



ENGELBERG CENTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The Ethiopian National Project – Scholastic Assistance Program Evaluation of the Implementation and Contribution of the Socio-Emotional Support Program in 2014/2015

Summary

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

The study was commissioned and funded by the Ethiopian National Project

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1. Introduction

The ENP scholastic assistance program for Ethiopian-Israelis in junior high and high schools (7th through 12th grades) has been implemented since 2004/5 as a supplementary after-school program. The program goal is to improve the scholastic achievements of these students and reduce the gaps between them and the other students, with a particular emphasis on the matriculation exams, by providing scholastic, emotional, and social support. The program pays special attention to the unique needs of the Ethiopian-Israeli students and incorporates joint activities for Ethiopian-Israeli students and non-Ethiopian students.

The Ethiopian National Project 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. This partnership is manifested in the representation of the partners in the governing bodies of the project and in the financial partnership.

After-school programs for youth are based on the assumption that making additional support available beyond the services provided by the school is likely to contribute to the participants, their families and their communities, and keep the participants away from risk behaviors (Halpern, 1999). Afternoon programs reduce the amount of time that the adolescents spend on their own, promote desirable social behavior, provide a convenient time for intervention programs (e.g., to help participants with their studies or prevent the use of addictive substances), give the participants a chance to establish supportive relationships with adults (Gottfredson et al., 2007), and provide positive opportunities for them to learn and develop according to their needs. In their 2003 survey, Hall et al. present studies showing the considerable contribution of afternoon programs for youth in a broad range of areas including: improving attitude and attendance at school, reinforcing aspirations for higher education, reducing school dropout rates, improving scholastic skills and achievements, and reducing risk behaviors.

Alongside the scholastic aspect, like other afternoon programs (see surveys by Ben-Rabi et al., 2010¹, and Durlak et al., 2010), the ENP scholastic assistance program focuses on socio-emotional support for the students, i.e., promoting social and developmental outcomes, such as social skills, self-esteem and self-image, initiative and leadership skills (Akale, 2015).² Within this framework, the students in the ENP scholastic assistance program participate in various activities:

- ◆ Recreational, enrichment or empowerment activities outside of the school
- ◆ Workshops (e.g., personal empowerment, preparation for military service, enrichment in various subjects, etc.)
- ◆ Individual and group support meetings with a member of the program staff (most of whom are Ethiopian-Israelis).

Most of the schools also maintain contact with the parents and work to strengthen knowledge of Ethiopian culture and heritage by introducing the culture to all the students in the school, for example by marking the Sigd holiday and the memorial day for those who perished in the Sudan. These and other joint activities for program participants and non-Ethiopian students are oriented toward strengthening the integration of the Ethiopian-Israelis into society as a whole.

Since 2004/5, the Myers-JDC Brookdale Institute (MJB) has examined the work of the project through an evaluation study of the key components of the program. The study's goals are to contribute to the ongoing development and design of the program and to provide information on which to base decision-making and planning for further dissemination of the program. Over the years, MJB has conducted evaluation studies examining different aspects of the scholastic assistance program from various angles: the students' actual achievements, and the perspectives of the school principals, the program implementers, and the participants themselves.

¹ Ben-Rabi, D and Amiel, S. 2010. *After-School Educational Programs: Goals, Work Practices and Best Practice Indicators*. RR-567-10. Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute: Jerusalem (Hebrew).

² Akale, R. 2014. *Quarterly Review 2013/14, December-March 2014*. Ethiopian National Project: Jerusalem (Hebrew).

2. Study Method

The study goal was to examine the provision of the socio-emotional support to the students and its contribution from the perspective of the participants, the program staff, and members of the school staff. In addition, the study enabled us to learn about the arrangements made by the schools and localities to implement the support. In this way, it will add to the understanding of the subject with regard to a range of programs working in similar areas.

The information was collected from 6 schools, representing the different implementing organizations. At each school, interviews were conducted with:

1. Staff of the implementing organizations (general director: local or regional and the social coordinator)
2. Members of the school staff (school principal or vice-principal and the school's program coordinator)
3. A focus group of program participants.

In order to learn about the characteristics of the support provided by each of the implementing organizations and their work practices, we conducted interviews with the program director of each organization (ORT, Branco-Weiss, the Israel Association of Community Centers and Edusystems) and with regional directors of the ENP in the areas where the schools chosen for the study were located (two interviews).

Altogether, interviews were conducted with 26 respondents and 6 focus groups in which a total of 28 students participated.

3. Main Findings

- ♦ ***The goals of the socio-emotional support:*** According to the respondents, the socio-emotional support for the students has several specific goals aimed at empowering the students:
 - Conceptualizing the future: *"The goal is to build a picture of the future, what I want to be when I grow up and how will I deal with difficulties in order to achieve it"* (school principal).

- Strengthening self-efficacy: *"Give the children a further push – 'I can do it, I'm capable'"* (general director).
 - Strengthening community identity: *"It's important for the children to be proud of their culture and return to their roots"* (social coordinator).
 - Enrichment: *"Help the children to see things that they don't see from home"* (regional director).
 - Emotional support as a means to scholastic success: *"The empowerment course is much more important than a math course, because if you don't free your mind for study, even 20 more math courses won't help"* (school principal).
- ◆ **Implementation model:** As noted, the scholastic assistance program is made up of two interlinked components: scholastic assistance and socio-emotional support. The selection of content and activities varies among the schools and implementing organizations due to different work practices, the number of students in the program at each school, the amount of additional resources at the disposal of the school or organization, and the skills and preferences of the program staff at each school. In most of the schools the program is implemented by three key staff members:
- The general director, who is appointed by the implementing organization and whose responsibilities vary according to the job description of each organization: The main task of the directors is to provide scholastic assistance, but they are also involved in the planning and implementation of the socio-emotional support program.
 - The social coordinator, who is appointed by the implementing organization: Most of the social coordinators are college graduates and members of the Ethiopian-Israeli community and their work focuses on socio-emotional support. They also serve as role models for the adolescents.
 - The school coordinator, a member of the school staff appointed by the school: The school coordinators coordinate the program and it is their job to promote cooperation between the program and the school, by building joint responsibility, ensuring a high level of recruitment of students to the program and taking responsibility for the program teaching staff.

Sometimes the socio-emotional support is provided by the school coordinator and the local or regional director working together, rather than an Ethiopian-Israeli social coordinator. This depends on the implementation model in the locality and the number of students in the program.

- ◆ ***School involvement:*** The respondents from the program and school staffs gave positive reports about cooperation between the program and the school, and emphasized the importance of planning and collaboration to integrate the program into school activity and adapt the emotional aspects of the contents to the students' needs. The cooperation and involvement of the school are expressed in several areas:
 - Selecting students to participate in the program: *"We sit down as a team, think about which student is suitable for what, who needs empowerment, who needs emotional support"* (school principal).
 - Transfer of information about the participants to the school staff: *"The social coordinator often tells us things that they've told her, so that we'll know how to react, to behave and what to do. She complements the staff in a very significant way"* (school principal)
 - Including teachers from the school as teachers in the program: *"When (program) teachers are members of the school staff, that's ideal, because they goes back to the staff room with knowledge and exposure to the Ethiopian-Israelis [which they acquire from the pedagogic training provided by the implementing organization]"* (program director).
 - Planning and conducting the socio-emotional activities: *"It's very important that the school agrees with the contents we're providing. We involve them. After all, it's their school"* (social coordinator).
 - Conducting joint activities for Ethiopian-Israeli and non-Ethiopian students in the school: Some of the activities are conducted in cooperation with the school and are intended for all the students, such as events marking the Sigd holiday and the memorial service for those who perished in Sudan. These introduce the culture and history of the Ethiopian-Israeli students to all the students and create an opportunity for Ethiopian-Israeli and non-Israeli students to come together. Furthermore, in some of the schools, some of the activities are intended for all students in the same class or in a particular grade. Examples include meeting

with someone from the community who tells his story, either to serve as a role model or to enrich certain subject matter.

There are also cases where the ENP and school staffs develop activities that are suitable for all the students. For example, after the social protest by Ethiopian-Israelis in the spring of 2015, the ENP social coordinator together with the school social coordinator devised an activity suitable for an entire class, which would be given by the homeroom teacher. *"We met with the social coordinator, prepared lessons plans, gave some advice to the homeroom teachers, and the homeroom teachers imparted the contents to all the students."*

- ◆ ***Cooperation with other programs in the locality:*** Local cooperation is above all through the joint steering committees and collaboration between the ENP and the heads of the education departments. At the activity level, in some localities the cooperation goes beyond the schools and includes other organizations in the locality that provide particular services to Ethiopian-Israelis or to all students in the locality. These cooperative efforts make it possible to pool resources and to implement enrichment programs and social activities to a larger extent. The respondents noted several patterns of cooperation – with other schools in the same locality, with other programs for Ethiopian-Israelis in the locality, such as Aharai! Follow Me!, and with ENP youth centers.
- ◆ ***Contributions of the program:*** The respondents (program and school staff as well as students) noted that the socio-emotional support made a considerable contribution to everyone involved – the students themselves, the parents and the school.
 - ***Contribution to the students:*** The students noted several key contributions in the emotional area:
 - Personal development and empowerment: *"It helped us to understand ourselves." "It's a privilege to be in the program. I'm developing in all sorts of directions, not only in my studies." "The workshops increase our confidence."*
 - Conceptualizing the future: *"The program helps [you] to know what to do in the future." "We were taken to visit the university; they showed us that it's worth investing in our studies ... that we too can succeed."*

- Increasing motivation to study: *"The activities give you more energy to invest more."*
"They help you to realize your potential and to be motivated."
 - Someone to talk to: *"Without the coordinator, I feel as if there's nowhere to go. The coordinator helps, advises, sets you a target to reach."* *"When people needs help, they can speak to the community coordinator, who is encouraging and helps you think about your problems in a different way".*
 - Strengthening the bond with their parents: *"There was a meeting with our parents. It was fun. It brought us closer to our mothers and fathers."*
- ◆ The respondents noted that the contribution of the support and the scholastic assistance cannot be considered separately, and that the one enriches the other – scholastic success strengthens self-efficacy and empowerment enhances scholastic success.
- ***Contribution to the parents:*** Most of the respondents believe that strengthening the parents and their relationships with the school and with their children is an integral part of empowering the students. The respondents noted the increased involvement of the parents in the school and in the children's lives thanks to the intervention of the program staff, in particular the work of the social coordinator and the school coordinator.
 - ***Contribution to the school:*** The school principals noted the contribution of the program's resources to advancing the students' achievements and well-being. The professionals from the implementing organizations stressed that the program makes Ethiopian culture accessible to the entire school
- ◆ ***Challenges in providing the socio-emotional support and ways to improve it:*** The study findings indicate several areas in need of change, as reported by the respondents. These include:
- **Defined structure and budgeting for the socio-emotional support:** There is great variance among the schools, both in the budget allocated for socio-emotional activities and in the range of activities. The respondents indicated that they felt that despite its considerable contribution to the students and to the schools, the socio-emotional activities were not perceived to be equally important as the scholastic element. They pointed out the need to emphasize this component in the planning, supervision, and budget processes.

- More detailed definition and planning of the goals and methods of working with the parents including ways to increase their enlistment in activities
- Training and ongoing coaching for social coordinators in order to strengthen their skills in specific areas, such as working with parents and designing empowerment workshops, in order to implement those areas in all the schools.
- More efficient organization when the social coordinator works in a large number of schools
- Strengthening the coordination and pooling of resources with other programs in the localities in order to make it possible to broaden the range of activities offered to the students and provide services to a greater number of students
- Adding elements that are currently not included: Many respondents noted the needs for two types of intervention that are currently not included in the program's support and require specific professional knowledge: Professional emotional interventions, and interventions to improve learning skills.

4. Conclusions

The evaluation study found that according to the respondents (program staff, school staff and students) the socio-emotional support provided to students participating in the scholastic assistance program is an important component of the program and that it has been assimilated in the schools and is considered an integral part of the practices to promote Ethiopian-Israeli students.

There is great variance among the implementing organizations and the schools in the type of activity provided but in general:

- ◆ The students participate in recreational activities and/or enrichment activities outside of the school and receive the support of a member of the program staff (in most cases an Ethiopian-Israeli) in individual and group meetings within the school.
- ◆ In most of the schools, there is also emphasis on contact with the parents and on conducting activities to strengthen Ethiopian culture and heritage, for example organizing events marking the Sigd holiday and the memorial day for those who perished in the Sudan.

- ◆ The program is implemented with particular attention to the unique needs of Ethiopian-Israeli students and also incorporates joint activities for Ethiopian-Israeli students and non-Ethiopian students.

The study revealed that the staff members implementing the program are very important, particularly the figures who are in close contact with the participants: the school coordinator or the social coordinator. The holders of these positions are the driving force of the program, and the relationship and trust between them and the students affects the success of the socio-emotional support. When the position is held by Ethiopian-Israelis, they serve as role models for the students.

The students who participated in the study noted that the program had contributed greatly to their personal empowerment, to conceptualizing their future and to increasing their motivation, and had supported them through difficulties and strengthened their relationships with their parents.

There are several challenges in implementing the program and directions for its improvement, including: the need to structure a more defined implementation and budget model, to add emotional interventions provided by professionals and activities to strengthen learning skills, to strengthen the work the parents, to train the social coordinators and to bolster cooperation with other programs in the locality. Attention to the challenges noted in the study could increase the contribution of the socio-emotional activities for the students participating in the scholastic assistance program.

The study has been presented to the program staff – both to the public council heading the project and to the directors of the organizations implementing the program in the field. The study findings are saving as the basis of ongoing work to improve the program and extend its dissemination.