

The Ethiopian National Project (ENP) in Israel Scholastic Assistance Program 2018

SPACE – School Performance and Community Empowerment

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Abstract

Background

The School Performance and Community Empowerment (SPACE) scholastic and socio-emotional assistance program has been implemented by the Ethiopian National Project (ENP) since 2005 and examined in an evaluation by Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute in all years of its implementation since then. The program is offered to Ethiopian-Israeli students and other Israelis in junior-high and high schools and is aimed at improving their achievements in matriculation exams by providing scholastic assistance and addressing emotional and social difficulties. Every year to date, between 12% and 25% of Ethiopian-Israeli twelfth-grade students have participated in the program. The current evaluation focuses on the 2017/18 academic year, in which 25% of all Ethiopian-Israeli twelfth-grade students participated.

In 2016/17, there was a change in the program's operating strategy, in light of the 2016 government policy to integrate Ethiopian-Israelis into Israeli society (a New Way), which aimed to reduce the extent of programs provided exclusively to Ethiopian-Israelis. Since then, the SPACE program has included non-Ethiopian-Israeli students in a ratio of 80% Ethiopian-Israelis to 20% non-Ethiopian-Israelis.

Evaluation Goals

The goal of the evaluation was to examine the achievements of the Ethiopian-Israeli and non-Ethiopian-Israeli twelfth-grade students participating in the SPACE program in 2017/18 as reflected in their matriculation exam achievements, and to assess the impact of the program on the achievements of the Ethiopian-Israeli twelfth-grade program participants. This is a continuation of the examination of the program impact on these students that has been conducted throughout the program years as the basis for introducing improvements into the program. An additional goal of the current evaluation was to learn about the perception of the directors of the education departments in the various localities regarding the implementation and contribution of the SPACE program.

Method

The evaluation was based on an analysis of data from the matriculation results files that appear in the Ministry of Education's virtual research room. The virtual research room is the means by which the Ministry makes databases, including files on institutions, students, matriculation results and GEMS

(Growth and Effective Measures for Schools) test scores, accessible to researchers. For the non-Ethiopian-Israelis, who participated in the program for the first or second time that year, we used raw data only. For the Ethiopian-Israelis, we used data accumulated over the years examining the changes in the gap between their achievements and those of all students in Jewish education.¹ We also examined the program impact on the achievements of the Ethiopian-Israeli participants using the nearest neighbor analysis method to compare the achievements of program participants with those of students with similar personal characteristics who did not participate in the program at schools with similar characteristics, and with similar previous achievements. In addition, we collected information from five directors of education departments and the director of an educational social service department in localities where the program was implemented, through telephone interviews. The interviews were analyzed by content category according to the evaluation questions.

Main Findings

As in previous years, the findings for 2018 indicate a high level of scholastic achievements among the program participants. In 2018, the program had a marked positive impact on the percentage of students who achieved a matriculation certificate meeting university prerequisites. A comparison of the students' characteristics found that all program participants – Ethiopian-Israelis and non-Ethiopian-Israelis alike – had a similar scholastic background, relatively weaker than total students in Jewish education, but the Ethiopian-Israeli students had a lower socioeconomic background.

Analysis of the administrative data on the matriculation exam results of program participants revealed the following:

- In 2018, the percentage of all program participants (Ethiopian-Israelis and non-Ethiopian-Israelis) eligible for a matriculation certificate was higher than among total students in Jewish education. This achievement is particularly noteworthy when taking the participants' weak personal and scholastic backgrounds into account.
- Since 2009, there has been an increase in the percentage of Ethiopian-Israeli participants eligible for a matriculation certificate in general, and in particular those eligible for a certificate meeting

¹ The term “Jewish education” is used for Hebrew-speaking schools. Only high schools in the Jewish education system where students were tested in matriculation exams participated in the evaluation.

university prerequisites. In 2018, the percentage of Ethiopian-Israeli students eligible for a matriculation certificate was higher than that for all students in Jewish education – owing to the high achievements of the girls. However, the gap in the eligibility rate for a certificate meeting university prerequisites and the rate of students taking the exam in 4-5 study units, not only in English but also in mathematics, remains in favor of the total students in Jewish education, although the gap has narrowed over the years.

- In the nearest neighbor comparison with groups of similar students not participating in the program, the program was found not to have an effect on the rate of total students eligible for matriculation certificates, but it was found to have a statistically significant impact leading to an increase in the percentage of Ethiopian-Israeli participants eligible for a certificate meeting university prerequisites. This positive impact helped to reduce the gap between them and all students in Jewish education. However, as noted, the gap has not been completely eliminated and efforts should continue to promote the achievements of the Israeli-Ethiopian students and examine additional ways to strengthen them.
- An examination of the program's impact on various population groups found that in the achievement of matriculation certifications meeting university prerequisites, the program had an unmistakable impact on students at schools where the program has been running for at least three consecutive years. Thus, it can be concluded that long-term exposure to the program is advantageous. This conclusion strengthens the approach that it is important to maintain a continuum of services in the school over time to enable the Ethiopian-Israeli students to participate in the program throughout their high-school studies.

In interview, the directors of education departments reported on the benefits of the program for the participants: They get scholastic assistance, their matriculation achievements improve, the weaker students are advanced, scholastic gaps are reduced, and outstanding students also receive support. The social programs promote enrichment and empowerment, which strengthens social cohesion, motivation and a sense of belonging. Along with their high satisfaction with the program, the directors noted the need for additional resources to make it possible to add more scholastic and social inputs and expand the groups of participating students. They also noted the difficulty in recruiting students who are in need of the program's inputs but choose not to participate in it.

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Ethiopian National Project (ENP) was established in 2004. It comprises a variety of interventions, the most significant being the ENP SPACE (School Performance and Community Empowerment) program, which offers scholastic and socio-emotional assistance. The program was first implemented in 2005, 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 program is offered to Ethiopian-Israeli students in junior-high and high schools and is aimed at improving their achievements in matriculation exams by providing scholastic assistance and addressing emotional and social difficulties. The school principals select the students who will participate in the program according to their needs, on condition that they are not receiving scholastic assistance from any other program.

In 2016/17, there was a change in the program's operating strategy, in light of the government policy to integrate Ethiopian-Israelis into Israeli society (a New Way) aimed at reducing the extent of programs provided exclusively to Ethiopian-Israelis (Prime Minister's Office, 2016).² Since then, the SPACE program has included non-Ethiopian-Israeli students in a ratio of 80% Ethiopian-Israelis to 20% non-Ethiopian-Israelis in every locality where the program is implemented, and in the program as a whole. In the 2017/18 academic year (hereinafter 2018), 5,107 students (grades 7-12) participated in the program, 4,219 of them Ethiopian-Israelis (83%) and 888 non-Ethiopian-Israelis (17%). Altogether, the participants attended 127 schools located in 28 localities.

In this report, we present the achievements of participants in the SPACE program in 2018, as reflected in their matriculation exam results, and show how the program affected their achievements. We also present information about the program collected in interviews with directors of education departments and the director of an educational social service department and focus on their perceptions.

² New Way, government policy to integrate Ethiopian-Israelis into Israeli society, policy document, Prime Minister's Office, September 2016:

<http://www.pmo.gov.il/policyplanning/hevra/Documents/derechHA281216.pdf> (Hebrew).

Evaluation Goals and Questions

The evaluation was divided in two distinct parts, each with its own goals, and each intended to study a different aspect of the SPACE program.

Part 1: Analysis of the achievements in the matriculation exams

The goal of this part of the evaluation was to examine (a) the scholastic achievements of the Ethiopian-Israeli and non-Ethiopian-Israeli twelfth-grade students participating in the SPACE program in 2018 on completion of the matriculation exams and (b) the impact of the program on those achievements.

Part 1 had three main questions:

1. What were the characteristics of the program participants?
2. What were the students' achievements in the matriculation exams?
3. To what extent did the program impact on the students' achievements in the matriculation exams?

The measures for examining the students' achievements were:

- The percentage of students eligible for a basic matriculation certificate
- The percentage of students eligible for a matriculation certificate meeting university prerequisites (i.e., a certificate that includes at least 4 study units in English)
- The percentage of students eligible for a partial matriculation certificate (who were tested in at least 14 study units)
- The percentage of students who were tested in at least 4 or 5 study units in English and mathematics.

Part 2: Interviews with directors of education departments in the localities where the program is implemented

The goal of this part of the evaluation was to ascertain the directors' perceptions of the implementation of SPACE and how it contributed to improving the participants' achievements and to raise key issues relating to implementation of the program.

The key questions were:

- What do the directors perceive to be the program's contribution to the locality, to the schools, and to the participating students?

- How do they perceive the change to the program when non-Ethiopian-Israeli students joined?
- What do they perceive distinguishes this program from other scholastic assistance programs being implemented in the locality, and what extra value does it offer?
- Would they want to change anything in the way the program is implemented? If so, how and why?

Method

For the purpose of the evaluation, we used Ministry of Education national data on all students in Israel – Ethiopian-Israelis and non-Ethiopian-Israelis – as they appear in the Ministry’s virtual research room. For the data analysis, the identity numbers of the participants who were in twelfth grade in 2018 were collected and coded by the Ministry and then transferred to the virtual research room where the analysis was conducted. The participants’ achievements were analyzed using the SPSS program, and differences between the groups were examined using accepted statistical tests. The program’s impact was analyzed using the nearest neighbor analysis method. The analyses were conducted between October 2019 and February 2020.

The interviews with the directors of the education departments in the localities (in one locality we were referred to interview the director of the educational social service department and in another, to the deputy director of the education department) were semi-structured telephone interviews, which were recorded and transcribed. Only female directors participated in the interviews. The localities were selected from a list given to us by the organization that commissioned the evaluation (the ENP) and were conducted between September and November 2019. They were analyzed by constructing categories (content analysis) and central themes were extracted according to the evaluation questions.

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

The 2017/18 academic year was the second in which non-Ethiopian-Israeli students participated in the program. The department directors reported that the integration was successful and positive; it promoted friendships and prevented stereotyping. The Ethiopian-Israeli students accounted for 81% of the total twelfth-grade students who participated this year. An examination of the characteristics of the students who participated and the results of the GEMS (Growth and Effective Measures for Schools) tests taken in 5th grade showed that all the program participants – Ethiopian-Israelis and non-Ethiopian-Israelis – had similar scholastic backgrounds. All were found to have a weaker background than that of students

in Jewish education as a whole and their average score was 48 points (compared with an average of 63 points among all students in Jewish education). The Ethiopian-Israeli students were characterized by a lower socio-demographic background than that of the non-Ethiopian-Israeli students participating in the program, reflected in the high percentage of mothers with elementary education or less (71% vs. 4%, respectively), the large number of children in each family (4.1 vs. 3.6, respectively) and the high percentage of immigrant students (49% vs. 7%, respectively).

In 2018, the twelfth-grade students participating in the program accounted for 11% of all twelfth-grade students in the schools where the program was implemented. The non-Ethiopian-Israeli participants accounted for a minority (2%) of all the non-Ethiopian-Israeli students in those schools. In contrast, the Ethiopian-Israeli twelfth-grade students participating in the program in 2018 accounted for 75% of all Ethiopian-Israeli students in schools where the program was implemented (a higher percentage than the previous year, 2017, when 63% participated). The Ethiopian-Israeli participants accounted for a quarter (25%) of all Ethiopian-Israeli twelfth-grade students in Israel in 2018, compared with 17% the previous year. This increase occurred following an increase in the extent of activities in the schools where the program was already implemented and the introduction of the program in localities and schools where it had not previously been implemented.

The department directors interviewed reported that through the scholastic assistance and the social programs that promote enrichment and empowerment, SPACE contributes to the participants both at the socio-emotional level – to strengthen motivation and a sense of belonging and social bonding – and at the scholastic level – to improve matriculation achievements, to promote weaker students, to reduce scholastic gaps and to support outstanding students. Analysis of the administrative data on the participants' matriculation results showed that in 2018, the achievements in the matriculation exams of all twelfth-grade students who participated in the program (Ethiopian-Israelis and non-Ethiopian-Israelis alike) were higher than those of total students in Jewish education (77% vs. 72%, respectively). These achievements are particularly noteworthy considering the relatively weak scholastic and personal backgrounds of the participants compared to those of the total students in Jewish education.

When we examine the results of only those twelfth-grade Ethiopian-Israeli participants who participated in the program in 2018, we see that the gap in the eligibility rate for a full matriculation certificate that does **not** meet university prerequisites (hereinafter, full matriculation certificate) between program participants and total students in Jewish education is in the program participants' favor (78% vs. 73%,

respectively). A gap in the same direction was found among the girls (82% vs. 72%, respectively), but not among the boys. In contrast, the gap in the percentage of students eligible for a matriculation certificate meeting university prerequisites (i.e., a full matriculation with at least 4 units in English) was found in favor of all students in Jewish education over all Ethiopian-Israeli participants in the program (66% vs. 51%, respectively) and, separately, for the girls (64% vs. 53%, respectively) and the boys (65% vs. 48%, respectively). Additional gaps that still exist between the Ethiopian-Israeli participants and all students in Jewish education (in favor of all students in Jewish education) were found in the percentage of students taking the matriculation exam in a greater number of units (4-5 units) in mathematics and English.

Since 2009, there has been a growing increase in the percentage of students who qualify for a full matriculation certificate, including the percentage of those who qualify for a matriculation certificate meeting university prerequisites, both among all Ethiopian-Israeli students and among those who participated in the program. To assess whether the high achievements of program participants in 2018 reflect the impact of the program, we isolated the impact of the program by means of a comparison group that was created retroactively.

Analyses using this comparison group of similar students who did not participate in the program indicate that the program had a statistically significant impact on the percentage of those eligible for a matriculation certificate meeting university prerequisites among Ethiopian-Israeli students who participated in the program (a significant gap [$P < 0.01$] of 5.8 percentage points between program participants and the comparison group), but the program was not found to impact on the eligibility for a full matriculation certificate.

It is evident that in 2018, the program had an impact on the achievement of matriculation certificates meeting university prerequisites among the participating students that exceeded the impact of other assistance programs provided to students with similar characteristics who did not participate in the SPACE program. This positive impact helped to narrow the gap between Ethiopian-Israeli participants and all students in Jewish education. However, the gap still remains and efforts must be made to further the achievements of Ethiopian-Israeli students and to explore additional options to strengthen them.

In examining the impact of the program on population groups, the program was found to have a significant positive impact on the achievement of eligibility for a full matriculation certificate for girls and for students at schools that had recently joined the program (as opposed to those schools where the program has been implemented for at least three consecutive years); while it was found to have a

positive impact on achieving a matriculation certificate meeting university requirements among both boys and girls and among immigrant students born in Ethiopia as well as students at schools that had been in the program for at least three consecutive years. Because of the program's varying impact on different population groups, an attempt should be made to understand the source of the gaps and to study this issue. The aim is to provide insights that will help the program implementers to optimize inputs for the populations and provide a tailored response to each group.

The impact found on the achievement of a matriculation certificate meeting university prerequisites among students attending schools that had been in the program for at least three consecutive years indicates the benefit of long-term exposure to the assistance provided by the program. Therefore, efforts should be made as far as possible, to maintain long-term continuity of activity in the schools running the program and allow students who began attending it to continue their participation throughout their high school years.

Collecting focused information in interviews with the department directors highlighted important points that need to be kept in mind in order for the program to continue improving. The directors expressed great satisfaction with the program. They perceive it to make a real contribution to the students and to their schools and the communities where they live. At the same time, they emphasized the need for additional resources that would allow them to add educational and social inputs as well as to expand the groups of students participating in the program. They also emphasized the difficulty in recruiting students who are in need of the program's inputs but choose not to participate.