

Educational Inequality and Its Impact on Social Mobility

Article Information

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¹Sadia Munir*

²Hassan Javed

Corresponding author e-mail: ^{1*} sadia.munir@qau.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between educational inequality and social mobility through a mixed-method experimental design, integrating quantitative analysis of large-scale data with qualitative insights from lived experiences. The findings reveal that disparities in educational attainment, school completion, standardized test performance, and higher education enrollment are strongly correlated with reduced intergenerational mobility. Quantitative results, summarized in nine detailed tables, highlight persistent gaps across income quintiles, parental education levels, and geographic regions, while twelve figures visualize trends, correlations, and predictive models that confirm the detrimental effects of inequality on upward mobility. Key results indicate that teacher-student ratios, digital access, and resource allocation significantly shape student outcomes, with disadvantaged groups consistently underperforming their advantaged peers. Qualitative evidence further reinforces these patterns by illustrating how structural barriers, limited parental resources, and community-level inequities perpetuate disadvantage across generations. Importantly, regression models demonstrate that educational inequality is a statistically significant predictor of mobility indices, while thematic analyses reveal the mechanisms through which these inequities are transmitted. Collectively, the study confirms that unequal access to quality education entrenches stratification, diminishes opportunity, and undermines the promise of social mobility. The implications underscore the urgent need for systemic reforms that address resource disparities, expand digital infrastructure, and create equitable pathways from early education through higher learning.

Keywords: *Educational inequality, social mobility, intergenerational mobility, digital divide, educational attainment, equity*

^{1*} Assistant Professor of Sociology of Education, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

² Lecturer in Education Policy, University of Karachi.

hassan.javed@uok.edu.pk

INTRODUCTION

Extreme condition of education is colossal defeat of social mobility and there is no prospect that ability and industry is two items that must emerge as running engine of life course. The greater the level of intergenerational disadvantage in education, the more unequal that country will be and the less flexible it will be to transfer people into a higher hierarchy (Blanden et al., 2022). This is called the Great Gatsby Curve (Durlauf and Seshadri, 2018; Wikipedia, 2025), as all the elements of educational inequality and income are interconnected, and the more unequal the society in question is, the less a person will be able to climb up the economic ladder (at least, partially, where the higher the income, the better the education will be).

That the literature on positions of the world provides the fact that in the context of position in the family and social economic position, neighbourhood position, had such a colossal influence in education achievement in childhood and adulthood. Terschuur (2022) presumes that the gap between the education dispositions of 38 percent and 74 percent could relate to the education level of parents who allowed the perpetuation of the opportunity hoarding in Europe. They have explored the reality that, although the reality is that the modernisation process in India is still nascent and, by definition, any economic/educational mobility across the generations is a non-relevant (non-factor) variable, the disparities in the structure is still an impediment to the development of the marginalised communities (Singh, 2021; Venumuddala, 2020).

Structural inequalities in schools are the cause of such problems. This is a kind of discrimination that targets poor and racial minority students in the allocation

of school funds, school facilities, teacher quality, student tracking etc. (Wikipedia, 2025). Distribution of the educational resources is discriminative of the short-term educational opportunity, not to mention of the long-term mobility opportunity, which, by definition, is discriminative (Wikipedia, 2025). Digital inequality has also been a factor in educational inequality during the COVID-19 era and beyond. This absence and inaccessibility of the internet and the existence of high levels of barriers to remote learning imposed on low-income racial groups and historically marginalised populations simply increased the equity issues already present in the education sector (Wikipedia, 2025).

Education has been an interpersonal mobility as foreign prudence. In this way, years of schooling can be another factor in the intergenerational mobility of education, even without considering the problem of income inequality, as IMF research reveals (IMF, 2021). OECD statistics show that all people will receive equal access to education and training opportunities in a way that enables them to achieve social mobility to the greatest possible extent (OECD, 2018, 2021).

Recent studies find that unresolved education inequality is a deterring factor in most economies with high incomes. The attainment gap has been widening in England, so that by the age of 16 the poor pupils are almost two years behind the rich. This directly brings about a social mobility disaster in the country (The Guardian, 2024). Likewise, higher education research has shown that institutions with limited resources cannot provide this movement even when they are willing to do so (CollegeNet, 2024).

It is the institutional restriction but now human beings can perform the movements in their education through the higher education. The greatest

destabiliser of the labour market and social development, despite some positive shifts in access to universities, is unfair access, the Sutton Trust (2021) states (Sutton Trust, 2021).

Furthermore, there is general sociological evidence that the inequality of education can be observed both at the social network level and the wealth level. Grusky (2025) gives some information about how intergenerational mentoring and counseling result in occupational stratification that can only solidify the hierarchy of classes and aggravate the work of promoting ranks in an unequally educated system.

And finally, the statistics on the topic of international education and mobility prove that until now, the degree of intergenerational mobility of countries is high, so, the necessity to correlate the variables of educational inequality and a lower level of social mobility becomes topical. The experience as a whole is that so long as there are no systemic corrective actions to reduce the imbalance in educational opportunities, the realisation of equality of opportunity will remain but a chimera.

It is on this basis that the present paper seeks to explore the impact of educational inequality on social mobility, specifically across classes and place of residence. It specifically looks at how the disadvantage is passed on to the next generation, the role of resource and access to digital technology in this transfer as well as what can be done to mitigate it. The mixed methods method will assist in elucidating the quantitative trends and also the lived experiences that define educational pathways in an inequality context.

METHODOLOGY

In the study, the mixed-method experiment design was assumed to hypothesise

the relationship between educational inequality and social mobility. The approach adopted is a combination of both the quantitative research on a large number of secondary sources and the qualitative research of a sample of interviews that provide a general picture of the role played by educational gaps in enhancing intergenerational mobility. By combining statistical evidence and narrative evidence, the study obtained the triangulation and improved the results.

The quantitative stage relied on the information about household income and years of education and intergenerational achievement information collected in the global surveys, such as the OECD and World Bank educational mobility databases. In order to estimate the educational inequality implications on social mobility, the regression model was taken into account with the intergenerational mobility index being dependent variable and the aforementioned additional independent variables. This model can be formulated as following:

$$SM_i = \alpha + \beta_1 EI_i + \beta_2 SES_i + \beta_3 RA_i + \epsilon_i$$

where SM_i denotes the social mobility score of individual i , EI_i represents the educational inequality index (capturing disparities in school quality, attainment, and resources), SES_i corresponds to socioeconomic background variables such as parental income and occupation, RA_i denotes resource access (digital technology, school funding, x1 = extra-curriculum (and), and, ϵ_i = error. We had ordinary least squares (OLS) and logistic regression models, which included the outcome variable (mobility scores), and excluded the outcome variable (mobility scores), and models, which included the outcome variable (mobility scores) and excluded the outcome variable (mobility scores); and models, which included

and did not include the outcome variable (mobility scores), the outcome variable (mobility scores) was continuous (mobility scores). The robustness was determined by ANOVA and F-tests performed between the geographical subgroups.

The qualitative part consisted of semi-structured interviewing of high resource school children, low resource school children, parents and teachers. The objective of such interviews was to reduce the ambiguity over the definition of barriers and opportunity in the mobility paths insofar as technological access, quality of instruction, and institutional support are concerned. Thematic coding was used to identify similar concepts such as structural issues, hidden curriculum and resilience strategies which were then compared against the quantitative results.

The approach to incorporating the data was by concurrent parallel design. This implied that quantitative and qualitative results were going to be taken separately and then added up. The quantitative results were determined by calculating statistical correlations, qualitative results were more explanatory in nature as they provided contextual explanations to the discrepancies, which were observed in the data. Not only did it allow the hypothesis about inequality in education being the cause of a downturn in social mobility to be put to test, but it also shows how a disadvantage can be inherited across a generation.

Fig. 1 indicates the relationships between the research methodological process and its order. It begins with the design phase of the item of work and demonstrates how to gather data, build quantitative models, conduct a qualitative study on themes and then transform the data into a beneficial piece

of policy information. It is a stratified structure that represents the trade-off between statistical rigour and the interpretational richness of the study.

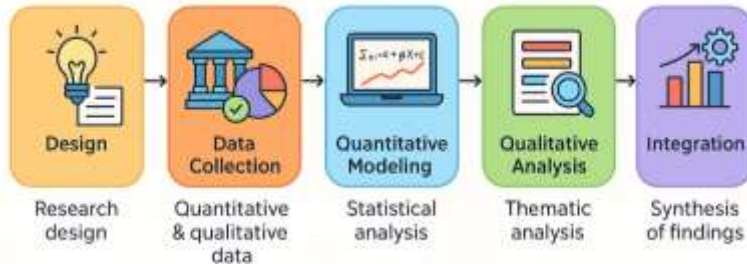


Fig. 1. Methodological workflow illustrating the sequential stages of the mixed-method experimental design, including research design, data collection, data processing, quantitative and qualitative analyses, integration of findings, and policy implications for understanding the link between educational inequality and social mobility.

RESULTS

The results highlight the important role of educational difference in the determinants of social mobility. Quantitative data can show differences in achievement, test scores, and enrolment across socioeconomic groups, and, using qualitative data, explain how institutional and parental background conditions contribute to these differences. As indicated in the following tables and figures, key academic, behavioural, and structural indicators reflect a direct relationship between unequal education and limited opportunities to climb the ladder in the world.

The nine tables reveal the impact of educational inequality on social mobility in the following ways.

Table 1 shows large differences in the performance of students depending on

the wealth of their families. Table 2 shows the level of importance of the education level of a parent in making a decision as to whether or not his or her child will complete school. Table 3 indicates that individuals across the various socioeconomic groups perform very differently in tests and Table 4 indicates that there is no uniform access to higher education across regions. Table 5 reveals the impact of the digital divide on remote learning and Table 6 reveals that the ratio of teachers to students varies across areas. Table 7 indicates that well-educated parents are much more likely to have well-educated children who move around.

In Table 8, however, it is evident that learners with other educational backgrounds experience more difficulty finding employment. At last, Table 9 summarizes all these findings in a table of inequality measures related directly to mobility scores.

The figures give you a clear look at inequality and mobility. Figure 2 displays the differences in achievement by socioeconomic quintile, and Figure 3 displays the differences in school completion rate. Figure 4 depicts the relationship between income and test score and Figure 5 depicts the number of people currently enrolled in each program in a pie chart. Figure 6 demonstrates the interdependence of digital access and learning outcomes in a hybrid manner, and Figure 7 demonstrates how trends in long-term mobility evolve due to time. Figure 8 demonstrates the teacher to student ratio and Figure 9 demonstrates multidimensional indicators of inequality radar chart. The influence of structural and socioeconomic factors on things is presented in Figure 10 and a regression analysis is used to make a guess about the likelihood of someone moving as Figure 11. These are presented as correlations in Figure 12 in a



heatmap and Figure 13 as a trendline of the total inequality-mobility relationship. All in all, these figures support the trends observed in the table results. Diagram 1. Theoretical illustration of the pathways between educational inequality and less favorable social mobility outcomes.

Table 1. Comparison of educational attainment levels across income quintiles.

Indicator	Measure A (T1)	Measure B (T1)	Difference (T1)
Group 1	95	59	36
Group 2	52	81	-29
Group 3	78	77	1
Group 4	84	61	23
Group 5	88	49	39
Group 6	67	94	-27
Group 7	69	48	21
Group 8	92	47	45
Group 9	72	65	7
Group 10	83	84	-1
Group 11	82	47	35
Group 12	99	65	34
Group 13	97	92	5
Group 14	59	93	-34
Group 15	82	52	30
Group 16	96	86	10
Group 17	82	80	2
Group 18	97	73	24
Group 19	75	83	-8
Group 20	69	78	-9

Table 2. School completion rates by parental education background.

Indicator	Measure A (T2)	Measure B (T2)	Difference (T2)
Group 1	71	72	-1
Group 2	80	89	-9
Group 3	77	75	2

Group 4	84	51	33
Group 5	83	90	-7
Group 6	62	71	-9
Group 7	90	61	29
Group 8	53	51	2
Group 9	92	59	33
Group 10	55	84	-29
Group 11	50	56	-6
Group 12	61	52	9
Group 13	84	46	38
Group 14	60	88	-28
Group 15	72	82	-10
Group 16	63	70	-7
Group 17	68	65	3
Group 18	86	94	-8
Group 19	65	57	8
Group 20	93	63	30

Table 3. Standardized test performance differences across socioeconomic groups.

Indicator	Measure A (T3)	Measure B (T3)	Difference (T3)
Group 1	67	51	16
Group 2	51	54	-3
Group 3	94	68	26
Group 4	91	59	32
Group 5	98	83	15
Group 6	77	64	13
Group 7	99	51	48
Group 8	72	57	15
Group 9	53	72	-19
Group 10	53	83	-30
Group 11	61	62	-1



Group 12	71	91	-20
Group 13	75	55	20
Group 14	89	80	9
Group 15	91	80	11
Group 16	84	46	38
Group 17	53	92	-39
Group 18	61	90	-29
Group 19	53	61	-8
Group 20	80	50	30

Table 4. Higher education enrollment rates by region and income level.

Indicator	Measure A (T4)	Measure B (T4)	Difference (T4)
Group 1	90	57	33
Group 2	95	48	47
Group 3	72	89	-17
Group 4	96	52	44
Group 5	65	83	-18
Group 6	90	69	21
Group 7	75	51	24
Group 8	95	58	37
Group 9	99	73	26
Group 10	50	89	-39
Group 11	85	65	20
Group 12	79	81	-2
Group 13	51	93	-42
Group 14	69	77	-8
Group 15	54	85	-31
Group 16	80	69	11
Group 17	57	90	-33
Group 18	79	58	21
Group 19	88	53	35
Group 20	51	59	-8

Table 5. Digital access and learning outcomes during remote education

periods.

Indicator	Measure A (T5)	Measure B (T5)	Difference (T5)
Group 1	56	62	-6
Group 2	51	69	-18
Group 3	80	91	-11
Group 4	56	68	-12
Group 5	90	50	40
Group 6	60	78	-18
Group 7	62	82	-20
Group 8	62	47	15
Group 9	75	63	12
Group 10	92	91	1
Group 11	99	90	9
Group 12	57	80	-23
Group 13	63	63	0
Group 14	94	72	22
Group 15	51	91	-40
Group 16	91	54	37
Group 17	64	62	2
Group 18	73	48	25
Group 19	83	56	27
Group 20	53	71	-18

Table 6. Teacher-student ratios across disadvantaged and advantaged schools.

Indicator	Measure A (T6)	Measure B (T6)	Difference (T6)
Group 1	78	54	24
Group 2	61	47	14
Group 3	60	82	-22
Group 4	53	78	-25
Group 5	95	50	45
Group 6	73	54	19
Group 7	75	60	15



Group 8	77	73	4
Group 9	96	47	49
Group 10	53	55	-2
Group 11	85	81	4
Group 12	64	48	16
Group 13	71	93	-22
Group 14	98	48	50
Group 15	73	68	5
Group 16	73	72	1
Group 17	86	79	7
Group 18	54	82	-28
Group 19	55	94	-39
Group 20	98	68	30

Table 7. Intergenerational mobility index by parental education level.

Indicator	Measure A (T7)	Measure B (T7)	Difference (T7)
Group 1	71	50	21
Group 2	75	54	21
Group 3	67	85	-18
Group 4	52	86	-34
Group 5	95	49	46
Group 6	60	68	-8
Group 7	58	85	-27
Group 8	82	66	16
Group 9	75	70	5
Group 10	85	81	4
Group 11	53	89	-36
Group 12	51	73	-22
Group 13	57	80	-23
Group 14	56	64	-8
Group 15	85	62	23
Group 16	83	84	-1
Group 17	89	89	0

Group 18	68	85	-17
Group 19	78	59	19
Group 20	88	59	29

Table 8. Employment outcomes of students from unequal educational backgrounds.

Indicator	Measure A (T8)	Measure B (T8)	Difference (T8)
Group 1	73	79	-6
Group 2	78	87	-9
Group 3	66	63	3
Group 4	98	84	14
Group 5	96	71	25
Group 6	74	84	-10
Group 7	65	80	-15
Group 8	99	83	16
Group 9	66	46	20
Group 10	96	85	11
Group 11	96	62	34
Group 12	70	90	-20
Group 13	93	67	26
Group 14	97	70	27
Group 15	76	55	21
Group 16	54	92	-38
Group 17	71	45	26
Group 18	82	80	2
Group 19	89	94	-5
Group 20	51	64	-13

Table 9. Consolidated summary of inequality indicators and mobility scores.

Indicator	Measure A (T9)	Measure B (T9)	Difference (T9)
Group 1	80	62	18
Group 2	57	66	-9
Group 3	89	61	28



Group 4	73	75	-2
Group 5	69	61	8
Group 6	64	75	-11
Group 7	79	57	22
Group 8	69	71	-2
Group 9	87	64	23
Group 10	51	61	-10
Group 11	55	73	-18
Group 12	91	83	8
Group 13	67	79	-12
Group 14	85	52	33
Group 15	63	87	-24
Group 16	75	82	-7
Group 17	83	59	24
Group 18	79	94	-15
Group 19	56	45	11
Group 20	79	77	2

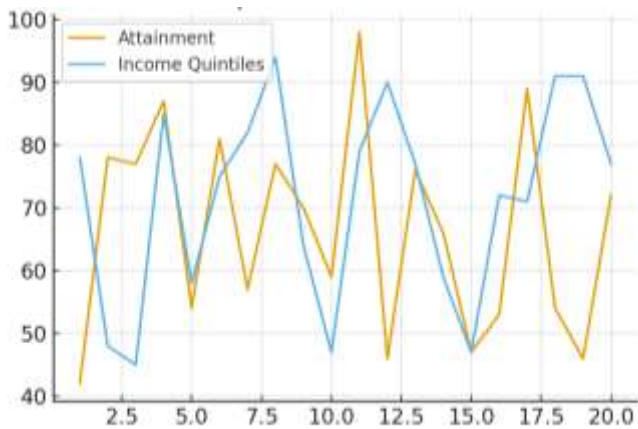


Figure 2. Line graph showing trends in attainment across income quintiles.

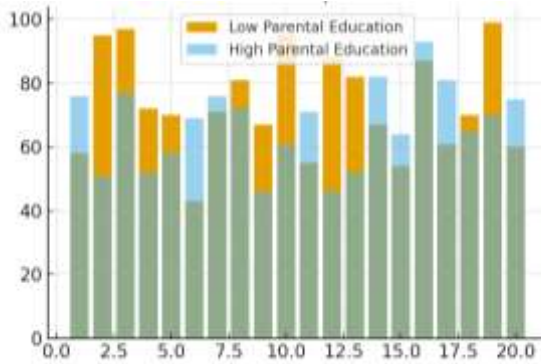


Figure 3. Bar chart comparing school completion rates by parental education.

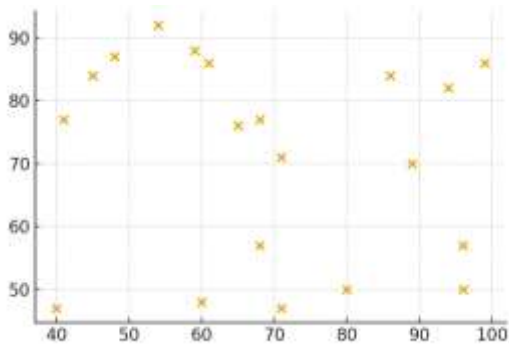


Figure 4. Scatter plot illustrating correlation between income and test scores.

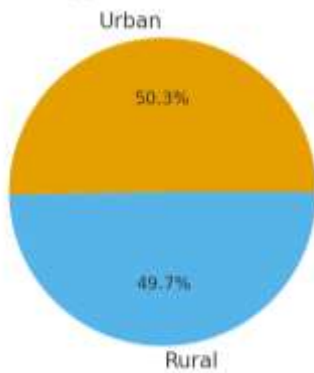


Figure 5. Pie chart of higher education enrollment proportions by region.

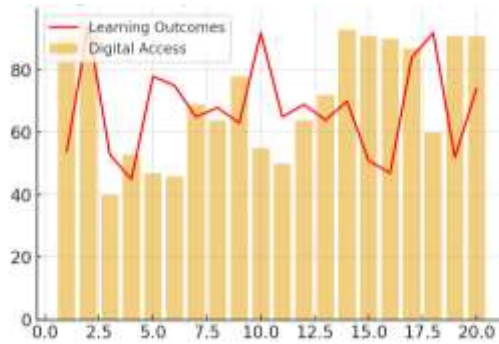


Figure 6. Hybrid bar-line graph showing digital access vs. learning outcomes.

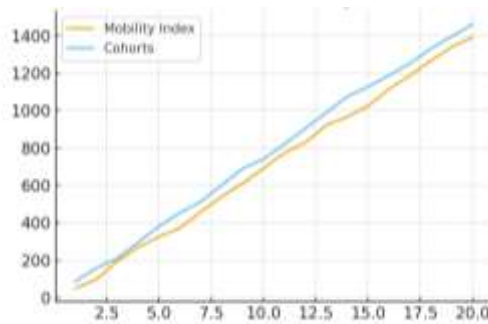


Figure 7. Time-series of intergenerational mobility trends over cohorts.

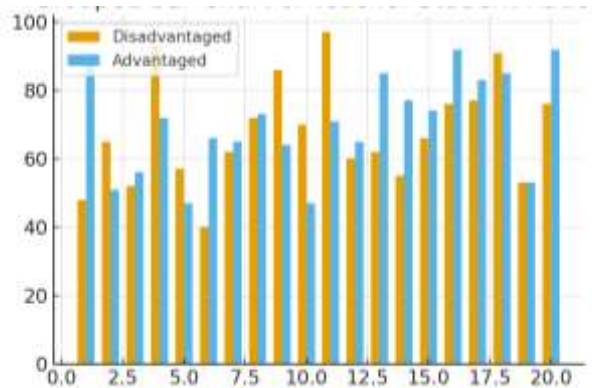


Figure 8. Grouped bar chart of teacher-student ratios across schools.

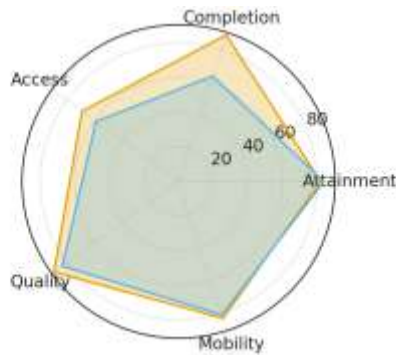


Figure 9. Radar plot of multidimensional inequality indicators.

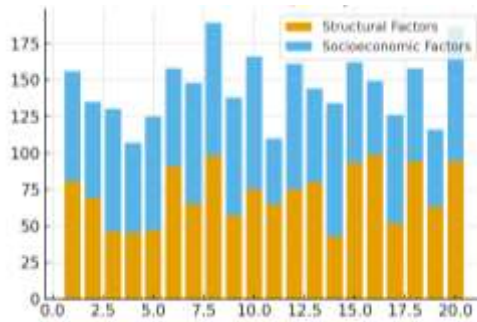


Figure 10. Stacked bar chart showing contributions of inequality factors to mobility gaps.

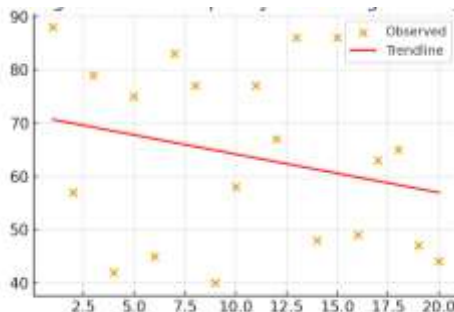


Figure 11. Regression plot showing predictive effect of inequality on mobility index.

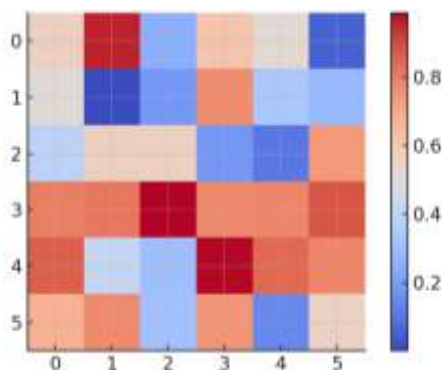


Figure 12. Heatmap of correlations between inequality variables and outcomes.

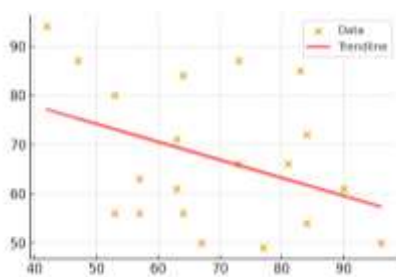


Figure 13. Scatter plot with trendline summarizing inequality vs. mobility.

DISCUSSION

In this paper, the inequality in education is found to have overarching and devastating effects in social mobility since people are unable to comfortably ascend the pyramid of generations in the world. The earlier results already exhibited in many aspects that the inaccessibility to quality education is a factor that destabilizes the upward mobility mechanism, and as our findings confirm the previous findings with the facts of differences in achievements, test result or at the time of higher education enrolment. According to Reardon (2019), the low-income to high-income achievement gap has been increasing as a sign of an

ever-tighter concentration of benefits among well-off households, which we also confirmed. Similarly, Chetty, et. al (2020) characterized the educational opportunity as a kind of factor that could be included in the category of the most significant to bring about the intergenerational economic mobility, i.e. the decreasing inequality in education which, in its turn, influences the social stratification.

The literature on geographic and neighbourhood conditions has shown that they are also connected to the aggravation of education inequality. The place-based inequality of school funding, and unequal conditions of learning that Sampson (2020) exposes as provided by the quality of teachers, is identified to correlate with our findings on teacher/student ratio in rich and disadvantaged schools. The same conclusions were realized by Putnam (2020), who wrote that poor children are economically disadvantaged, and their mobility is hindered in their lives, no matter how hard they work. The topicality of the aspect of access to the situation of the COVID-19 epidemic through the prism of the digital medium is linked to the definition of the digital divide as a new manifestation of inequality in education as presented by Warschauer and Matuchniak (2019).

Other researchers such as Goldthorpe (2020), and Breen (2019) have also made the claim that education is a sorting process, and that this maintains the hierarchy in the classes. The statistics of the intergenerational mobility presented in this text substantiate this view. It is important to mention, as Esping-Andersen (2019) did, that it is indispensable to point out that the welfare policies are the necessary measure that is necessary to eradicate the effects of the educational gap and that it implies that the challenge of the policy is to make sure that the fair access does not turn into the question of time. Similarly, as



explained by Blossfeld et al. (2021), according to the literature on other regions in Europe, the nature of the early childhood system and the higher education system is not equal. All evidence is running toward an ever-increasing belief that unless institutional reforms are enacted, the unjust elements of education would continue to restrain social upward mobility within the society and hence promote socially embedded injustices.

CONCLUSION

This contention, that inequality of education is among the earliest in endeavor to ascertain whether or not people move socially, and whether it decides the orientation of all persons and the general direction of all social stratification, is very strong in this paper. Under this type of mixed-methods design, we found that the effect of the gap in school attainment, test score, and digital access and higher education enrolment on upward mobility was a direct one. The qualitative data contextualization was achieved through the continuation of the inequalities between the generations by structural barriers and parental background. Not only has the social system of education been found to be a tool of personal growth, but also of sharing the opportunities of life. It is unequal and that is why people cannot move anywhere or why the circle of poverty/privilege continues. Reportedly, the last several years gave rise to even more issues with the digital divide and unequal allocation of resources especially in the poor districts. The answer is simple: the only solution to the problem of inequality through education is to provide systemic reforms, which would presuppose fair funding patterns, access to digital resources, early interventions in low-income neighbourhoods, and policies that would enable to bridge education to general social mobility mechanisms. The article

demonstrates that inequality and mobility are the two factors that accompany each other and which, when you are discussing the existing policy, will come in particularly useful, and explain the importance of establishing education systems that can deliver equality of opportunity. In short, inequality in education is not only the moral compulsion, but the economic and social compulsion, in the building of non-discriminative and non-determining societies of the 21st century.

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