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ENGELBERG CENTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Ethiopian National Project: Scholastic Assistance Program – Evaluation Study

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

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Executive Summary

The Ethiopian National Project (ENP) was established in 2004 with the goal of helping 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. The program has been accompanied by an in-depth evaluation since its inception. In this report we present the findings for the 2008/9 school year.

The ENP is a unique partnership between the Jewish Federation of North America (JFNA), the Government of Israel, representatives of Ethiopian Jewish community organizations, the Jewish Agency for Israel, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in Israel and Keren Hayesod-UIA. This partnership is manifested in the representation of the partners in the governing bodies of the project and in the financial support for the program.

The ENP scholastic assistance program is provided to Ethiopian-Israeli students in junior high and high schools (grades 7 to 12) and is designed to improve their scholastic achievements, with a special emphasis on matriculation exams. To address these goals, the program provides interventions that provide after-school scholastic assistance as well as a range of activities focused on the emotional and social development of the participants. In addition, the program reaches out to parents to involve them in various ways. The program is implemented through the leading organizations in Israel that are involved in supplementary assistance to disadvantaged youth: The Branco-Weiss Institute, ORT-Israel, the Israel Association of Community Centers and Maksam (an Ethiopian sponsored NGO).

In addition, the ENP operates supplementary programs that focus on the support of families and expanding opportunities for meaningful after-school enrichment activities through a network of special social clubs.

In 2008/9, the scholastic assistance program was implemented in 96 schools in 24 localities and some 5,000 students participated.

1. The Study

The Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute was asked to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the program from the start of the program and has published a series of evaluation reports. The evaluation has provided regular feedback to support the ongoing improvement of the program and regular reports on the progress in achieving the program's goals. The current report relates to the evaluation of the program as it was implemented in 2008/9 and addresses three main aspects:

- ◆ The implementation of the program
- ◆ Satisfaction of the school principals and the participating students with the program and their assessment of its contribution

- ◆ Impact of the program on the scholastic achievements of the students on the high school matriculation exams in 2008/9.

In order to examine these three components, we used qualitative and quantitative study methods employing a broad range of information sources that enabled us to compare different perspectives on the program.

- ◆ In-depth interviews and focus groups with school principals and the regular classroom teachers, key national and regional staff at the ENP, coordinators and key staff of the program at each of the schools
- ◆ Participant observations of program activities
- ◆ Structured telephone interviews (questionnaires) with school principals and a comparison to the interviews carried out in 2007. We interviewed 83 principals of schools where at least 10 students participated (98% response rate).
- ◆ A self-report questionnaire completed by key staff involved in direct implementation of the program (some 73 interviews) and comparisons with the previous reports in 2007
- ◆ Self-report questionnaires filled in by students that participated. Altogether, 1,422 students were interviewed at a sample of 41 schools and frameworks (96% response rate among the students who participated in the program).
- ◆ The national data files of the Ministry of Education were used to examine the impact of the program on the achievements of the students on the matriculation exams.

2. Program Implementation

- ◆ The program provided extra instruction in small classes held in the afternoon, after regular school hours, usually on the school premises. On average, four hours per week of extra instruction were provided per student and most sessions were conducted in small groups (on average, 5 students). A light meal was provided for the participants.
- ◆ As reported by the principals, 74% of Ethiopian-Israeli students in the participating schools participated in ENP scholastic assistance program.
- ◆ The subjects in which most students received assistance were mathematics (66%) and English (42%). Fifty percent reported that they needed yet more assistance. They were primarily interested in assistance in additional subjects in which the program does not currently offer scholastic assistance.
- ◆ Alongside the scholastic assistance, the program also provided a broad range of activities addressing the students' social and emotional needs, carried out by special staff (youth counselors). These included personal counseling, empowerment workshops and enrichment activities. The program implementers, the school principals and the students reported that these activities made a very meaningful contribution to establishing a relationship with the students, enhancing their motivation, strengthening the involvement of the parents in the school and helping the students develop plans for the future.

- ◆ The various respondents suggested a number of ways to strengthen the program and its implementation. These included: extending the scholastic assistance to additional subjects, enhancing the students' regular participation and dealing with students who lack motivation.

3. Satisfaction with the Program and Assessment of its Contribution

3.1 The School Principals

- ◆ Most of the school principals (82%) reported high or very high satisfaction with the program.
- ◆ 71% felt the program responded appropriately to the needs of all or most of the participating students.
- ◆ 88% felt that the program responded to the needs of Ethiopian-Israeli students whose needs had not previously been met.
- ◆ 87% felt that the program enhanced the quality of interventions provided for the Ethiopian-Israeli students.

The vast majority felt that the program contributed to a great or very great extent in a range of areas:

- ◆ 71% reported that the program enhanced the academic achievements and 33% to helping the students move into a more advanced track.
- ◆ 66% felt that the program increased the students' motivation to learn.
- ◆ Overall, 74% felt that the program advanced the learning abilities of the participating students, in at least one of the areas examined.
- ◆ In all the areas examined, there was an increase in the satisfaction with the program between 2007 and 2009. The percentage of principals who reported that the program had a great or very great contribution to the participants rose from 68% in 2007 to 80% in 2009.

3.2 The Participating Students

The students also reported very high satisfaction with the program to a great or very great extent.

- ◆ 87% reported they were satisfied with the scholastic assistance classes.
- ◆ 90% would recommend the program to their friends.
- ◆ 90% reported that they felt the teachers providing the assistance really cared about them.

The students were asked what the program had contributed to them personally.

In the area of scholastic achievements:

- ◆ 82% reported that participation in the program had increased their motivation to study to a great or very great extent.

- ◆ 45% of the students felt that their academic achievements had improved to a great or very great extent due to the program and almost all students reported that the program had contributed to their academic achievements at least to some extent.
- ◆ 41% of the students reported that the program had contributed to a great or very great extent in moving them up to a more advanced track for one or more subjects.
- ◆ 84% of the students considered that the program had helped them to a great or very great extent in at least one of the aspects examined.

In the areas of social and emotional needs:

- ◆ 65% of the students reported that the program contributed to improving their self-confidence to a great or very great extent.
- ◆ 50% reported a range of additional benefits, such as strengthening their involvement in school activities.
- ◆ 45% of the students reported that the program contributed to strengthening ties with friends.
- ◆ 44% of the students reported that the program contributed to helping them develop plans and goals for the future.
- ◆ 80% of the students reported that they had benefitted from the program to a great or very great extent in at least one socio-emotional aspect.

4. Contribution of the Program to Improved Matriculation Results

A key focus of the program was on improving the matriculation results of the participants. Eligibility for matriculation certificates and the quality of the certificates are key measures of scholastic success and are requirements for acceptance at institutions of higher education. However, it is important to note that the program can also contribute to general achievements – such as completing 12 years of education and developing motivation, good learning habits and persistence that contribute to the future opportunities of those not going on to higher education.

4.1 The Gap in Matriculation Achievements between Ethiopian-Israeli and all Jewish Students in 2005 on the Eve of the Implementation of the Program

A major motivation for the initiation of the program was the very large gaps in achievements in matriculation exams in 2005.

- ◆ The percentage of twelfth-grade Ethiopian-Israeli students eligible for regular matriculation certificate was 36% among Ethiopian-Israeli students vs. 59% among all Jewish students.
- ◆ The gap in the percentage of Ethiopian-Israeli students eligible for matriculation certificates that met university entrance criteria was much greater: 18% vs. 52%.

These gaps emphasize the magnitude of the challenge facing the scholastic assistance program at the time of its inception.

4.2 The Analysis of the Contribution of the Program to the Achievements of the Participants

The level of achievements in 2009 of twelfth-grade Ethiopian-Israeli students participating in the program (599 students) was much greater than that of all Ethiopian-Israeli twelfth graders (2,736 students).

- ◆ 57% of the Ethiopian-Israelis who graduated twelfth grade at schools with the program were eligible for a matriculation certificate (vs. 40% of all Ethiopian-Israelis).
- ◆ 34% met university entrance criteria (vs. 24% of all Ethiopian-Israelis).

Importantly, however, even before the program began in 2005, the achievements of the Ethiopian-Israeli students at the schools where the program was implemented were higher than those of Ethiopian-Israeli students at the other schools.

Therefore, in order to assess the impact of the program on the achievements of the participants it was necessary to compare the achievements of participants to students with similar characteristics¹ at schools without the program. This enables us to estimate what would have happened had the program not been implemented, as the difference in the results with the comparative group (control group) can be interpreted as measuring the impact of the program.

It is important to note, however, that the comparison schools may also have had various special assistance programs in which the Ethiopian-Israeli students participated. Indeed, the program was not implemented in schools that already had some significant intervention program. Thus, we are comparing the additional value of the ENP as opposed to whatever other forms of assistance existed in the comparison schools.

We conducted two analyses:

a. The comparison group was selected according to characteristics of schools

An analysis examining the impact of the program on all twelfth graders participating in the program in 2009 (599 students): This took into account the previous achievements of the Ethiopian-Israeli students at school level (the percentage of eligibles among the Ethiopian-Israeli students at the school prior to implementation of the program).

¹ The comparison group was selected according to the students' personal characteristics (gender) and the characteristics of their schools: State or State Religious and the percentages of students eligible for matriculation certificates among all students in the current year and the percentage of those eligible for matriculation certificates among Ethiopian-Israeli students at the school in 2005. An additional analysis took account of the students' results in the GEMS Growth and Effectiveness Measures for Schools (*meitzav*) exams when they were in 8th grade (in 2005) instead of the achievements of Ethiopian-Israeli students in matriculation exams in 2005.

b. The comparison group was selected according to characteristics of schools and the individual results of the Ethiopian-Israeli students in the 8th grade achievement exams.

This comparison additionally took into account the previous personal achievements of the students participating in the program, as expressed in the 8th grade national achievement exams (GEMS or *meitzav*) of the Ministry of Education. This analysis was conducted only for those students examined in the GEMS exams in 2005, when they were in 8th grade (334 students).

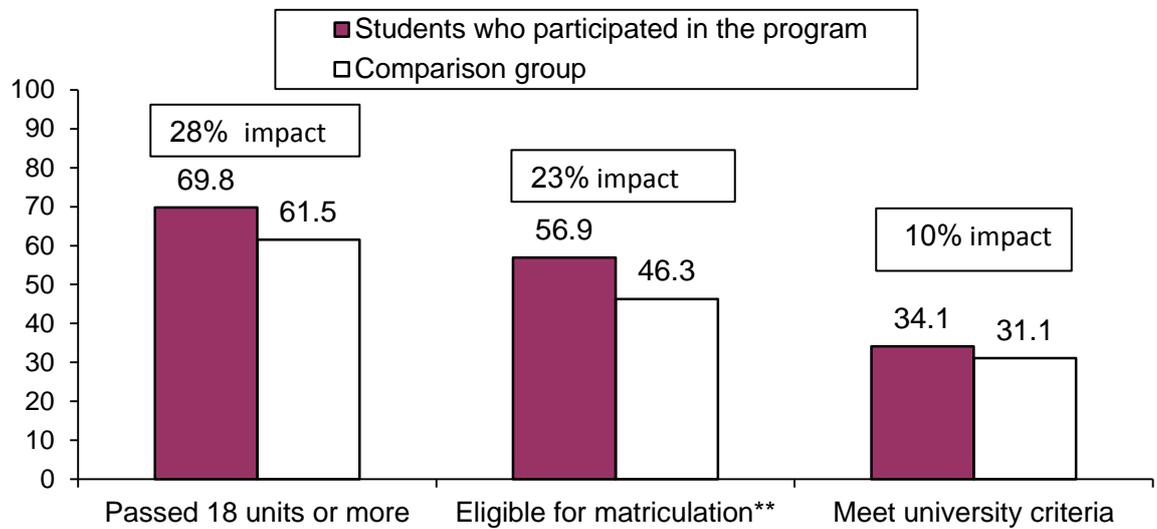
In both analyses we find very significant program impacts on the achievements of the students in the following measures (see figures):

- ◆ Eligibility for regular matriculation certificate
- ◆ Eligibility for matriculation meeting university requirements (a matriculation certificate that meets university entrance criteria is conditional upon passing at least 4 units in the English exam).
- ◆ Passing at least 18 subject units on the matriculation exams, as opposed to the 21 units required for receipt of a matriculation certificate. In other words, these are students who were very close to receiving a matriculation certificate and could possibly complete the requirements in later years.
- ◆ Successfully passing the specific matriculation subject units in math, English and Hebrew.

4.2.1 Estimate of the Impact of the Program: The Comparison Group Selected According to School Characteristics

- ◆ Eligibility for matriculation: The percentage of those eligible for matriculation was 56.9% among the program participants vs. 46.3% among the comparison group that did not participate. This is an improvement of 10.6 percentage points, or 23%, among those who participated in the program.
- ◆ Other measures: Similarly, there was an improvement in the other measures: successfully passing the matriculation exams in math, English and Hebrew and the percentage of students who passed at least 18 study units
- ◆ Eligibility for matriculation meeting university requirements: There was an improvement of 10% in the percentage of students whose scholastic achievements in the matriculation exams met the university requirements; this is not statistically significant.

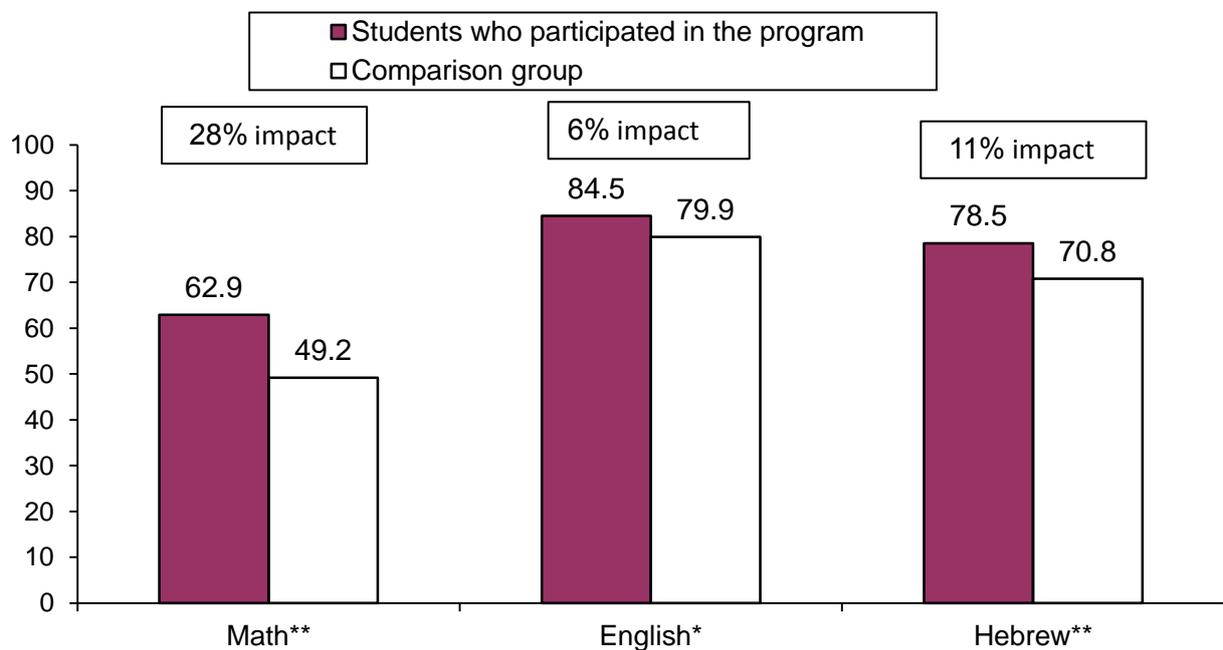
Figure 1: Percentage of Participating Students and Students in the Comparison Group who Achieved Various Scholastic Achievements (2008/9) and the Impact of the Program in Percentage Terms



** p<0.01

¹ n=599. The comparison group consisted of 521 students in schools not participating in the program

Figure 2: Percentage of Students Passing Matriculation in Math, English and Hebrew among Participants and the Comparison Group (2008/9) and the Impact of the Program in Percentage Terms



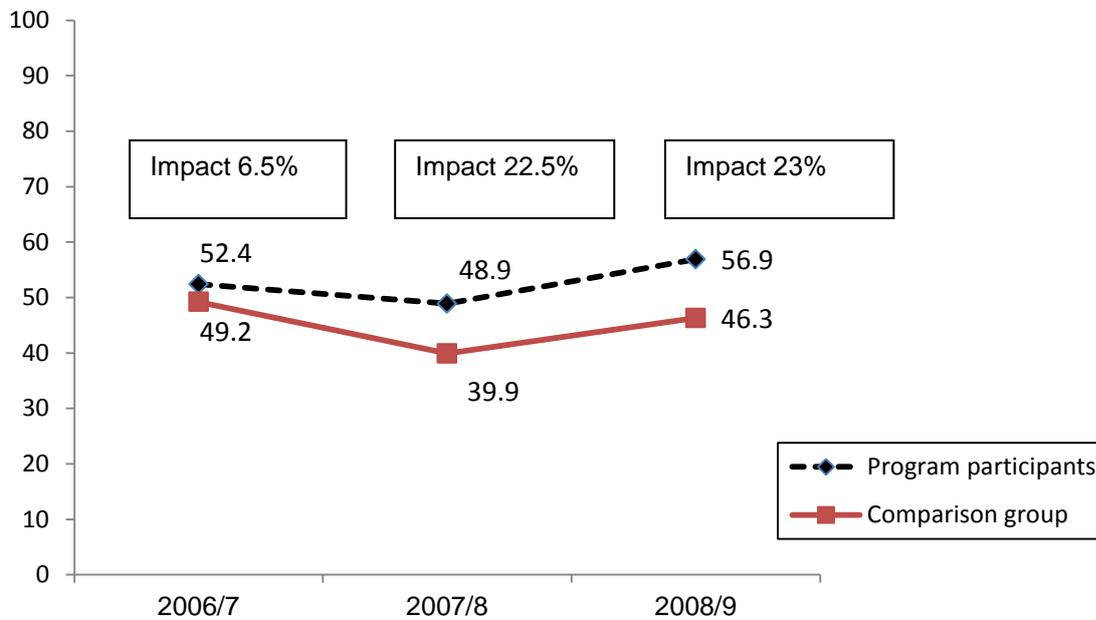
** p<0.01 * p<0.05

¹ n=599. The comparison group consisted of 521 students in schools not participating in the program

Changes in the impact of the program between 2006/7 – 2008/9²:

From year to year those reaching twelfth grade had the opportunity for greater and greater years of exposure to the program. Thus, in 2009 most of the twelfth graders who participated in the program (approximately 80%) were at schools participating in the program for the fourth year, that is, they had participated for four out of the maximum six years of program participation. In 2007, the exposure was much less. Consistently we find that between 2007 and 2009 there was a significant increase in the impact of the program on the percentage of those eligible for regular matriculation. The difference between program participants and the comparison groups representing the impact of the program rose from 3.2 percentage points (6.5%) in 2007 to 10.6 percentage points (22.9%) in 2009.

Figure 3: Percentage Eligible for Full Matriculation Certificate among Twelfth Graders Participating in the Program and those in the Comparison Group, 2006/7-2008/9, and the Impact of the Program in Percentage Terms



² A fixed number of schools according to schools that participated in the program in 2009.

4.2.2 Estimate of the Impact of the Program: The Comparison Group Selected According to School Characteristics and Individual Results on the 8th Grade GEMS (*Meitzav*) Exams

- ◆ From the second analysis, we see that the improvement in the eligibility for matriculation of the students who participated in the program in comparison to those who did not was maintained even when the comparison was made with students with similar eighth-grade achievements prior to the program.
- ◆ In this analysis, we even find that there was a more significant improvement in the percentage of students who met the university entrance criteria: an improvement of 5.8 percentage points or 19% in favor of the students who participated in the program (from 31% to 36.8%).

5. Conclusion

The principals and the Ethiopian-Israeli students who participated were very satisfied with the program and reported a broad range of significant contributions to strengthening the Ethiopian-Israeli students who participated. The analysis of the national data of the Ministry of Education indicated that the program significantly contributed to improved scholastic achievement, as reflected in the success on the national matriculation exams at the end of high school. This was also confirmed by the reports of the principals and the students themselves.

The study also brought to light several issues relating to the implementation of the program and the achievement of its goals, which are serving as a basis for the discussion of ways to strengthen the program.

Furthermore, there is a need to continue to strengthen the students' matriculation results, with an emphasis on success in the English exams, which is the barrier to obtaining a matriculation that meets university entrance criteria.

The study findings have been submitted to the program implementers and funders and discussed at length with them. There are a number of efforts in process to address the implications of the findings.

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Special thanks to the school principals who participated in the survey and provided the information that made this study possible and to the school staff whom we interviewed. We are grateful to the Ethiopian-Israeli students who so fully cooperated with the interviews.

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