

# KNOWLEDGE AS A GOOD IN THE EDUCATIONAL MARKETPLACE: THE CASE OF THE LIVERPOOL UNIVERSITY EXTENSION IN ISRAEL

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**Abstract** –*This paper explains the activities of the Liverpool University Extension in Israel according to a new approach that treats knowledge as an economic good operating according to defined rules. The paper reports findings of a case study, performed in the spirit of qualitative research that examined the Liverpool University Extension in Israel, which offers a program toward receipt of the MA in education and art. The purpose of the study was to investigate the Extension as an illustration of the processes of interest. Specifically, the study attempted to determine whether the Liverpool University Extension had adopted and applied principles corresponding to the perception of ‘knowledge as a good’. The study, the first of its kind regarding higher education, explores four issues: (1) the extension’s policy, (2) its programs of study, (3) the student body (i.e., demographic profiles, the reasons for turning to the extension and expectations regarding the program of study) and (4) qualitative aspects of the MA theses submitted. The research questions ask to determine whether a relationship can be established between these four factors and whether those relationships result from the approach adopted (i.e. ‘knowledge as a good’).*

## **Introduction: the establishment of foreign university Extensions as an outcome of globalization in higher education**

**G**lobalization, by which we mean the eradication or disregard of national boundaries for the purpose of marketing and selling goods and services, has not escaped Israel. Since the early 1990s, the penetration of international brand names into the Israeli market has become increasing blatant. Israel, with its population of about 7 million, is considered to be a medium-sized market that nonetheless exhibits availability of considerable capital for consumption (e.g., the large number of cellular phones per thousand) and highly developed consumerism. The penetration of brand names has been accompanied by massive investments in marketing, advertising and sales promotion. The same process, witnessed throughout the world, including Eastern economies such as China, has been based on adoption of competition and cooperation as behavioral norms (Kwiek, 2001; Scott, 2000; Vander Wende, 2001). As part of this trend, globalization has affected

higher education as well (Alderman, 2001; Willis, 2001). Until the mid-1990s, Israel's higher education industry operated by means of state-owned universities and colleges in addition to a small number of private colleges. From the mid-1990s on, 25 U.S., European and African universities came to offer degree programs in Israel; they soon attracted B.A. and M.A. students that today number about 9,000 in comparison to the 108,595 students studying in the universities and the 98,473 studying for a BA in the colleges (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2002). In 1998, legislation was passed — the Council of Higher Education Law — that permitted foreign university extensions to operate under the supervision of the Council of Higher Education.

A recent amendment to this law, Amendment No. 11, requires foreign universities be licensed and sets down guidelines for their operation (Gottlieb & Yakir, 1998):

1. The programs licensed in Israel shall be identical to those at the home university. Graduates of the Israeli programs have the same rights as 'home university' graduates.
2. Entrance requirements, evaluation procedures, quality control and staff appointments are to be applied in Israel by the home university.
3. Extensions of foreign universities in Israel will not cooperate with a recognized Israeli institution of higher education unless the Council has given special permission to do so. Foreign extensions will not receive public funds.
4. At least 30% of the program shall be taught by instructors from the home university. Twenty percent of the Israeli staff shall declare the foreign extension as their main employer or hold an appointment at the foreign university for at least four years.

The university extensions, whose primary goal is profit making, have striven to acquire as many students as possible. To achieve this goal, intensive advertising and sales promotion campaigns have been launched, a strategy that treats the distribution of information and the marketing of education in a manner similar to any other consumer good. In the following, I discuss those marketing principles applied by the Liverpool University Extension.

### **The Liverpool Extension's adoption of the 'knowledge as a good' approach**

The Liverpool Extension is managed in Israel by a profit-oriented commercial body, the Kidum College Network. The Extension treats knowledge in the manner of an economic good, waiting to be successfully marketed and geared to satisfying

the wants of the majority of its consumers. This perception of 'knowledge as a good' dictates a unique mode of behavior with respect to the acquisition of knowledge, beginning with its marketing and concluding with determination of its quality level and characteristics. The type of knowledge, its substance and method of transmission are influenced and adjusted to the consumer's needs. This approach is revolutionary when considered against the classical concept of higher education, one that framed knowledge as an absolute entity, offered to the consumer public without any reference to marketing and certainly not to consumer needs or satisfaction. In contrast, the 'knowledge as a good' approach gives rise to a different conceptualization of the educational process. The innovative perception of students as *clients* as opposed to *consumers* now provides the foundations for planning knowledge's features, marketing method and transmission (Kotler and Hornik, 2000; Scitovsky, 1992). In the following, the six principles of this new approach and how they are applied by the Liverpool University Extension are described.

### *Supply and demand*

The 'knowledge as a good' approach requires adoption of a market strategy given that knowledge is to be sold to a maximum number of clients. Marketing campaigns rest on four basic concepts: *supply*, *demand*, *wants* and *needs* (Kotler and Hornik, 2000. p. 66). First, needs and their demand are identified. Needs indicate dissatisfaction of some human condition; wants represent the desire for some unique method of satisfying those needs. Demands are wants for distinctive products and the willingness to purchase them and are susceptible to fluctuations in supply by the market. Wants are transformed into demands once they are supported by purchasing power.

From this perspective, the Liverpool University Extension exploited a situation where the demand for higher education exceeded its supply. This dimensions of this demand resulted from the massive wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s (about 1 million individuals), a high rate of unemployment (9%), rapid growth in the hi-tech industry and changes in the demographic profiles of potential university entrants when confronted by inflexible supply, as detailed in the following.

- *Demand* for higher education in Israel has generally been greater than *supply*. The majority of the public accepted this condition whereas those with sufficient economic means were able to complete their education abroad. Since the 1980s, with budding privatization and economic decentralization, the equilibrium between supply and demand underwent modification.

- *Drastic increase in the number of high school graduates from all demographic sectors.* The number of high school students graduating from the Hebrew education system rose from 6,581 in 1960 to 20,503 in 1970 to 31,316 in 1980, 52,735 in 1990 and 78,420 in 2001. With respect to the Arab education system, the number of high school graduates rose from 139 in 1960 to 535 in 1970, 3,743 in 1980, 8,550 in 1990 and 14,399 in 2001. Among these graduates, the number qualified to receive a full matriculation diploma rose consistently over the years, from 22,740 in 1987 to 45,029 in 2000. It should be noted that although the absolute number of graduates eligible for a full matriculation diploma rose, the rates have remained stable in recent years: 50.4% in 1996, 49.7% in 1998 (CBS, 2001) and 51.5% in 2003.
- *Increase in the number of BA graduates.* The number of university students earning a BA has risen, from 6,740 in 1980 to 30,520 in 2001; the trend was similar in the colleges, from 197 in 1980 to 11,500 in 2001, and in the Open University, from 281 in 1990 to 1,775 in 2001. Thus, 56.6% of all BA recipients studied in the universities.
- *Increase in BA graduates pursuing an MA.* As a result of the sharp increase in BA graduates, the number of students aspiring to earn an MA has also increased. As the universities are incapable of accepting the majority of applicants, demand has burgeoned for advanced studies despite the dramatic rise in the number of university MA graduates, from 6,740 in 1980 to 17,298 in 2000. Pressure for privatization has intensified, which led to the opening of alternative educational paths outside the universities, that is, colleges and foreign university extensions.
- *Increase in demand for BA degrees in law, business administration and computers.* Because the universities are unable to absorb the deluge of applicants, the colleges have begun to offer programs culminating in a BA in the demanded professions. To illustrate, the colleges awarded 253 law degrees in 1995; the number reached 1793 in 2000.
- *Increase in the number of rejected university applicants for BA degrees in law, business administration and computer science.* In 2000, the universities rejected 21% of all applicants although in the three most-demanded disciplines, the rejection rate was considerably higher. Entry requirements are higher in these fields, and fewer are accepted. This situation, in which the demand for academic education exceeds its supply,

presented an apt environment for the Liverpool Extension's entry into the Israeli market.

#### *Definition of target population and identification of market segments*

The Liverpool University Extension identified the existence of a broad target population for MA studies in education and focused its activities on this market segment. This population was composed primarily of veteran members of the education system: teachers, counselors and principals having BA degrees who find it difficult to be accepted to the universities due to the rigid entrance qualifications, who live in the periphery and who are unable to integrate work with study. The Ministry of Education encourages teachers to continue their education and expand their knowledge; it even compensates teachers for the cost of their studies through wage increments that are recognized for pension purposes upon retirement. Precise location of this target population allowed the Extension to identify their needs and to construct an appropriate policy as well as programs of study.

#### *Product differentiation and client needs*

Often, one can identify a market niche, that is, a small group of consumers whose needs are inadequately met, within a larger market segment. In order to promote marketing efforts, a product differentiation strategy will be devised, based on product quality and maximum fit to the needs of niche members. The Liverpool Extension performed such an adjustment to their product. Their stated target population was, in fact, dissatisfied despite their urgent desire to acquire an MA in one of Israel's universities. In order to capture this clientele, the Extension's marketing strategy stressed the credibility of its degree due to the fact that unlike other extensions and even some university programs, Liverpool requires completion of a thesis. In order to adjust itself to the student's needs, the Extension pledges to provide close personal mentoring during the writing process; most importantly, it bases the thesis topics on the student's professional experience.

#### *Identification of competitors' goals, evaluation of competitors' advantages and disadvantages*

The Liverpool Extension also succeeded in identifying the advantages and disadvantages — in terms of its clients — of its competitors, the other foreign university extensions as well as the local universities. This information was incorporated into its marketing strategy.

We begin with the universities' disadvantages:

- Programs of study are constructed according to the institution's needs and not the students' needs; hence, they are unsuitable for teachers.
- Rigid entrance requirements.
- No personal guidance is provided during the writing of papers and the thesis.
- Campuses are often not easily accessible.

The disadvantages of the other foreign extensions include:

- A thesis is not required.
- The program of studies does not take the students' professional experience adequately into consideration.

In recognition of these drawbacks, the Extension constructed a concentrated program of studies that is conducted during school vacations. Entrance requirements are more flexible, and personal mentoring is provided to each student when completing assignments; professional experience is an important factor in the program. The Extension's facilities are quite accessible to students residing in the periphery (the main campus is located a five-minute walk from the railway station). Because a thesis is required, the degree has high standing.

### *Salience of client satisfaction*

Like organizations involved in the sale and marketing of consumer products, the Liverpool University Extension adopted the motto: 'The customer is always right.' Extension staff is highly sensitive to any indication of the level of student satisfaction. To this end, a feedback questionnaire is distributed to ascertain performance of lecturers and mentors; if their scores are low, the Extension dismisses faculty. The Liverpool Extension also demands teaching excellence, another factor that is examined at the conclusion of each course.

### *Advertising, sales promotion and public relations*

Considerable sums have been invested by the Extension in advertising, sales promotion and public relations, conducted by hired professionals. Within the framework of these activities, the faculty participates in professional conferences and study days open to their target public: teachers, school principals and counselors. Significant sums are likewise invested on advertising in newspapers and journals geared to education professionals.

# **The Liverpool University Extension in Israel — a case study**

## **Methodology**

### *Purpose of the study*

The Liverpool University Extension in Israel opened its doors after foreign extensions were licensed to award academic degrees or, stated otherwise, institutionally legitimated. The case before us is, in effect, an illustration of how the ‘knowledge as a good’ approach is implemented by a private institution in the era of globalization. Because the Extension is a private university, managed by a commercial organization, it receives no institutional support and displays attributes characteristic of globalization: the sale goods, in this case knowledge, from one country — the UK — to another country — Israel. The present study, the first of its kind applied to higher education, adopts the approach that treats knowledge and higher education as economic consumer goods to be treated according to market principles.

The study focuses on four main issues: policy, students, programs of study and MA theses. The study will examine the coherence between the four issues and their relationship with the conceptual approach adopted.

### *The research questions*

Each research question relates to one of the four basic issues at the study’s core:

1. Policy: What is the Liverpool University Extension’s declared policy, what factors distinguish that policy, and does that policy reflect the features of the ‘knowledge as a good’ approach?
2. Programs of study: What programs are offered? Do they correspond to Extension policy on one hand and student expectations on the other?
3. Students: What demographic profile characterizes the student body? What factors brought them to enroll in the Extension and what expectations do they have of their studies?
4. Theses: What characterizes the theses written by the Extension’s students? Do the theses reflect Extension policy?

### *Method*

The analysis was based on an in-depth, qualitative case study that stressed the views of the subjects and their interpretations of their experience. Descriptive statistics were used to construct the demographic profiles.

## *Research tools*

The research tools were chosen to respond to the questions guiding the study.

Question 1: Content analysis of Course catalogues and official documents.

Question 2: Content analysis of the programs of study.

Question 3: Construction of demographic profiles of the student body based on data collected from 375 personal files, 21 structured interviews and comparative analysis of the responses.

Question 4: Content analysis of 375 MA thesis topics.

## *Background*

Liverpool University was founded more than 100 years ago. About 12,000 full-time students (1,000 of which come from countries outside the European Union) and 18,000 part-time students are currently enrolled. The academic staff numbers about 1,000 full-time faculty. Teaching and research cover a broad range of subjects including social and environment sciences, the humanities, education, engineering, law, medicine and mathematics. Liverpool is known for the number of Nobel Prize winners counted among its faculty. The extension in Israel has been active since 1996 and is managed by a commercial body entitled the Kidum College Network. Its physical plant, administrative and classroom facilities are divided between two locations. The main branch, serving about 200 students, is located a 5-minute walk from Tel Aviv's main railway station, a hub connecting travelers from the north and the south. Another branch is located in Jerusalem. The teaching staff includes 15 faculty members from the UK and 15 from Israel. By June 2003, about 500 graduates had successfully completed their studies and received an MA.

The university's Israel extension offers three programs of study: an M.Ed. in Educational Curriculum and Management Studies, an M.A. in English Language Teaching and Learning and an M.A. in Contemporary Art. About 80% of the Extension's students are enrolled in the M.Ed. program. With respect to the research questions, questions 1 and 2 will be examined in the context of all three programs whereas questions 3 and 4 will focus on the M.Ed. program.

The Liverpool University Extension is one of 10 comparable institutions offering similar programs in the Tel Aviv area. Compared to other extensions, Liverpool is relative small, with about 150 students per class, spreading throughout all three programs, as compared to the 1,000 students enrolled in the University of Derby extension, and the hundreds in each of the other extensions. Liverpool is exacting in its admission requirements and demands completion of many written papers; moreover, it is the only extension that requires submission



of a thesis as a condition for award of a degree. Prior to 2001, the home university demanded that the theses be written in English. This demand was softened in 2001, with theses now submitted in one of three languages: Hebrew, Arabic or English. Inasmuch as the other extensions do not require a thesis, and the fact that Liverpool is unwilling to lower its entrance requirements or learning demands, the number of its students remains limited.

### *Research Population*

Data regarding 375 out of the 400 students attending the Liverpool University Extension up to June 2002; structured interviews with a sample of 21 students.

### *Procedure*

The research was conducted during the 2002/2003 academic year. At the first stage, data were collected from the students' personal files. This stage was performed by a research assistant in cooperation with Extension staff. During the second stage, structured interviews were conducted with 21 students. The interview data were collected and analyzed by a research assistant. The first two stages were conducted in order to prepare micro-level demographic profiles. In the third stage of the research, a content analysis of the programs of study and thesis topics was performed.

### *Limitations of the Research*

The study's limitations proceed from the nature of qualitative research, which is based on interpretations offered by the subjects as well as the researcher. These interpretations are subjective in nature and capture the attitudes of the subjects exclusively. Furthermore, the sample of 21 interviewees does not entail a representative sample; the data gathered therefore do represent the attitudes of the remaining 400 students enrolled in the Extension. Hence, the research does not make any claims for generalizability of its findings; rather, it employs the findings to support the suggested new theoretical approach.

## **Findings**

The findings will be presented according to the four issues at the core of the research: policy, programs of study, students and theses.

## ***Policy***

The Liverpool University Extension in Israel maintains the policy declared by the mother institution. A content analysis of university documents (catalogues and internal directives) identified the following operative principles:

1. Considerable weight is given to the student's professional experience; the purpose of the program of study is to upgrade that experience. Considerable stress is placed on integrating professional experience into every learning assignment, including the final thesis. The goal of this integration is to improve the student's professional competence in practice. Only those applicants having experience in the profession of teaching or other educational positions are eligible for admission (*Bulletin*, p. 1).
2. Whether within the framework of frontal instruction or written papers, students are required to display reflective thinking and a critical attitude by means of a discourse with written texts. Again, this approach is realized by incorporating personal and professional experience. In their writing papers, students are required to make critical assessments and substantiate their comments by reference to their experience. These analyses are meant to represent 20% of each paper.
3. The program of studies is targeted at improving the application of knowledge so as to enhance outcomes such as the level of teaching and the school's educational achievements. As stated in the catalogue: 'Student papers are meant to improve the level of the school in which you teach...The program is designed to improve the level of teaching in the school and to raise the level of the students' educational achievements' (*Catalogue*, pp. 5, 10).
4. Studies are based on graduated progress in the student's writing capabilities. The student is required to complete eight papers, with demands steadily rising in terms of scope and depth. The university believes in learning through constant practice.
5. Students receive personalized guidance before and during the writing of each paper. A personal mentor is available to each student throughout the course of studies.
6. The university is punctilious with respect to grading examinations and papers. Papers are graded according to 'explicit criteria that are learned in the course of studies' (*Catalogue*, p. 12). About 20%-25% of the students receive failing grades and are required to revise their papers; about 5% receive outstanding grades.

7. All applicants holding a B.A. degree from any recognized institution of higher learning are accepted to the M.A. program.

### *Analysis and interpretation*

It appears that the Extension's educational policy can be conceived as operating along three main axes: maximum assistance to the individual, instruction based on professional experience and application of the knowledge acquired. This policy differs from that of Israel's universities in that the mentoring received within the framework of courses and thesis preparation is relatively impersonal. Furthermore, personal experience is considered to be tangential to academic learning. The universities are certainly not geared to the practical aspects of knowledge — only to its growth and investigation — at least on the declarative level. Instead, official policy rests on student needs and maximal student satisfaction from the programs of study.

### *Programs of study*

#### *M.Ed. in Educational Curriculum and Management Studies*

The two-year program is divided into three levels, each composed of four course units (modules). Each module is equivalent to 15 credits in the British system. At each level, students are required to submit papers of 20,000 words in English or 15,000 words in Hebrew or Arabic.

Level 1 is comprised of four modules: Study Skills, Assessment and Evaluation in Education, Personal Perspectives on Education and the Political Context of Education.

Level 2 is also comprised of four modules: Research Skills, Policy and Management, Comparative Perspectives on Education and Language, Education and Power.

Level 3 contains two modules: Advanced Research Workshop 1 and Advanced Research Workshop 2.

The thesis involves two modules.

Instruction and supervision throughout the course of studies is conducted according to procedures stipulated by law, which require the teaching team to include British and Israeli instructors. Classes are taught one day a week during the entire two years of study (excluding holidays and vacations) and in workshops concentrated during the education system's vacations.

## *Syllabi*

The home university prepares a syllabus for each course; lecturers in Israel are required to follow these syllabi to the letter. The Israeli teaching staff is obligated to visit Liverpool University for several weeks in order to familiarize itself with the curriculum. In addition, the Israeli lecturers are tested by the British university's faculty and must be accredited in order to work at the Extension. The course material is acquired by the Israeli team in common with those British colleagues who will travel to Israel. Beginning in 2001, the majority of papers have been written in Hebrew and submitted to Israeli lecturers. Theses, however, are judged by a team composed of the British faculty. As a result of these steps, the curriculum offered at the Israeli extension are identical to those offered by the mother university in Liverpool.

### *M.A. in English Language Teaching and Learning*

The two-year program of studies contains three levels: *Module 1* covers aesthetics, interpretation and criticism, *Module 2* covers museumology within the context of modern art while *Module 3* covers preparation of the thesis. Classes are taught by the Israeli and British faculty according to the curriculum constructed by the mother university.

### *Analysis and Interpretation*

This program of studies reflects the Extension's policy. First, close personal mentoring is provided to each student during his or her studies and while writing the thesis. Second, class schedules are adjusted to the student's attendance capacities and constructed according to that criterion. That is, the focus is on the student, with the Extension responding to his or her needs and capabilities. Third, excellence in teaching is stressed, expressed by employment of British and Israeli instructors have outstanding teaching skills. This approach is meant to achieve the greatest level of consumer — that is, student — satisfaction.

An internal survey conducted among the Extension's students indicated that the majority had enrolled as a result of recommendations made by friends who were currently studying or had received their degree from the Extension. These findings support our premise that knowledge is perceived by the Extension's students as a good marketed according to three criteria: (a) the most appropriate contents — interesting programs of study, (b) attractive packaging — high quality teaching and (c) a consumer-oriented approach — personal and continuous mentoring at each of the program's stages.

## Students

A different methodological approach was adopted with respect to construction of the students' demographic profiles and identification of their reasons for studying at the Liverpool University Extension as well as their expectations regarding the program's outcomes.

### *Demographic profile*

The basic data was culled from the students' personal files (n=375). The age profile was as follows: 30-34: 10%; 35-49: 18%; 50-59: 57%; 60-67: 15%.

The students attending the Extension are relatively older than the students attending the universities. About 72% of the students are over 50 years of age and none of the students are under 30.

85% of the students are women, while 15% are men. 61% of all students are teachers, 10% school counselors, 10% kindergarten teachers, and 19% school managers.

48% of students hold a B.A., 41% a B.Ed., 6% are veteran teachers, while the remain 5% fall in the 'other' category. The B.Ed. degree is awarded by Israel's teacher training colleges and recognized by the universities. However, holders who wish to earn an M.A. from the universities are required to takes 4-12 annual hours (or credits) of supplementary courses.

A review of the residence data shown in Table 1 reveals that the Extension's students live in all areas of the country.

TABLE 1: Residence

Area	Percentage
Jerusalem	12.0
Gush Dan (the central region including cities comprising the Tel Aviv Metropolitan Area: Holon, Bat-Yam, Petah-Tikva, Ramat HaSharon, etc.	33.0
Central Plain (including towns and villages such as Netanya and Even Yehuda)	30.0
Northern District	15.0
Southern District	6.0
The Golan Heights	1.6
Judea and Samaria	2.4

Specifically, 53% of the students live in large cities, 23% in rural towns and villages, 1.6% in the settlements (Judea and Samaria as Gaza), 4.8% in Arab towns and villages; 4.8% in remote towns and villages and 12.8% in development towns. Hence, 47% of the Extension's students live in the periphery.

### *Analysis and interpretation*

The students attending the Liverpool University Extension in Israel display unique characteristics in comparison to the general population of university students. The majority of students are middle-aged women, teachers, hold a B.A. and live in the periphery. This demographic profile describes the Extension's target population: the Extension offers services to a population that finds it difficult to attend the regular universities whether due to academic demands — completion of supplemental courses for holders of the B.Ed. — or other constraints, such as accessibility as well as family and work obligations. We can thus assume that in the absence of university extensions, this population would not ordinarily continue their education at the available institutions of higher learning. In contrast to Israel's universities, the Liverpool Extension provides responses to these constraints. It does not require completion of supplemental studies, is readily accessible by rail from points throughout the country, constructs class schedules appropriate for teachers, provides close personal mentoring and allows assignments to be completed in three languages (as stated, Hebrew, Arabic and English). As a result, the acquisition (or purchase) of higher education is made feasible for Israelis residing in the periphery, distant towns and villages, the settlements and Arab towns and villages. The research findings indicate that the demographic profile of the students indeed matches the profile of the Extension's chosen target population.

## **Motivations and expectations**

In order to respond to the respective research questions, a structured interview was conducted with a group of students studying toward the M.Ed. because this track contains the largest number of students (80% of the Extension's entire enrollment).

### *The Sample Population (n=21)*

Age — 30-34: 4 (19%), 40=43: 9 (43%), 47-57: 7 (33%). One participant refused to respond to this question.

*Religious affiliation* — Moslem: 1 (4.7%), Jewish: 20 (95%)

*Religious observance* (among Jews only) — Secular: 13 (61.9%), Conservative: 3 (14%); Orthodox: 4 (19%).

*Education* — B.A.: 14 (67%), B.Ed.: 7 (33%).

*Profession* — Teachers: 15 (71%), kindergarten teachers: 2 (9.5%), school principals: 3 (14%). Note: one participate did not respond to this question.

*Place of Residence* — Gush Dan: 12 (57%), small towns and villages, moshavim and kibbutzim: 7 (33%), Arab towns and villages: 1 (4.7%), settlements: 1 (4.7%).

*Length of Residence in Israel* — Native-born or veteran residents: 19 (91.4%), new immigrants (i.e., residents for less than 10 years): 2 (9.5%).

The demographic profile of this group reflects the multiculturalism characterizing the Extension's students. Hence, the students represent every major sector in Israel's population: Religious, secular, Arabs, settlers, new immigrants as well as veteran residents, residents of the major cities as well as the periphery.

## Research tools

The main research tool used was a structure interview that requested the interviewees to indicate three reasons for their choosing to attend the Liverpool University Extension as well as two expectations they held regarding outcome of their studies.

### *Findings: reasons for choosing to attend the Extension*

A content analysis was conducted of the 60 responses received. These were assigned to four categories, as shown in Table 2:

TABLE 2: *Reasons for choosing to attend the Extension*

Reason	No. of Responses
Convenience	26 (43.3%)
Admission requirements	12 (20.0%)
Extension's reputation	12 (20.0%)
Professional interest	8 (13.3%)

## ***Convenience***

The majority of reasons (43.3%) for choosing the Extension belong to the category convenience. Nevertheless, a number of subcategories can be distinguished (the subcategories are listed below, followed by indicative statements.)

### *Convenient hours*

- ‘Class hours are amenable for my job and home workloads.’
- ‘It enables me to work, as well as study; class hours are at night and don’t interfere with my job.’
- ‘Classes are coordinated with my working days.’
- ‘The number of days that I study can be coordinated with my work schedule.’

### *Easy access (transportation)*

- ‘The train schedule provides convenient arrival and departure times.’
- ‘The railway station is nearby so there’s no problem arriving or going home.’

### *Comfortable program of studies*

- ‘The program’s duration and the number of weekly class hours were important factors in my choice of this university.’
- ‘Learning is based primarily on writing papers according to my own pace.’
- ‘The program is short and intensive; I’ll be able to obtain my degree quickly and soon start teaching in the colleges.’

## ***Admission requirements***

This group represents 20% of all the reasons given. These reasons relate to the appeal of the Extension’s entry requirements, particularly the lack of supplemental course requirements and academic standards that were perceived to be lower those demanded by the universities.

- ‘The Extension’s requirements are less onerous than those of the universities.’
- ‘The Extension doesn’t require a teachers college graduate with a B.Ed. to complete supplemental course, a requirement that is annoying and tiresome.’
- ‘I was very disappointed by Israeli universities, which set up barriers and require that you take a lot of supplemental courses.’



- ‘I thought that the studies would be easier than in the universities.’
- ‘Learning here is based on writing papers, not on exams.’

### ***Reputation***

This category, which also received 20% of the comments, refers to choices made in response to recommendations by friends or acquaintances who had attended the Extension, the institution’s reputation for quality and sincerity, and the presence of known lecturers among the faculty (as listed in the catalogue).

- ‘The Extension is known for its seriousness.’
- ‘The institution’s characteristics and how it is described in advertisements.’
- ‘Recommendations from friends who studied here.’
- ‘A lecturer I had formerly studied with appeared on the faculty list.’

### ***Professional interest***

This category of reasons for choosing to attend the Extension received the lowest percentage of all the responses: 13.3%.

- ‘During the interview, they gave me information about courses that suited my specialization.’
- ‘The program is very close to my field of interest.’
- ‘The subjects taught interest me and will help me find work in the future.’
- ‘I was looking for something interesting that would occupy me while my son is completing his army service in a combat unit.’

### ***Analysis and interpretation***

The majority of reasons for choosing the Extension (86.7%) relate to technical factors such as convenience, especially of specific types of, academic requirements and reputation. Only 13.3% of the comments were substantive, that is, referred to professional interest in the program of studies. It appears that choice of an institution that provides knowledge is conducted in a manner resembling choice of any other consumption good. Its packaging, reputation and convenience represent the most meaningful aspects considered by the students when choosing the good’s supplier, in this case, an institution of higher learning.

It appears that intellectual interest remains a persistent factor; yet, instrumental aspects appear to be those determining the actual choice. Each of the 21 subjects set down three reasons for attending the Extension; we anticipated that their

responses would belong to different categories. However, the limited number of responses belonging to the category ‘professional interest’ — 8 out of 60 — indicate that the majority of interviewees did not consider this as a reason for their choice. We should stress that these statements represent the subjects’ subjective perception of their motivations, not the objective factors. Thus, for example, although the requirements to be met for receiving a degree from the Extension with respect to the scope of the assignments and the number of class hours do not differ from other institutions, the situation is sometimes reversed. Students at the Liverpool University Extension are required to submit papers 60,000 words in length if written in English, and 45,000 words if written in Hebrew or Arabic. In contrast, the universities have no such explicit paper submission requirements, with each lecturer deciding the number and length of papers according to his or her own criteria.

### **Expectations of outcomes of their studies**

Each of the 21 subjects was requested to submit two of the main expectations he or she held regarding their studies; hence, a total of 42 statements were transmitted. Despite the difficulty of distinguishing between *reasons* and *expectations*, a clear differentiation was made between the two concepts. Content analysis of the statements resulted in four expectation categories, as shown in Table 3:

TABLE 3: *Outcome expected*

<b>Outcome Expected</b>	<b>Responses</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Interest and self-enrichment	14	33.3
Professional development and skill acquisition	10	23.8
Efficiency: Benefit versus cost	10	23.8
Personal professional support	8	19.0

#### ***Interest and self-enrichment***

The expectation category receiving the highest number of responses was ‘interest and self-enrichment’: 14 statements (33.3%). These statements refer to the students’ anticipation of finding interest in the course material and development of their personal and professional attributes.

- ‘Interesting and enriching subjects.’
- ‘In-depth studies.’
- ‘Promote my professional capacities.’
- ‘Courses that were in-depth, interesting, and thought-provoking.’
- ‘Broaden my knowledge and interests.’

### ***Professional development and skill acquisition***

This category received 10 responses (23.8%).

- ‘To acquire academic writing skills.’
- ‘To learn research skills.’
- ‘To acquire skills for treating children with learning difficulties.’

### ***Efficiency: benefit versus cost***

Individuals studying at the Extension claim that they invest considerable sums in the program; hence, they expect that the resulting benefits will be at a level proportional to the cost. Ten statements entered this category, a number equal to those that entered the category of professional development and skill acquisition.

- ‘To acquire a degree as quickly as possible.’
- ‘The time will be well-spent and fully exploited, without any time wasted.’
- ‘To hand in my papers on time and successfully complete assignments.’
- ‘To acquire a degree quickly so I can advance professionally.’

### ***Personal professional support***

The smallest number of statements (8, or 19%) belongs to this category.

- ‘The staff’s (lecturers and administrators) professional, personal and sincere attitude.’
- ‘Close personal mentoring.’

### ***Analysis and interpretation***

Analysis of the sample’s expectations revealed an interesting phenomenon. Although the majority of reasons for choosing the Extension related to technical (instrumental) rather than substantive factors, the absolute majority of expectations — 57.1% — referred to course content, professional interest, self-

enrichment and development of professional skills. The expectations relating to efficiency and personal support were likewise discussed from the perspective of teaching and learning. In effect, these expectations do not betray motives of convenience or low requirements. It appears that instrumental motives drive the students to choose the Liverpool Extension although once they are accepted and begin studying at the institution, their primary expectations are directed at the faculty and administrative staff. Their feeling can be encapsulated in the statement: ‘I paid a lot; therefore, I anticipate the most interest, best enrichment and most serious and qualitative teaching.’

## Dissertations (Theses)

A total of 375 theses were analyzed in order to examine whether the Extension’s policy regarding the incorporation of students’ professional experience within their academic studies — is reflected in the topics chosen for the M.A. thesis. Each thesis was examined according to two variables:

1. Was the thesis a case study? The assumption at its foundation was that writing a thesis entailing a case study indicates a topic directly related to the author’s experience, that is, the topic touches upon the student’s place of employment and/or profession.
2. Does any relationship exist between the thesis topic, the student’s profession (e.g., teaching computers or mathematics) and his or her place of employment (e.g., junior high school or technical high school)?

*TABLE 4: Distribution of statements by relationship between thesis topic, place of work and profession*

<b>Relationship between Thesis Topic, Place of Work and Profession</b>	<b>Statements</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
No relationship	45	12.0
Dyadic relationship: Subject and place of work	73	19.4
Dyadic relationship: Subject and profession	46	12.2
Triadic relationship: Subject, place of work and profession	211	56.2
Total:	375	100.0

TABLE 5: Examples

Type of Relationship	Thesis Title	Student's Place of Employment	Student's Profession
Triadic: Thesis topic, place of employment, occupation	The effects of participating in the <i>Ne' emaney Theatre</i> on the academic performance of 10th and 11th grade students in the Aliyat Hanoar Boarding School – A case study	Aliyat Hanoar Boarding School	Teacher of theatre arts
	Employing adolescent with learning difficulties within the community – A case study	A center for the occupational training of adolescents with learning disabilities	Special education teacher
	The school work plan as a means of empowering the principal as a team leader – A case study	An elementary school	School principal
Dyadic: Thesis topic and place of employment	The professional image of urban school teachers in comparison to Kibbutz school teachers – A case study	A kibbutz as well as an urban school	Teacher
	<i>Hila</i> : A program for coping with student dropouts – A case study	The <i>Hila</i> project	
	The absorption of immigrant youth from the former Soviet Union in Israeli schools	A high school	
Dyadic: Thesis topic and student's profession	Educational perceptions of rabbis teaching in Israel's high schools		A religion and home room teacher
	Helping pupils with learning disabilities to succeed in mathematics		Mathematics teacher
	Physical education as a catalyst for empowerment of students with problematic socio-economical backgrounds		Physical education teacher

## ***Findings***

Of the 375 theses examined, 270 (72%) were case studies. Content analysis of the theses revealed four categories of relationship between the thesis topic, the student's profession and his or her place of employment: No relationship, dyadic relationships between either the topic and student's profession or between the topic and the student's place of employment, and a triadic relationship between topic, profession and place of employment. Table 4 shows the distribution of statements relating to the relationship between the thesis topic, place of work and profession, whereas Table 5 presents three examples of each type of relationship by type of relationship.

### *Analysis and interpretation*

The absolute majority of theses, 72%, are case studies, specifically, research involving the authors' investigation of their work environment. Moreover, in 87.8% of the cases, either a dyadic or a triadic relationship can be identified, whereas only 12% of the theses display no relationship whatsoever between the subject and the student's personal or professional, work-related characteristics. In 52.2% of the theses, a triadic relationship between the thesis subject, the student's profession and his or her place of work is apparent.

These findings indicate that the Liverpool University Extension in Israel has succeeded in realizing its policy goal, that is, maximum incorporation feasible of the students' professional experience within the formal program of studies. By doing so, the Extension contributes to the student's professional development at the same time that it promotes the work environment's effectiveness. This approach is supported by the students, who enthusiastically welcome the opportunity of investigating their work environment and who urge employers to support their studies. The policy is therefore one of the main factors that persuades students to enroll in the Liverpool Extension.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

The article introduces a new approach to the perception of knowledge and higher education: the 'knowledge as a good' approach. The research conducted at the Liverpool University Extension in Israel among students studying for an M.Ed. examined four factors: policy, programs of study, the students' demographic profile, and the students' reasons for choosing to attend the Extension. The last factor included student expectations regarding the program's

outcomes and the topics researched in the M.A. thesis. The study's findings reveal characteristics attributed to privatization and globalization and the implications of viewing knowledge and education as consumer goods responsive to the forces of supply and demand. The relationship between the study's findings and the theoretical concepts are analyzed below. As required by the principles underlying qualitative research, no attempt is made to generalize the data beyond the framework of the research and the suggested theoretical framework.

Acquisition or purchase of higher education has broken free of geographic boundaries, an event illustrated by the performance of the UK-based Liverpool University Extension in Israel (Scott, 2000). The Extension has extended the option of acquiring advanced education to a broad spectrum of the population beyond the boundaries of Israel's elites (Longden, 2002). The study's findings indicate that the Liverpool Extension's student represent the cultural mosaic characterizing Israeli society, with most students living in small towns and villages located in the periphery, far from Israel's center. The majority of students, primarily women, include Arabs, religious Jews, settlers as well as kibbutz and moshav members. Although all students hold recognized B.A. degrees, the majority would not have been accepted to State-run universities or, if accepted, would have been required to complete supplemental course work. Content analysis of the 21 interviews conducted, during which the interviewees were asked to note their three main reasons for attending the Extension, revealed that the major reason for their choice was convenience: course schedules that allowed them to combine studies and a job, comfortable class hours, easy access by public transit, intensive personal mentoring and written assignments or papers rather than examinations.

Further analysis indicates that the Liverpool University Extension operates according to the principles of *supply and demand*. The limited supply of opportunities to earn a university MA in the field of education — only a few hundred are accepted throughout the country despite the thousands of teachers, principals and other education system personnel applying. This demand results from Ministry of Education (the main employer of these professionals) policy that encourages academization of staff and offers remuneration in the form of financial benefits realized in salaries and pension rights.

From the point of view of the supplier, the Extension has adopted *teaching excellence as a sales promotion mechanism*. The institution employs lecturers and mentors (teaching assistants) of proven quality but on a temporary basis, without tenure. A decline in performance can culminate in immediate dismissal.

*Free competition*, a direct outcome of privatization and globalization, has motivated numerous institutions of higher learning to offer MA degrees in education; this includes every university, several colleges and numerous extensions associated with foreign universities. Competition has brought the Liverpool Extension to offer unique services expressed in its programs and advanced thesis requirements. Furthermore, its education policy stresses the applied or practical aspects of knowledge, bases learning on the student's personal and professional experience and the provision of close mentoring throughout. The program of studies is organized on three levels, with assignments adjusted accordingly; classes are held with the student's comfort in mind — one day a week in addition to a concentrated session during the summer break. The thesis topics encourage research of the student's work environment. Hence, 72% of the theses represent case studies, and 88% of the topics display a relationship between the topic, the student's profession and his or her place of work. An analysis of this relationship reveals that 12.2% of the theses indicate a dyadic relationship between the topic and the student's profession, 19.4% between the topic and the student's place of work and 56.25% a triadic relationship between all three elements.

These findings indicate that the Liverpool Extension successfully implements its policy. We suggest that this policy, which is intimately responsive to the student and his or her profession, represents yet another marketing instrument. Rooting the program of studies directly in an individual's professional needs appears to provide a greater incentive to acquire higher education than does university policy, which focuses on the accumulation of knowledge per se, development of conceptual models and the capacity to conduct theoretical research. Stated differently, the Extension's policy stresses, as stated, the salience of *applied knowledge*. The acquisition of knowledge is therefore meant to assist students in improving their professional practice in areas such as student assessment and treatment of special students, for example. The findings regarding the number of theses based on case studies and the linkage between the thesis topics, place of employment and student's profession reflect this principal.

Other findings clearly indicate that students weigh *benefits against costs*. This represents one of the most interesting of the study's findings. The high *cost* — in terms of tuition — incurred, almost three times that required by the universities, motivates development of expectations regarding the *benefits* to be gained in terms of professional interest, teaching excellence, close mentoring, relevance of the course material as well as timely completion of the degree. Unexpectedly, these high expectations do not correspond to the reasons given for opting to attend the Extension. An absolute majority of student noted *convenience* as the main



motive behind their choice rather than *professional interest, teaching excellence* or *personal or professional enrichment*. This finding can be interpreted as populist in the sense that it indicates the degree to which the Extension attempts to meet students' expectations through its program of studies. The Extension enjoys considerable income (tuition); it therefore attempts to satisfy its clients, who prefer higher tuition to meeting higher academic criteria. Hence, the *willingness of the Israeli public to pay* a great deal in order to earn an advanced degree transforms them into a sought-after market. Given that, we must consider the dangers inherent in such an attitude coupled with the pressure to acquiesce to those demands.

We may conclude that the 'knowledge as a good' approach has been adopted *de facto* by the Liverpool University Extension in Israel. Moreover, the correspondence and close coherence between the extension's policy, programs of study, students' thesis topics and their expectations supports the argument that the Extension's goal, like that of any other economic organization, is to maximize its success in the sale of knowledge. The Extension is aware of the danger lurking behind any decline in this coherence, a situation that may induce lower demand and the institution's eventual collapse. The continued existence of the Extension is, therefore, directly dependent on student-client satisfaction, an outcome of sustained coherence.

The Liverpool University Extension in Israel likewise demonstrates the repercussions of the 'knowledge as a good' approach. We can certainly number the benefits of greater distribution of knowledge and of making that knowledge accessible to a broad population that had previously been deprived of this opportunity. Yet we cannot ignore the incipient negative implications for quality of knowledge and the method of its purchase. In order to learn more about this issue, long-term follow up as well as comparative research is required.

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