furthermore, there is also a need to pay particular attention to the lower achievements of Ethiopian boys.

As more students will reach the 12th grade after having begun the program in junior high school and if it will be possible to expand the program in the years ahead to include a higher percentage of Ethiopian students, we expect it will be possible to further reduce the gaps between Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian students.

The study findings have been discussed with those implementing and funding the program, and they serve as the basis for further efforts to improve the program and continue its dissemination.