

Abstract

This study examines the impact of educational figures on the identity formation of youth of Ethiopian origin during their studies in Israeli educational boarding schools. The research attempts to investigate through the students' eyes, the significant aspects of the teachers and of the educational institutional framework that have impacted them, regarding the shaping of their own personality and identity throughout the years that they participated in this framework. A survey of the literature on identity and identity formation shows that the role of the educational figures regarding identity formation has not been sufficiently studied. Research in this field mainly focuses on the question of how the individual undergoes the process of identity formation through intra-psychic processes. However, other researchers (Schachter & Rich, 2011; Schachter & Ventura, 2008; Tzuriel, 1984) discuss the need to explore the role of other agents of identity, apart from the individual himself/herself during the identity formation of youths; namely, as the outcome of the many interactions taking place during adolescence. We have concentrated on the Ethiopian origin population in this study to expand the understanding on the role of teachers as agents of identity; this, due to the fact that following the first waves of immigration from Ethiopia in the 1980s the Ministry of Education made a sweeping decision to place these students in 'social-pedagogical' boarding schools in order to ease their integration process as new immigrants and provide them supportive social-pedagogical environments to help with their integration in the Israeli society. Various theories explain that the immigration process causes various crises, including identity crisis (Bar Joseph, 1990; Kahana, 1980). Immigrant populations experience identity problems, resulting from the need to cope with moving to a totally different country than the one they had lived in, including language, culture, and society (Berry, 2006). Thus, we assumed that this

population is suitable for examining the perceived impact of educational figures on youth identity and personality formation of Ethiopian descent. A survey of the literature on boarding schools reveals that the students of Ethiopian origin were referred to 'social-pedagogical' boarding schools (Gruper, 2005). These differ from other types of boarding schools in Israel (such as therapeutic boarding schools) due to their educational perspective that maintained that in certain situations, such as immigration, issues of identity may be significant for attaining educational goals. This understanding also provides support for the focus of this research on students of Ethiopian origin who studied in social-pedagogical boarding schools, to explore the processes of identity formation in its educational and institutional context. The literature survey displayed that these youths lived for most of their adolescent lives in boarding schools and for short period of times in their homes, which had made the boarding school into a replacement for the home, to a certain degree, and so provided these youths all their individual needs, including emotional and cognitive needs (Arieli, 1999). Furthermore, the school and boarding environment were located in the same place, in order to allow continuous communication between the relevant personnel regarding the personal and pedagogical progress and functioning of these youths. Therefore, the main figures that assisted these youths during the years had been educational figures, including teachers, counselors, house mothers, caretaker of the building, etc'. Thus, we assumed that we could study the importance, function, and the impact of educational figures on their students, in such institutes.

Hence, this study focuses on the graduates of boarding schools of Ethiopian descent who immigrated to Israel during the years 1984 and 1991 - men and women 26 years and older. The sample of our research comprised of graduates, so that these respondents will be at a stage in their lives in which they are able to reflect on and

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examine their experiences from the boarding schools after maturing and moving on with their lives (McLean & Thorne, 2003). They are then better able to describe the impact of the educational figures on them throughout the years to this day.

Fourteen young graduates of social-pedagogical boarding schools - men and women 26 years and older - have been interviewed in this study: seven women and seven men. Nine graduates studied at a religious boarding school, three studied at a religious boarding school and became secular, while two studied at a secular boarding school. Nine of the respondents are married and five are single.

This study is based on qualitative interviews comprised of two parts. The first part consists of structured introductory questions which have been asked in every interview. The second part comprises of open-ended questions (according to need), structured as a biography interview (theme-focused), which are based on similar studies concerned with agents of identity and has been modified for this study (Schachter & Ventura, 2008; Schachter & Galili-Schachter, 2012). The participants were asked to tell their life-stories in a detailed manner, but were guided to focus on the issues relevant to the research. Additional questions are sometimes added during the interviews, in order to guide the interviewees to specific issues in order to analyze certain relevant topic. Such life story interviews are carried out in a semi-formal manner. The respondents are requested to provide detailed *stories* of different events and to describe the thoughts and feelings they have experienced during these events and not only express thoughts and ideas.

The interview questions were intended to elicit information on two main issues: The interviewees' background story and their worldview, religious perspective, and life significant events; and, the educational institutes where they have been educated; especially, the boarding school and the impact that the pedagogical

personnel had on their identity formation. The interviews were then analyzed according to Gross' content analysis procedure (Gross, 1995).

The findings are divided into four chapters, according to the questions of the study. First, we have investigated their perception of the characteristics of the *educational framework and the educational figures*. The findings indicated that the graduates viewed the teachers and the management of the institute as highly involved in their identity formation. They regarded the *educational framework*, in which they have studied, in a very positive light and even considered necessary for their development and the path they eventually followed. The analysis of the interviews reveals that the features of this system are very important, in their opinion, in this regard, including "the significant relationships (group)", "holistic education", "education and enrichment", and "order and organization". This sub-chapter has also explored the characteristics of the *educational figures*. The analysis of the interviews demonstrates the aspects of the pedagogical staff concerned with their identity and strengthened them throughout their living in the boarding school. These aspects include: "attitude towards them characterized by warmth and love/giving", "support", and "counseling across the years during which they grew up in the boarding school". The respondents' view of the pedagogical personnel was highly positive. They served as "role models" for them. They have also mentioned the importance of the "values" and "the feeling of faith in their ability" instilled in them at the boarding school.

The second chapter examined the identity *outcomes* (identity capital) that they have acquired at the boarding school, from their point of view. Analyzing the transcripts of the interviews indicate that they viewed the boarding school as a safe place, where they have acquired many attributes related to identity, which assisted them throughout their lives as adolescents and even during later stages in life in

different frameworks, such as military service, family, studies, and work. The graduates mentioned that they gained "self-confidence", "responsibility", "religious identity", "social identity", "strength", and "independence". Moreover, the participants described the educational figures as an integral part of the educational experience at the boarding school, which had a very significant role in their lives personally, morally, socially, and identity-wise. They have contributed to the shaping of their personality and identity. Many respondents regarded the educational figures as role models; in regard to the manner that they treated them and others, educated them and instilled values in them, in particular.

The third sub-chapter analyzed the findings of how they perceive their living in the boarding school, compared to retrospectively potential living in home. These findings display that the students actually viewed their experience at the boarding school as a very positive and effective especially on their identity formation process, despite criticism they had, too. Several issues arose from their interviews : high degree of awareness to the difficulties of adjustment their parents had encountered as new immigrants to Israel, understanding the need to place them in a boarding school at that time , high appreciation for the framework of the boarding school and everything it had provided them, acknowledging the importance of the family and its support while living in the boarding school, recognizing the contribution and the influence of the family and the boarding school on their education and identity formation. The fourth sub-chapter discusses the question of how the graduates retrospectively see the boarding school; namely, what is the degree of importance and necessity of the boarding school as a framework to cope with their adolescence in regards to the political, social, and immigration contexts. The findings indicate that the respondents view the boarding school in the following way: "a place that offered

potential for opportunities", "a framework that shaped their personality and who they are today", "an institute that provided them education and values which they believe in", and "framework that prepared them for the future". The conclusion drawn from their words is that they viewed the boarding school as having great importance in different areas, which are detailed in this chapter.

These findings reinforce the main argument: the importance of the study concerning the significance of teachers and pedagogical institutes on the identity formation of adolescents. Previous research has not focused on the importance of partners other than the individual on his or her identity formation. This study reveals that the students attribute considerable importance to the boarding school and the educational personnel who provided them support throughout their identity formative years. They have mentioned distinct aspects that were relevant to the processes of identity formation. They have also stated clear outputs that they have acquired in the boarding schools and that were essential to the shaping of their identity. In addition, this study offers insights regarding the framework of boarding schools. Despite the changes that have taken place in them throughout history, such institutions have served in this particular case, according to respondents, as a place where adolescents of Ethiopian descent could cope with the experience of immigration and the processes of identity formation occurring during this age. It has been a safe platform to explore different experiences. This framework has also allowed the adolescents to go through this process with a minimal degree of conflict at home and outside home. It seems that this framework intensively provided both a school and boarding environment where the educational figures had been an integral part of the lives of the adolescents and impacted them in various areas; especially, shaping their identity (and who they are

today). This process, which is clearly revealed in the interviews with the graduates, is the outcome of many processes described in this thesis.

The discussion section deals with the issue of whether these findings, in the context of teachers' role in identity formation, are valid in regards to all adolescents, whoever and wherever they are, or perhaps, the fact that the respondents are new immigrants makes them a unique population in this regard. Another question discussed is whether the positive findings derived in the interviews regarding such institutions that students studied in during the 80's and 90's, indicate that social-pedagogical educational boarding school frameworks would also be considered appropriate today?

Further research suggested concerns the question of other ways that the experience of immigration impacted students' lives in general and the process of adolescents of Ethiopian descent in particular. Moreover, due to the fact that this research portrays the boarding school as a unique framework that provides support, contains, and allows adolescents to experience holistic education which affects them in an extraordinary manner, further study could be conducted to explore the uniqueness of the framework of boarding school. Our research provides an opportunity to learn from such schools' management, and implement certain processes within the regular education framework. Nevertheless, it is important to ask which features of the boarding school are also relevant to other populations which study at boarding schools and whether they are appropriate for other types of boarding schools, such as the therapeutic boarding schools.