

30 Years of the Academic Colleges Revolution in Israel – Have the Goals Been Achieved?

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Introduction

Thirty years have passed since the gates of academia were opened to the public in Israel in 1995, following the government's plan to expand higher education in Israel.¹ This program added academic colleges as a new layer to Israel's educational system, alongside the existing tier of universities. In this article, I wish to examine the effects of the change on access to higher education in Israel. The main question to be examined is whether the program's goals to expand the academic system have been achieved.

The goals were defined in two stages:

1. Increasing the supply for the rising demand for higher education in Israel due to social pressure.
2. Accessibility of higher education to the social and geographic periphery. This specific goal was set following the heavy pressure exerted by public figures, legislators, and committees that pointed to a significant gap in education and higher education between the Center and the development cities (for example, the decision of a ministerial committee headed by Haim Ramon of June 27, 2000 to establish a public committee to examine all issues related to increasing the share of students from the southern region in institutions of higher education. A parliamentary committee headed by MK Ran Cohen and the State Comptroller's report on gaps in higher education.²

Despite the opening of the gates of academia, the new program set a goal not to harm the research budgets that remained in the exclusive hands of universities, and colleges were defined as teaching institutions only.

After the implementation of the first part of the plan, in the early 2000s, more defined goals were set for the primary goal, namely expanding access to higher education among four target populations:

1. The women in academia.
2. The social and geographic periphery.
3. The Arabs in Israel.
4. The ultra-Orthodox public.
5. Ethiopian immigrants in Israel.

Like any system that undergoes a significant change, the academic system has moved from a closed system to an open one. However, it has shifted from a closed to an open, though less controlled, system. Large-scale institutions were added to the system that were not under supervision, or the system was

not prepared for proper supervision. The officials in charge, namely the Council for Higher Education (CHE) and the Ministry of Justice, were forced to establish new arrangements through legislation to circumvent the Basic Law on Freedom of Occupation's guarantee of the right to open institutions. First, the amendment to the law, known as Amendment 10, which regulated the status of the regional colleges that served as branches of the universities in Israel and taught 75% of the degree studies. Second, the amendment to the Council for Higher Education Law, known as Amendment 11, was designed to regulate the status of overseas branches. This amendment gradually led to the closure of most of the overseas branches.

This article will present the changes at the institutional and social levels, and how changes were created that were not anticipated by policy makers at the CHE, such as the need to distinguish between colleges and their role in the system, and the role of the veteran institutions – universities and their role in light of the significant change experienced by the academic system in Israel. The data and changes in this article were also reviewed by a participating researcher who closely followed as a new layer in Israel's educational system.

Keywords: Higher Education, Colleges, Social Gaps, Quantitative and Qualitative Gaps.

Research Objectives

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Has the expansion of access to higher education in Israel, over the past 30 years, through colleges, contributed to reducing the gaps in higher education between young people from affluent localities and young people from less affluent localities?
2. Have the goals set for expanding access to higher education among the targeted populations been achieved: women, residents of the geographic and social periphery, Arabs, ultra-Orthodox, and Ethiopian immigrants?
3. Did the reduction of gaps in higher education contribute to the reduction of social gaps in the populations that were counted?

The main arguments of the study

1. The expansion of access to higher education in Israel over the past 30 years has indeed led to the entry of new

¹ Prime Minister's Office (1994, September 28). *The Higher Education System - Master Plan and Development, Government Decision No. 3964*.

² The State Comptroller and the Ombudsman (1999). Annual Report 50B for 1999 and Accounts for Fiscal Year 1998

populations into higher education, such as the ultra-Orthodox, Arabs, and residents of the social and geographic periphery. At the same time, there are still quantitative gaps, as the share of new populations in academia is lower than their share in the general population. The share of students from a relevant age group in less affluent localities has also not increased relative to the number of high school graduates over the eight years of follow-up until 2019 (Swirsky et al., 2022).

2. Since higher education is perceived as an essential factor in determining earnings and reducing inequality in employment (Hanushek, 2016; Argov, A., 2017; Weiss et al., 2022), the percentage of students studying prestigious subjects, which lead to high wages among students from less affluent localities, is low compared to students from more affluent localities. Therefore, income inequality is maintained.
3. Even if the percentage of students in the periphery has increased, the expansion of access to higher education has created a phenomenon called 'over-education'. This phenomenon is more common among bachelor's degree graduates in less affluent, immigrant, and Arab localities. They are forced to compromise on a job and a little education. Therefore, their earnings are lower than those of other graduates of the same level of education who work in positions that suit their education (Bleikh, H., 2020).

Summary of Findings and Main Conclusions

The opening of the academy's gates led to a revolution in the number of students:

1. The number of undergraduate students has increased from 55,250 in 1990 to 215,583 in 2024, more than fourfold.
2. The total number of students increased from 89,060 in 1990 to 302,674 in 2024.
3. A significant expression of the change can be seen in the abolition of university hegemony over undergraduate studies – the percentage of undergraduate students at universities dropped from 85% in 1990 to 41.5% in 2024, after students from Ariel and Reichman College, who were upgraded to universities, and the WIZO Academic Center, which was integrated into the University of Haifa, moved to the category of "university." Without these additions, the percentage of undergraduate students at universities would have been only 37%.
4. The opening of the gates of academia has led to precise results in the level of education of Israeli citizens, as indicated by the OECD report in recent years – Israel is among the most educated countries in the organization and above the OECD's general average. Half of those aged 25-64 (51%) in 2023 had post-secondary and higher education, while the OECD average was 40%.
5. Despite the expansion of the academic system through colleges, quantitative gaps remain between students from well-off localities and students from less affluent localities. The qualitative gaps between these groups, as measured by areas of study and earnings, persist and even widen.
6. In order to reduce gaps in education in general, and in higher education in particular, educational institutions in the periphery should be strengthened, and colleges spread across the country should be allowed to teach more prestigious and high-paying fields of study.

Methodology

The study will require a quantitative analysis of data before 1995 and after that year through recent years, and to determine the impact of changes in learners' data at the general level between the center and the periphery. This distinction requires examining the changes in the program's target groups.

The target population – students who lived in well-off localities during their studies, and on the other hand, students who lived in less affluent localities. From these two groups, I will examine changes in the 22-30 age range. In addition, the populations targeted by the CHE programs include women, Arabs, Ethiopian immigrants, ultra-Orthodox, and residents of the periphery.

For this purpose, the study will be based on data collected and published by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), the CHE, the Ministry of Finance, and the OECD between 2000 and 2024. The data analysis will be conducted both quantitatively and qualitatively to examine vertical and horizontal inequality in higher education. These data were collected from official websites of the CBS, the CHE, the OECD, and the Ministry of Finance, as well as official reports published by these and other government institutions.

To examine whether the change has also reduced social gaps, I will analyze changes in a qualitative index focusing on subjects with social mobility and high earnings within the target populations.

The examination of vertical and horizontal inequality will be conducted using the socio-economic key set by the CBS (hereinafter, the CBS for localities in Israel – Index 1-10, with 1-4 defining unestablished localities and 7-10 well-off localities). Localities 5-6 localities at the intermediate level.

This index was chosen for this work in the absence of indices or other data that clearly identify peripheral populations. Previous studies have tended to examine gaps in higher education or social gaps between focusing on their country of origin. Since it was forbidden to indicate the country of origin on official forms, identification of students from less affluent localities, rather than official forms' identification of students from well-established localities, provides objective data for research.

This study does not ignore the fact that students move to the localities where they study during the study period. For this purpose, we will also examine the data on learners' follow-up 8 years after the end of high school studies, until entry into academic studies.

In addition, the research will critically examine relevant primary and secondary literature and analyze theories throughout the research period.

Importance of the study: This study provides a new and conclusive examination of the results of the expansion of the academic system in Israel after 30 years of change. Examining the impact of this expansion on the populations that have been set as targets in the CHE program in relation to their share of the population in Israel, both in terms of quantity and quality. The analysis of the data was conducted both theoretically and from the perspective of a researcher-participant who has been involved at all stages of change since it was decided to expand access to higher education in Israel to reduce the gaps between the center and the periphery.

Literature Review

The Spread of Higher Education in Israel

The spread of higher education worldwide has not spared Israel. Awareness of higher education's power to increase social mobility and train for prestigious professions has led to a significant increase in demand for higher education since the 1980s. Researchers have listed several reasons that have led to increased pressure on the academic system in Israel to open its doors to the general public:

1. The Spread of Higher Education in the world – no more Institutions for the training of Elites, but Institutions open to the public seeking opinion and academic Profession (Trow, 2024).
2. There has been a growing awareness of academic studies, both due to the demands of the economy in Israel and a growing awareness among young people of the importance of higher education towards a better professional future (Volansky, 2005).
3. An increase in the number of matriculation graduates in Israel.
4. Increase in the number of pre-academic preparatory programs that have trained their graduates for academic studies (Volansky, 2005)
5. The immigration of about a million people in the 1990s, mainly from the former Soviet Union, who flocked to the doors of higher education in Israel, increased the pressure on decision makers (Haliwa, 2020).
6. Legislative initiatives that threatened the academic system to open up the system through legislation, as was done with the amendment to the Bar Association Law that allowed college graduates to take the official bar exam (Haliwa, 2015).
7. Diversity in the type of institutions – not only research institutions and universities, but also arts, engineering, and teaching institutions. This diversity has helped integrate diverse populations into academia (Guri-Roseblit, S., 2005).

The implications of opening the gates of academia for gaps in higher education and society were examined at two levels that affect one another – the institutional and the social. On both levels, two leading schools were formed:

The stratification approach, according to which institutional hierarchy is a central factor in the creation of a stratified system (Tiechler, 1988). The fact that the CHE created a distinction between institutions and determined that research would be in universities and teaching in colleges created stratification. Institutions of type A and B were created.

The diversity approach is clearly a format that will satisfy the needs of the economy and those of students. (Guri-Roseblit, S., 2005) Institutional diversity, in turn, reduces gaps in society.

The Theory of Diversity and Its Arguments

Researchers of this school of thought in Israel and around the world see the opening of the gates of academia as a welcome process that can reduce inequality in access to higher education and in narrow educational and societal gaps. Until World War II, higher education served the elites of the Western world and provided a reserve of political, economic, and legal leadership. The goal was to perpetuate the regime of the existing elites. World War II brought about significant change, as academic institutions could no longer ignore the demands of discharged soldiers to study and advance, especially in academic subjects. The opening of the gates of academia worldwide also brought

about a change in the overarching goals of academic institutions, from research institutions to something else. which is intended for a reserve of elite leaders or researchers, for institutions that train for the world of employment, which has become more technological and professional. Trow, 2024).

All these changes brought a new population into academia, gradually changing its face and goals. Professions that were historically not part of academia, such as economics, medicine, accounting, and nursing. The demand for professional higher education and the pursuit of prestigious professions forced institutions to adapt their goals to the growing demand in the West. Gradually, institutions of higher education became institutions of higher professional training, alongside research and science (Trow, 2024).

Researchers from this school of thought in Israel believe that the opening of the gates led to an increase in the number of students from underrepresented in higher education, relative to their share in the general population (Volansky, 2005). The inequality in opportunities to acquire higher education was reduced, and as a result, the gaps between groups in higher education narrowed (Krueger, 2002). The diversity significant of institutions allows for a large number of underrepresented populations to be absorbed into the field of art, because everyone can find a study track that interests them. Engineering and, of course, the general academic track. Such diversity also increases the supply of students to the labor market in accordance with the needs of the economy and the labor market. Guri-Roseblit, S., 2005).

The Theory of Stratification and Its Arguments

Researchers of the stratification school argue that, even though the reforms have expanded access to higher education and brought new populations into the student circle, there is still quantitative inequality in higher education, which has been compounded by qualitative inequality (Swirsky et al., 2022). They defined inequality as vertical inequality and horizontal inequality. the attainment of advanced degrees, while horizontal inequality expresses differences between types of diplomas from more prestigious and less prestigious institutions, and between different types of diplomas. In contrast, horizontal inequality expresses differences between types of diplomas from more and less prestigious institutions, as well as differences in the attainment of advanced degrees. In contrast, horizontal inequality expresses differences between types of diplomas from more prestigious and less prestigious institutions, as well as between different types of diplomas. In contrast, horizontal inequality expresses differences between types of diplomas from more prestigious and less prestigious institutions, and between the attainment of advanced degrees. In contrast, horizontal inequality expresses differences between types of diplomas from more prestigious and less prestigious institutions, as well as between types. In contrast, horizontal inequality expresses differences between types of diplomas from more and less prestigious institutions, as well as differences in the attainment of advanced degrees. In contrast, horizontal inequality expresses differences between types of diplomas from more prestigious and less prestigious institutions, as well

University, were transferred to temporary budgeting by the Ministry of Education and were not included in the CHE's expansion plan.³ In fact, the CHE absorbed more than a dozen institutions that operated nationwide and were not established by the CHE.

Diversity in Types of Institutions of Higher Education

Since the expansion of the system, the number of institutions in Israel has increased significantly, and the variety of institutions has increased. The number of institutions increased from 21 in 1990 to 67 in 2013. In the following table, you can get an impression of the growth process as well as the reductions initiated by the CHE in recent years.

Table No. 1: Number and types of institutions that have developed in Israel since the opening of the academic system.

Year/Types of Institutions	1990	13/2012	2025-2024
Research Universities	7	7	8
Open University	1	1	1
Year/Types of Institutions	1990	13/2012	2025-2024
Unbudgeted University	0	0	1
Total Universities	8	8	10
Academic Colleges of Engineering	0	4	4
Academic Colleges of Art	2	3	3
Public/General Academic Colleges	3	13	13
Total General Public Colleges	5	20	20
Out-of-budget colleges	1	15	9
Colleges of Education	7	22	18
Total Institutions	21	67	57

Source: CHE. Processing data from various boards. CHE website. Retrieved 31.12.24

The great demand for higher education led the management of the CHE to accept, under its auspices and budget, institutions that operated throughout the country in a partial academic format. There were mainly three types of institutions: colleges that operated as training institutions for engineers and became engineering colleges; teaching colleges that became academic colleges of education and branches of universities in Israel; and academic institutions that underwent an academic process and were trained as general institutions for bachelor's and master's degrees. This process led to the expansion of the system in a

short time and with minimal investment by the state. There was no need to build campuses. Instead, it is the adaptation of existing ones to proper academic standards.

The increase in the number of students

The increase in the number of students peaked in the early 2000s, when all the regional colleges came under the CHE's wing. The following table shows the impressive growth in undergraduate studies between 1990 and 2023.

Table 2: Number of undergraduate students in universities and colleges, Years: 1990, 2000, 2010, 2020, 2024/25.

School Year	Number of undergraduate students	Percentage of students in universities	Percentage of students in budgeted colleges (including Israeli branches)	Percentage of Students in Non-Budgetary Colleges	Percentage of students in colleges of education
1990	54,805	84.8	3.4	3.0	8.6
2000	131,701	52.7	19.5	12.5	15.2
2010	184,851	37.2	33.0	18.5	11.3
2020	197,546	38.6	30.0	18	11.9
2023	214,247	41.2	30.0	17.4	11.3
202 4/5	215,583	41.5	29.5	17.9	11.0

Source: CBS website, processing data from various boards. Retrieved, 31.12.24. Universities were supplemented by students affiliated with colleges such as WIZO, who were added to the University of Haifa, Reichman, and Ari

³ The struggle was led by the heads of the Association of Public Colleges, headed by Maj. Gen. (res.) Moshe Nativ, whom I replaced in 2005.

The largest change in the number of undergraduate students occurred between 1995 and 2000. The percentage change reached +9.2%. In the years 2009-2010, the percentage change was +3.4%. Since then, the system has grown by an average of 1% to 2% each year.

The Impact of the Revolution in Higher Education on the Sectors Designated as Targets in the CHE Program

The special sectors identified as the program's target were, as noted, women, the Arab sector, the ultra-Orthodox Ethiopian immigrants, and the geographic and social periphery. All of

these were underrepresented in relation to their share of the general population in Israel. Today, it can be said that the women's and Arab sectors have made good use of the opening of the gates and have significantly improved their participation in higher education, while others continue to improve, as I will detail below.

A. Women in Academia

Women today constitute the majority of all degrees, as can be seen from the data in the following table:

Table 3: Percentage of women in academia in all degrees in the years 1990, 2000, 2010, 2020, 2020, 2023, 2024/5.

Degree Type	1990	2000	2010	2020	2023	2024/5
Bachelor's degree	53.6	57.4	54.8	58.2	58.6	59.0
Master's Degree	50.3	57.8	58.4	62.9	64.9	64.0
Ph.D.	41.3	51.1	52.7	53.8	53.7	53.8

Source: The CHE (2024, January 1, 2024). A collection of data ahead of the start of the 2020-2024 school year.

Despite these figures, some of them are in STEM and ICT subjects, which motivate social mobility, not high: their share in STEM subjects is only 3%-6%. The share of engineering studies has been small for many years, and it has risen in the past decade from 8% to only 10.2%, due to programs to encourage women in engineering studies. On the other hand, the share of women in education and teacher training is high, and in the last

twenty years it has ranged from 18% to 20% of all women. In 2020-2024, the share of women in this field was 78.5%. In the fields of medicine and allied medical professions, women were the majority – 79.6%. Despite their impressive share in many fields of study, their share is still not reflected in the senior academic staff in the institutions, as can be seen from the data in the following table:

Table No. 4: Percentage of Women in Senior Staff in Institutions of Higher Education in Selected Years.

Percentage of women	6/2005	11/2010	19/2018	20/2019	22/2021	23/2022	24/2023
Universities	27.1	29.0	31.1	31.8	35.6	35.4	35.4
Budgeted Colleges	31.4	36.5	42.4	42.7	45.4	46.2	46.0
Unbudgeted Colleges	33.8	39.1	38.7	40.9	45.3	46.4	46.3

Source: CBS (2024, July 17). Press Release: Academic Staff in Institutions of Higher Education in Israel, 2023/24.

B. Arabs in Higher Education

The number of students from Arab society reached 64,110 in the 2024 academic year, which is 19.2% of all students in Israel, and very close to their share of the population in that year (21%). Since the 2010 academic year, the percentage of Arab Israeli students has increased from 9.2% in 2010 (22,270 students) to 19.2% in the 2020-2024 academic year, a total increase of 147%. There was an increase of 236% in the master's degree and in the doctoral degree an increase of 165%.

These results are the result of a policy by the CHE Education that has encouraged higher education for several years. The goals set by the CHE to achieve in the Arab sector were:

- Increase the number of to their share of the general population.
- Increase the percentage of graduates due to the lengthening of

study years among Arab students. Increase the share of students pursuing advanced degrees – in 2021, the Council for Higher Education set a target of 12% for master's degrees, and in 2020, 7% for doctoral degrees.⁴ Expanding the diversity in the fields of study in this sector.

The CHE's support for the integration of the Arab sector has already included improvements in high school education, special preparatory programs for the Bedouin sector, especially in the south, and financial assistance in scholarships and other related payments.

In the following table, you can see the percentage of Arab students in the age group representative of the population.

⁴ CHE (2020, October) Opening of the 2020-2021 academic year alongside the coronavirus, p. 13.

Table No. 5: Percentage of Arabs in all degrees in relation to the percentage of Arabs in the population.

Academic Degree	Total All Degrees	Bachelor's degree	Master's Degree	Ph.D.
Percentage of Arabs among all degree students	%20.6	%22.0	%16.3	%8.9
Percentage of Arabs in the Age Group Representing the Population	%21.3	%28.0	%25.8	%20.5
Percentage ratio	%96.7	%78.6	%63.2	%43.4

Source: CBS (2024, February 5). Table B – Percentage of Arabs among Students in Institutions of Higher Education, among the Age Group Represented in the Population and the Ratio Between Them, by Degree, 2023/24

Despite these impressive figures, the Arab population remains underrepresented in master's and doctoral programs and in high-mobility fields, such as STEM and ICT. High rates were recorded among the Arab population in the 2024 academic year in education studies and teacher training (30.6%) and management sciences and business (24.2%). Only 12.1% of the Arabs studied STEM subjects in 2023. 8.8% studied physical sciences and 17.2% studied engineering and architecture.⁵ Recent research indicates barriers to the integration of Arabs into STEM subjects, who begin their high school studies. Even when Arabs are integrated into high school tracks that prepare them for STEM studies, the rate of those who integrate into this field, out of those eligible for a matriculation exam, is significantly lower than that of Jews: 31% of Arabs compared to 84% of Jews. Among women, the gap is larger: only 18% of those who studied for a suitable matriculation exam for STEM subjects integrated into the field. compared to 41% of Jewish women who integrated.

In order to improve this situation as well, the Council for Higher Education (CHE) expanded the pilot of the "Gateway to Academia" preparatory programs for Arabs in East Jerusalem and scholarships for assistance in preferred fields of study as part of the IRCA program.⁶

C. Ethiopian immigrants in higher education

The Ethiopian population in Israel is about 1.8% of the total population in Israel. The share of Ethiopian immigrants in higher education has steadily increased over the past 15 years, reaching 4,599 students in 2024, compared to 2,937 in the 2015 academic year. Their share among bachelor's degree students in 2024 was 1.7% of all students – almost identical to their share of the general population in Israel. However, their number among master's and doctoral degree students is greatly understated: only 0.9% in master's degrees, and only 0.2% in doctoral degrees. The number of Ethiopian students in the last three years has remained almost unchanged. These data point to the perception of higher education as a training for social and occupational advancement and less for research and science, and to well-known barriers in the periphery that are blocking the increase in the rate of their participation in higher education, as indicated by the Council for Higher Education in its annual reports:

1. Barriers in the pre-academic stages: In 2022, only 54% of 12-year-old Ethiopian students received a matriculation

certificate that meets the prerequisites of the universities, compared to 75.1% of all Hebrew Jewish education students. The rate of those who continue to study for a bachelor's degree among high school graduates of Ethiopian origin in 2014, eight years after high school graduation, was only 24.3%, compared to 48.1% of all high school graduates in Hebrew education.

2. In 2023, Ethiopian immigrants studied mainly in academic colleges, 59.8% compared to 39.4% of all students. This figure indicates a choice of available and applied academic studies for work, and fewer studies with a research horizon.
3. The percentage of women among Ethiopian students that year was higher than the percentage of all students (71.6%), compared to 60.3% respectively – this figure indicates a change in the leadership of the household from men to women and the choice of professions that require short training for work.
4. The percentage of women in academic colleges is high – 72.1% vs. 60.4% respectively and similar to the general data of this sector.
5. In STEM subjects, the percentage of Ethiopian immigrants was very low: in the bachelor's degree, the percentage of students in this field was 33.1% compared to 18% among Ethiopian immigrants.
6. A large percentage of Ethiopian immigrants studied for a bachelor's degree in the following fields: Social Sciences,, 21.8% compared to 17.0% of all students, and over 15%, similar to all students.

Despite all of the above, the number of Ethiopian students in institutions of higher education is on the rise – between 2017 and 2023, an increase of 24.8% compared to 10.2% for the overall student population. The number of new undergraduate students of Ethiopian origin increased by 4.6% in 2023 compared to the previous year, 4.3%, while the general population saw a 4.3% decrease.⁷

D. The Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) in Higher Education

of the CHE programs for the past two decades. The implementation of the programs began through study platforms, in which several universities were taught under a single administrative framework. In 2012, a new format was added called MAHAR (Center for Studies for the ultra-Orthodox). Ten opened in 2024. In 2024, the Council for Higher Education issued a Tender for the city of Beit Shemesh, in order to increase accessibility for the ultra-Orthodox population.

⁵ CBS – Central Bureau of Statistics (2024, October 5). Table 2.29.1 – Percentage of Arab students by gender, field of study, type of institution, and degree.

⁶ Kalischer, A., et al. 2013. Integration of Young Arabs in STEM Education and Quality Employment. Aaron Institute for Economic Policy, Richman University.

⁷ CBS: (2023, November 9) Press Release: The Population of Ethiopian Origin in Israel – A Collection of Data on the Occasion of the Sigd Festival 2023.

As a result of this activity, the number of ultra-Orthodox students increased 3.2 times over the past decade, from about 5,500 students in 2011 to about 17,380 students in 2024. In 2024, the share of ultra-Orthodox students in higher education was 4.7% of all students, 5.2% of undergraduate students, and 7.2% of all new undergraduate students. 82% of all ultra-Orthodox students, and the rest mainly pursued master's degrees. Most of the ultra-Orthodox undergraduate students (77.8%) were women, similar to the previous year.⁸ However, this rate is still significantly lower than their share of the population: only 4.7% of all students, compared to their rate in Hebrew education, which stood at 26% in 2023 and 20% of all students in Israel.

Additional weaknesses of this sector, as revealed by the CBS data for 2024:

- a. 32.8% Of all ultra-Orthodox undergraduate students, about 27% studied in budgeted colleges, only 21% studied at universities – these figures indicate a focus on subjects for an accessible livelihood, such as education and teaching, which are subjects with low social mobility and enable work in the community.
- b. Among the new students this year, almost half of all ultra-Orthodox students studied in colleges of education – 48.5% – a rate that is four times higher than the corresponding rate among all undergraduate students – 13.1%.
- c. The share of ultra-Orthodox students in the 2023-2023 academic year in subjects with high social mobility is low compared to all students: in engineering subjects, only 6.4% of all ultra-Orthodox students' studied in higher education, compared to 16.2% of non-ultra-Orthodox students studied in higher education, compared to 16.2% of non-ultra-Orthodox students. In the natural and computer sciences, 16.2% compared to 20.3% non-ultra-Orthodox.
- d. When we examine the percentage of male students in these subjects, the figures are slightly high, but still low relative to all students: in engineering and architecture, 9.6% are ultra-Orthodox compared to 23.6% are non-ultra-Orthodox. 19.1% of all ultra-Orthodox students studied computer science and natural sciences in 2020-2023, compared to 28.5% of non-ultra-Orthodox students. Ultra-Orthodox women have a high percentage of teachers in education and training, 4.9% in engineering compared to 10.0% in non-ultra-Orthodox women, and in computer science and natural sciences, more than ultra-Orthodox women: 14.9% compared to 13.4% non-ultra-Orthodox women, due to the involvement of high-tech companies that encouraged ultra-Orthodox women to work in their framework.⁹

In ultra-Orthodox communities, trends are emerging that indicate a change the academic system needs to prepare for: the share of ultra-Orthodox taking the matriculation exams has increased from 24% in 2008/9 to 44% in the 2020/21 school year. This increase is due to the number of ultra-Orthodox girls taking the matriculation exams. In 2021, 69% of ultra-Orthodox girls studying at the Beit Yaakov network took the matriculation exam. Among boys, too, there was a change from 2% taking the matriculation exam in 2015/16 to 6% in 2020/21. A similar increase was also recorded in the submission of matriculation exams that meet the universities' threshold requirements, following the opening of ultra-Orthodox high school yeshivas. The growth rate in the number of ultra-Orthodox men seeking higher education and employment is slightly higher than the natural growth rate of ultra-Orthodox society.

E. Higher Education in the Social and Geographic Periphery
CBS data and various studies indicate a relatively low percentage of young people from the social and geographic periphery compared to their share of the general population. In this respect, its share is low relative to its size before and after the Academy's gates opened.

To assess the impact of the change on this population, we will use two indices: a quantitative and a qualitative index. Using the quantitative index, we will examine the increase in the number of students from the beginning of the change to the last year, and using the qualitative index, we will examine whether the change has led to a reduction in social gaps, as measured by the income key.

The Quantitative Index

Using this index, we will examine three variables in relation to the population of the periphery:

1. The number of students from socioeconomic clusters is low according to the proportion of their share in the relevant population.
2. The number of people entering higher education from low socioeconomic clusters is eight years after graduating from high school in these localities.
3. The number of new students entering each year from socioeconomic clusters is low.

In terms of the general aspect, which examines a change at the district level, the change has taken its toll, and indeed, there has been an increase in the number of students in the peripheral districts of the north and south, as is evident from the data in the following table:

Table No. 6: Students by Institution District for the Years 1990, 2000, 2020, and 2024.

Region	90/1989	2000/1999	10/2009	20/2019	24/2023
Percentages	100	100	100	100	100
North	---	5.3	9.2	9.5	8.7
Haifa	21.7	17.9	13.8	12.5	12.7
Tel Aviv	42.8	31.5	30.9	29.6	32.1
Center	4.1	15.9	17.4	18.4	17.5
Jerusalem	22.7	15.5	13.4	15.5	15.2
South	8.7	13.9	15.3	14.5	13.8

Source: CHE (2024, October). The Opening of the 2025 School Year in the Shadow of the Iron Sword War, p. 15.

⁸ Malach, G., Kahner, L. (2024). Education. Yearbook of ultra-Orthodox Society in Israel, 2024, 25-42.

⁹ Above.

The following table shows the percentage of students from low aged 18-30, almost thirty years after the opening of the gates of socioeconomic clusters, relative to their share of the population academia:

Table 7: Distribution of the population in Israel between the ages of 18 and 30, by socioeconomic clusters in 2022.

Social cluster	Percentage of the population	Some of them are in undergraduate studies	Some of them are in their master's degree studies	Some of them are in their doctoral studies
Social Clusters 1 - 2	%22.8	%6	%7.9	%4.3
Social Clusters 3 - 4	%28.5	%20.9	%26.6	%20.6
Social Threads 5 - 6	%16.7	%16.2	%19.3	%17.2
Social cluster	Percentage of the population	Some of them are in undergraduate studies	Some of them are in their master's degree studies	Some of them are in their doctoral studies
Social Clusters 7-8	%19.1	%27.8	%28.3	%34.7
Social Clusters 9 – 10	%12.9	%29.1	%17.9	%23.2

Source: Data processing from Weininger, A. Data on new students by socioeconomic status. Research and Information Center, Knesset.

The percentage of undergraduate students in 2022 who came from localities ranked 1-2 is significantly understated relative to their share of the population: 6% compared to 22.8% in the 18-30 age group. In contrast, the percentage of students from localities ranked 9-10 is 29.1%, compared to 12.9% of the population in the same age group. A lower ratio was also observed in the second group of localities (3-4) compared to the

first group (7-8). The gap between the lower social clusters 1-4 and the higher clusters 8-10 persisted across the degrees.

When examining the percentage of students living in localities from low social clusters in the research institutions, another weakness is revealed, as is evident from the data in the following table:

Table 8: Undergraduate Students by Institution and Socioeconomic Cluster, 2024.

	Total		Socioeconomic Cluster (Percentage)				
	Absolute numbers	Percentages	2- 1	4 – 3	6 – 5	8 – 7	10 - 9
Total Students	196,242	100	9.4	23.0	16.6	24.4	21.9
Universities	89,541	100	6.2	19.3	14.0	25.2	29.6
Budgeted Colleges	70,824	100	11.8	25.9	19.4	23.8	15.2
Out-of-budget colleges	35,877	100	12.6	26.6	17.6	23.8	15.2

Source: CHE (2024, October). The start of the 2020-2025 school year in the shadow of the Iron Sword War.

The figures do not include the Open University and the colleges of education budgeted by the Ministry of Education.

In general, the population belonging to social clusters 1-2 is vastly underrepresented across all institutions and degree types. The population belonging to clusters 3-4 is vastly underrepresented in universities offering all types of degrees. In contrast, it is represented in surplus in colleges of education and non-budgetary colleges, mainly in master's degrees. In contrast, the population in the strongest clusters of 7-10 is represented by a significant surplus across a large number of institutions, especially universities offering degrees of all types.

Follow-up: Continuing to Academic Studies

Follow-up of high school graduates in 1997, who continued to academic studies until 2005, indicates a high percentage of learners from localities from socioeconomic clusters 9-10 compared to the rate of those who continue from localities 1-2: 15.1% in clusters 1-2 compared to 47.6% in clusters 9-10 and more than twice as much in the second two groups: 17.2% from clusters 3-4 compared to 37.5% in clusters 7-8.¹⁰

A similar report conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics indicates a fixed gap between the groups – a low percentage of students who continue eight years after graduating from high school among the student population who come from localities ranked 1-4, compared to those who continue from localities ranked 8-10, as shown in the data of the following table:

¹⁰ Dagan-Buzaglo, N. (2007). The right to higher education in Israel.

Table 9: Follow-up of Continuing Studies in Hebrew Education within Eight Years of High School Graduation (Selected Years).

Social Cluster Hebrew education	2001 Percentage of Follow-up Continued Follow-up to 2008 (2008)	2005 Percentage of those who continue to be monitored until 2012 (2012)	2010 Percentage of those who continue to be monitored until 2018	2011 Percentage of those who continue to be monitored until 2019 (2019)	2015 Percentage of Persistents – Follow-up to 2023
4–1	29.3	32.5	33.5	32.4	31.7
7–5	45.3	50.4	48.9	47.8	47.8
10–8	59.8	65.0	64.4	62.8	65.1
They did not continue	53.6	51.0	54.8	55.7	55.1

Source: CBS Data processing from the CBS website in selected years. Data updated as of October 10, 2024.

In fact, over a period of twenty years, from 2001 to 2021, the percentage of those continuing from lower social clusters increased by 2.4%, from 29.3% to 31.7%. The percentage of those continuing to degree studies in higher clusters 9-10 increased by 5.3%. Moreover, in this group, the percentage of those continuing from the same age group reached 62.8% in 2011-2011 and remained at 53% throughout the reporting period. The conclusion that emerges from this is that the high gap between the groups has been maintained and even increased since the opening of the gates of academia.

New Students

Another statistic that can indicate the perpetuation of the gaps between the groups is the percentage of new students by socioeconomic cluster. The distribution of new undergraduate students, by socioeconomic cluster for the 2019-2020 academic year, indicates 10% in socioeconomic clusters 1-2 and 22% in socioeconomic clusters 9-10. The cumulative rate of all new undergraduate students in the 18-30 age group indicates a larger gap: 16.5% from localities in clusters 1-2, compared to 69.3% from localities in clusters 9-10. The gap is also significant in the group of localities 3-4: 33% compared to 55% in clusters 7-8.

The conclusions that emerge from these data are that the lower the socioeconomic cluster, the smaller the cumulative share of new degree students in the 18-30 age group. The chance of a young person coming from clusters 9-10 entering academia by the age of 30 is 4.2 times higher than the chance of a young person coming from clusters 1-2.

The latest CBS report on the educational attainment of 25-45-year-olds, based on the Education Registry for 2008-2021, strengthens the argument that the gaps between students from affluent and less affluent localities persist, despite the opening of the gates of academia. Although the overall average in Israel, which stood at 26.8% in 2008, rose in 2021 to 33.0%, this increase is evident in localities ranked 8-10 and not in localities ranked 1-2: The highest percentage of those with an academic education was found in the towns of Modi'in-Maccabim-Ra'anat and Givat Shmuel – 60.1%. The lowest percentage is in Modiin Illit (6.4%), which ranks in the lowest cluster 1-2.

¹¹ For example, Weiss A (2022). A snapshot of the state of the country, charts on social and economic issues in Israel, 2022. Taub Institute for Social Policy Research in Israel. And yes, the Ministry of Finance. On the impact of an academic degree on income in the labor market. December 2022

The Quality Index

Many studies¹¹ point to academic training as playing a decisive role in motivating the deciles, as measured by the earnings index. The average monthly salary of all bachelor's degree graduates in 2020 was NIS 13,900, 29% higher than the average monthly wage in the economy, NIS 10,800. High wage levels were found among graduates in mathematics, statistics, computer science, engineering, architecture, and medicine. Their salaries ranged from NIS 25,700 to NIS 31,400 9 years after receiving their degree. Low wage levels were found among graduates in fields related to education and teacher training, as well as in Arts and Languages. Their average monthly salary ranges from NIS 11,800 to NIS 12,800 9 years after receiving their degree.¹² The average wage in 2024 was NIS 13,591, an increase of 6% compared to the previous year. In high-tech professions, the average wage was NIS 31,508, compared with NIS 10,948 in education professions. In financial services, NIS 22,188, and in professional and scientific services, NIS 18,201.¹³

An examination of the percentage of students studying subjects with high social mobility, such as STEM subjects, indicates significant gaps between the group of students living in localities 8-10 and students from localities 1-4:

1. The 2022 CBS report points to significant gaps in the fields of study: one-third of all students who lived in localities from high socioeconomic clusters 8-10 studied toward a bachelor's degree in STEM fields, compared to one-fifth of students who lived in low-income localities 1-3. The percentage of students studying STEM subjects among those aged 25-45 in the higher clusters was 4.6 times higher than in the lower 14% clusters, compared to 3%. In the field of engineering within STEM subjects, too, the share of residents of the periphery is lower than that of residents of localities in the higher clusters: the share of students from localities 1-3 in engineering studies in 2022 was 19% in the 18-30 age group, while their overall share in the same age group was 36%. The share of students from high school districts 8-10 was 27%, while their overall share in the same age group was 17.5%.
2. In another examination of the percentage of students studying high-tech subjects between the groups, it was found that 10% of students in higher clusters 8-10 studied high-tech subjects, and only 6% of students in clusters 1-4.

¹² CBS (2022). Education and Higher Education, Statistical Yearbook for Israel 2022, Chapter 4, Education and Education, p. 124.

¹³ CBS (2024, October 6). Press Release: Average gross salary per employee job in July 2024.

When this figure is measured by age group (25-45), the gap widens: 4% vs. 1%, respectively.

3. The cumulative rate of new bachelor's degree students in STEM studies in 2019-20 was 26.3% in clusters 9-10 compared to 3.3% in clusters 1-2. These data indicate that the chances of a young person from clusters 9-10 studying high-earning professions are 8.8 times higher than those of a young person from clusters 1-2 and 3.1 times higher than those of a young person from clusters 3-4.
4. In fact, from 1996 to 2021, the gap in the percentage of students between the two groups increased: in 1996, the percentage of students studying science and technology in lower clusters 1-3 was 17%, and in higher clusters 8-10 it was 23%. In 2021, the percentage of students studying these fields in higher clusters 8-10 was 35%, while in lower clusters 1-3 it was 24% – a gap of 11%, compared to 6% in 1996.
5. The share of students belonging to low clusters among students studying in colleges of education is higher than their relative share in the population: 34.3% compared to 27.8% of the population in 2022-23. On the other hand, the share of students belonging to higher clusters among those who studied in small colleges that year is lower than their share of the population (17.2% vs. 24.4%), respectively.

Budgeting Policy

The CHE's budgeting model is based on uniform indicators between institutions and is intended to improve teaching and research outputs. However, this budget creates a differentiation between the universities and the budgeted academic colleges. Universities are budgeted for teaching at all degree levels and for promoting basic scientific research. The colleges are responsible for academic teaching at the bachelor's and master's degrees only, and are budgeted for a teaching component only. The research component of the budgeting model is a significant part of the budgets transferred to the universities, and this section is not used in the colleges, except for research budgeting as part of the salary agreement signed with the senior faculty in the colleges since 2012.

The institutions' budget is divided into two main components: direct participation, which consists of a teaching component, and a research component, which, as noted, is intended for universities only. In order to examine whether the CHE's policy is appropriate for the significant change that occurred in the wake of the college revolution, we will examine whether a budget is compatible with the change, comparing universities and colleges according to the scope of activity, compared to the teaching component alone, in the absence of a research component in the colleges.

Table No. 10: The CHE's General Budget and Direct Participation in Institutions: 2009, 2020, and 2024

Selected Years/Percent Learning and Budget	Total budget of the CHE (in thousands of NIS)	Total Direct Participation	Total Universities	Total Colleges
2009	6,660,495	4,750,030	3,912,291	733,498
Percentage of students studying for a bachelor's degree			%37	%33 (excluding colleges of education)
Budget Percentage			%82	%15.5
2020	11,800,943	8,138,201	6,289,646	1,644,550
Percentage of students studying for a bachelor's degree			%38	%30 (excluding colleges of education)
Budget Percentage			%77	%20.2
2024	13,611,870	9,495,388	7,224,702	2,044,000
Selected Years/Percent Learning and Budget	Total budget of the CHE (in thousands of NIS)	Total Direct Participation	Total Universities	Total Colleges
Percentage of students studying for a bachelor's degree			%41.2	%30 (excluding colleges of education)
Budget Percentage			%76	%21.5

Source: CHE - Data processing from the CHE website. Budget of the CHE for the years 2009, 2020, and 2024. Retrieved 10.2.25

These data indicate that colleges are still perceived as institutions for teaching bachelor's and master's degrees and therefore are not entitled to institutional research budgets, despite having conducted applied research for many years and having teaching staff advancing based on research outputs. The colleges' budgets do not reflect the scope of their undergraduate activities, and although they have improved since 2009, they have remained almost unchanged over the past 25 years (from 2009 to 2024).

In 2024, the CHE's original total budget was NIS 13,651,870. The universities' share was NIS 8,759,571 – more than 76%-excluding the open universities. An additional \$2 billion was directed to direct and indirect research, and some of it flowed indirectly to universities as well.

Discussion and conclusions

To answer the central question of this study, I examined the system's achievements against the goals set by the CHE, even though it did not set quantitative targets in most cases, instead expanding accessibility in general. The details of the plan were

defined during implementation of the general plan and throughout the years of implementation, particularly for the target populations defined in the advanced stages of the plan. The questions we posed for the study were:

1. Has the college revolution reduced inequality in opportunities to acquire higher education in Israel?
2. Has the expansion of the system through colleges led to a reduction in inequality in higher education in the populations that have been set as targets?
3. And has the reduction of inequality in higher education led to a reduction in social gaps between students from affluent localities and students from less affluent localities?

As the findings indicate, the opening of academia's gates in the mid-1990s made higher education accessible to the Israeli public in general and to the country's geographic and social periphery. Populations that were not represented in higher education at all, such as the ultra-Orthodox, are participating in it, and their numbers are increasing, even though they do not reflect their share of the country's general population. The percentage of Arab residents of Israel in higher education has increased significantly over the past 15 years, and in the bachelor's degree, it reached almost 19% of the population. The share of Ethiopian immigrants in higher education has increased over the past 10 years, reaching 1.8% of the population with bachelor's degrees. Although women were defined in all CHE reports as a target for expansion, their share was high before the college revolution and continued to rise even after the expansion of access through colleges. In the peripheral areas – in the south and the north – there has been an increase in the percentage of students studying in higher education, particularly in the Northern District. In districts far from the center, there has been a significant increase in the number of students attending various types of academic colleges due to their greater access to the periphery in the north and south. As the findings show, all four target groups set by the CHE have high percentages of students in academic colleges. The Arab sector, the ultra-Orthodox, and women are in high numbers in colleges in general and in colleges of education and teaching in particular. Therefore, the college revolution achieved the main goal set by the plan's formulators.

The first hypothesis, which was based on the central claim of the "diversity **approach**," that the opening of the gates of academia led to an increase in the number of students from all populations who were underrepresented in higher education, was confirmed by the quantitative findings found in the reports of the CHE and the CBS. The number of undergraduate students in the entire system increased more than fourfold during the years of change (1990-2024). The total number of students during these years increased more than threefold. The inequality in opportunities to acquire higher education was reduced, and as a result, the quantitative gaps in higher education at the national level were narrowed. The second argument of this school of thought, namely that opening the gates of academia will lead to the creation of new types of institutions and thus increase the number of learners from underrepresented populations, has also been confirmed by the data. The researchers at this school argue that diversity in institutional types leads to two benefits for society and the economy. First, the number of students increases because each candidate can find the field of study that interests them in the new institutions. Due to the increase in the number and diversity of

institutions, the number of institutions increases, because a larger supply increases the likelihood that each candidate finds the right place for themselves. The laws of supply and demand in economics state that when supply increases, competition increases. In our case, the competition for the hearts of every worthy candidate is growing. Competition motivates new institutions to admit more students to ensure their survival and success. Second, the economy has graduates from a variety of fields that match the changing demands of a technological and competitive economy, such as the Israeli employment market.

Two prominent examples confirm this claim: the engineering colleges, which were gradually established in the early 2000s, helped narrow the large gap between the demand for engineers and the number of graduates the system trained before the college revolution. OECD data from 2015 indicated a significant gap in the number of engineering graduates between Israel and the industrialized OECD countries.¹⁴ This gap has been narrowing in recent years, leading to the addition of technological colleges to the national effort on this issue. In 2000, more than 11,000 engineering and architecture students studied at universities. The number of students studying engineering and architecture in 2017 rose to 19,949, and the share of engineering colleges was 45% of all students (Haliwa, 2020). The number of students studying engineering and architecture in 2024 has risen to 46,203, more than 2 times the 2014 figure. The share of engineering colleges in that year was 45% (CBS, Table 2.3). Since no unbudgeted colleges have been opened in this field, all students who do not study at engineering universities attend budgeted colleges in Israel. This figure further strengthens the argument that the expansion of the system through public colleges has contributed to expanding access to engineering, since there is no supply of engineering through the non-budgeted colleges, as in other professions. Engineering studies involve high operating costs, so the colleges that have not yet budgeted for them have not yet entered this field.

Another example is the field of nursing: in Israel, there was a shortage of nurses, and even the Ministry of Health considered importing nurses from abroad. Following the opening of several nursing departments in colleges, which were added to those in universities, the number of nurses increased significantly: in 2010, the Ministry of Health issued 929 nursing licenses. This number increased to 1,744 in 2015, up 88%. The number continued to rise, and in 2023 the number of licenses for nurses reached 4,107, compared to 3,476 in 2022 – an increase of 18%. Since 2010, the increase has been 4 (Ministry of Health Report, 2022).

Another indication, which confirms the hypothesis that was based on the "school of diversity," is the fact that the application to studies in the new academic colleges is not a default, but rather a conscious choice and in many cases a priority, because the colleges offer professional studies with high applicability, such as accounting, nursing, engineering, law, and more, and the fact that they are close to the students' place of residence. Another indication supporting this claim is that universities have lost their hegemony in undergraduate and graduate studies: the percentage of undergraduate students at universities has dropped from 85% in 1990 to 38% in 2020. This percentage increased

¹⁴ OECD- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2015). *Education at a glance: OECD indicators, executive summary*. OECD.

slightly in several years during 2023-2024, with the transition of several institutions previously defined as "colleges" to the category of "universities," such as Reichman University, Ariel University, and the WIZO College in Haifa, which was integrated into the University of Haifa. In 2024, the percentage of undergraduate students at universities was 41%. A decrease of more than 50% in the number of students compared to 1995, indicating a significant change in academia in Israel.

The percentage of master's degree students is also declining in universities and is gradually shifting to colleges: in 1990, all master's degree students were enrolled in universities. In 2000, the percentage of universities dropped to 97%, and in 2010, to 73.4%. In 2020-2024, the share of academic colleges in master's degrees reached 39%, while universities accounted for only 57.4%. The rest studied at Orop.

Despite the findings that indicate a reduction in inequality in the opportunity to enter higher education following the addition of the college tier, and a reduction in gaps in higher education at the national level, there are still gaps in the quantitative index, as the researchers of the stratification approach believe, and in the quality index in the sectors we examined. In the opinion of these researchers, the gaps are found in the social and geographic periphery, as I raised in the study's central argument, despite the entry of new populations into higher education. Their share is still lower than their share of the country's general population. As the findings show, the percentage of students aged 18-30 from less affluent localities did not increase significantly relative to the number of high school graduates in the eight years of follow-up until 2019. This means that, within a given age group, the gaps remain considerable, even though they have been reduced by 3-4% since the opening of academia's gates.¹⁵

Researchers at this school argued that the way the system was opened, with colleges defined in advance as non-research institutions, created second-class institutions, while the veteran universities, which enjoy large research budgets, are of type A. The share of colleges in the higher education budget did not increase relative to their share of bachelor's degrees. In the last three years alone, the colleges' budget has risen to 21% of the CHE's overall budget, even though their share of bachelor's degrees exceeds 30%. Moreover, a central component of the higher education budget is the research budget, which is directed only to universities; as a result, this component accounts for 76% of the total budget (not only the teaching component). Is it possible to corroborate the claim of the stratification school that the colleges are all second-class institutions? From the data we presented, it appears that this claim is only partially valid, and only about the research component, for several reasons:

1. The influx of students to colleges is a priority, and the fact that the colleges offer innovative fields of study and applications. Testify to the perception of the colleges in the eyes of the candidates – they see them as an academic home for all intents and purposes, and this is evidenced by the percentage of students studying in them.
2. The fact that the colleges do not benefit from research budgets as part of the CHE's policy does not entirely block the engagement in research in the colleges. Many colleges

conduct research, and their senior faculty receive competitive research grants, as evidenced by publications from the Council for Higher Education and the Israeli Research Fund.

3. The fact that many of the colleges engage in research, even though they are not entitled to research budgets, has led to a change in the perception of the Council for Higher Education and the Ministry of Finance. Since 2012, they have agreed that researchers should be budgeted for research and continuing education in order to prevent outdated teaching. Since 2012, following the first collective wage agreement in Israel, a formula has been established for an institutional research budget that will help researchers in colleges conduct research and study. This seminal agreement, of which I was one of the leaders, was renewed in 2017 until 2026.

Since the opening of the academic colleges and their addition to the academic system in Israel, research fields for master's degrees have been established in them, in contrast to the initial program that defined them as non-research institutions. Therefore, the colleges at the beginning of their career have not been approved for a research master's degree.

1. The changing reality, following the significant increase in the number of students in the new academic colleges, has created a situation that researchers of the graded school did not foresee. The change in the image of the colleges, which were initially designated as teaching colleges, is significant – the image of institutions for teaching and research, as is customary in the Western world, is taking shape. A clear sign of the change in their role is the discussions currently underway at the Council for Higher Education to redefine the colleges' roles and the functions they play in the system. All the proposals that arise define the colleges as institutions for teaching and applied research, as part of their official role in the system.

The latest studies from the school of stratification redefine the gaps – horizontal inequality and vertical inequality. This inequality does not address whether the goal of expanding access to higher education in Israel has been achieved, but rather whether expanding access has indeed reduced gaps in higher education and, consequently, social gaps. Horizontal inequality reflects differences between different types of diplomas at the same level of education. This refers mainly to certificates from prestigious and less prestigious institutions and, in essence, is a quality index. Vertical inequality is expressed later in studies and graduate degrees, and is primarily a quantitative metric. The creation of a stratified system has led to a different kind of inequality, in which students from affluent localities choose prestigious institutions and leading fields of study, thereby securing high incomes. In contrast, students from less affluent localities have no choice but to attend less prestigious institutions, pursue less prestigious fields of study, and earn lower earnings relative to the national average academic salary.¹⁶

¹⁵ Swirsky, S., Connor Atias, A. & Lieberman, A. (2019). Education and higher education. *Social Situation*, 2018,35-31

¹⁶ Haliva, P. (2020). Higher Education: Growing Inequality in the Horizontal and Vertical Dimensions in the Social Periphery. *Social Issues in Israel: A Journal of Social Issues* 29(2), 427-458.

Gaps by Quantitative Index

As the findings indicate, the share of each target group is incomplete relative to their share of bachelor's degrees and to the general population in Israel. Except for the female sector, which is also high in advanced degrees, the share of Arab graduates in master's degrees in 2024 is low relative to the representative age group in this population – 16.3% compared to 25.8%.

The ultra-Orthodox sector, which was not represented at all in higher education before the college revolution, entered higher education following the ongoing encouragement by the CHE. In recent years, the number of students has increased 3.2 times, from about 5,500 in 2020-2021 to about 17,380 in 2020-2024, representing 20% of all students in Israel's educational frameworks.

Ethiopian immigrants, as a target group in the CHE program, have reached their share of the undergraduate population. However, their share among graduate students remains very low compared to their share of the population.

Among residents of the geographic and social periphery, there has also been an increase in the number of students in the northern and southern districts, where populations living in localities belonging to groups 1-4 in the Central Bureau of Statistics rankings are concentrated. However, it is still not possible to point to a significant change whereby the gaps in higher education have narrowed relative to their share of the country's population.

Two indications point to the failure to narrow and even perpetuate gaps in higher education in the periphery:

1. The examination of new entrants to higher education each year from the periphery and the percentage of those who continue for eight years after high school. Follow-up of those who continue to higher education indicates an alarming statistic, according to which over a period of twenty years, from 2001 to 2021, the percentage of those who continue from lower social clusters increased by only 3% and amounted to 32.4%, compared to an increase of 3% annually in higher social clusters, with the share of bachelor's degree studies at 62.8% in the same age group.
2. The cumulative rate of all new undergraduate students in the 18-30 age group indicates a significant gap: 16.5% came from localities in clusters 1-2, compared to 69.3% from clusters 9-10. Even in the 3-4 vs. 7-8 locality groups, the gap is large: 33% vs. 55%, respectively.

The data in these two indicators confirm the existence, and perhaps even perpetuation, of the gap between the groups despite the college revolution. Moreover, a large part of the sectors underrepresented in higher education – ultra-Orthodox, residents of the periphery, and Ethiopian immigrants – live in lower social clusters. Therefore, the gap in the periphery also reflects the underrepresentation of these sectors.

CBS publications for 2021 confirm a quantitative gap between localities in the number of academics: Modi'in-Reut-Maccabim had the highest percentage – 60.1% – and the same percentage in

Givat Shmuel. In other well-established localities such as Givatayim, Ramat Hasharon, and Hod Hasharon, the percentage of those with higher education ranged from 54.2% to 59%. The lowest percentage, 6.4%, was in Modiin Illit, while percentages ranged from 9.6% to 15.1% in Ramle, Rahat, and Bnei Brak.¹⁷

Gaps according to the Quality Index

To examine qualitative gaps between students from well-off and less affluent localities, it is customary to use the percentage of students studying high-earning fields of study. This measurement is made in both OECD surveys and surveys by the Central Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Finance. Earnings levels are an indicator of social mobility and, therefore, of social gaps. A labor force survey conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics in 2019,¹⁸ in which the relationship between education level and labor force participation rate was examined, and an annual report by the OECD for 2021, indicate a clear impact of higher education on several parameters:

1. Participation rate in the labor force: Higher education has a clear impact on the rate of participation in the labor force, both in terms of gender and in general. In the gender field, the participation rate of women in Israel exceeded that of women in OECD countries, 86% and 81%, respectively. The same CBS survey also found that the higher the level of education, the higher the labor force participation rate among those aged 25-34, and that this is identical to the OECD average among men, more than 89%.
2. The level of earnings – the monthly salary of a bachelor's degree graduate in 2019 was NIS 13,900 and was 29% higher than the monthly average in the economy. The highest salary levels were recorded among graduates of the following fields: mathematics, statistics, computer science, engineering, architecture, and medicine. The lowest wages were recorded among graduates in education and teacher training, art, and languages. According to the 2024 report published by the Central Bureau of Statistics, the average wage in high-tech professions was NIS 31,508, compared to NIS 10,948 in education professions.

I examined the data using a qualitative index across high-earning fields of study, such as STEM and ICT subjects, compared with teaching studies and humanities, among graduates from well-off and less affluent localities. Sectors that benefited from the college revolution and saw increased enrollment, such as women and Arab Israelis, have not yet closed the gap, according to the qualitative index. Despite the increase in the number of women across all study tracks, a small share of them are in STEM and ICT subjects. In the field of engineering, their share in 2024 was 10.2%, following initiatives initiated by the CHE to increase it. In the education professions and teacher training, there is a large share, which also affects their representation in the senior academic staff, because the education professions are less research-oriented and operate in institutions that are not defined as research institutions.

The share of the Arab sector in advanced degrees is still low, and, like the women's sector, its share in high-mobility professions, such as STEM and ICT subjects, is very low. In contrast, it is very high in education and teacher training professions.

¹⁷ CBS – Central Bureau of Statistics (2024, February 5). Press release: Education level of 25-66-year old according to the Central Bureau of Statistics' Education Registry, 2008-2021.

As for the peripheral population, the qualitative gaps are even greater than the quantitative ones. Like the other sectors I examined, the share of students from low-income localities (1-4) in STEM and ICT studies is significantly lower—in 2020-2021, 10% of students from established localities studied high-tech subjects (4% of the total population aged 25-45), compared to about half of them from less well-off localities. Compared with their age group, their share is 1% of all 25-year-olds. In engineering subjects such as industry and management, electricity and machinery, the share of students from localities 1-3 was 5%-6% compared to 6% in machinery and 12%-20% in electrical and industrial engineering and management of high-end localities 8-10.

The earnings impairment resulting from studying non-leading and low-income fields is also the result of what researchers have called "over-education"—a mismatch between education and the workplace. Academics in fields such as education and the humanities are forced to work in jobs outside their field of study. Therefore, their salaries are not, on average, what is known for academics. This phenomenon is more common in the periphery and among graduates of localities 1-4 on the socioeconomic index. These forced earnings perpetuate the earnings gaps and, therefore, the gaps in society. Thus, education did not solve the issue of social inequality, since its acquisition created another problem. Another characteristic of the periphery is the high dropout rate.¹⁸ The dropout rate of students from the periphery is higher than the national average, both on a local basis and based on a subject of study:

1. The highest percentage of students who dropped out of school in 2022, after a first year of study, was in colleges of education. It stood at 11.4%. Among men at these colleges, the dropout rate was 16.6%. In academic colleges, 8.5% and in universities, 5.2%.
2. High dropout rate among students studying humanities: in 2018, it was 13.1% and in 2022, it decreased to 8.4%. The dropout rate in engineering and architectural sciences was 5.8% in 2018 and rose to 6.1% in 2022. In STEM subjects, the dropout rate was 9.3% in 2018 and dropped to 7.1% in 2022.
3. The dropout rate among Arab students in 2022 was higher than the dropout rate among Jewish students – 9.1% compared to 7.0% among Jews.
4. A high dropout rate was measured in 2018 among students from localities ranked 1 on the socioeconomic index (18.7%), compared to 5.5% in localities ranked 10. In localities 2-4, the dropout rate was 11%, compared to 6.9% in localities 7-9.
5. The dropout rate among ultra-Orthodox women in 2018 was 28.5% compared to 22% for men, while in 2022, there was a change for the better, with a dropout rate of 10.0% among men and 8.8% among women.

The high dropout rate was observed among those studying education, teacher training, and the humanities, where the peripheral population has a high percentage. Another parameter measured in dropouts is the percentage of dropouts by educational institutions. It was found that the dropout rate in colleges is high compared to universities, and even in this

parameter, residents of the periphery, Arabs, ultra-Orthodox, and Ethiopian immigrants are more likely to attend colleges than universities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

1. The expansion of the system through the colleges did indeed reduce the gap in the opportunity to acquire higher education, and narrowed the gap between the center and the periphery, as claimed by the 'School of Diversity', and at the same time, there are qualitative gaps, and in less established localities, there are also quantitative gaps, as claimed by the 'Stratification School'.
The CHE must enable more technological studies in the peripheral colleges. At this point, we emphasize that the most difficult figure in relation to the gaps between the periphery and the center is that twenty years of change have led to a 2.4% increase in the number of students continuing to academic studies from localities in social clusters 1-4, amounting to 31.7% of those who continue in clusters 8-10, compared to 65.1% of those continuing in clusters 8-10.
2. The CHE budget for the past 25 years is not based on a clear policy to reduce social gaps in the periphery, except for goals set for the Arab, ultra-Ultra-Democratic, and Ethiopian sectors. Of the budget allocated to colleges for the 2026-2026 school year, only 35.7% is dedicated to encouraging the periphery, while 10 of the 24 budgeted colleges operate in peripheral areas ranked 2-5 in CBS's ranking of social clusters. If there had been a target plan for the periphery, as was set for Arabs and Ethiopian immigrants, we would have witnessed greater change there, and the change could have been quantitatively monitored.¹⁹
3. There are characteristics common to all the target groups in the CHE program— high representation in less leading professions and low representation in leading professions. For the Arab Israeli Arab Israeli community, the ultra-Orthodox and residents of the periphery remain barriers before entering academic studies, which clouds the possibility of taking advantage of the opening of the gates of academia. These barriers are already present in high school; therefore, action must be taken to address them at an early stage.
4. Since colleges of education do not contribute significantly to social mobility, their number must be reduced in order to raise the prestige of the teaching field – such a reduction in supply and adaptation to demand will increase the prestige of the profession.
5. Closing the gaps in the ultra-Orthodox sector does not depend only on the policy of the CHE, but mainly on a change in the perception of the sector's rabbis. Increasing financial aid may significantly encourage young people to break social conventions and venture out to study. The restrictions imposed by the High Court of Justice in several rulings that dealt with gender segregation, both of students and of academic staff, do not help or prevent a broader study by young people in the ultra-Orthodox sector.

¹⁸ Alon, M. (2022, March 3). The First Generation of Higher Education – A Status Report (Conference Lecture). In A. Levin (Moderator).

¹⁹ CHE: Merav Abuhaira, Head of the Budgeting Department of the CHE Colleges, Letter to the Directors General of the Budgeted Academic Colleges dated August 13, 2025, Budget of Institutions for the 2020-2026 Academic Year

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