

Horizons to High-Tech – Program Evaluation

Executive Summary

June 2014

Program Description

The Horizons to High-Tech program assists young people from the social and geographic periphery to get accepted to engineering studies in university. The program targets young people who don't meet the admission criteria and who have difficulty bearing the economic burden of the studies. It helps them improve their qualifications through a special pre-academic program, and provides educational and financial support throughout the academic studies.

Purposes of the Research

The research, conducted by Martens-Hoffman, sought to examine all stages of the program implementation: identifying and screening of potential participants; characteristics of individuals who were admitted to the program and those who were not; causes of dropout at different stages; and the financial and educational assistance over the course of studies.

Methodology

The research used quantitative and qualitative tools in order to examine to what extent the program meets its objectives and operates efficiently. The qualitative tools included semi-structured in-depth interviews with officials, focus groups, and preparatory program students. Quantitative methods included surveys among students in the preparatory program and in academia, dropouts, and those who were not accepted to the program. In addition, data regarding the selection process was analyzed in order to evaluate its efficiency.

Main Findings¹

Acceptance to university: Among 975 individuals who started the pre-academic program (between the years 2008-2012) 697 completed it and 311 of them were accepted to university degree programs (44%). This is a little lower than the original goal, according to which 50% of the pre-academic program students would reach university studies.

Acceptance to College: Approximately 40% of the participants in the sample who dropped out of the program or were not admitted to university went on to study natural sciences or exact sciences in college.

Based on the research data it may be concluded that approximately 58% of the program participants study exact sciences in universities and colleges.²

¹ The findings refer to the first 5 cohorts.

² Based on findings of a dropout survey that did not include all the dropouts

Drop-out: The dropout rate from the pre-academic program was approximately 19% in the preliminary stage and 17% in the main program. The data regarding the successful completion of the preparatory in cohorts 1–5 (83% of the participants) are slightly higher than the goal of 80%. The main causes of dropout are financial and learning difficulties.

Target population: Approximately 14% of the participants in cohorts 5–6 (43 and 37, respectively) are from the community of Ethiopian Israelis. This percentage is quite high in comparison to similar programs that report 3%-7%.

The perceived contribution: 76% of the program participants stated that the program contributed to a great or to a very great extent in coping with challenges of academic studies. This rate is slightly higher than that of similar programs (70%).

Satisfaction: The participants' satisfaction is very high. For example, students in the preparatory program (5th cohort) and in academia would strongly recommend that their friends join the program (4.58 and 4.52 respectively on a scale of 1-5).

Social Return on investment (SROI): Based on a limited SROI model developed by Rashi's Evaluation Department, for every shekel invested in the program, the state receives from direct taxes alone approximately 7.8 shekels over the career period.

Conclusions

- The Horizons to High-Tech program is unique in that it offers an opportunity for academic studies without prerequisites (matriculation and psychometric exams).
- The research findings suggest that without the program, the number of young people from the target group who pursue academic studies would be much lower, due to both their financial difficulties and low educational achievements.
- The students in the program are motivated and have high aspirations.
- The recruitment process identifies suitable candidates for the program mainly in the periphery.
- Students who asked for educational and financial assistance report that they are highly satisfied with the way it was handled when the request was for educational assistance of (4.07 on a scale of 1-5) and moderately to highly satisfied (3.40) when it was for financial assistance.

Challenges and Recommendations

- The dropout from the program in some academic institutions requires attention. We believe that the scope of enrichment as well as the educational and financial support should be increased for preparatory program students. In addition, it is important to introduce methodical screening early in the recruitment process to identify candidates who are not suited to the program.
- Among the applicants who were not accepted to the program there is a relatively high proportion of new immigrants, candidates whose parents are Ethiopian, and individuals without a matriculation certification. These groups are part of the program's target population, and assisting them in the selection process requires further consideration.