

**Evaluating the Effectiveness of Four Intervention Models
through Persona Dolls to Improve Acquaintance and Attitudes of
Israeli Kindergartners towards the Ethiopian Community**

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Abstract

The Israeli society includes a variety of cultures, including the Ethiopian culture. The cultural diversity might create tensions between the different social groups, and indeed, negative biases are created often towards outgroups (the groups to which the person does not belong and does not identify), and preferences are created towards the ingroup (the group to which the person belongs and with which they identify). These biases have implications on intergroup relations. The Ethiopian descendant community constitutes about 2% of the population in Israel, and sometimes encounters negative attitudes towards them. Negative biases towards outgroups develop early, and therefore it is necessary to foster acquaintance with people from different cultures and positive attitudes towards them from an early age.

The purpose of the present study was to promote acquaintance of Jewish kindergarten children in Israel with the Ethiopian descendant and to foster positive attitudes towards them at an early age. For this purpose, an intervention program was built and implemented to examine the effectiveness of four different intervention models through persona dolls. First, a comparison was made between two models showing similarities between persona dolls of Ethiopian descendant and persona dolls that are not of Ethiopian descendant. One, a model based on the hypothesis of interpersonal similarity, in which similarity was expressed through similar hobbies and similar preferences, and the other is based on the hypothesis of intergroup similarity, in which similarity was expressed through common religious and national identity. Second, a comparison was made between a model based on indirect contact (meeting with persona dolls of Ethiopian descendant) and a model based on both direct and indirect contact (meeting with an experimenter of Ethiopian descendant and with persona dolls of Ethiopian descendant).

Participants were 125 Jewish-Israeli boys and girls from five state kindergartens in the center of Israel (53% girls; Average age 5 years and three months), who have no acquaintance and daily contact with people of Ethiopian descendant in the educational framework. The research design included an experiment in which the children's knowledge of social groups and their acquaintance with them, and their attitudes towards social groups were tested individually before and after the intervention program, through a questionnaire administered by an experimenter who is not of Ethiopian descendant. The participants were assigned to four experimental conditions and a control group. In the first two conditions, an experimenter from the ingroup of the participants (who is not of Ethiopian descendant), conducted one of two intervention programs: Intervention based on interpersonal similarity or intervention based on intergroup similarity. In the other two conditions, an experimenter from the outgroup of the participants, an experimenter of Ethiopian descendant, conducted one of the two intervention programs. In the control group, an experimenter from the ingroup of the participants conveyed educational contents, for example: recycling and the earth, using persona dolls. The intervention program sessions were conducted in small groups. Each group had two or three meetings a week, for three weeks. It should be noted that the study was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic in Israel and in the world, which posed major challenges to the proper sequence of the program under this crisis.

The study's results indicate that kindergarten children are hardly acquainted with people of Ethiopian descendant and have not been in direct contact with them. On the other hand, the children are well acquainted with the categories of Jews and Israelis, and also manifest high level of familiarity with Jews and Israelis. Following this, the kindergarten children demonstrated more relevant knowledge about Jews and Israelis after the intervention program under different experimental conditions, delivered by an experimenter who is not of Ethiopian descendant. It was also found that after the intervention program, the children were more aware of their Jewish origin, and even their awareness of their Israeliness relatively increased in most of the study's conditions. The intervention contributed to strengthening the Jewish-Israeli intragroup identity of the children. The ingroup persona dolls and their stories gave to children an opportunity to get to know their ingroup better and identify with it. In addition, before the intervention, the children showed a preference towards their ingroup compared to their outgroup. This preference was manifested by more positive attitudes towards the ingroup than the outgroup only at the liking measure. After the intervention, it was found that an intervention based on interpersonal similarity delivered by an experimenter from the ingroup, who is not of

Ethiopian descendant, contributed to the children's willingness to sit closer to children of Ethiopian descendant. Contrary to this, the intervention program by an experimenter of Ethiopian descendant didn't contribute to more positive attitudes towards children of Ethiopian descendant compared to the children that the program was delivered to them by a non-Ethiopian experimenter. These results were the opposite from the expected. Accordingly, the kindergarten children who participated in the program that delivered by an experimenter of Ethiopian descendant, chose to sit closer to the children of their ingroup after the intervention, and also indicated to being less familiar with people of Ethiopian descendant.

The current study has some important educational and research implications. The intervention program enabled children to be exposed to different content through experiential activities and thus enriched their knowledge about social groups. The current study revealed that Jewish children in Israel doesn't know almost anything about the Ethiopian community, so it is important to develop programs that will allow kindergarten children to get to know the social diversity that exists in their country. Moreover, the present study extended our knowledge regarding the biases of young children towards children of Ethiopian descendant, and showed that kindergarten children in Israel generally have positive attitudes towards children of Ethiopian descendant. This indicates that it is possible that negative attitudes towards children of Ethiopian descendant have not yet been acquired at this young age, and these are acquired later. This knowledge emphasizes the importance of early intervention and suggests that early acquaintance with different social groups may prevent the development of negative attitudes toward them in the future. Furthermore, the study's results show that it is important that the educator who deliver the program would be from the ingroup of the children to whom the program is conveyed. In addition, the study's results show that it is important that the outgroup would be present in the intervention program separately and not alongside figures from the ingroup, in order to give the outgroup the full attention of the participants and the opportunity for in-depth acquaintance. In addition to these, the current study also contributes to understanding the consequences of global crisis situations, and in particular the Covid-19 pandemic, on kindergarten children and on implementing educational interventions to improve attitudes between groups in times of crisis.