



Graduates of "Start" – Tafnit for Matriculation and Dropout Prevention Program

A joint program of
the Rashi Foundation and partners, the Ministry of Education, the Shaha"r Division
and the Education Departments in participating localities

Report of Research Findings

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Brief Summary

Evaluators:

- Ms. Naama Bar-On, Ms. Michal Bar-Doron, Ms. Marina Goroshet, Ms. Larisa Boglavski and Dr. Miri Levin Rosales
- Prof. Shifra Sagy: Chair of the Center for Enhancement in Education

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Background

At the end of the 2006-2007 school year, after three years of activity (in addition to a two-month preparatory course in 9th grade), about 100 of the first graduates of the Start program completed the 12th grade in the two comprehensive schools in which the program began to operate.

The **objective** of this study is to examine the contribution of the "Start – Tafnit for Matriculation" program for students who are dropouts or have the status of "hidden" dropouts. This contribution is assessed in terms of academic achievements at the end of 12th grade, compared to students from classes with similar characteristics in the same schools, in previous years, who were not exposed to the program (hereinafter – the control classes).

About the program

The goal of the Start program – to prevent dropout, overt and hidden, of at-risk students by boosting academic success and addressing emotional needs. The program leads to attainment of a full matriculation certificate by the end of 12th grade.

The program – The Start program is a program that operates in high schools in the periphery. The program accepts 9th-grade students who have low achievements and have the status of "hidden" dropouts (and are at risk of becoming overt dropouts). Most of the students accepted into the program have at least seven failing grades in their report cards in 9th grade prior to entering the program. In order to prevent dropout and to attain a matriculation certificate, the students begin learning in 10th grade in accelerated classes run by the school staff, employing the accelerated method and principles of narrowing gaps of the Rashi Foundation's Tafnit program, which was developed by Nissim (Max) Cohen, an educational sociologist.

Methodology

Population: In order to select the control group, we approached schools in which the program is operating and focused on the low-end classes (not special education) from two years prior to the initial program activity. That is, we focused on students who studied in these schools two years earlier because all of the potential target population for the control group participated in the program in later years. We had actually planned to select the control group from the school year completed just one year previous to the implementation of the program, but we found that in one of the schools an intervention program operated among the students slated to be the control group. Therefore, we selected the control group from students who studied in these schools two years earlier. A complex sampling process was conducted, as explained in detail in the report.

It was found that both the trial classes and the control classes were relatively small in size, though the trial classes were bigger – which is disadvantageous to the Start program (that is, the starting point for examining the Start program were inferior to those of the control classes). The starting point from the perspective of learning achievements – the average number of failing scores and the average scores at the end of 9th grade – were similar in the control and trial classes. (See details below.)

Findings

Summary of key findings

Table 1 below show that students in the trial group, who had similar characteristics in terms of failing scores and average scores at the end of 9th grade in comparison to the students in the control group (and were assigned to classes with similar characteristics as those of the control group in 10th grade), succeeded in achieving significantly higher scores than the students in the control group.

It was found that:

1. In the Start trial classes, there is a high rate of eligibility for matriculation, compared to 0% eligibility in the control classes.
2. In the Start trial classes, there is a high rate of students who are lacking only one subject, compared to 0% of the students who lack only one subject in the control classes.

Diagram 1 –

Comparing eligibility for matriculation in the trial group and in the control group, in %, among all of the students who began their studies in 10th grade and for whom there is matriculation data in 12th grade

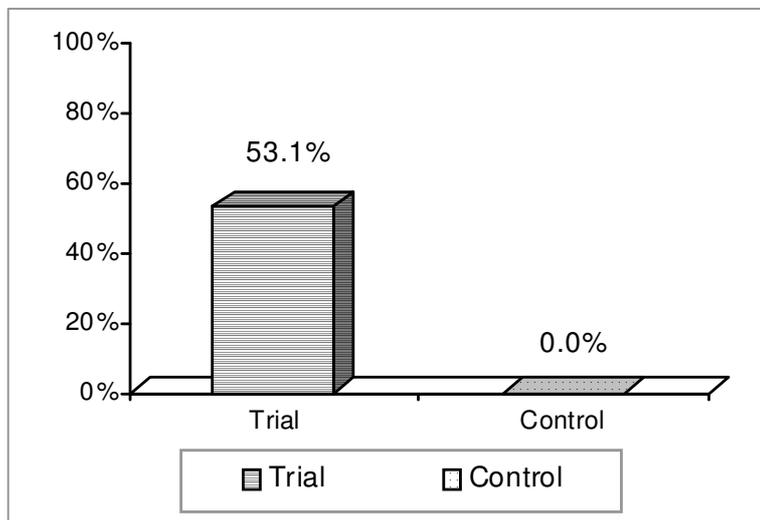
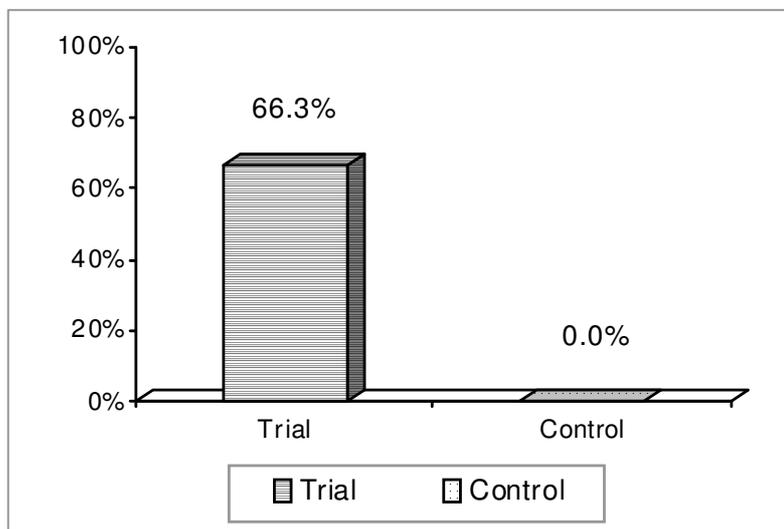


Diagram 2 –

Comparing those eligible for matriculation and those who lack one subject in the trial group and in the control group, in %, and for whom there is matriculation data in 12th grade



It seems that the Start program has indeed reached its target population and is helping this population. It has indeed reached students at the low end, not including special education students, and it has reached students with particularly high rates of failures. The average number of failures in the trial and control groups in the different schools is similar – an average about 8 to 8.3 failing scores in each group. An even more precise analysis indicates that while the range of failing scores in 9th grade among students in the control group is between 1 and 14, the failing scores in the trial group range from 4 to 14. That is, the trial group does not include students with a low rate of failures (see Appendix 3).

The average scores of the trial group (average – 44) and control group (average – 45) at the end of 9th grade are very similar, with the control group enjoying a slight advantage: The students in the control group were slightly stronger than the students in the trial group in 9th grade. The rate of overt dropout in the trial group is somewhat lower than that of the control group (6.7% in the trial group and 11% in the control group).

Thus, the basic assumptions of the program were supported. None of the students in the control group was eligible for a matriculation certificate or close to achieving one, compared to the situation in the trial group.

These findings correlate with the assessments of the interviewees (school principals and representatives of the education system), who see a clear contribution by the Tafnit program in the academic context (study skills, achievements, an improved attitude toward the school and toward learning), in the social realm (acquiring more positive norms of behavior, social abilities, identification with the school and with stronger students) and on the personal level (acquiring self-confidence, responsibility, focusing on themselves and on their studies).

Nonetheless, it should be noted that this research was only conducted in two schools (which are the only two in which it was possible to conduct the study during this period). In order to confirm and reinforce the research findings, we recommend conducting further research on a wider scale during the coming years.

Table 3 – Summary of findings

Prior to the process- at the end of 9th grade - the trial and control group		
Criteria	Trial group – Students in the Tafnit Start program	Control group
A. Average no. of failing scores in the school report card at the end of 9 th grade	8.2	8.2
B. Average score in the school report card in 9 th grade	44	45
C. Percentage of students with 7 or more failing scores in their report card in 9 th grade	73.9%	71.4%

After the process – at the end of 12th grade – after 3 years, the trial and control group		
Criteria	Trial group – Students in the Tafnit Start program	Control group
A. Eligible for a matriculation certificate (of those who started 10 th grade)	53.1%	0%
B. Eligible for matriculation or lacking one subject to be eligible for matriculation	66.3%	0%
C. Distribution of those eligible for matriculation	66.7% of those eligible for matriculation had at least 7 failing scores in 9 th grade	0%
D. Overt dropout (graduates of 12 th grade compared to those who started 10 th grade)	6.7%	11.1%