

# Technological education as a driver of social mobility

• By JEHUDA HADDAD



PRIME MINISTER Benjamin Netanyahu speaks to students involved in high-tech related programs during a Cyber Security Conference in Tel Aviv in January. (Reuters)

The Chief Economist Unit in the Finance Ministry recently published a comprehensive analysis which found that academic field of studies has the most impact on a young person's chances to improve his or her future socio-economic status. The key study finding shows that engineering and computer science top the social mobility index.

The study's main conclusion was that academic fields in the sciences, among them medicine, computers and engineering, lead to the highest level of mobility. Besides the prerequisite of 12 years of study, admission requirements to these academic departments in most cases include five matriculation units in mathematics and a technical background in computers. These are reasonable requirements, however to meet them a supporting environment, economically and socially, is needed.

Thus, for example, a child growing up with a computer at home has an advantage over a child without a computer, even when their IQ and motivation are identical. It is reasonable to assume that a child growing up in a family with the economic means to pay for Talan (parent-funded additional enrichment courses) will enjoy the benefit of computer, English and science classes earlier than a child whose parents also want this for their child, but lack the economic means. What's more this gap continues throughout the pupil's experience in the school system. Strong populations are those that can afford private lessons for their children, and psychometric preparation courses further down the road.

The chances of an individual with an academic degree to reach

the upper fifth percentile in the future stands at about 33%, much higher than those who completed only 12 years of study, however the leading fields of study deter-

mining this social mobility are very selective. We must therefore ask ourselves whether all young people in Israel enjoy the same opportunities in acquiring education and climb-

ing the socio-economic ladder.

Quite a few studies conducted in recent years have shown that an individual's socio-economic status does not affect the chances to complete an academic degree. Individuals who begin their academic studies from a lower starting point will not necessarily complete their degree with lower grades. However socio-economic status does impact the individual's initial chances of admission to an academic institution. The problem of social gaps in academic education in Israel is reflected in admission or non-admission to academia. Indeed studies have proven that if the admission barriers could be overcome, then perhaps many young people from a low socio-economic background could bridge these gaps, and not only complete their academic studies, and even successfully, but also reach quality positions with high potential salaries, and in doing so improve their social mobility.

The relevant government ministries must act resolutely so that all young persons in Israel will have the opportunity for studies that will lead to future economic success. Equal opportunity in education begins as early as early childhood and primary school. Achieving such equality will be possible by encouraging good educators to move to locations far from the center of the country, by providing all schools access to technological means of study, and by enabling all children in Israel to gain access to prestigious study programs. Investment of the government and state entities in technological education in early stages of education will enable young people, throughout their studies in the education system, to advance and reach the occupation they aspire to and ultimately choose, regardless of whether this will be accompanied by economic success.

Furthermore, equality and even an advantage should be provided through scholarships, preparatory programs, dormitories or rent assistance, reinforcement hours for teaching assistants and more.

With the appropriate policy it will be possible to narrow social gaps, increase social equality and promote social mobility in Israel.

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