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**The improvement of Preverbal and Early Verbal skills of
Ethiopian origin Toddlers.**

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the construction and evaluation of an intervention program – the Orr program¹ – designed to promote early communication and language skills of young children in the cultural context of the Ethiopian community in Israel. The intervention included direct child-centered intervention and culturally adapted parental guidance. More specifically, the study engaged in the promotion of early communication skills mainly Joint Attention, Behavior regulation and social interaction initiatives. The study sought to close the gap in knowledge pertaining to this domain.

The research employed a two stage mixed methods design. In the first stage, qualitative data was gathered through interviews with professionals of Ethiopian origin in order to construct a parental guidance program based on cultural dialogue and collaboration with members of the Ethiopian community. The second stage included a quantitative study and a pre post intervention evaluation, employing an experimental research design that sought to determine whether a specific intervention influences an outcome. Three measures were used pre and post intervention to evaluate early communication and verbal skills. The research population consisted of 82 children of Ethiopian origin, 48 boys and 34 girls, 18-30 month old. Of those, 43 were 18-24 months of age, and 39 were 25-30 months of age at the beginning of the study. 32 mothers attended parental guidance(PG) sessions.

The findings show that pre-verbal and verbal communication skills were promoted as a result of the implementation of the Orr program. Ultimately, these findings allowed the advancement of the Eco-Cultural (EC) Orr model that shows how pre-verbal and verbal communicative skills can be promoted through scaffolding, mediation, symbolic play and awareness and sensitivity training, all of which comprise the EC-Orr program.

The conclusions emerging from the research present a contribution to theoretical knowledge on language acquisition and promotion of communication skills among children from 18-30 months old growing within an immigrant society in cultural

¹ The Orr program is an intervention program combining direct child-centered intervention and parental guidance (*Orr* – the Hebrew word for light)

transition. The EC-Orr model can also provide practical guidelines for any professional seeking to improve language abilities of children at an early age.

Key Words: Orr intervention program, early communication skills, joint attention, language acquisition, Ethiopian community, cultural transition, mediation, scaffolding.

INTRODUCTION

The research engages in the construction and evaluation of an intervention program - The Orr Program - designed to promote early communication and language skills of young children in the cultural context of the Ethiopian community. The intervention included direct child centered intervention and culturally adapted parental guidance.

The Ethiopian community in Israel is going through continuous cultural transition from a traditional collectivist way of life to western individualized culture, the prolonged absorption process may be related to their visible otherness as a black skin community among a majority of white population.

The Ethiopian community came to Israel in two large immigration waves in the years 1984 and 1991, and in smaller numbers since. The number of members of the Ethiopian community in Israel is about 135,500 people; about 20,000 of whom are children under the age of 9 (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Three decades of the Ethiopian community's integration into Israeli society have introduced significant changes in the statistics of employment and education of the community, where the percentage of employment of immigrants that immigrated under the age of 18 is higher than that of those who immigrated after the age of 18 (85% vs. 60%). 95% of the immigrants born in Israel have 12 years of schooling or more compared to those who have arrived after age 18. More than 60% of Ethiopian immigrants who arrived after the age of 18, had no formal education and could not read or write Amharic (the majority's native language). 10% had between 5-12 years of schooling. (Central Bureau of statistics 2014; Finkelstein & Salomon 2007; Kupfer 2013).

Despite the significant increase in education and employment rates, Ethiopian origin employees earn significantly lower wages than veteran Israelis and above 72% are considered below the poverty line. (Haviv, Helban-Eilat & Schatz, 2010). According to standards of living measures that compared income, expenses cover and housing density, the living standard among Ethiopian immigrants is the lowest among other immigrant groups. (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics 2014). However low SES (socioeconomic status) and/or affiliation to a minority group may delay the process of language

acquisition (Snow 1993; Fernald, Marchman, Eisleder 2013; Jung; Galindo & Fuller 2012).

Previous research findings indicate that Ethiopian Israeli children show lower achievements from kindergarten years to adulthood, in their environmental-literate and verbal knowledge when compared to non-Ethiopian children from equivalent socioeconomic background (Shany, 2006; Shany & Geva, 2011; Tanenbaum, 2009; Stavant, 2012). The data regarding disparities in verbal knowledge inspired the need for the current study to examine intervention modalities to promote early communication skills and verbal skills of children under the age of three, and the modification of the intervention program to accommodate the cultural needs and characteristics of the participants.

Knowledge Gap and Significance of the Research

While the fundamental role of early interaction in the process of language acquisition is widely accepted, very little, if any research, has been conducted on early communication skills of Ethiopian Israeli children under the age of three.

To date most of the research on the subject of Ethiopian Israeli children has focused on school-age children (Bar Yosef, 2001; Levin, Shohami, Spolasky et al, 2002; Tanenbaum, 2009; Shany & Geva, 2011; Stavant et. al, 2012). One extensive research examined the early literacy skills of Ethiopian Israeli preschool children (Shany, Geva & Melech-Felder 2010). Scant research has examined the issue of intervention programs designed to promote early communication skills in general and in the context of cultural transition in particular.

This research contributes an innovative inter-domain perspective to the promotion of early communication skills which reflects both in depth investigation of a wide variety of early communication behaviors and reference to the broader context of cultural transition.

Research Aim

To evaluate the construction and implementation of multifaceted Intervention program, i.e. the Orr program, and its effects on the pre-verbal and early verbal communication skills of 18-30 month old children of Ethiopian origin.

Research Questions

1. Which aspects of Ethiopian origin culture and transformations through cultural transition should be embedded in parental guidance sessions?
2. Do the initial levels and extent of change in pre-verbal skills predict the change in verbal skills over time?
3. What is the influence of the Orr intervention program on the promotion of preverbal communication skills among 18-30 month old children of Ethiopian origin?
4. What is the influence of the Orr intervention program on the promotion of early verbal skills among 18-30 month old children of Ethiopian origin?
5. What is the influence of implementing a culturally adapted parental guidance program on the promotion of communication and verbal skills among 18-30 month old children of Ethiopian origin?

Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: A connection between pre-verbal early communication skills and verbal communication skills will be found.

Hypothesis 2.1: A systematic intervention program (the ORR program), combining direct child centered intervention (DCCI) and parental guidance (PG), will contribute to the development of IJA (Initiated Joint Attention) components and RJA (Response to Joint Attention) components as a function of age group (age group: 1.5-2 yrs. = 1 vs. 2-2.5 yrs. = 2).

Hypothesis 2.2: A systematic intervention program (the ORR program), combining DCCI and PG, will contribute to the development of **IBR** (Initiated Behavioral Requests) and **RBR** (Response to Behavioral Requests) as a function of age group (age group: 1.5-2 yrs = 1 vs. 2-2.5 yrs. = 2).

Hypothesis 2.3: A systematic intervention program (the ORR program), combining DCCI and PG, will contribute to the development of **ISI** (Initiated Social Interaction) and **RSI** (Response to social interaction) as a function of age group (age group; 1.5-2 yrs = 1 vs. 2-2.5 yrs = 2).

Hypothesis 3: A systematic intervention program (the ORR program), combining DCCI and PG will contribute to the promotion of early verbal skills.

Hypothesis 4: Children in the intervention group with parents (PG) will demonstrate higher levels of improvement of early verbal skills than children in the DCCI only group.

Research Variables

Dependent Variables

- ❖ Preverbal communication skills among 18-30 month old children of Ethiopian origin.
- ❖ Early verbal communication skills among 18-30 month old children of Ethiopian origin.

Independent Variables

- ❖ Orr intervention program: systematic intervention program, combining direct child centered intervention (DCCI) and parental guidance (PG).

LITERATURE REVIEW

III.5.3. Main Theories

The current study derives from two theoretical approaches representing multidimensional perceptions of child development: the Ecological approach and the

socio-cultural approach, and other branching theories, the sociolinguistic approach to the development of language and communication, culturally adapted intervention and multi-system model for intervention.

The use of broad theories in combination with more focused ones offers shared ideational grounds reflecting the use of both wide lens exemplifying the wide tapestry of factors affecting language and communication skills in infants, alongside a narrow lens whose aim is to zoom in on specific aspects of communication skills, adult-child interaction and cultural influences.

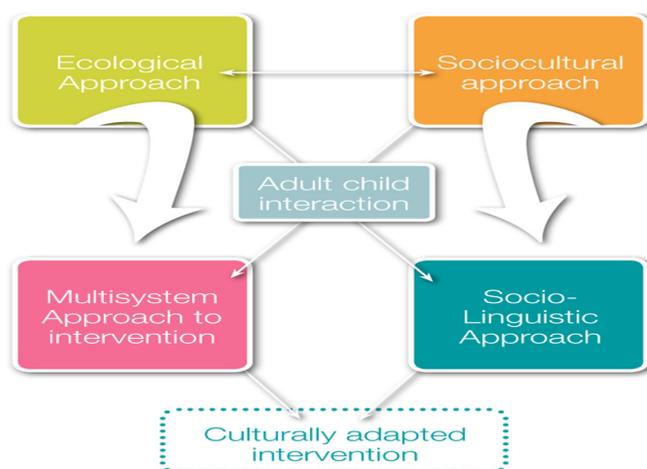


Figure 1: Main Theories

What is shared by and unifies both basic approaches that were chosen, despite the different emphasis each presents, is the assumption that development is a complex process of dynamic relations between biological features of the child's readiness for the social and cultural system that envelops him or her such as family and educational factors. One of the significant factors in this process is an ongoing sensitive and intensive interaction, which takes place between an infant and adult figures in his or her environment.

In the following section, the various theories used in the model and the connections that evolved among them will be presented. Similarly, a number of central concepts that

emerge from these theories will be presented and additional concepts will be clarified further. The conceptual model of the research and an interpretation of this model will be presented as well.

The difference between the ecological and socio-cultural approaches lies in their attitude towards culture. The Ecological approach refers to culture as one of the circles of influence effecting the development of the child. According to Vygotsky's approach, child development can be neither explained nor interpreted without relating to the social context in which it is taking place. Since the research deals with multi-disciplinary intervention among populations in cultural transition, it appears that the integrated dual approach enables a discerning attitude to each of the disciplines.

Multi-dimensional approaches to language and communication development express the view that human communication and the development of communication skills in general, develops in the process of social interaction. During these interactions, adults choose to focus on and transmit significant cultural concepts.

According to this perception, the infant comes into this world equipped with innate socialization capabilities which enable him or her to grasp others' intentions and meanings, interests and feelings. One of the significant factors in this process is the ongoing sensitive and intensive interaction between the infant/child and adults in his or her environment, which develops during the process of mother-baby attachment (Bowlby, 1973, 1988; Bruner, 1975, 1983). This interaction provides the baby with confidence in his/her ability to express his/her needs and desires and later to communicate effectively verbally and nonverbally (Sagi & Ginni, 2008; Thijs & Koomen, 2008).

Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1982)

Attachment Theory posits that attachment relations are formed through the child's early experiences of a responsive, intimate and continuous relationship with his/her mother (Bowlby, 1973, 1988). Over time, these experiences with a caregiver influence and guide the development of an internal representation of self and others. This, in turn serves as a basic model for other close relationships (Ainsworth, 1991).

Secondary Attachment Figure: Although it is widely believed that the child's basic attachment style with a parent reflects on his/her relationships with non-parental care providers, accumulated evidence show that children can develop varied and differential sets of relations (Sagi & Ginni, 2008). The concept of differential relationships raises the importance of relationships with significant others (extended family members, caretakers, teachers). These caregivers may function as secondary attachment figures (Ainsworth, 1991). Children's coping abilities with adverse life circumstances are associated with the availability of protective factors such as supportive relationships with caretakers. Children who experienced high quality interaction with caretakers showed better language and cognitive skills (Buyse, Verscheren & Doumen, 2009, Cugmas, 2007; Judge, 2005).

Secondary Interaction figure: This study offers that the significant role of a secondary attachment figure in the infant's emotional development might be applied to the development of early communication skills. Caretakers and early intervention specialists may function as secondary or complementary interaction figures for children who experience verbal delay due to lack of early communication interaction.

Sociolinguistic Approach to Language Acquisition (Bruner, 1975, 1983; Tomasselo, 2012)

The process of communication, verbal or non-verbal, is a social activity that can be regarded as the bridge between one understanding of a situation and another by its nature. Communication presumes inter-subjectivity - shared understanding based on a common focus (Roggoff, 1991, 2003; Callaghan et. al., 2012). Recurrent interactive episodes help an infant to determine the focus of adults' attention and thus the intended referent of their language. In this way communicative interactions facilitate a child's early language (Tomasselo & Farrar, 1986).

Communicative Adult-Child Interaction: Interaction which takes place during daily activities such as eating, changing and play, and communication exchanges based on responsive and consistent response to signs elicited from the child. (Ainsworth et. al., 1978; Tamis-LeMonde et. al. 2012; Greenspan & Weider, 2006)

System Approach to Intervention (Cicchetti & Valentino, 2006; Guralnick, 1997; 2011)

These multisystem models of intervention regard development as an intricate process of dynamic interaction within the cumulative burden of risk factors and the buffering effects of protecting factors that comprise individual, family, community and broader socioeconomic and cultural contexts.

Multiple risk factors that constitute stressors on a family system such as limited financial resources, marital difficulties, prolonged immigration crises, low education levels, lack of support systems and the undermining of family structures, pose a threat to young children's development (Sameroff, 2010; Fox & Ostrovsky, 2006; Lochman, 2004; Guajardo & Snyder, 2009; Rufferty & Keneth, 2010). Thus policies that focus solely on one setting are unlikely to be as effective as those targeting intervention across multiple settings (Crosnoe, Wirth, Pianta et. al., 2010; Hammre & Pianta, 2007; Gwynne, Blick & Duffy, 2008).

III.5.6. Main Concepts

Cultural transition / Migration

An individual's or a group's voluntary territorial transition from one country to another is one of the major factors affecting the continuity and changes of parenting practices (Strier, 2001; Tienda, 2009; Crosnoe & Fuligni, 2012).

Immigrants must make complex adjustments, on an individual as well as on a family level, in order to become absorbed into the new culture (Leshem, 2004; Berry, 2004). The distance separating the features of the original culture and the new culture is a significant factor in determining the process of individuals' and groups' adjustment. From among the different groups that have immigrated to Israel, the Ethiopian community has experienced the sharpest transition from a rural traditional society into a modern Western society (Bar-Yosef, 2001).

In the transition to parenthood, beginning parents rely on parenting models deriving from their families of origin. In an immigration situation, these models can become unstable

and are undermined. As a result, parents are liable to feel a sense of estrangement both in their culture of origin and in their absorbing culture (Von- Klitzig, 2006).

The Ethiopian culture rests upon orally passing traditions from one generation to another while using indirect communication which is interpreted by such culturally transmitted tools as proverbs, folktales ,metaphors and lullabies. This discourse has disappeared for the most part in the process of immigrating to Israel. (Shany, 2006; Shmuel, 2011).

Not preserving the cultural code and supplementing it by

practices such as reading books and linguistic mediation, might lead to gaps in child development within the Ethiopian community in the area of speech and literacy skills. (Mendlinger & Zvikel, 2007).

Early communication skills

Joint attention refers to the triadic coordination of attention between self, other and an object, event or symbol (Tomasello & Farrar, 1986; Vaughan Van Hecke, Mundy, Meyer et. al. 2007; Rudd, Cain & Saxon 2008). The function of Joint Attention behaviors is to share attention with the interactive partner or to monitor the partner's attention. (Mundy, 2003).

Behavioral Requests refer to the child's skill in using nonverbal behaviors to elicit aid in obtaining objects or events.

Social Interaction Behaviors refer to the capacity of the child to engage in playful and affective positive turn-taking interactions with others.

Stages in language acquisition

The developmental stage is defined as the period with a starting point and ending point during which a qualitative change transpires in the child's ability to communicate. The transition from one stage to the next, does not note the total disappearance of the characteristic communication behaviors of the previous stage. (Dromi, 2009).

The complexity of the language acquisition process leads to much diversity at the age when children move from stage to stage and in the duration of each stage. Individual differences also stem from factors such as the rate of neurological maturation processes or the extent to which the child is exposed to language, (Zur, Segal & Rom, 2012).

The Orr program

The Orr program is a multi-disciplinary, comprehensive, and intensive intervention program for children, parents, and educational staff. The program operates in early childhood education frameworks. The program acts to prevent and reduce impairment to the developmental potential of young children and toddlers, who are raised in families that struggle with the challenge of providing enriching developmental stimuli to their children.

Culturally Adapted Intervention

A culture based approach to intervention strives to express social tolerance, discover and implement the cultural capital of the community, involve members of the community in the process of change as equal and necessary partners (Howes, 2010; Ben-Ezer, 2009). Implementation of culturally adapted interventions require a combination of child rearing skills and practice from the culture of origin with those prevailing in the destination culture (Schemer, 2009; Roar-Strier & Rosental, 2006).



Figure 2: Conceptual Model

III.5.7. Interpretation of the Model

The center of the model depicts the main research variable: Ethiopian children's early communication skills. Around this central variable is the system of factors which influence the development of these skills and connections among them. Cultural transition has a formative influence on parent-child interaction in the course of day-to-day activities. In addition, cultural transition has a far-reaching effect on the family's economic situation, and the role division within the family. These factors as well as socio-economic pressure, with which families cope, influence the level of availability and investment in fostering early language skills.

A high percentage of the women's employment in Ethiopian families and technological changes such as early exposure to television screens of smart phones and tablets are just some of the factors affecting the joint attention interactions between parents and infants. In order to provide a solid foundation for the development of language skills and prevention of delayed language development, the "Orr" intervention program was selected for this research, an integrated model consisting of direct support for infants through a secondary interaction figure and a parental guidance program.

METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm: Mixed Methods Research

The current research aimed to evaluate the effect of the Orr program on the promotion of early communication skills among 18-30 months old children of Ethiopian origin. The Orr program integrates direct child centered intervention (DCCI) through adult –child interaction and culturally adapted parental guidance (PG). Mixed methods research is a research design which focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that combining quantitative and qualitative approaches provides a better understanding of the research problems than either approach alone (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011).

Action research

The research sought to evaluate the effect of an intervention program on improving the communication skills of Ethiopian origin toddlers, and the joint effort of the researcher and professionals among the community to develop a parental guidance program. The cultural context of the research and the evaluation of practice led to the choice of an action research.

Community based action research focuses on methods and techniques of inquiry that take into account people's history, culture, interactional practices and emotional lives (Stringer, 1996). Action research focuses on the needs of marginalized groups and individuals in our society. This research attempts to avoid distinct hierarchy between the researcher and the research participants so as to not further marginalize the participants.

Research Design

The current research employed a sequential two stage embedded mixed method research design (Cresswel, 2009), which used qualitative and quantitative methods.

Table 1: Research design - Mixed methods and action research

Stages	Aims	Tools	Population
<i>Stage 1</i> <i>Qualitative</i>	Gathering data on traditional habits, communication patterns, needs assessment	Personal interviews Group interviews	8 cultural mediators of Ethiopian origin 5 program coordinators of Ethiopian origin
	Construction of the parental guidance sessions content and structure		
<i>Stage 2</i> <i>Quantitative</i>	Operation of the Orr intervention program Evaluation of results		
	Pre intervention assessment	Orr observation, ESCS, PLS-3	82 children ²
	Operation of the intervention program	Twice weekly DCCI 5 PG sessions	82 children. ³ 32 parents
	Post intervention assessment	Orr observation, ESCS, PLS-3	82 children

² 18-30 month old children of Ethiopian origin.

³ Parents of Ethiopian origin to children 18-30 months old.

RESULTS

Qualitative Results

Table 2: Categories emerging from research question 1

Category	Sub-category	Quote
1) Early adult-child communication patterns in Ethiopia	Physical proximity to the mother	<i>"The baby is constantly next to his mother or carried on her back', and she talks to him while doing her chores."</i>
	Interaction with siblings and extended family	<i>"The child spends the whole day near older siblings and other relatives they talk to him, they say: bring this, get that."</i>
	Songs and rhymed games.	<i>"Mothers used to sing and they were fingers games."</i>
Category	Sub-category	Quote
2) Time motive in adult-child interaction	Lack of time due to transition to modern life in Israel.	<i>"Parents are trapped in a race to provide the family needs, many works many hours in cleaning jobs and factories. Mothers are not at home as they were in Ethiopia."</i>
	Media as an alternative to adult child interaction	<i>"Parents are busy and the children spend most of the time with the television, computer or other screens."</i>
	Commitment to family and community as a time consuming demand	<i>"Our generation is torn between taking care of both our children and our parents, I need to read official documents to them and go with them to the doctor."</i>
3) Planning of parent's guidance groups	Inclusion of traditional cultural components.	<i>"We need to find something that will apply to the younger parents which are remote from Ethiopian culture."</i>
	Parents' needs of guidance	<i>"It's very important to speak about books and spending time with the children."</i> <i>"They know a lot it's just that many have no faith in their own knowledge."</i>
	Parents' attendance	<i>"It's very difficult to bring the parents they are working and in the evening tired and have to be with the children."</i>
4) Preservation of	Preservation of child rearing habits	<i>"It's important to preserve the physical proximity and the breast feeding."</i>

Preservation of values	<i>“The most important is the preservation of respect to elders if you don’t respect someone you can’t learn from him.”</i>
Preservation of language	<i>“Most young children don’t speak Amharic and there is not enough communication with grandparents.”</i>
Cultural disassociation	<i>“Some of the young parents are neither here (Israel) nor there (Ethiopia) they don’t play and read stories but they also don’t let the child accompany them in everyday chores.”</i>

Physical proximity to the mother and extended family members formed a foundation to the development of communication and language acquisition in Ethiopia. The cultural transition process which involves both parents joining the work force, preserving of core values as providing support to elder family members and employment and providing obligation restrict time intervals dedicated to parent-child interactions.

Preservation of cultural habits as traditional food and art varies among Ethiopian origin immigrants especially among young parents that grew up in Israel. Parents needs to guidance include, support of the parents confidence in their cultural knowledge the need to enhance parents awareness to face to face play activities and exposure to books from a young age,

Most parents do not preserve the use of origin language in discourse with their children. Cultural transition may cause a situation of cultural disassociation from Ethiopian culture parental practices without adoption of modern western parental practices.

Quantitative Results

Results regarding the initial level of preverbal skills (eye contact, alternate eye contact) and the extent of change over time (point and show in aim to share), were correlated to comprehension and spoken verbal skills.

All Initiated joint attention skills significantly increased among intervention groups in comparison to the control group considering interaction between time and intervention time.

Initiated and responsive behavioral requests components: giving an object in ask of aid, response to verbal requests without gestures, reaching an object, significantly increased among intervention groups in comparison to the control group, considering interaction between time and intervention time.

Initiated social interaction components (initiation of rhymed songs, display of joy during a rhymed song, response to play with an object) significantly increased among intervention groups in comparison to the control group, considering interaction between time and intervention time.

The magnitude of change was significantly higher in the intervention groups relative to the control group in the production of 2 words combinations, 3 words combinations and over all scores of the PLS-3 spoken language (SPLS).

The magnitude of change was significantly higher in the intervention groups relative to the control group, regarding understanding of questions, understanding instructions without gestures, identifying animals and identifying objects and scores of PIS-3 Comprehension scales (CPLS).

Children in the intervention group with parents showed higher increase in some verbal skills in comparison to intervention group without parents and control group.

CONCLUSIONS

Factual conclusions

Conclusions emerging from Research Question 1

Which aspects of Ethiopian origin culture and transformations through cultural transition should be embedded in parental guidance sessions?

Physical proximity to the mother and extended family members is a source of early communication development. Additionally, preverbal communication and language acquisition occur through guided participation in everyday chores and is not restricted to patterns of distal parenting habits that focus on assigned intervals of face to face interaction and enrichment.

However, through cultural transition when both parents join the work force, babies are weaned at an early age and attend daycare centers. Parents of Ethiopian origin go through complex cultural transition, consisting of changes in family structure and roles, conflicting needs between preservation of core cultural values and adapting to those of destination culture. This transition may lead to restricted time dedicated to interaction with young children.

Members of the Ethiopian community present various degrees of acculturation that vary between total assimilation and adoption of Israeli habits and integration of both Ethiopian and Israeli culture. In some cases, cultural transition may lead to detachment from origin parental practices without embracing destination culture practices. This results in a *cultural void*, a term that describes lack of knowledge and awareness regarding child development practices and language acquisition.

It can be concluded that the majority of children of Ethiopian origin are not exposed to Amharic at home and their main spoken language is Hebrew. It may be suggested that young children are not exposed to rhymed songs and stories in Amharic or Hebrew.

Restricted opportunities to pre-verbal and verbal interactions may lead to disparities in language acquisition. These conditions create the need to intervene at fundamental stages of language acquisition. The research was based on socio-linguistic approach to language acquisition, which refers to early communication behaviors, such as joint attention episodes, as patterns that evolve into verbal discourse.

Conclusions emerging from Research Question 2

Do the initial levels and extent of change in pre-verbal skills predict the change in verbal skills over time?

Discussion of this research question served to substantiate a pattern of link between initial levels and change in joint attention and behavioral request behaviors, as well as verbal skills.

The findings emerging from this study show that alternate eye contact is an early evidence of the child's ability to consider others as communication partners and to share his/her intents and meanings.

Early communication skills and early language acquisition occurs in conjunction with the infant's aptitude to view others as communication partners whose attention can be attained and engaged. The mutual and reciprocal nature of joint attention skills forms the foundation to the intricate process of verbally labeling referents and conveying meaning.

JA skills express the child's need to convey complex and symbolic messages that cannot be conveyed through gestures. Behavioral requests serve their communicative aim at the preverbal level and therefore do not target higher verbal needs.

The fundamental role of pre-verbal joint attention skills was part of the content and structure of the intervention program in the form of intensive training provided to the mentors and parents, and the choice of intervention program components.

Conclusions emerging from Research Question 3

What is the influence of the Orr intervention program on the promotion of preverbal skills among 18-30 month old children of Ethiopian origin?

The findings emerging from this research question show that sensitivity of the Orr mentors to subtle communicative intention served to reinforce the participants' motivation to engage in joint attention situations and promoted IJA communication skills of the participants.

The Orr program influenced the promotion of preverbal Initiated Behavioral Requests (IBR) and Responsive Behavioral Requests (RBR). Since RBR behaviors are associated with primal communication behaviors, in comparison to JA behaviors it may be understood that the promotion of IBR and RBR behaviors is related to an individually

adapted form of intervention that scaffolds the child's aptitude to convey his/her needs and wishes, and focuses on the child's current level of performance.

The promotion of social interaction behaviors is related to a gradual exposure to unfamiliar means of joint engagement through reciprocation during song and movement activities. In accordance with developmental continuity from early communication to verbal development, a combination of sensitivity to the child's nonverbal and verbal communication and a structured and stimulating environment, is fundamental to the promotion of verbal skills.

Conclusions emerging from Research Question 4

What is the influence of the Orr intervention program on the promotion of early verbal skills of 18-30 month old children of Ethiopian origin?

The research indicates that the promotion of verbal skills may be associated with the quality of interaction, i.e. scaffolding of preverbal and verbal skills through mediation and adaptation to the individual needs and developmental achievements of the participant.

An additional conclusion is that the use of multi-sensory activities, such as rhymed songs, symbolic play and shared book reading, may also contribute to an enhanced word acquisition process. Furthermore, the promotion of verbal communication skills within the Orr program requires joint attention to a referent to achieve verbal labels leading to the development of words, as the mere exposure to words and language used by adults is insufficient.

Conclusions emerging from Research Question 5

What is the influence of implementing a culturally adapted parental guidance program on the enhancement of communication and verbal skills among 18-30 month old children of Ethiopian origin?

The importance of adapted and attuned interaction through heightened awareness to the child's communicative intentions and the need to adapt the intervention to the

characteristics of parents in cultural transition, both led to the connection between the cultural knowledge that was acquired through dialogue with members of the community and practices that support language acquisition.

The research demonstrates that promoting communication and verbal skills involving 2-word combinations and 3-words sentences among 18-30 month old children of Ethiopian origin, is associated with guidance based on mediation and joint attention through every day chores as well as shared book reading – all of which are fundamental components of the Orr program.

Conceptual Conclusions

The conclusions emerging from this research allow the advancement of an evidence-based model for promoting pre-verbal and verbal communication skills of 18-30 months old children who belong to an immigrant society coming from a collective traditional society into an individualized western culture society.

Furthermore, the study shows how the improved Orr program, which included an enhanced communication skills aspect, promoted the language acquisition process of the children participating in the program. *Figure 6* presents the Ecological-Cultural Orr (EC-Orr) model of communication skills promotion.

On the conceptual level, the EC-Orr model that emerged from this study expresses the construct of a theory-based practical intervention model, designed to promote pre-verbal and verbal skills among 18-30 months children from the Ethiopian community in Israel. This community is experiencing a prolonged cultural transition. Additionally, the EC-Orr model shows that in terms of language acquisition, the pre-verbal initiatives and interactions constitute a preliminary stage of language acquisition. The model further shows that recurrent interactive episodes help an infant to determine the focus of adults' attention and thus embodies the intended referent of their language. In this way communicative interactions facilitate a child's early language (Bruner 1985; Callaghan et al 2011).

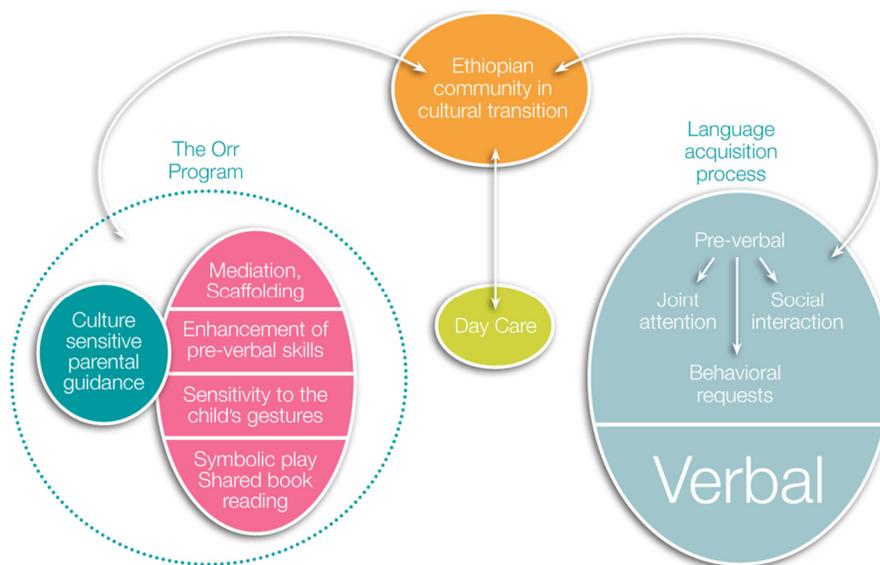


Figure 3: The EC-Orr Model

The EC-Orr program applies an ecological approach of language development that refers to the various systems constructing a child's language development. The various systems include both the child's characteristics and traits and the interaction between the child and his/her family and education sub-systems.

The intervention model is based on scaffolding the child communicative skills through mediated interaction and training of the Orr mentors to detect and react to the child's communicative initiatives.

Scaffolding describes the process of pre intervention evaluation which allowed the Orr mentors to identify each participant's level of pre-verbal and verbal skills and design an individually adapted intervention geared to promote their abilities. Evaluation of early pre-verbal skills among young children requires heightened awareness of the mentors to detect and support subtle early communication behaviors, such as joint attention, behavioral requests and social interaction. As such, sensitivity and awareness were essential components of the training process undergone by the Orr mentors.

Moreover, the scaffolding process was based on mediation techniques which allow the adult to enhance and utilize the child's natural inquisitive behaviors as well as initiate new learning experiences. The mediation process is inseparable of the various means which construct the Orr intervention.

Symbolic play, Shared book reading, rhymed songs all serve to provide a multi-sensory stimuli both auditory and visual to extenuate the learning Process.

Parental Guidance (PG) sessions embodied the cultural context within which the Ethiopian community in Israel operates. Taking an ecological and socio-cultural approach to an intervention program mandates thorough consideration of context. Migration creates drastic changes in family structure and parental practices, especially when origin and destination cultures are remote in terms of cultural habits and values. Hence, the culturally adapted parental guidance sessions was based on the deep cultural knowledge of professionals from the Ethiopian community.

Practical Implications

The EC-Orr intervention model that was constructed for the purpose of the current study suggests an applicable model which includes: Training program for early intervention professionals to enhance awareness of pre-verbal communication; Designed Structure and means of intervention sessions; and parental guidance sessions - all of which can be applied in various education and intervention frameworks.

- ❖ The EC-Orr intervention model specifies the promotion of adults' abilities to identify young preverbal children initiation of joint attention to an object or an event. Accurate interpretation of the child's communication initiatives contributes to an improved verbal labeling of such events or objects leading to promotion of language acquisition.
- ❖ The EC-Orr model can serve as a preventive measure. Parental guidance and professional staff training at the very early stages of development may prevent developmental delays of pre-verbal and verbal skills.

- ❖ The EC-Orr model can serve to raise awareness, in the field of early education training programs, to the fundamental role of early communication skills in language acquisition process. Such awareness is especially important in an education system with high child-adult ratio as the Israeli daycare system.

Research Limitations

The research was conducted by the coordinator of the program, who was involved in the construction and operation of the program for an extended period of time (19 years). This might suggest lack of objectivity. The research employed an action research paradigm. Action research often evolves from a critical observation of the practitioner towards aspects of the practice and the need to evaluate as part of a restructure process. The current study evolved from an observation of the need to develop new means to promote the verbal skills of the participants in the program hence indicating the researcher was objectively aware of the programs various aspects and limitations.

An advantage of the researcher involvement was that the former acquaintance created mutual trust between the researcher, the Orr mentors and the professionals of Ethiopian origin. This in turn led to their cooperation in the implementation of the intervention program.

In an attempt to avoid the objectivity limitations the researcher used a triangulation strategy, employing three different measures and various assessors. All the data regarding the children pre and post-performance was statistically analyzed with the help of a statistics expert. The triangulation has allowed the research to present a robust body of findings which raises the level of generalizability.

Contribution to knowledge

Contribution to theoretical knowledge- the current study suggests an intricate connection between pre-verbal and verbal components of language acquisition and their promotion, through the EC-Orr intervention within a community in the midst of a prolonged cultural transition process, such as the Ethiopian community in Israel. The research combines

these different realms into a united multifaceted yet concise model allowing a distinct observation of an otherwise broad developmental and social process.

The EC-Orr model that emerged from this research is original and innovative in that it raises awareness to the fundamental role of early communication behaviors in the development of communication and language skills within a cultural context.

The current study filled a substantial gap in knowledge in three domains:

- a) Pre-verbal and verbal communication skills of children 18-30 months old belonging to an immigration community in transition;
- b) Perceptions of professionals of Ethiopian origin regarding early communication development and parental guidance to parents of very young children;
- c) Intervention programs designed to promote early communication skills among typically developing children. While vast research was done on intervention to promote early communication skills among autistic spectrum children, scant research evidence exists regarding intervention among typically developing children.

Contribution to practical knowledge was made by offering the EC-Orr model as a practical guide for practitioners wishing to promote pre-verbal and verbal communication skills of children in communities experiencing a cultural void. This may also contribute to changing policy regarding intervention within early age education and training.

VII.6. Future Research

Future research may expand on the examination of the following issues:

- ❖ Intervention with parental guidance component. Such research may focus on intervention in parent-child dyads rather than in groups.
- ❖ The impact of daycare training and education on children's developmental skills. Daycare structure may have a detrimental effect on children from low SES

background. Hence, it may be suggested to research training for daycare staff regarding facilitation of early verbal skills.

- ❖ The theme of '*cultural void*', i.e. detachment from parental practices of the origin culture without adoption or adaptation to destination culture practices. This theme emerged as a risk factor through the findings of the current study, suggesting a need for further research on that subject.