

SCHOOLING ALTERNATIVES, INEQUALITY, AND MOBILITY IN ISRAEL

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the value of second chance opportunities for obtaining a matriculation diploma in Israel in attenuating social inequalities. Our results indicate that men, students of vocational versus academic tracks, and individuals from the lower middle range of the socioeconomic hierarchy benefit from the existence of second chance structures. We find reductions in social origin inequalities on the odds of obtaining a matriculation diploma. However, obtaining a matriculation diploma via a second chance route is associated with lower post-secondary educational attainment and weaker occupational attainment, compared to traditional routes.

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the role of “second chance” educational opportunities in attenuating educational and occupational inequalities in Israel. Second chance opportunities in educational attainment rest on the idea that through an organized structure an individual can actualize an educational opportunity missed or failed

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the first time around. Specifically, we define second chance education as the existence of a formal structure by which individuals seek a second chance to either complete their secondary schooling or improve their completion status. The notion that failure is not final and that mobility can be achieved through non-traditional routes is central to educational structures that stress equal opportunity (Inbar & Sever, 1989). The opportunity for individuals to correct a past failure or to actualize their potential is often targeted at those for whom the traditional route has not been successful. The existence of second chance education has been considered a vehicle for moderating educational inequalities in society (Ayalon, 1990; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Inbar & Sever, 1986).

It is important to distinguish "second chance" education from "alternative" education. Alternative education takes the form of separate curricular tracks offered at various stages of the educational system. Most systems offer a main route, in the form of a relatively demanding academic track leading to study in a university, and alternative routes, intended for less able or less ambitious students. Alternative education is not intended for those aspiring to complete a four-year college or university education. Rather, alternative routes are often vocational and prepare students for immediate entry into the labor market as skilled workers. Researchers agree that students who embark on the alternative tracks are disproportionately drawn from the lower social strata, and are diverted away from a university education and from the professions (Shavit, 1984; Oakes, 1985). Moreover, the prospects of early entrance into the labor market are said to lure some academically able, lower-class students away from college and the professions (Saha, 1985). As such, alternative education is often blamed for contributing to the reproduction of social inequality.¹

The idea of second chance education is different. Second chance education is based on the belief that both schools and students often err when deciding to drop out from the main route, and that such errors can and should be corrected (Yogev, 1997). It is intended to provide students who did not succeed on the main road with another chance to do so, not via a parallel road, but rather through re-entry portals into the main track. Inbar and Sever (1989) offer the following three basic criteria by which second chance structures should be evaluated: (1) accessibility; (2) effectiveness; and (3) equivalence. They argue that second chance structures must be non-selective, effective in terms of actually improving the educational attainment of the participants, and lead to similar if not the same rewards for success as the first chance provides. The promise of educational attainment via a second chance route should not merely mirror that which is offered by the traditional educational structure in society. Rather, second chance programs

can offer a renewed sense of potential for disadvantaged groups in society, whose chance for mobility may be limited in the traditional route.²

Second chance education has been researched as a potential mechanism for moderating inequalities that exist within the educational structure (Ayalon, 1990; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Inbar & Sever, 1986). Previous research has explored the mechanisms themselves, the target population, organizational structure, and who makes use of second chance opportunities to meet their educational goals. The research has attempted to answer two main questions. First, to what extent do second chance programs actually enable students to reach higher education, and second, to what extent do they reduce educational inequality between social strata? Previous studies were more successful in providing answers to the first question than the second. In many cases these studies either concentrated on students of specific second chance programs, or excluded early dropouts from their samples, thus failing to perform the appropriate comparisons for the analysis of educational inequality. By using nationally representative data on birth cohorts, we can compare second chance students to both students on the traditional route as well as to dropouts, and thus address both of these questions.

Scholars are generally skeptical about the success of second chance education in reducing inequality. First, it is often the case that educational institutions claiming to offer a second chance are, in practice, offering alternative routes, which tend to exacerbate class inequalities in educational attainment. For example, community colleges in the U.S. were first established with the intent that they would be second chance institutions, and most emphasized a liberal arts education. Gradually, they expanded their vocational programs and shifted to an alternative education focus (Brint & Karabel, 1989). In recent decades, the majority (about 60%) of community college students are enrolled in vocational programs (see, for example, Dougherty, 1994). Thus, many community colleges were, in fact, transformed from second chance into alternative forms of education. Second, even when second chance institutions adhere to their initial calling, they do not seem to further the subsequent attainments of students. The General Educational Development test (GED) in the United States, which serves as a high school completion certificate for individuals who have dropped out, is a case in point. When compared to those who graduate from high school, individuals who obtain a GED are less likely to continue with their education at the post-secondary level. In addition, GED recipients do not fare as well in the labor market as those who complete high school in the traditional way (Boesel et al., 1998; Murnane et al., 2000). Third, research has shown that second chance educational programs often miss their target population – students of underprivileged social groups – and instead, they serve middle-class students whose

family resources enable them to take advantage of these additional opportunities. For example, Lee and Frank (1990) report that users of community colleges as a pathway to four-year universities in the U.S. are not socially disadvantaged on average. Ayalon (1990) shows that in Israel, members of the more privileged Jewish ethnic group take the best advantage of second chance opportunities.

Second Chance Education in Israel

There are two major forms of second-chance education in Israel: external matriculation examinations and university preparatory programs (*Mechinot*). Students who do not succeed in all matriculation examinations while in secondary school, or those who had dropped out, can take them on their own at any time. When taken outside the formal secondary school framework, the examinations are referred to as external matriculation examinations. External examinations are similar to internal ones except that the final grade of the internal examination is computed as an average of the exam score and the school grade in the subject; in the external examination, the final score is computed solely from the exam score. Most students who take external examinations do so within the external school systems. These are usually private schools that specialize in preparing students for the examinations. Their clientele consists of two primary categories: teenagers who failed in academic secondary schools and young adults, usually in their twenties, who did not pass some or any of the matriculation examinations (Inbar & Sever, 1986).

The university academic preparatory programs, *Mechinot*, are one-year intensive study programs sponsored by the universities in collaboration with the Israeli Ministry of Education, which also subsidizes them (Ayalon et al., 1992). The goal of the *Mechinot* is to offer young men and women a second chance at university admissions, or to improve their prospects for admission to the more selective faculties therein.

Earlier empirical research on second chance education in Israel has been rather limited in scope. Inbar and Sever (1986) studied the social composition of students enrolled in external secondary schools and found that their socio-economic characteristics are very similar to the general distribution of the population. Neither the top nor the bottom strata are over-represented in this group of students. They suggest that the real common quality among these students is that despite having not completed high school, they hold high educational aspirations. However, Inbar and Sever argue that these programs have not been successful in providing external school students entry into post-secondary education. They found that only a small percentage of the

students who enroll in external schools actually receive the matriculation diploma they desired.

Ayalon (1990) compared the social composition of external day schools to that of academic and vocational students at traditional secondary schools, as well as to dropouts. She too found that the socioeconomic profile of external students is similar to the composition of average Israeli high schools, except that *Ashkenazim*, the privileged Jewish ethnic group, are over-represented among them. She concludes that external schools are employed as a second chance by academically weak *Ashkenazim*, a socio-economically successful ethnic group, rather than by those who are at the very bottom of the social hierarchy. Thus, despite their intended goals of moderating educational inequalities, students of advantaged groups are those who benefit most from these second chance mechanisms. Therefore, this second chance structure actually widens social gaps in education by providing additional opportunities to students from privileged strata. In a later study, Ayalon et al. (1992) examined the social composition and success rates of students enrolled in *Mechinot* in the early 1980s. In this case, the authors found that educational inequalities between social strata that were observed at the beginning of the program diminished by graduation. Yet, this study did not explore what leads to enrollment in *Mechinot* or their impact, relative to other educational destinations, nor was the focus on tertiary educational outcomes.

Compared to previous studies of second chance opportunities in the Israeli educational system, ours has two main advantages and one major limitation. The first advantage is that we have at our disposal nationally representative data based on birth cohorts. Previous studies were in many cases not representative of the entire population, either because they excluded early dropouts or because they studied students at specific second-chance programs. The second advantage is that our data provide us with the opportunity to address the two main questions on second chance education: a second chance for whom and a second chance to where? Thus far, the Israeli research has primarily focused on the first question. The limitation is that we do not have information on the institutional structures within which respondents may have attempted to obtain a second chance. We do not know if they enrolled in *Mechinot* or in external schools. However, our focus is not on the specific type of second chance taken, but rather on the comparison of second chance students to other "traditional" students.

The study has three specific components. First, we study the social determinants of the educational route taken by students and distinguish between three main routes: (1) early dropout of secondary education; (2) main road: obtaining the matriculation diploma in time (by age 19) and going on to tertiary

education, and (3) second chance. Second, we compare the degree of gender, ethnic, and socioeconomic inequality in the log odds of matriculation, before and after the use of second chance education. Third, we explore the post-secondary educational and occupational attainment associated with having taken a specific educational route. Specifically, we look at the attainment of second chancers in comparison to individuals who took other educational routes.

DATA AND VARIABLES

Our data are drawn from the national population censuses held by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) in 1983 and in 1995. The Census consists of a short questionnaire, which is administered to all persons living in Israel during the week of the census, and a more detailed one, which is completed by a 20% sample of households and their members, who are fifteen years old and over. The census master files, which are kept under tight security at CBS, include respondents' national ID numbers. This allows CBS to merge individual records across censuses. Subject to various confidentiality constraints, the research community can request sub-files from this rich database. In this study we employ merged records for persons who were 19–20 years old in 1983. We refer to them as our primary subjects. The 19–20 age group was selected because it was old enough in 1983 to have graduated from secondary school, completed the matriculation examinations, and to have been informed by the Ministry of Education of the results. For primary subjects who still lived with their parents at the time of the census, data was merged with parents' 1983 census records.³ In the 1983 census there were 16,114 detailed questionnaires completed for 19–20 year old individuals. For 3,212 of these individuals, detailed questionnaires were completed in the 1995 census. This is exactly the proportion that we would expect on the basis of equal probability (20%). Of those, we identified parental records for 90%.

The first dependent variable in our analysis is labeled *Route*. This variable represents the educational route that primary subjects followed. It is measured by cross-tabulating the highest diploma attained by 1983 and by 1995, and it consists of five categories. The first category includes subjects who did not obtain the matriculation diploma in 1983 or in 1995. We label this category "leavers" in that they have opted out of any post-secondary education. Indeed, many of them did not complete secondary school. This category comprises 35.3% of the sample. The second category consists of

all those who obtained a matriculation diploma on time (in 1983 when they were 19–20 years old) and then obtained post-secondary educational qualifications by 1995. A quarter of the sample took this route, which we label the “main road.” The third category consists of those who did not obtain a matriculation diploma in 1983, but who by 1995 obtained the diploma or even completed a post-secondary degree. We assume that most students who took this route did so via the external schools or the Mechinot and we label this category “second chance.” The second-chance route is taken by about thirteen percent of the cohort. A fourth category is labeled “halters.” These are people who obtained the matriculation diploma in 1983 but did not complete any form of post-secondary education. About 11% of the sample fall in this category. Finally, the last category “Other,” which consists of 17.8% of the cohort, includes subjects with missing data on route, as well as 6.3% who were coded as having a matriculation diploma in 1983 but not in 1995.⁴ Other dependent variables will be described later as we bring them into the analysis.

Six variables were included as predictors for this analysis. *Track* in secondary school included three mutually exclusive dummy variables: academic track, vocational track, and no secondary education. Subjects were asked to indicate how many years they attended each form of education. Those who attended any vocational secondary education were coded as vocational track students; those who attended at least 3 years of academic secondary education were coded as academic track students; those who attended two or fewer years of academic education, and no vocational education, were considered having no secondary education. *Parental education* is computed as the mean number of school years attended by mother and father. *Standard of living* is an indicator of the economic circumstance of subjects’ family of origin. The census form includes a list of yes/no questions about household possessions, including such items as an air conditioner, car, television, phone, etc. We computed an index summing positive responses to the possession questions, and for ease of interpretation standardized it to a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. *Ethnicity* consists of three dummy variables: “Ashkenazim” (Jews whose fathers were born in Europe, America or South Africa as well as second generation Israelis⁵); “Mizrahim” (Jews whose fathers were born in the Middle East or in North Africa.); and “Arabs” (Non-Jews whose fathers were born in Israel). Very few respondents did not fit in any of the three categories and were excluded from the analysis. *Gender* is coded 1 for men and 0 for women. The Census form asks women to indicate the number of births they have had. We employ mother’s response to this question as a proxy for the variable *number of siblings*.

Table 1. Proportions and Means of Variables by Educational Route,
Men and Women 19–20 Years Old in 1983.

Route	Proportions								Means (SD)		
	Total	Ethnicity (row percentages)			Gender Males	Track in Secondary School (row percentages)			Socioeconomic Variables		
		Mizrahim	Arabs	Ashkenazim		Academic Track	Vocational Track	No Sec Ed	Parental Education	No. of Siblings	Standard of Living
Leavers	0.35	0.53	0.33	0.14	0.53	0.11	0.60	0.29	8.3 (6.1)	6.3 (2.5)	-0.36 (0.91)
Main Road	0.25	0.36	0.09	0.55	0.48	0.62	0.37	0.01	16.5 (6.2)	3.8 (2.0)	0.65 (0.88)
Second Chance	0.13	0.54	0.24	0.22	0.60	0.35	0.64	0.01	10.5 (6.4)	5.4 (2.4)	-0.08 (0.88)
Halters	0.11	0.50	0.16	0.34	0.44	0.57	0.43	0.00	13.5 (5.9)	4.2 (2.0)	0.33 (0.92)
Other	0.18	0.54	0.21	0.25	0.56	0.25	0.67	0.08	10.7 (7.0)	5.4 (2.5)	-0.04 (0.95)
Total	N = 2909	0.49	0.22	0.29	0.56	0.33	0.55	0.12	11.5 (7.1)	5.2 (2.5)	0.00 (0.99)

RESULTS

Educational Routes

Table 1 includes descriptive sample information on the independent variables by educational route. Arabs and Mizrahim are over-represented among leavers, as are men and students of vocational tracks. The mean parental education and standard of living are lowest for this category, and the number of siblings is highest. This finding is consistent with numerous studies of the socioeconomic background and social origin of high school dropouts and those who do not advance to post-secondary education (Shavit, 1990; Ayalon, 1990). Main roaders are disproportionately Ashkenazi (55%) and students of the academic track (62%), and their social origins are more favorable on average than those of the other categories. For example, the standard of living is much higher for this group than for any other group, and their mean parental education (16.5 years) is nearly twice that of the leavers. Turning to the second chance category, we see that in comparison to main roaders, it consists of more men, Arabs and Mizrahim, and its mean parental education and standard of living are lower. Finally, second chance students are disproportionately vocational track students.

We now turn to a multinomial logit analysis of the determinants of educational route. Since virtually no dropout has ever obtained a matriculation diploma, when estimating the logit models for Route, we ran into singularity problems when estimating our models. Therefore, we dropped all subjects ($n = 349$) who did not report a minimum of 2 years of secondary education from the multinomial logit analysis. (They were subsequently returned to the analysis presented in later tables.) In Table 2 we present the logit coefficient estimates on two log odds ratios: taking a second chance rather than being a leaver (column 1), and second chance rather than taking the main road (column 2). The results in column 1 show that the ethnicity variables are not statistically significant in affecting the odds that a student who failed to obtain the matriculation diploma by 1983 will take a second chance and do so by 1995. Arabs are on average more likely than Ashkenazi Jews to take a second chance, but this difference is not statistically significant. Vocational track students are less than half as likely as academic students to take a second chance ($e^{-0.99} = 0.37$). In addition, parental education increases the odds of taking a second chance. The effects of the other social origin variables are not statistically significant in this column.

Turning to column 2, we contrast second chancers against those who took the main road. Here, the effect of vocational track is again important, vocational track students are more than twice as likely to take a second chance route rather

than the “main road” to post-secondary education ($e^{0.87} = 2.39$). This is an expected result because vocational tracks do not usually enable students to obtain a full matriculation diploma at the end of secondary education, and they must resort to second chance opportunities. Gender plays an important role in this column: men are more likely to have obtained the matriculation diploma via a second chance route. We also see strong socioeconomic effects. First, the effect of parental education is negative and much larger than its positive effect in the previous equation. Second, family size has a positive effect, indicating that students from larger families are more likely to take second chance routes as opposed to the main route. Third, standard of living has a large negative effect ($e^{-0.46} = 0.63$) on the log odds of arriving at post-secondary education via a second chance route rather than the main route. Clearly, students whose parents are more educated and who are from wealthier families are more likely to succeed in the first attempt at obtaining the diploma and are less likely to require a second chance. In terms of ethnicity, while we do see that Mizrahim and Arabs are more likely than Ashkenazim to take a second chance route rather than the main route to post-secondary education, these results are not statistically significant.

In sum, vocational track and parents’ education have opposite effects in the two equations. Vocational education and lower parental education reduce the odds of taking a second chance versus leaving, but they increase the odds when second chancers are compared to those on the main route. However, socioeconomic background is more effective in discriminating between second

Table 2. Multinomial Logit Estimates of Educational Route.

Independent Variables		Second Chance	Second Chance
		vs. Leavers	vs. Main Route
		(1)	(2)
Ethnicity (reference: Ashkenazim)	Mizrahim	0.03	0.36
	Arabs	0.51	0.31
Sex (reference: female)		-0.17	0.36*
Parents’ Education		0.03*	-0.07*
Number of Siblings		-0.06	0.10*
Standard of Living		0.00	-0.46*
Secondary Track (reference: Academic)			
	Vocational	-0.99*	0.87*
Intercept		0.17	-0.81*

* Significant at $p < 0.05$.

chancers and main routers than between second chancers and leavers. In other words, although second chancers originate from better-educated families than the leavers, they more closely resemble leavers, in terms of social origin, than the users of the main road.

The Overall Effect of Second Chance on Inequalities

The analysis presented so far pertains to the question: who is more likely to take the back door versus the front door to the matriculation diploma and higher education? We now turn to our principal question: do second chance structures for the attainment of the matriculation diploma enhance or attenuate social inequalities? In Table 3, we present the determinants of attaining a matriculation diploma by 1983 (column 1) and by 1995 (column 2). The comparison of the two columns should show whether the existence of second chance mechanisms to obtaining the diploma have widened or narrowed the stratification of educational attainment by social origin. Those who obtained the diploma by 1983 did so largely via the front door while those who obtained it between 1983 and 1995 did so through second chance structures. If second chance equalizes the odds of obtaining the matriculation diploma across social groups, we hypothesize that the effects of the various independent variables in column 2 would be smaller than in column 1. Conversely, larger effects in column 2 would indicate that second chance structures enhance inequalities in the odds of matriculation.

Comparing the estimates in the two columns shows that the negative impact of being Mizrahi versus Ashkenazi on the odds of obtaining the diploma is reduced between 1983 and 1995. The comparison of Arabs and Jews shows that although the former are less likely to obtain the diploma, when controlling for social origin, the effect of being Arab is positive rather than negative. This result has been shown by previous research (e.g. Shavit, 1990). The net advantage of Arabs is larger in 1995 than in 1983 reflecting the finding shown in Table 2. Mainly that, net of the various control variables, Arabs are more likely than Jews to take second chances at obtaining the diploma than to be leavers. In 1995, the male disadvantage relative to females is half of what it is in 1983. This suggests that although males are at a disadvantage with respect to the odds of obtaining the diploma through traditional routes, they make-up for it by utilizing second chance routes to its attainment. By contrast to the reductions in the effects of ethnicity and gender, the effect of parental education does not decline and the effects of standard of living and number of siblings decline only slightly.

Table 3. Binary Logit Estimates of Matriculation Diploma.

Independent Variables		Diploma Obtained By 1983	Diploma Obtained By 1995
		(1)	(2)
Ethnicity (reference: Ashkenazim)	Mizrahim	-0.23~	-0.14
	Arabs	0.01	0.24
Sex (reference: female)		-0.51*	-0.30*
Parents' Education		0.05*	0.05*
Number of Siblings		-0.15*	-0.13*
Standard of Living		0.46*	0.41*
Intercept		0.12	0.24*

* Significant at $p < 0.05$.~Significant at $p < 0.10$.

We conclude that the second chance structures substantially reduce ethnic and gender inequalities in the log odds of obtaining a matriculation diploma. Second chance structures slightly reduce the effects of the economic circumstance of childhood and family size, and do not reduce the effects of parental education on the odds of obtaining a matriculation diploma.

A Second Chance to Where?

In this section we explore whether the use of second chance structures affects later educational and occupational attainment and inequality therein. Breen and Johnson (2000) studied alternative educational routes in Sweden and have suggested that the non-conventional routes to tertiary education leads to lower ultimate achievements than the main route.⁶ In Table 4 we present the determinants of post-secondary educational achievements by 1995. The dependent variable – *post-secondary status* – in this analysis has three categories: “university degree,” including those who have obtained a university degree by 1995; “non-academic post-secondary qualification,” including those who have obtained a non-academic post secondary degree; and “no post-secondary qualification,” including those who did not obtain any post secondary qualification by 1995.

In Table 4 we present multinomial logit estimates for the log odds of three contrasts: university degree versus no post-secondary qualification, non-academic qualification versus no post-Secondary qualification, and university degree versus non-academic qualification. The analysis is conditional on having obtained a matriculation diploma, whether via the main road or through second

Table 4. Multinomial Logit Estimates of Post-Secondary Education Conditional on Matriculation Diploma.

Independent Variables	University vs. no Post Secondary Education	Non Academic Post Secondary vs. no Post Secondary Education	University vs. Non Academic Post Secondary Education
		(1)	(2)
Ethnicity (reference: Ashkenazim)			
Mizrahim	-0.26	-0.21	-0.04
Arabs	0.12	-0.53	0.65
Sex (reference: female)	0.18	0.12	0.05
Parents' Education	0.14*	0.06*	0.07*
Number of Siblings	0.02	0.09*	-0.07
Standard of Living	0.29*	-0.13*	0.42*
Secondary Track (reference: academic)			
Vocational	-0.36*	-0.03	-0.32
Route (reference: main road and halters)			
Second Chance	-1.01*	-0.16	-0.85*
Intercept	-1.20	-0.85*	-0.15

* Significant at $p < 0.05$.

chance opportunities. The equation for each contrast estimates the effects of social origin, high school track and whether one took the second chance route to post-secondary educational attainment.

The results presented in column 1 of the table show that the odds of second chancers obtaining a university degree are lower than those on the main road – regardless of social origin. The findings are different when we investigate the determinants of the log odds to obtain a non-academic qualification rather than no post-secondary qualification; second chance has no statistically significant effect on the log odds of this contrast. Evidently, non-academic programs are not very selective, and therefore, the effects in this column are generally small and only two estimates are statistically significant. The contrast of the two levels of post-secondary education (column 3) shows that the second chancers have higher odds than do their main road counterparts for obtaining the less prestigious certificate – the non-academic degree. In sum, whether one had obtained a matriculation diploma via a second chance route or the main road does not affect the odds of obtaining non-academic qualifications, but the route to obtaining the matriculation diploma is statistically significant in shaping the odds of attaining a university degree. In this case, the odds are considerably

lower for the second chancers. In addition to the effect of route on tertiary education we find the expected effects of social origin and of track in secondary school. Graduates of academic secondary education are more likely to obtain a university diploma, as are those from wealthier and more educated families. Individuals who received a non-academic post secondary qualification often came from large families.

We now turn to analyze the effects of educational route on occupational attainment. Two competing hypotheses regarding the relationship between these two variables come to mind. The first is that in comparison to main roaders, second chance students may be less academically able (otherwise they could have completed the matriculation examinations on time, and would not have needed to resort to a second chance). Thus, second chancers would be less likely to have done very well in the university or to have attained a very prestigious occupation. On the other hand, second chance students may be more highly motivated, at least as adults, than those who simply followed the traditional educational track, and this quality may enhance their occupational attainment.

In Table 5 we present two OLS regressions with the dependent variable – socioeconomic index (SEI) – as a measure of subjects' 1995 occupation status.⁷ The mean of SEI in the sample is 44.58 with a standard deviation of 24.19. Route is the major independent variable in the analysis with second chance as the omitted category. We estimate two regression equations. The first includes Route with the following controls: ethnicity, gender, parental education, number of siblings, standard of living, and track while at secondary school. The results from this analysis indicate that those who followed the main road attained a much more prestigious occupation than second chancers, who, in turn, attain a much more prestigious occupation than leavers. Clearly, these differences are largely due to the ultimate qualification attained. Therefore, in the second equation we control for tertiary qualification and find the following results: As one would expect, holders of university degrees have very high SEI scores, followed by those with non-academic post-secondary qualifications. Second, net of tertiary qualification, the effects of Route are substantially reduced relative to the first equation, but maintain a similar pattern: second chancers attain occupations whose SEI scores fall in the middle between those attained by main roaders and leavers. This result is consistent with the first of the two hypotheses presented above. It would seem that those who require a second chance are usually not the strongest students and are therefore not very likely to enter the most selective university departments (e.g., the professional schools) which lead to the top of the occupational hierarchy. When compared to leavers on the other hand, second chancers are probably more able and motivated and attain better occupations.⁸

Table 5. OLS Regression Effects of Educational Route on Occupational SEI Scores.

Independent Variables	(1)	(2)
Ethnicity (reference: Ashkenazim)		
Mizrahim	0.07	0.40
Arabs	-1.00	-2.76*
Sex (reference: female)		
	0.38	-0.63
Parents' Education	0.39*	0.23
Number of Siblings	-0.76*	-0.61*
Standard of Living	0.69	-0.57
Secondary Track (reference: academic)		
Vocational	-4.28*	-2.41
Route (reference: second chance)		
Main Road	18.28*	5.63*
Halters	-1.24	6.80*
Leavers	-11.54*	-5.01*
Other	-1.05	-0.55
Post-Secondary Qualification (reference: none)		
University Degree		27.07*
Non-Academic Post		
Secondary Qualification		11.32*
Intercept	47.59	40.44
N of cases	1485	1473
R ²	0.34	0.41

* Significant at $p < 0.05$.

CONCLUSION

Do Second Chance Opportunities Reinforce Disadvantage or Offer Access to Opportunity?

In this paper, we investigate the role of second-chance structures in the process of educational stratification. Specifically, we study the social characteristics of those students who have made use of second chance educational opportunities, relative to those who did not. We examine the extent to which the availability of second chance education alters the degree of ethnic, gender and socio-economic inequalities in the odds of obtaining a matriculation diploma. Moreover, we compare the ultimate educational and occupational attainments of those who took the main road to those who took the route of second chance. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to address all three aspects of the problem at hand.

Previous studies on second chance education have been rather skeptical regarding the role of second chance structures in altering the outcomes of the educational stratification process. It has been argued that students from privileged social origins that had failed in the first attempt to reach certain credentials most often use these mechanisms. Therefore, second chance structures do not reduce inequality of educational opportunity between social strata. Previous Israeli studies of external schools tend to agree with this conclusion.

Our results are somewhat more optimistic than are those from previous studies. First, when compared to those who took the main road to the matriculation diploma and higher education, the social origins of second chance students are clearly disadvantaged. On the other hand, among those who did not obtain the diploma via the main road, the odds of exploiting second chance opportunities are clearly related to socioeconomic origins. In other words, it is not the case that the socioeconomic and ethnic profile of second chancers is similar to that of the general population or is middle-class. The users of second chance structures tend to come from the lower middle ranges of the social hierarchy, are predominantly men rather than women, and vocational rather than academic track students.

Second, the overall inequality in the odds of obtaining the matriculation diploma between men and women, and between ethnic groups, is reduced by the utilization of second chance opportunities. Inequality between economic strata is also reduced slightly, albeit not significantly. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first reporting of such a result.

Third, second chancers are not likely to reach the top of either the educational or the occupational pyramids. Rather, when compared to those who had obtained the matriculation diploma via the main road, second chancers are more likely to obtain non-academic post-secondary qualifications rather than the baccalaureate degree, and reach less prestigious occupations. And yet, their occupational attainment is clearly superior to those who had not obtained a matriculation diploma at all. This finding would be interesting to explore at other types of second chance systems. For example, at community colleges in the U.S., where many enrolled students may not reach their ultimate educational goals, does additional schooling contribute to a social positioning that is superior to those with no post-secondary education, and inferior to those who complete the baccalaureate degree?

Whether implicit or explicit, if the goal in expansion of the educational system through second chance structures is one of equalizing opportunities, then the success of such programs should prove to narrow the gaps in attainment that exists between different groups in the social hierarchy. Our results indicate that second chance structures do in fact contribute to the equalization

of opportunities. However, these changes are minimal in terms of shifts in the overall system of social stratification. The existence of such programs clearly widens access, however the desire for upward mobility via post-secondary educational or professional attainment is not realized.

Our findings show that second chance structures help to maintain the stability of the stratification system. Individuals who take advantage of second chance opportunities originate from the lower-middle strata, and second chance structures assist them in keeping this position. The advantages of using the main road compared to second chance mechanisms are obvious. However, given the fact that second chancers did not use the main road, second chance opportunities, which do not seem to provide their users upward mobility, may protect them from downward mobility. Thus, these structures do contribute to the enhancement of social equality at least by preventing the enlargement of educational and occupational gaps. This leads us to the conclusion that the critical attitude toward second chance structures, prevailing in stratification research, should be moderated.

NOTES

1. And yet, some scholars (e.g. Shavit & Kraus, 1990) point out that the role of alternative education in the stratification process should not be evaluated by comparing it to mainstream education, but rather by comparing it to a hypothetical system from which it is absent. In the absence of alternative education, lower-class students would drop out in larger numbers.

2. For an in-depth review of the theoretical underpinnings of the concept of second chance education, see Inbar (1995).

3. Subjects are identified by a household identification number and by their relation to the head of the household or the 'first' person in the household. The values of this variable are spouse, son/daughter, parents, etc. Thus, we could merge the records of the sons/daughters with those of the head of the household and of the head's spouse. The merge with parental records was not possible for subjects who were not polled in the parental household (10% of the sample). Leaving the parental home at the age of 19–20 is due mainly to early marriage, which is relatively common among females of lower socioeconomic strata. Since young married women of lower socioeconomic origin may be less interested, compared to other groups, in acquiring post-secondary education, dropouts may be underrepresented in the final sample.

4. Clearly, this category represents either reporting or coding error. The vast majority of subjects in this category attended vocational secondary education where obtaining a matriculation diploma is not very common. Some people are not fully aware of the meaning of 'matriculation diploma' "Bagrut" and fail to distinguish it from a graduation diploma that is awarded to all secondary school graduates, but is of little value in the labor market or for further education. Therefore, it is likely that the errors were in the 1983 "Bagrut" response rather than in the 1995 response. By 1995, the difference may have become more apparent to respondents and the responses may have been more accurate.

5. Second generation Israelis (father born in Israel) are less than 3% of the sample. In 1983, 72% of the Israeli born aged 40–64 (the age group of the parents of the subjects in our study) whose fathers were born abroad were of Ashkenazi origin (ICBS, 1994). Our data show that Israeli-born parents are very similar to the Ashkenazi parents in years of schooling, standard of living, and number of children.

6. They also found a slightly stronger effect of social origin on subsequent educational attainment for those who followed non-conventional educational routes. We did not find consistent interactions between route and social origins in our data.

7. The Socioeconomic Index of Occupations originally developed by Duncan (1961) is a composite measure of the median education and income of persons employed in each occupation. The index correlates highly with the prestige of an occupation as measured in large samples. It was adapted to the Israeli case by Tyree (1981) and later by Semyonov, Lewin-Epstein and Mandel (2000).

8. Our results are consistent with research on the labor market performance of community college entrants versus those who do not attend college at all and those who attend four-year institutions (Kane & Rouse, 1999). It is also consistent with work on GED recipients who fare better in the labor market than do their high school dropout equivalents, and worse than their high school graduate counterparts (Murnane et al., 1997, 2000).

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