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**Abstract**

The diversification of higher education systems into 'first tier' and 'second tier' institutions raises the issue of who gets to study where. The diversity approach suggests that the institutional enrollment of students will be mainly influenced by their social origins, whereas the stratification approach underscores the role of academic ability in the process of matching students and institutions. We hypothesize that the two approaches are not mutually exclusive and that their applicability is context-bound, depending on the characteristics of the second-tier institutions. The hypothesis was tested through a survey of a sample of about 4,500 Israeli freshmen enrolled in first- and second-tier institutions in the Israeli expanded and diversified higher education system. Multinomial logistic regressions of institutional enrollment revealed the role of the hierarchy of the second-tier institutions in shaping institutional enrollment and in preserving the advantages of privileged groups. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)