HIGH SCHOOL TRACKING AND COLLEGE DESTINATION IN ISRAEL

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Abstract

The independent effects of high school tracking on college attendance, constantly found in the United States since the early 1970s, are usually interpreted vis-à-vis the signifying influence of tracking on academic motivation and achievement. Recently, however, with the expansion of American higher education, the importance of high school tracking as an independent signifier of college enrolment has declined (Karen 2002). In this paper we examine whether high school tracking serves as an enrolment signifier in the expanded higher education system of Israel, by assessing its effects on students' allocation to the new colleges versus the established universities. Since high school tracking in Israel is highly visible to students by branching them to academic versus vocational studies, and within those to specific majors or fields of specialization, one may expect students in the lower academic or the vocational tracks to opt for the new colleges even after controlling for their social origins and academic ability.

We examine this issue by assessing the effects on college versus university destination of seven high school de-facto tracks – the academic track with double science major, single science major, double science and humanities major, double humanities major, single humanities major, or no major at all, and the vocational track The data used are taken from a large 1999 national survey of a stratified sample of 4061 freshmen in public and private colleges and in similar fields of study at all universities.

Three logistic regression models of college versus university destination are estimated. The first, assessing the effects of high school tracks, shows that all tracks except for the most prestigious (the academic double science track) significantly increase the odds of college enrolment. This is especially true for the lower academic tracks (humanities majors or no major at all) and the vocational track. These effects are not altered much after the introduction of the students' socio-demographic profile (gender, age, religiosity, geographic location, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status of origin) into the second model. However, when academic ability (the mean score of high school matriculation grades and of the psychometric test) is introduced into the third model, the net effects of high school tracking become non-significant. The results therefore indicate that high school tracking serves as a proxy for academic ability with respect to institutional enrolment in Israeli higher education, and cannot be considered an independent signifier for students regarding their higher education destinations. Subsequently, the futility of high school tracking and the need to detrack high school studies are discussed.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (N = 4061)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
High School Tracks																	
1. Academic, 2 sciences																	
2. Academic, 1 science	-.17*																
3. Academic, sci & hum	-.17*	-.20*															
4. Academic 2 hum	-.17*	-.20*	-.20*														
5. Academic, 1 hum	-.15*	-.17*	-.17*	-.17*													
6. Academic, no major	-.13*	-.15*	-.16*	-.15*	-.13*												
7. Vocational	-.18*	-.18*	-.18*	-.18*	-.15*	-.14*											
Socio-Demographic Variables																	
8. Gender: Female	-.06*	-.04*	.00	.21*	.08*	-.02	-.19*										
9. Age	-.10*	-.03*	-.12*	-.10*	-.01	.30*	.12*	-.12*									
10. Mizrachi origin	-.09*	-.04*	-.02	.03	.04*	-.03*	.11*	.00	-.08*								
11. F's academic educ.	.10*	.06*	.05*	-.04*	-.03*	.00	-.13*	-.01	-.13*	-.33*							
12. M's academic educ.	.10*	.05*	.05*	-.04*	-.04*	-.02	-.11*	-.02	-.15*	-.30*	.51*						
13. Family income	.09*	.09*	.04*	.00	-.01	-.08*	-.14*	-.02	-.07*	-.17*	.28*	.24*					
14. Religiosity	-.08*	-.02*	.10*	-.01	-.06*	.02	.04*	-.05*	-.07*	.29*	-.11*	-.11*	-.16*				
15. Central location	-.03*	.04*	.00	.00	.03	-.01	-.04*	-.02	.04*	.01	.06*	.02	.09*	.00*			
16. Academic ability	.25*	.08*	.15*	-.11*	-.18*	-.09*	-.16*	-.11*	-.17*	-.14*	.28*	.26*	.23*	-.04*	.13*		
17. College destination	-.16*	-.06*	-.08*	.02	.10*	.05*	.13*	.00	.15*	.11*	-.20*	.17*	-.13*	.07*	.01	-.54*	
Mean	.13	.17	.17	.16	.13	.11	.14	.57	23.49	.29	.40	.37	3.37	.29	.61	584.21	.58
Standard Deviation	.33	.37	.38	.37	.34	.31	.35	.50	4.18	.46	.49	.48	1.05	.45	.49	77.80	.49

* p < .05

Table 2: Logistic Regression Models for College Destination

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
High School Tracks			
Academic, 1 science	.56**	.47**	.02
	(.12)	(.13)	(.15)
Academic, sci & hum	.48**	.37**	.10
	(.12)	(.13)	(.15)
Academic, 2 hum	.93**	.76**	-.17
	(.12)	(.13)	(.16)
Academic, 1 hum	1.38**	1.24**	.06
	(.13)	(.14)	(.18)
Academic, no major	1.16**	.87**	.06
	(.14)	(.16)	(.25)
Vocational	1.58**	1.27**	.25
	(.13)	(.15)	(.19)
Socio-Demographic Variables			
Gender: Female		.03	-.21*
		(.72)	(.10)
Age		.07*	-.05*
		(.01)	(.02)
Mizrachi origin		-.04	-.08
		(.09)	(.11)
F's academic education		-.47**	-.20
		(.09)	(.11)
M's academic education		-.22*	.02
		(.08)	(.11)
Family income		-.10*	.02
		(.04)	(.05)
Religiosity		.31*	.41*
		(.09)	(.11)
Central location		.09	.43*
		(.07)	(.10)
Academic Ability			-.02**
			(.00)
Constant	-.52**	-1.51**	13.26**
	(.09)	(.35)	(.79)
Pseudo R^2	.07	.13	.40
-2 Log Likelihood	5362.90	4525.22	3012.37

* $p < .05$
** $p < .001$