



Access to Higher Education in Israel A Literature Review

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Abstract

Background

Higher education plays a crucial role in advancing society, fostering innovation, and driving economic development. It contributes to individual well-being, promotes social mobility, and helps reduce disparities. Over the past four decades, access to higher education in Israel has significantly expanded, yet gaps remain among various population groups in the acquisition of higher education. The Chief Scientist at the Ministry of Education approached the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute to carry out a review to identify the challenges and barriers that hinder or prevent access to higher education in Israel among certain population groups.

Objective

To provide policymakers, professionals in the field of higher education, and other stakeholders with a comprehensive overview of the challenges and barriers that hinder or prevent access to higher education in Israel among four population groups: Arabs, ultra-Orthodox Jews, first-generation higher education students (those whose parents do not have an academic education), and Ethiopian Israelis (first and second generation).

Methodology

A review of academic articles, systematic reviews, and research reports published primarily during the last decade, focusing on access to higher education in Israel and other relevant topics, such as academic achievement in primary and secondary education. The review was also based on information collected from government websites, civil society organization websites, and newspaper articles.

Main Findings

Despite the upward trend in participation rates in higher education during the 1990s among the aforementioned four population groups, there are still significant gaps between them and the general population in educational attainment. The main barriers that hinder or prevent access to higher education, which are common to all the groups, include low socioeconomic status, low prior academic achievement (such as poor grades on matriculation exams), difficulties in meeting admission requirements for institutions of higher education, language barriers

(primarily in English and Hebrew), lack of role models, limited social capital, and a lack of familiarity with the academic system. In addition to these shared barriers, each group faces unique challenges, such as community resistance among the ultra-Orthodox.

Recommendations

Policy recommendations include, among others, the development of strategies to promote vocational-technological education; increasing eligibility for matriculation certificates that meet university admission requirements by strengthening Etgar and Mabbar classes (special programs to aid students in achieving full or partial matriculation) and improving the quality of the matriculation certificates of their graduates; and providing culturally adapted access to information about higher education.