



Challenge Centers – Evaluation Study

Executive Summary

September 2013

Program Description

The Challenge Centers is an informal education program aiming to equip youth at risk (grades 8-9) with tools and skills that will enable them to lead normative and productive lives. The program takes place in two centers, in Netanya and Herzliya, and runs four or five days a week during after-school hours. Activities include homework preparation with one-on-one help from college students, followed by various recreational activities with an emphasis on challenging sports (such as marine sport, judo and more). The centers also offer workshops and lectures in varied subjects, annual hikes, and outings to army bases, educational sites, museums, etc.

The research goal

The research examines the effectiveness of the program, focusing on improvement in personal and educational empowerment parameters.

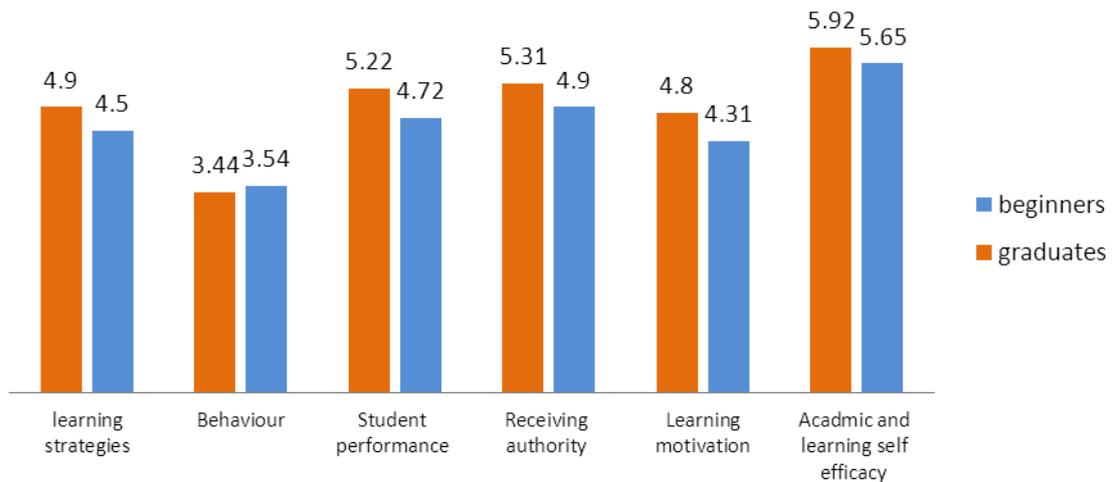
Methodology

31 program graduates took part in the study. They filled in questionnaires which asked about educational achievements, school performance, self-esteem, personal dream and the perceived benefit of the program. In addition, questionnaires were given to active participants at two points of time: October 2012 and June 2013. At the start of the year's activity, pupils in 8th grade (N=41) were asked to report on their attitudes and behavior in the end of 7th grade. At the end of the year, pupils in 9th grade (N=49) were asked to report on their attitudes and behavior. (Although the two questionnaires were not completed by the same participants, the 8th grade and 9th grade respondents are of a similar enough profile for comparison.) In addition, the participants' school teachers filled a questionnaire that examined perceived benefit of the program with regard to educational achievements and overall school performance.

Main Findings

- The program contributes significantly to improving educational achievements of participants and their general performance at school. For example, 89% of teachers think that the program contributed to a great extent to the improvement in pupils' educational achievements.

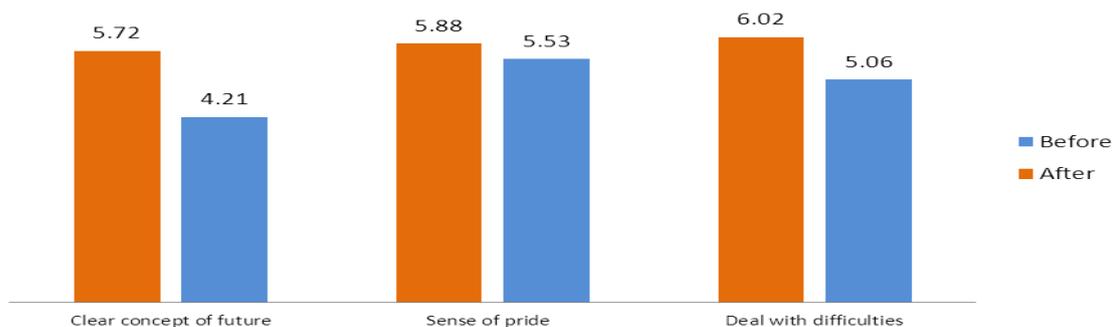
Comparison of beginners and graduates in school performance, according to pupils (N=90)



* On a scale of 1-7

- The program contributes to increasing pupils' sense of capability in regard to completing matriculation, but is less successful in increasing their sense of capability in regard to studying for an academic degree.
- In most cases, the program contributes to a great extent to the acquisition of social and psychological skills that are likely to assist participants in dealing with challenges. In comparing graduates with beginners, there is a rise of 10% in the rate of pupils reporting on acquisition of skills and qualifications that will help them deal with life's challenges.
- In examining the concept of the program, it is clear that there is high correspondence between the structure and components of the program and its stated goals.
- According to the graduates' questionnaires, participation in the program helped them reach adequate educational achievements: 89% of respondents who are high school students say that their educational achievements are average or above, and all the post-high school respondents say that they left school with some kind of matriculation certificate (54% with full matriculation). At the same time, only 12% of all graduates claim that they invested (or are investing) efforts in their studies.

Contribution of the program to acquisition of skills for dealing with life's challenges (N=31)



* On a scale of 1-7

- The findings indicate that the program contributes significantly to improvement in the ability of graduates to deal with difficulties, to their sense of pride in their own achievements and to their building a clear concept of the future. For example, graduates of the program think about their future and intend to enlist in the IDF: 94% of graduates in high school claim that they will enlist to the army and 92% of those who are now serving in the IDF are thinking about their future. At the same time, only a minority of the high school respondents see themselves as taking degree studies in the future, but this rate increases and reaches 50% among the respondents in the army.

Main Conclusion

It was found that the program is effective in reaching its goals. It is clear that participation in the program contributes to improved educational achievements, performance in school, sense of capability, and acquisition of skills to deal with life's challenges.