



## For-Profit Mid-Career Programmes as a Second Chance

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Israeli universities have recently established for-profit (FP) mid-career programmes, intended for holders of junior managerial positions who wish to acquire a Master's degree and improve their status and salary. We analyse the programmes as a second-chance structure, which provides working people with the opportunity to win a Master's degree from a prestigious university. The sample is 580 students of FP and regular programmes in the social science faculty of Tel Aviv University, Israel. A questionnaire was administered to all students who took these programmes from 2004 to 2008. The data are analysed by logistic regression. The major findings are as follows: the FP programmes serve as a second chance for the lower stratum of the dominant ethnic group and for the higher stratum of the disadvantaged ethnic group. Graduates of the elite universities more often use the programmes to obtain a job-relevant degree.

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### Introduction

The appearance of for-profit (FP) mid-career programmes — a new entity in higher education — is related to several recent social trends in many higher education systems. These include the expansion, diversification and marketization of higher education, and the emergence of lifelong learning.

Higher education systems have notably changed in recent decades. The first and most obvious change is their remarkable expansion (Meyer *et al.*, 2007), accompanied by significant diversification. Higher education is no longer dominated by research universities, aiming at the accumulation and distribution of knowledge, and many higher education systems now offer professional programmes, which are labour-market oriented (Teichler, 1996; Breneman *et al.*, 2006).

One of the reasons for this change is the increasing proportion of older students, who are career- and not education-oriented (Breneman *et al.*, 2006). This is particularly true for students who have already joined the labour



market and wish to upgrade their position by acquiring education. In the literature and in policy making this trend has been termed Lifelong Learning, in recognition that learning may stretch out across a lifetime (Gorard and Selwyn, 2005; Field, 2006). In recent years this has become a policy consensus, often mentioned in the context of the rise of the knowledge society, linking economic growth and wellbeing in the globalized economy to constant production and use of new knowledge and information (Field, 2006). The notion of lifelong learning has emerged in the context of the changing pattern of individuals' lives, as occupational careers — 'jobs for life' — are currently in decline, giving way to a demand for retraining, transferable skills and multiskilling.

Higher education systems respond to the demands of lifelong learners by offering practical rather than intellectually centred programmes. One of the consequences of this process is a change in the meaning of the Master's degree. Some Master's programmes are no longer a step toward doctoral studies, but the path to an independent professional degree (Yogev, 2010).

An additional recent development in higher education is its marketization. This occurs when governments and higher education institutions adopt new market-based policies designed to make universities more efficient and effective (Dill, 2003).

## **FP Programmes in Higher Education**

In this context of changing higher education systems, we witness the establishment of FP degree-granting programmes. Unlike the traditional higher education programmes, these are oriented to making a profit; they focus on education and training for employment and treat the students as clients or consumers rather than supplicants (Breneman, 2006). FP programmes usually cater to older populations, which corresponds to the feature of lifelong learning mentioned above.

FP higher education programmes have been the target of severe criticism, on institutional and social grounds. Institutionally, the economic and market considerations underlying these programmes, which have no evident academic logic, are censured (Barnett, 2003; Yogev *et al.*, 2008). Also, their academic standards are found to be faulty. Their concentration on economic success prevents the FP programmes from matching the selectivity of non-profit programmes, thus lowering their standards (Yogev *et al.*, 2008). Critics also argue that these programmes downgrade the academic profession (Breneman, 2006). Socially, the criticism is levelled against the high tuition demanded by the FP programmes. This costly fee widens social gaps, as only wealthy students can afford it (Breneman, 2006).



The lower selectivity of the FP programmes, which is criticized from the institutional aspect, can be viewed differently from the social aspect. Since lower class students have higher odds of failing to meet the high standards of the selective higher education programmes, lowering the standards can reduce social inequality in enrolment. This argument may seem unrealistic in light of the high tuition charged by FP programmes. How can we see programmes that demand high tuition as moderating social inequality? We argue that this claim is indeed unrealistic regarding conventional students, but it makes sense regarding older students who have already joined the labour market. The social position of traditional students enrolled in higher education is measured according to their parents' socioeconomic achievements (e.g., Shavit *et al.*, 2007). It is otherwise for students who have already joined the labour market, and wish to upgrade their professional status by acquiring education. These students may have come from lower socioeconomic strata, but after joining the labour market their social position is no longer defined by their parents' achievements. Members of the workforce who have attained some degree of professional and economic success, and can afford the tuition charged by the FP programmes, may try to convert their own economic achievements into educational credentials. For this population, the FP programmes may potentially compensate for initial disadvantages, which may have accounted for their modest achievements in high school, preventing them from conducting their undergraduate studies in selective higher education institutions and/or prestigious fields of study. As Gorard and Selwyn, (2005) assert, greater adult participation in education and training may combat social exclusion and increase equity.

Our study investigates adults who completed their undergraduate studies earlier in life and try to acquire advanced university degrees later on. It applies Gorard and Selwyn's definition (2005) of lifelong learners as those who 'reported at least one immediate episode of post-compulsory education or training and at least one other episode later in life'.

The potential impact of lifelong learning on changing patterns of educational inequality has not enjoyed wide research attention. This paper concentrates on this under-investigated area and seeks to offer some initial findings. To achieve that goal we combine the established body of scholarship investigating stratification and higher education with questions emerging from the recent trends of marketization of higher education and of lifelong learning. We analyse FP mid-career academic programmes oriented to lifelong learners in Israel as a second chance for populations who suffered from initial ethnic and socioeconomic disadvantages. We also refer to educational disadvantages, although we analyse students who have already acquired the Bachelor's degree and cannot be considered educationally disadvantaged, in absolute terms. We refer to relative disadvantages, related to the students' undergraduate studies,



such as non-prestigious and economically unrewarding fields of study, second-tier higher education institutions and low graduation grades. All these limit their opportunities for graduate studies. We ask whether graduate students who are ethnically, socioeconomically and educationally disadvantaged compared with their peers are better represented in FP than in regular programmes in similar areas of study.

## **Second Chance in Education and the FP Mid-Career Degree Programmes**

Second-chance structures are non-selective channels providing ‘another opportunity to move onto a track one dropped out of or missed altogether’ (Inbar and Sever, 1989) — that is, they furnish another opportunity mainly to dropouts from mainstream education. Being mostly aimed at students from underprivileged strata, they are viewed as a potential mechanism for moderating educational inequalities in society (Brint and Karabel, 1989; Shavit *et al.*, 2002).

Previous research shows that second-chance structures often miss their target population. Instead of improving the opportunities of underprivileged students they serve middle class students who failed in mainstream education and whose family resources enable them to take advantage of these later opportunities (Ayalon, 1990; Lee and Frank, 1990). Raffe (1979), analysing the second chance (the ‘alternative route’) in Britain, distinguished ‘alternative in the social sense’ from ‘alternative in the educational sense’. The former refers to an alternative for students with social disadvantages, the latter to an alternative for students with educational disadvantages.

FP programmes satisfy the three criteria of a second-chance structure, stipulated by Inbar and Sever (1989): accessibility, effectiveness and equivalence. These programmes are easier to access than regular ones because they are less selective; they are effective because they actually improve the students’ educational attainments; they are equivalent because the degree they offer is similar to that of the regular programmes. In analysing these programmes in Israel as a second chance we assume that the students, who possess a Bachelor’s degree, did not continue their studies because of social and/or educational disadvantages. ‘Social disadvantages’ are those of socioeconomic or ethnic origin; ‘educational disadvantages’ for students who already have the Bachelor’s degree, are graduating in a non-prestigious field, graduating from a second-tier institution, and low achievements in undergraduate studies.

In Israel, as in many other countries, social and ethnic inequality in higher education is conspicuous. The lower socioeconomic strata and underprivileged ethnic groups are underrepresented (Addi-Raccah and Ayalon, 2008). The



disadvantaged ethnic groups are Jews of Middle Eastern and North African origin (usually called Mizrahi (pl. Mizrahim, 'easterners') and Arabs. The odds of members of these two groups obtaining the matriculation diploma, a prerequisite for higher education, are relatively low (*ibid.*), so their enrolment rates in higher education are likewise low. The disadvantage continues on the path from undergraduate to graduate studies. For example, in 2007 Arabs, who are about 20% of the population, amounted to only 6% of all students for the Master's degree. Mizrahi students, who are more than 50% of the Jewish population, constituted about 22% of all Master's students (CBS, 2007).

### Higher Education and FP Mid-Career Programmes in Israel

Until the 1990s, Israeli higher education consisted mainly of six research-oriented publicly supported universities, one scientific institution for graduate studies, and one Open University. Some colleges existed at that time, but they were not allowed to grant an academic degree and were not considered part of the higher education system. The six universities offer graduate and undergraduate programmes and are considered quite selective. Admission to their undergraduate programmes is based almost exclusively on test results: average score in the matriculation tests, mostly taken at the end of high school, and a psychometric score. The latter is based on the psychometric test, which is a general aptitude test, and is required by the universities. Programmes differ in their cut-off score, which mainly depends on supply and demand. Students in the regular Master's programmes usually continue in the same field of their undergraduate studies. Admission to these programmes depends on achievement in undergraduate studies. The minimal graduation grade for admission to Master's programmes is usually 80 (on a scale from 0 and 100).

The Israeli higher education system has undergone significant expansion and diversification since the 1990s (Ayalon and Yogeve, 2005; Menahem *et al.*, 2008). The change is because of the establishment of new colleges, aimed at undergraduate studies, and the granting of academic accreditation to the undergraduate programmes of the older ones. The decision to expand the higher education system was made by the Israeli Council for Higher Education (CHE) in the early 1990s, in response to the growing demand for higher education that followed demographic changes (such as mass immigration), a significant increase in the number of high school matriculants, and the credentialing trends of the labour market (Guri-Rosenblit, 1993). Unlike the universities, which are all publicly supported, some of the colleges are privately owned. The CHE, however, accredits the programmes of all higher education institutions, public and private, thereby controlling autonomously the major



share of developments related to the expansion of higher education. Through its operational organ, the Planning and Budgeting Committee, the CHE regulates the government's financial allocations to the universities and the public colleges.

At present Israeli higher education is stratified according to several dimensions. Yogev (2000) divides the universities into elite and non-elite ('target') institutions. The elite universities concentrate on graduate studies and absorb better students, whereas the non-elite focus on undergraduate studies. The colleges, which are quite diversified, are also internally stratified, particularly according to their selectivity (Ayalon and Yogev, 2006). The two types of internal stratification are secondary, however, to the stratification between the colleges, which are considered the second tier of higher education, and the universities, which constitute the first tier (Ayalon and Yogev, 2006).

An additional source of stratification in Israeli higher education is the field of study. Israeli undergraduate students enrol in a specific field right from the start. The prestige of fields of study mainly depends on their selectivity. The admission cut-off point, which as noted is based on supply and demand, represents the field's selectivity. Programmes whose cut-off point is close to the minimal requirements are non-selective and less prestigious. Programmes whose cut-off point significantly exceeds the minimal requirements are the most prestigious. Fields that lead to economically rewarding professions (i.e., business, economics, law, engineering, computer sciences, and medicine) are usually highly valued. The social sciences take an intermediate position, but some majors (psychology, communication) are more prestigious than others (sociology, political science). The humanities and education, which are the least in demand, are usually non-selective and are considered the least prestigious (Ayalon and Yogev, 2005). This hierarchy of fields of study holds for universities and colleges alike. However, for each field the colleges are less selective than the universities (Ayalon and Yogev, 2005).

The present system of higher education includes, in addition to the universities, about 50 colleges. The idea of further expanding the system by establishing FP programmes in the non-profit publicly supported universities is mainly the result of a severe financial crisis, beginning in the late 1990s. Because of this, as well as increasing competition with the colleges for students, the universities initiated FP programmes for the Master's degree (Yogev *et al.*, 2008).

The FP programmes, which operate in the public non-profit Israeli universities, are unique. They are not publicly supported, and are intended to generate revenues for the department and the institution. Tuition fees alone fund their operation, including hiring academic and administrative staff and renting the facilities such as classrooms. In contrast to the government-regulated tuition fees in the regular programmes, FP programmes base the



tuition on their estimated demand. In general, these students pay at least double the sum paid by students in the regular programmes.

Profits from FP programmes help the departments perform functions previously financed by their university, for example, hiring adjunct teachers and teaching assistants for the regular graduate programmes, offering scholarships to students in the regular programmes, and purchasing equipment. Owing to these advantages, many faculty members who originally opposed these programmes as downgrading higher education have changed their attitude (Yogev *et al.*, 2008).

Academically, most FP programmes parallel older and already approved regular ones. This is to sidestep the long approval procedure demanded by the CHE for new programmes. Still, the two types differ significantly. FP programmes are shorter than the usual Master's programmes. They last three semesters, including summer, totalling one calendar year. The regular programmes consist of four semesters and last at least two years. Classes in FP programmes are concentrated in two days a week, and all students study together. Yogev (2010), who studied FP programmes at Tel Aviv University, reports that unlike the regular programmes they do not include elective courses, and all students follow the same curriculum. He also reports that in all fields of study the FP programmes are less selective than the regular ones.

Unlike the regular Master's programmes, the majors in the undergraduate studies are not necessary prerequisites for enrolling in FP programmes, and continuity of field of study is less frequent (Yogev *et al.*, 2008).

FP programmes are mainly intended for managers in the labour market, whose status and salary can be upgraded through them. Better correspondence between their jobs and their education is likewise attained. For many workers, the area of their undergraduate studies is hardly relevant to their jobs. Acquiring a Master's degree in a field that is directly relevant to their job may help these employees to improve their performance, as well as their status and salary.

In Israel, employees in the civil service are entitled to a fixed subsidy from the employer for tuition whether they study in a regular or an FP programme. In the regular programme the subsidy covers about 75% of the tuition. In the FP programme the subsidy decreases according to the actual fees required by the programme. In the most expensive programmes (such as FP MBA programmes) it may drop to about 15% of the tuition fee, but in most programmes it is around 35–40%. Financial support from private employers may vary from student to student.

Our major purpose of the current study is to investigate whether FP programmes serve as a second chance in the social sense for socioeconomically and ethnically disadvantaged groups and/or as a second chance in the educational sense for privileged groups. We ask: to what extent are students characterized by initial social disadvantages and/or shortcomings in their

undergraduate studies better represented in FP programmes than in regular programmes in similar areas of study? What types of social and educational disadvantages distinguish students in FP programmes from those in regular programmes?

## Data and Method

### Data and variables

Data are based on a survey conducted by the authors in the Faculty of Social Sciences at Tel Aviv University. As noted, in Yogeve's typology Tel Aviv is classified as an elite university. It is the university with the largest number of FP programmes — over 20, whereas other universities have fewer than 10 programmes each (Yogeve *et al.*, 2008). The Social Sciences faculty conducts four programmes, two of which, public policy and labour studies, parallel regular programmes. We analyse these two programmes. The regular programmes are prestigious and in great demand. The prestige of Tel Aviv University and the prestige of the regular programmes contribute to the status of the FP programmes, which are highly valued and sought after. Obviously, we cannot claim that our sample represents the entire population of FP programmes in Israel, but we believe that the processes occurring in it represent those of parallel FP and regular programmes elsewhere. We conducted five waves of surveys: the cohorts of 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008. Students in the FP and regular programmes answered during classes a questionnaire composed mainly of closed items. The response rate was 70%. Non-response is mainly because of students who were absent from classes during data collection. The students were asked about their socio-demographic characteristics, educational background, and labour market position. The final sample consists of 580 students: 326 in regular programmes and 254 in FP programmes.

Following is a description of the variables.

Socio-demographic characteristics:

Gender

Age

Ethnic origin includes three dummy variables: Mizrahi, coded 1 for students who themselves or their fathers were born in the Middle East or North Africa, 0 otherwise. Non-Mizrahi, coded 1 for students of European or American origin and for second-generation Israeli Jews, 0 otherwise; Arab, coded 1 for Arabs, 0 for Jews.

Parental education — Years of schooling of the parent with the higher educational achievement.

Father's occupational prestige, according to the scale of Semyonov *et al.* (2000).

Educational history:

Major in undergraduate studies: Humanities (humanities and education 1, other majors 0); Social Sciences (social sciences 1, other majors 0);

Other includes social work, nursing, exact sciences, life sciences. Owing to their small numbers, these majors are contained in the same category, although they differ in prestige and selectivity. They have two common characteristics: they all are less relevant to the jobs of the students of the FP programmes than the social sciences; they are more prestigious than the humanities and education.

Institution of undergraduate studies:

Elite university (elite university 1, otherwise 0)

Non-elite university (non-elite university 1, otherwise 0)

College (college 1, otherwise 0)

Graduation grade, final grade in the undergraduate studies.

Labour market characteristics:

Current income

## Method

We use logistic regression to compare students of the FP programmes with those of the regular programmes. The dependent variable is studying in an FP *vs* a regular programme. The coefficients represent the logarithm of odd ratios. For example, the coefficient of gender represents the logarithm of the odds of male students to study in the FP *vs* the regular programme divided by the parallel odds for female students. We devise three models: the first contains the socio-demographic characteristics except age, which is more relevant to the respondent's current labour market position; the second adds the educational variables; the third model adds variables related to current labour market position: income and age. We use three models to test the effects of the variables introduced at each step on the coefficients of the previous step. The models contain three interactions: ethnic origin with father's occupational status, undergraduate major with institution, and parental education with income. Additional interactions (e.g., graduation grade with socio-demographic characteristics) were small and statistically insignificant, so we decided not to include them in the final models. For a better interpretation of these interactions we centred parental education and father's occupational prestige around their means. Owing to the small number of Arab students in the sample (23) we were unable to include them in the multivariate analysis. Most variables have small numbers of missing values. We introduced dummy variables, coded 1 for missing values, 0 otherwise. It is different for graduation

grade. The proportion of missing values is high — about 12%. We refer to this issue in the analysis of the results of the multivariate analysis.

## Results

### Descriptive results

The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. The differences between students in FP and regular programmes are seen to be in the expected direction. The proportion of the disadvantaged ethnic groups in the FP programmes is higher than it is in the regular programmes. Students of Mizrahi origin constitute 32% of the students in the FP programmes, whereas their proportion in the regular programmes is only 24%. Arabs constitute about 6% in the FP programmes and only half of this percentage in the regular ones. Students in the FP programmes are also characterized by lower parental education (13 vs 14 years of schooling), and fathers' lower occupational prestige (46 vs 50). The regular programmes of both public policy and labour studies cater particularly to women, who constitute 75% of the students in these programmes. The FP programmes are more attractive to male students: women constitute only 53% of the students in them.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics according to programme ( $N = 580$ )

<i>Variable</i>	<i>For-profit mid-career</i>	<i>Regular</i>
<i>Proportions:</i>		
Female	0.526	0.749*
Mizrahi	0.319	0.236*
Non-Mizrahi	0.378	0.325
Arabs	0.055	0.028
Major in undergraduate studies — humanities	0.276	0.150*
Major in undergraduate studies — social sciences	0.496	0.666*
Major in undergraduate studies — other	0.291	0.199*
Graduated from elite university	0.283	0.418*
Graduated from non-elite university	0.458	0.368*
Graduated from college	0.258	0.214
<i>Means and standard deviation</i>		
Parental education	13.20 (3.708)	14.239 (3.708)*
Father's occupational prestige	46.522 (1.427)	50.162 (1.323)*
Graduation grade	83.279 (5.161)	86.834 (4.108)*
Age	39.657 (7.604)	31.212 (6.967)*
Income	7973.577 (3888.538)	3708.738 (3211.327)*

\*Difference significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

Differences in the educational variables also place the students of the FP programmes in a relatively disadvantaged position. Twenty-eight per cent of these students majored in the non-prestigious humanities in their undergraduate studies, as against 15% of humanities graduates who study in the regular Master's programmes. Continuity of field of study is more frequent among students in the regular programmes: 67% of the regular students studied social sciences as undergraduates, compared with 50% of the students in the FP programmes (see also Yogev *et al.*, 2008). Students in the FP programmes are more often graduates of non-elite universities than students in the regular programmes: 28 *vs* 42% respectively. Students in the FP programmes graduated the Bachelor's programmes with lower grades than the regular students: average graduation grade is 83 *vs* 87. As expected, students in the FP programmes are older than students in the regular programmes (40 years *vs* 31 years), and they have higher income. All differences, except studying at a college *vs* a university, are statistically significant.

### Multivariate analysis

Table 2 shows that ethnic origin is the most significant socio-demographic characteristic in enrolment in the FP *vs* the regular programmes. It retains its main effect and its interaction with father's occupational prestige in all three models. Model 3 shows that for students with average father's occupational status, the odds of Mizrahi students studying in an FP *vs* a regular programme about double ( $e^{0.719}=2.052$ ) those of non-Mizrahi students.<sup>2</sup> The negative sign of the coefficient of father's occupational status, which reaches the threshold of statistical significance, implies that for non-Mizrahi students better social background decreases the odds of studying in the FP programmes. The interaction between ethnic origin and father's occupational prestige shows that social background operates differently for the disadvantaged ethnic group. For this group, better social background increases the odds of enrolment in FP *vs* regular programmes. In other words, FP programmes open new opportunities to students with lower socioeconomic background, but mainly when they are members of the dominant ethnic group.

Parental education does not have a significant main effect in any of the three models. Gender has a negative significant effect in the first two, indicating that the FP programmes cater more than the regular ones to male students. The coefficient of female decreases and loses its statistical significance in the third model. An additional analysis (not reported) showed that the coefficient lost its statistical significance after the inclusion of current income in the model. Women, whose lower income in the Israeli labour market is well documented (e.g., Haberfeld and Cohen, 2007), are apparently hard pressed to pay the high tuition charged by the FP programmes. After controlling for



**Table 2** Logistic regression of the log-odds to study in a for-profit mid-career programme ( $N = 580$ )

<i>Explanatory variables</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
<i>Gender</i> (male reference)			
Female	-0.929**	-1.097**	-0.532*
<i>Ethnic origin</i> (non-Mizrahi reference)			
Mizrahi	0.502**	0.524**	0.719**
<i>Parental years of schooling</i> (centred)	-0.020	0.013	-0.056
<i>Father's occupational prestige</i> (centred)	-0.011**	-0.018*	-0.016*
<i>Major in undergraduate studies</i> (social sciences reference)			
Humanities		1.679**	1.701**
Other		1.326**	-0.916
<i>Higher education institution</i> (elite universities reference)			
Non-elite university		1.215**	0.789*
College		1.763**	2.209**
<i>Graduation grade</i>		-0.173**	-0.117**
<i>Age</i>			0.159**
<i>Income</i> (*1,000 <sup>-03</sup> )			0.305**
<i>Interactions</i>			
Mizrahi × father's occupational prestige	0.029**	0.029**	0.045**
Non-elite university × humanities		-0.746	-0.410
Non-elite university × other		-1.129*	-1.191
College × humanities		-0.306	-1.742
College × other		-1.422*	-1.896**
Parental education × income			0.029**
<i>Missing values</i>			
Ethnic origin	-0.391	-0.736	-0.950
Parental education	0.285	0.359	-1.198
Occupational prestige	-0.683	-0.657	-0.526
Field of study		0.977	-0.145
Final grade		-1.856**	-4.290**
<i>Intercept</i>	0.309*	14.087**	3.810**
<i>Pseudo R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.064	0.237	0.491

\*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \* $p < 0.10$ .

income, gender difference in programme type disappears, suggesting that gender differences in enrolment are more a matter of economic resources than of different tastes.

The educational disadvantage in the undergraduate studies of the students in the FP programmes is obvious in the second and third models. A higher graduation grade lowers the odds of enrolment in the FP vs the regular programme. The score does not interact with any variable, implying that the FP programmes serve as a second chance for lower achievers, regardless of social origin or educational history.<sup>3</sup>

The main effect of humanities in Model 3 shows, *ceteris paribus*, that graduates who majored in the humanities and education at elite universities have odds about 5.5 times ( $e^{1.719}=5.749$ ) higher than those of their fellow graduates who majored in the social sciences of enrolling in FP vs regular programmes.<sup>4</sup> The interaction between humanities and college reveals that this pattern does not hold for college graduates. Subtracting the interaction effect (1.742) from the coefficient of the main effect (1.701), we see that for college graduates, students who majored in the humanities and education are as likely as students who majored in the social sciences to enrol in FP vs regular programmes ( $e^{1.701-1.742}=0.960$ ). The coefficient of the interaction between college and humanities does not reach statistical significance, but we cannot ignore its size and implications. The interaction between non-elite university and humanities is small and statistically insignificant, implying that the enrolment patterns of graduates of non-elite universities who majored in the humanities are similar to those of graduates of elite universities. The FP programmes serve as a means for acquiring job-relevant education mainly for graduates of the first but not of the second tier of higher education.

The picture is even sharper for students who majored in fields other than the humanities, education and social sciences in their undergraduate studies. The main effect of this is positive. Although it does not reach statistical significance it signifies a somewhat greater tendency of graduates of elite universities who majored in these fields to enrol in FP programmes than graduates who majored in the social sciences. The interaction effects show that for college graduates, and to some degree graduates of non-elite universities, the picture is reversed: social sciences majors tend more than majors in other fields to enrol in FP vs regular programmes. The main effect of institution further clarifies the picture. Among social sciences majors, graduates of colleges are about nine times ( $e^{2.209}=9.107$ ) more likely than graduates of elite universities to enrol in FP vs regular programmes. The comparison between non-elite and elite universities yields a similar pattern, although the difference is much more moderate ( $e^{0.789}=2.201$ ).

The main effects of major and institution, and their interaction, reveal that the FP programmes serve graduates of elite universities who majored in fields other than the social sciences to get education relevant to their jobs by acquiring a prestigious Master's degree in this field. College graduates, and to some extent graduates of non-elite universities, use FP programmes to win a prestigious Master's degree in their original field of study. These students already have a degree that is relevant to their jobs. The FP programmes serve to upgrade their higher education institution in their original, job-related, field of study.

The effects of age and income follow our expectations. Older age increases the odds of enrolment in FP vs regular programmes. Higher income operates in

the same direction. This is expected, as most students in the regular programmes are employed in temporary work, whereas most students in the FP programmes have already started their careers. More noteworthy is the interaction between income and parental education. The effect is positive, implying that increase in parental years of schooling increases the effect of income on the odds of enrolling in FP *vs* regular programmes. In other words, children of better educated parents are more inclined to use FP programmes to convert their economic achievements into educational credentials.

Comparison of the Pseudo  $R^2$  of the three models indicates the relative importance of the three variable sets. The model that includes only socio-demographic characteristics improves the model fit by about 6%. The inclusion of the educational variables improves the fit by about 17%. Age and income, which are related to current labour market position, improve the fit by an additional 25%. Clearly, the educational and the labour market variables are more significant than the socio-demographic variables in shaping enrolment in the FP *vs* the regular programmes.

## Conclusions

The paper examined whether FP programmes offer a second opportunity for gaining a Master's degree from a prestigious university to students of disadvantaged social origins ('second chance in the social sense'), thus moderating educational inequalities, or offer it to members of privileged groups whose achievements in their undergraduate studies were low ('second chance in the educational sense'), thus maintaining or even enhancing educational inequalities.

This examination is timely in view of several developments on the educational scene in recent years: diversification of higher education, emerging policies of its marketization, and a rising trend of lifelong learning. The confluence of these three trends creates a supply of a variety of FP programmes in higher education institutions and a demand for higher education by populations at advanced stages of their occupational careers.

Analysis of students in parallel FP and regular programmes at an elite university in Israel showed that the FP channel provides a second chance to students with social and educational disadvantages, which probably limited their educational opportunities at earlier stages of their life. The programmes serve as a second chance for all their students to acquire a prestigious Master's degree. The graduation grades of students in FP programmes are lower than those of students in regular programmes, regardless of their social origin. The FP programmes also help students to upgrade their undergraduate experience. Graduates of elite universities acquire a degree in a field of study relevant to



their work, whereas college graduates, many of them already possessing a degree in the social sciences, upgrade their higher education institution. This pattern reveals an exchange between field and institution. Students who join FP programmes possess at least one asset: a degree in the social sciences or a degree from an elite institution. The practical consequences of a job-relevant education, in terms of status at the workplace and salary, are obvious, whereas the reward for upgrading the higher education institution is less clear. The acquisition of a job-related education, which is more often used by graduates of the elite universities, thus grants them an additional advantage.

The findings show that students of disadvantaged ethnic origin are represented in FP programmes more than in regular ones. Social background operates differently on the two Jewish ethnic groups. In the ethnically disadvantaged group, an increase in father's occupational prestige is accompanied by an increase of the relative odds of enrolling in the FP programmes. The opposite is true for the dominant ethnic group: here an increase in the relative odds of enrolment in the FP as against the regular programmes is related to father's lower occupational prestige.

What are the social implications of FP programmes? Our findings allow a tentative generalization: when the two Jewish ethnic groups are compared, FP programmes provide a second opportunity for lower strata of the dominant ethnic group or for the higher strata of the disadvantaged group. The programmes accordingly moderate ethnic and social inequality in education, but only partially. They moderate ethnic inequality by paving the way for the disadvantaged ethnic group to a prestigious Master's degree from an elite university; they do likewise regarding socioeconomic inequality by furnishing new opportunities for members of the dominant ethnic groups whose fathers have lower occupational status. But they seem less relevant for the double disadvantaged — those who belong to lower strata of the disadvantaged ethnic group.

Our findings show that although the FP programmes provide a second chance for all students who experienced initial disadvantages, the more advantaged among them make better use of these programmes. These are members of the disadvantaged ethnic group whose fathers have attained better occupational achievements; members of the dominant ethnic group whose fathers have attained lower occupational achievements; graduates of elite universities who wish to acquire a job-related education; and children of better educated parents who tend, more than children of the less educated, to convert their self-attained economic resources into educational achievements. This pattern corresponds to previous findings on second chance in education, namely that social and educational advantages assist students to better utilize second-chance structures. This is a part of the general capacity of more advantaged students to decode and access new educational opportunities

(e.g., Morley and Lugg, 2009). Apparently, sociological observations that hold for regular students also hold for older students who have already obtained a bachelor's degree and have started their occupational careers.

Our findings have some policy implications for both higher education institutions and state policy makers. Regarding higher education policy, students at elite universities who majored in the humanities have higher odds of turning to FP programmes to study fields in demand in the labour market. In a context where low enrolment in fields with little demand ends in the closure of departments, an avenue that allows graduates to study areas more in demand may increase enrolment in the humanities at the undergraduate stage. This is particularly relevant now, when some employers and educators claim that the Israeli pattern, where students enrol in a specific field of study from the very beginning, has negative implications for their later flexibility in the labour market.

An additional policy concern has to do with the overall social implications of such programmes. As our findings show, FP programmes enable older students to utilize their self-acquired resources, offering initially disadvantaged groups a second opportunity. At the same time, these programmes integrate with a wider social trend of lifelong learning, which also contributes to the updating of knowledge and skills of the labour force. Obviously, these programmes cannot serve as the main road to reducing social inequality in Israeli higher education. As noted, they serve a relatively disadvantaged population, but not those who are economically and educationally disadvantaged in absolute terms. In addition, the FP programmes are the margin, and not the core, of Israeli higher education. Extensive development of these programmes will cause severe opposition of the academic staff of the universities. Still, the programmes certainly contribute to the lessening of ethnic, and to some degree socioeconomic, inequality in Israeli higher education, and the government should plausibly seek ways to expand them, alongside the regular programmes that cater to different populations.

The programmes may also have implications for the hierarchy of higher education institutions in Israel, which defines the universities as the first tier and the colleges as the second tier of higher education. One of the reasons for the universities' prestige is the better opportunities that they open to graduate studies. The fact that graduates of the colleges can acquire a prestigious Master's degree from an elite university may blur the differences between the universities and the colleges and cause changes in demand, in cut-off points, and eventually in the educational and socioeconomic profile of students in the two institution types.

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## Notes

- 1 Yogev *et al.* (2008), who examined eight programmes at Tel Aviv University, report on a similar pattern: students of the FP programmes belong more often to disadvantaged ethnic groups, and are of lower socioeconomic background, than students in the parallel regular programmes.
- 2 When an interaction term is included in a multivariate equation, the main effect of each interacting variable represents its effect when the value of the other interacting variables is 0. Since Mizrahi origin interacts with father's occupational prestige, its main effect refers to students whose father's occupational prestige equals the mean of the distribution (father's occupational prestige was centred, so 0 refers to the mean). The main effect of father's occupational prestige refers to non-Mizrahi (Mizrahi is coded 0 for non-Mizrahi students).
- 3 As expected, the coefficients of most variables representing missing value do not reach statistical significance. The exception is graduation grade, whose negative coefficient is statistically significant in Models 2 and 3. The negative sign implies that graduation grades are particularly missing for students in the regular programmes. Since 80 is the threshold of the regular programmes, and the average score of students in the FP programmes is 83, with standard deviation of 5.2, we believe that the bias of the missing values does not produce a bias in our results.
- 4 Since the model includes interactions of humanities with college and with non-elite university, its main effect refers to graduates of elite universities. The main effect of college and of elite university refers to students who majored in the social sciences.

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