"Ad Halom" Project – Parents Learn and Children Succeed – What we Learned and What we Achieved Up to Now

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Introduction

Data published in the Statistical Abstract of Israel indicate that the stronger the pupils’ socio-economic background the higher their scholastic achievements as reflected in 5th and 8th grade Meitzav scores (Hebrew acronym for School Efficiency and Growth Indicators) and dimensions related to matriculation exams. In other words, the lower the parents’ education level, the smaller the probability that their child will be awarded a matriculation certificate and will be admitted to university. In this way inter-generational class exclusion is perpetuated over years. Furthermore, ramifications of parents’ lower education level are evident in school dropout figures, matriculation exam scores and university admission data. Alternately, the higher the parents’ education level, the higher their children’s chances to succeed on matriculation exams and to be admitted to a higher education institution. The relationship between success in school and workforce integration and social mobility is clear.

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Formerly director General of the Ministry of Education, Dr. Shimshon Shoshani, announced a unique project in selected schools with low Meitzav scores and a high percentage of pupils whose parents have less than 12 years of formal education. The Ministry will offer participating parents an opportunity to complete 12 years of formal education, fully funded by the Ministry. This was a unique attempt by the Ministry of Education to address the low achievements of pupils in some schools by advancing their parents’ education, in the aim of impacting children’s school achievements.

The outlook that parents are mature adults with needs and desires and have a crucial influence on their children’s achievements and integration in society differs from assumptions implicit in projects implemented to date in various frameworks. This unique project partners with the Adult Education Division in the Ministry of Education as well as with Ministry district heads and heads of the age divisions, with the National Authority for Measurement and Assessment in Education (RAMA) and, at the local level, with school principals, directors of education centers, local authority representatives, parents, etc.

RAMA grouped schools into clusters, by municipality or learning center, with a prerequisite of a minimum number of parents with less than 12 years of education per group. The sample includes 150 schools, associated with 32 learning centers and municipalities. In some centers or municipalities more than one class was opened.

**Project goal:** To examine whether increasing parents’ education level to 12 years of schooling would improve pupils’ achievements as reflected in Meitzav and Matriculation scores, and whether parent involvement in their children’s education and school would also improve school climate.

The project has several prominent characteristics:

- This is the first time that the official education system or any education system intervenes and acts to change one of the pupils’
background variables; after all it is very difficult to change parents’ income or the socio-economic level of their place of residence, yet it is possible to raise parent’s education level to 12 years of schooling and in doing so, in light of what research has demonstrated, improve their children’s scholastic achievements.

- An understanding and awareness that in order to contend with issues and challenges on the national agenda – competition in the global world, a return to economic growth and development, reducing poverty, narrowing social gaps and increasing solidarity – continuous learning in adulthood and lifelong learning are required, to close gaps or to remain up-to-date. Such learning fosters adaptation to a changing environment; it is a supplementary and corrective measure to formal education; a tool for narrowing economic gaps.

- It is based on professional knowledge accumulated by the Division of Adult Education in the Ministry of Education about adult education and about formal education completion in the adult population in Israel over many years.

- This is a long-term project. The education system is usually impatient as it seeks immediate solutions and quick fixes. Investment in education and in adult education in particular is always long-term (producing significant benefits). Pupils’ improved achievement levels compared to their 5th grade Meitzav exam scores will only be seen several years down the road – perhaps in improved 8th grade Meitzav scores, in matriculation exam grades, or maybe they will meet higher education admission requirements or perhaps the effects will only be seen among their younger siblings.

- The project is accompanied by research from its inception. The National Authority for Measurement and Assessment in Education (RAMA) is involved in the project from the planning stage: RAMA decides which municipalities and schools will participate in the project, determines sample composition and accompanies
the project from beginning to end. In the first stage, in 2011, fifty schools participated in the project and fifty classes were opened in which parents studied to complete 12 years of formal education. In the second year, 2012, another 50 classes were added with an expected 150 classes in the third stage.

- Wide-ranging cooperation and pooling of activities of the entire Ministry of Education organization - the Division of Adult Education, Age divisions in the Pedagogic Administration, district heads, the Parent and Family department in the Psychological consulting Service, municipalities, directors of learning centers and RAMA. All these entities collaborated in order to bring about sustainable change in pupils achievements.

The assessment process is conducted by RAMA. As part of this process the scholastic achievements of schools with pupils whose parents participate in adult education frameworks and are completing their formal 12-year education are compared over time with similar schools (‘comparison group’) in which the pupils’ parents do not attend adult education frameworks. To this end schools were grouped into an experiment or control group based on achievement and school climate data. Follow-up is planned to track achievement and school climate indicators as reflected in Meitzav test scores in both groups.

The first classes opened in November 2010.

Assumptions

- In order to deal with issues and challenges on the national agenda - competition in the global world, a return to economic growth and development, reducing poverty, narrowing social gaps and increasing solidarity – continuous learning in adulthood and lifelong learning are required, whether to close gaps or remain up-to-date.
- In light of the abovementioned changes, it is increasingly important to continue learning throughout life, both formal and informal. Such
learning facilitates adaptation to a changing environment; it is a supplementary and corrective measure to what formal education was lacking in childhood and adolescence; a tool for narrowing economic gaps.

- The family unit and social solidarity are undergoing myriad changes. The awareness and knowledge that there is no substitute to these two fundamental structures creates the need to strengthen the family and its structures and to develop family and community robustness. This can be achieved by fostering knowledge, completing education, developing life skills and providing tools for managing family life and for adequate, suitable and relevant family and parent functioning.

- The State of Israel suffers from significant gaps between various population groups – economic and educational gaps (‘social-cultural capital’). Changing the education and professional training characteristics of the population group with limited capital (economic or education) is not possible without state intervention. The proposed project is expected to provide an infrastructure for acquiring education and training. Access to learning will assist those who seek to improve their economic-social status and will, indirectly, raise their children’s education level.

**Strategies**

- Ongoing partnership and dialog between entities at all project operating and activity levels.
- Foster system level partnerships: project management, municipal, inter-organizational, teacher and parent levels.
- Professional empowerment of teaching staff, program managers, school principals and directors of learning centers.
- Professionalization in the adult learning field as well as in the integration of school and community contents.
- Develop relevant tools at the program and teaching method level.
Operating Principles

- Involvement of the age divisions in the Ministry of Education as part of the partnership in all project stages.
- Grounded in professional knowledge accumulated over many years in the Division of Adult Education about adult learning and formal education completion in the adult population in Israel.
- Designing a plan for formative assessment and ongoing accompaniment by RAMA professionals.
- Adapt learning contents to parents’ needs and integrate contents from topics and emphases of the formal education system.
- Establish steering teams at the national, district and municipal level.
- Ongoing involvement of Ministry of Education district managers and school principals.
- Establish action teams at the municipal level comprised of learning center directors, school principals, teachers, parents, municipality representatives and any entity whose participation on the team is vital for project success at the municipal level.

Reactions of Parents to their Possible Participation in the Project

According to RAMA findings based on analysis of selection questionnaires filled by parents who attended selection exams and class openings, characteristics of the learner population in stage A of the project (2011) are as follows:

- The main attraction factors of the program for parents are the desire to help their children and to be role models for them, as well as the opportunity to complete their own formal education. These factors were listed in first place among program candidates from all groups: Hebrew speakers, Arabic speakers, individuals born in Israel and immigrants from different countries.
• Expectations from the program: among Hebrew speaking individuals, in addition to helping their children with homework the expectation to continue professional studies/certificate studies and to improve their self-confidence was prominent. Women more than men tended to indicate emotional-social issues such as self-confidence and respect of others towards them. Men on the other hand mentioned to a slightly greater extent than women the expectation for promotion at work. A high expectation to help their children with homework was also found among Arabic speaking individuals, along with continued professional development studies/certificate studies and improved self-confidence.

• Hindering factors mentioned by questionnaire respondents pertained mainly to emotional issues related to the studies and fear of failure, feelings that they have most likely carried with them from a young age. While these fears did not hinder many from joining the program, they most likely inhibited potential candidates from participating in the selection process (which in effect was a test).

• Participants in the selection gatherings hailed from various population sectors, with especially high representation of the following distinct population groups: women, Arabic speakers and individuals of Ethiopian origin.

Preliminary Activities

• We reviewed the research literature in Israel and around the world pertaining to similar projects.

• We collected data about education levels in municipalities and population sectors based on the latest population census (2008) and compared this data to the 1995 census.

• We compiled a list of Ministry of Education learning centers that offer various study levels and tracks to adults seeking to complete their formal education.
After several meetings with RAMA representatives we designed a preliminary plan for the assessment process.

We gathered all Meitzav scores from the past two years in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of all schools.

Schools with low Meitzav scores (less than 6) were selected.

Meetings were held with Ministry of Education division heads and it was decided that school contents would be included and workshops for parents would be conducted as part of the project.

**Preparations by Project Management Staff**

Preparations of the Division of Adult Education staff responsible for operating the project included the following activities:

- RAMA determined the municipalities and the schools within them that would participate in the first stage of the project. Schools were sampled randomly using the probability sampling method. For follow-up purposes schools were assigned to an experimental or a control group. The experimental group included 149 schools from 29 municipalities.

- RAMA developed assessment and follow-up tools, including self-administered questionnaires, observations, focus groups and in-depth interviews.

- The project and its various stages were presented to Ministry of Education division directors and to the Ministry’s top management, and received their approval.

- The project was presented to the Director of the Education Department of the Union of Local Authorities in Israel, and through him to directors of test departments in the municipalities.

- The project was presented to management of the Ministry of Education Adult Education Division which decided on how the project would be initiated, launched and operated.
• The project was budgeted and prepared for presentation to the budget committee with everything entail in this process, including publication of a call for proposal.

**Preparation of Ministry of Education Districts for Project Operation**

Preparation of Ministry of Education districts for project operation included the following activities:

1. Meetings were conducted with principals of schools sampled, with the participation of Ministry of Education district heads, directors of education departments in municipalities, learning coordinators in municipalities and representatives of the Adult Education division. Different options to recruit learners were also discussed.

1. Municipal steering committees were established.
2. Parent associations in sampled schools were contacted.

**Getting the Project off the Ground**

In order to get the project off the ground the following actions were taken:

1. The project was presented to parents in parent gatherings, letters were sent by school principals, individual meetings and telephone conversations were conducted.

1. Potential learners were registered and invited to take selection exams. These exams (responsibility of the Adult Education Division) determine the learner’s beginning education level and set the study goal; the purpose of the selection questionnaires (RAMA administers and is responsible) is to identify learner expectations and apprehensions and characterize perceived barriers and attraction factors.

**Class Operation**

Classes opened following the learner recruitment and registration process, and after completing the required administrative process for
municipality budgeting (budget committee).

Difficulties encountered in operating the classes that should be noted:

1. Some municipalities sampled did not have learning centers and class operation entailed establishing or reestablishing learning centers, including recruitment and training of staff, teachers, etc.

2. Difficulty was encountered in recruiting learners for the project, particularly because classes opened mid-year year after parents had already committed to activities at the beginning of the year.

**The Assessment Process**

The assessment process is conducted by RAMA. As part of this process the scholastic achievements of schools with pupils whose parents participate in adult education frameworks and are completing their formal 12-year education are compared and evaluated over time in contrast to similar schools (‘comparison group’) in which pupils’ parents are not taking part in adult education frameworks. Family and other processes are also evaluated using formative assessment tools. Formative assessment examines issues such as: how adult learners and their children perceive education (as well as changes in these perceptions after acquiring education); how adults perceive their children’s schools and their involvement in their children’s acquisition of education; how parents and children perceive the children’s occupational and employment future.

The parents are evaluated on two axes:

- The learner as a parent
- The learner as adult

**The Study Curriculum**

The study curriculum is comprised of three elements:

- Curriculums of the Ministry of Education Adult Education Division
for various education levels and adapted to parents’ needs. It should be noted that learners who complete the study requirements are awarded a certificate by the Ministry of Education.

- Curriculums of the Ministry of Education Elementary School Division, with emphases and priorities at the national and school level.
- Workshops for parents on issues relevant to the various groups, with group leaders provided and trained by the Parent and Family Department of the Psychological and Counseling Service.

Adult Education Division curriculums are intended for adults who lack elementary or high school education and are adapted to the world of the adult learner. These curriculums enable learners who have gained life experience along with professional and family status to complete their formal elementary or high school education. This in turn strengthens self-image and contributes to social mobility and its nature. The curriculums focus on three main areas: fostering knowledge, cultivating tools and skills and developing perspectives and attitudes. They cultivate the learner’s awareness and recognition of the importance of continued learning and instill the understanding that learners can realize their abilities and improve their functioning in the family, at work and in a democratic and equal society.

Three main tracks are offered:

**Program for completing elementary education** – the program provides basic tools such as reading, writing, reading comprehension and arithmetic for orientation in the modern world. The program spans 500 hours. Learners receive a certificate after completing this study track. The program includes: two mandatory courses – reading comprehension and mathematics. Tests in these subjects are conducted nationally. Learners also choose three elective subjects for which exams are administered internally.
Programs for completing high school studies:

Completing 10 years of formal education
Learners must participate and pass tests in five subjects according to Adult Education Division curriculums, of which two are mandatory: for Hebrew speakers – mathematics and reading comprehension; for Arabic speakers – mathematics and Hebrew or mathematics and Arabic. Scope: 560 hours.

Completing 11 years of formal education
In this track learners are required to participate and pass final exams in two mandatory and two elective subjects in one of two formats: format A – comprised of 7 completion units; format B – comprised of 5 completion units and a matriculation unit in any subject. Mandatory subjects are: for Hebrew speakers – mathematics and reading comprehension; For Arabic speakers – mathematics and Hebrew or mathematics and Arabic. Scope: about 550 hours. Matriculation exams are in accordance with the exam curriculum of the Ministry of Education Examination Division.

Completing 12 years of formal education
This track requires learners to participate and pass exams in at least five subjects in a format of 7 completion units and 3 matriculation units – a total of 10 study units. Scope: about 760 hours. Mandatory subjects for Hebrew speakers include: mathematics and reading comprehension at the matriculation or completion unit level and an essay at the completion level. Mandatory subjects for Arabic speakers are mathematics, Hebrew and Arabic at the matriculation or completion level.

Summary and conclusions for future
Satisfaction, Strong Points and Issues Needing Improvement
- Satisfaction from the program was very high, in particular within the
Hebrew-speaking sector (satisfied/very satisfied: 95% of Hebrew-speakers, 79% of Arabic-speakers).

Program Strong Points

- The primary strong point of the program is that it offers an opportunity for adults to complete 12 years of schooling (at no cost) - this chance is seen as a springboard to advancement in a variety of areas in life (in formal education, expanding horizons and enriching knowledge, as a means of learning a living, helping one’s children in school, self-confidence, etc…).
- Attitudes of the teachers.
- Quality of the instruction.

Issues Requiring Improvement

- Physical conditions of the classrooms (especially in the Arab sector).
- Adding English to the curriculum – in a significant number of the classes English was not taught at all. In others not all students were able to participate in English studies because of the wide gaps in levels of knowledge.
- Disappointment that the program does not enable completion of matriculation. In some cases: frustration that the program does not provide for completing matriculation. In others: lack of understanding at the outset that this is not part of the program, since some students were under the impression that the course would enable them to complete matriculation.

Impact of the Program on Literacy in the Home and Involvement in Children’s Education

- Parents who joined the program were from the outset individuals who attached great importance to their children’s education, and were (relatively) involved in their schoolwork and maintained
ongoing communication with the school staff (these findings are in concert with the outcomes of in-depth interviews held during the course of the program). Hence, it is difficult to identify specific contributions of the program to these issues.

- However, it is possible to indicate the program’s contribution in the following areas:
  - In each of the following subjects: Hebrew, arithmetic, and computer use, there was an increase of some 15% in the number of interviewees who reported that as a result of the program it is easier/much easier for them to help their child in schoolwork in these subjects.
  - Among interviewees there was a 12% increase in reports that they help their children with homework at least a week.
  - There was an increase of 7% of parents who said it is important to them that their children acquire higher education.
  - There was an increase of 7% of parents who initiated contact with the staff of their children’s schools during the course of the year.

Impact of the Program upon Participants

- In terms of the program participants themselves, comparisons between the beginning of the program and its end refer to two topics: computer use, and various aspects of self-image and self-confidence.
  - In both the above areas that were assessed, the impact of the program is significant:
    - Interviewees reported an increase in the use of the variety of computer applications and frequency of use. An especially high increase was noted in use of email (23%), in social networking (18%), and in writing documents (14%).
    - It can be deduced that the program enabled participants to
communicate effortlessly in writing with their environment via advanced digital technology (an issue of importance in their personal and work place lives).

- Self-image: There was noted improvement, especially in “soft” aspects of self-perception – those aspects not directly connected to achievements or success in studies/work: “I feel that I am of equal worth to others,” and I can be proud of many things about myself” – in each of these areas there was an 8% increase in the number of interviewees responding “very much agree.”

- Adult learners in the program have many expectations for the future, especially: vocational advancement, continued studies, continuing to help their children with the latters’ schoolwork, and in general, to progress and succeed more in life.

- The above do not preclude the possibility that our adult learners will require further help – guidance, counseling, and encouragement – to fulfil their expectations. It is recommended to follow-up on how, and if, these expectations are actualized.

- Make an effort to provide acceptable physical conditions in each classroom, especially in the Arab sector. In this connection, it is recommended to pay special attention to the following issues (which were raised in the in-depth s conducted during the program): adult-size chairs, heat, air-conditioning, a permanent classroom.

- Evaluate the option of learning English in all groups and on differing levels (even if not all students will be tested in this subject).

- Clarify expectations from the program at the beginning (the program leads to completion of 12 years of study, but not matriculation).

- Offer support for program graduates (counseling, guidance, referrals) to help them continue studies for matriculation or vocational studies.