



# The Influence of Education on Social Mobility in Rural Areas: Addressing Educational Inequalities for Sustainable Development

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article history:</b></p> <p>Received June 20, 2024 Revised Juli 22, 2024 Accepted Aug 30, 2024</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b></p> <p>Social Mobility; Education Inequality; Rural Communities; Upward Mobility; Sustainable Development.</p>	<p>This research explores the influence of education on social mobility in rural areas, focusing on the barriers and opportunities that shape educational access and outcomes in these communities. The study examines how factors such as socio-economic status, infrastructure, gender, and government policies affect the potential for upward social mobility through education. Data was collected through surveys, interviews, and case studies across various rural regions, providing both qualitative and quantitative insights. The findings reveal that limited access to quality education, financial constraints, gender disparities, and socio-cultural norms significantly hinder educational attainment in rural areas, thereby restricting social mobility. Despite these challenges, the research highlights the positive impact of targeted policy interventions, such as scholarships and infrastructure development, in improving educational access. Furthermore, the study identifies the growing role of technology in bridging educational gaps, although technological barriers remain in many rural communities. The research concludes that addressing educational inequalities is crucial for promoting sustainable development and fostering social mobility in rural areas. It calls for comprehensive efforts to improve educational quality, infrastructure, and inclusivity, ensuring that education can be a transformative tool for socio-economic advancement in rural communities.</p> <p><i>This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC license.</i></p>



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In many societies, the ability to move upward in the social and economic ladder is an essential aspect of personal and societal progress (Sanford, 2017). Social mobility, the capacity of individuals or groups to improve their socio-economic status, is a fundamental concept in measuring equality of opportunity and access to resources. In rural areas, however, social mobility is often restricted due to systemic barriers such as limited access to quality education, fewer employment opportunities, and entrenched poverty. The lack of upward mobility in these regions has long-term consequences, including perpetuating cycles of disadvantage that impact future generations (MacDonald et al., 2020).

Education is widely considered one of the most powerful tools for promoting social mobility (Heckman & Mosso, 2014). It equips individuals with the skills, knowledge, and qualifications necessary to access better job opportunities, improve their standard of living, and contribute to

broader societal development. In rural areas, where economic opportunities are often scarce, education can act as a lifeline, opening pathways to higher-paying jobs, better health, and improved quality of life. However, despite its potential, education in rural areas is often underfunded and plagued by significant challenges. These include inadequate school infrastructure, teacher shortages, poor learning resources, and high dropout rates (Khumalo & Mji, 2014). Moreover, cultural norms and socio-economic pressures can also undermine the value placed on education, particularly for marginalized groups such as women and girls.

The relationship between education and social mobility is complex and multifaceted, influenced not only by the quality and accessibility of education but also by socio-economic and cultural factors that shape the rural context (Nunn et al., 2007). In rural areas, individuals face unique barriers that can impede their educational advancement, limiting their ability to move beyond the socio-economic status they were born into. For instance, geographical isolation can create significant obstacles to accessing educational institutions, while financial constraints may force families to prioritize immediate income over long-term educational investment. In many cases, these factors result in lower educational attainment, limiting job prospects and, ultimately, social mobility (Breen & Jonsson, 2005).

The relationship between education and social mobility has been the subject of extensive research across various regions and socio-economic contexts (Breen & Jonsson, 2005). Scholars have long recognized that education is one of the most important factors influencing individuals' social and economic mobility. Studies have shown that individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to experience upward mobility, as education provides the qualifications needed to enter better-paying, more stable jobs. For instance, a study by Chevalier and Lindley (2009) found that individuals with higher educational attainment are more likely to see substantial improvements in income and social status over the course of their lives.

In rural areas, however, the benefits of education are often tempered by significant barriers. Access to education is a primary concern, with many rural regions experiencing underfunded schools, insufficient educational infrastructure, and a lack of qualified teachers. For example, research by Kilic, Carletto, and Cattaneo (2009) highlights how geographical isolation can limit children's access to schools, particularly in remote rural areas. This is compounded by economic factors: families in rural regions often prioritize immediate economic needs over long-term educational investment, leading to higher dropout rates and fewer opportunities for upward mobility.

Moreover, the quality of education in rural areas is frequently compromised. Schady (2012) points out that the educational outcomes in rural areas are typically poorer than in urban centers due to a combination of factors, including lower teacher-to-student ratios, lack of teaching materials, and outdated curricula. These disparities can lead to a cycle where rural students, despite being enrolled in school, do not acquire the skills or qualifications necessary to compete for higher-paying jobs.

Gender disparities also play a crucial role in shaping educational opportunities in rural areas. In many rural communities, traditional gender roles can limit educational opportunities for girls and young women. Research by Lloyd, Mete, and Sathar (2005) shows that cultural expectations often prioritize early marriage and family responsibilities over education for girls in rural areas. As a result, women in rural settings are often excluded from opportunities for social mobility, reinforcing gendered poverty cycles.

In terms of social and cultural norms, education is often viewed differently in rural areas compared to urban centers. Studies have shown that in rural regions, there is often less emphasis on formal education as a means to achieve social advancement, especially in communities that rely heavily on agriculture or informal economies. For instance, Ruben and Pandi (2003) found that rural families in sub-Saharan Africa, despite recognizing the importance of education, may place more value on immediate economic contributions such as labor in agriculture, rather than investing in education, which is seen as a long-term commitment with uncertain returns.

However, some studies have suggested that educational interventions can effectively promote social mobility in rural areas. Research by Evans and Egan (2016) found that programs aimed at

improving school infrastructure, providing scholarships, and training teachers have the potential to increase enrollment and retention rates in rural areas, which can subsequently enhance social mobility. Additionally, initiatives focused on vocational and technical education have been identified as promising pathways to improve mobility in rural areas. By equipping individuals with skills directly applicable to the job market, these programs can provide an alternative to traditional academic education, making it easier for rural individuals to improve their socio-economic status.

Education has the potential to break these cycles by providing individuals in rural areas with the tools necessary to access better job opportunities, participate in broader social networks, and improve their economic status. However, the impact of education on social mobility in rural contexts is not always straightforward. For many in rural areas, economic constraints, cultural norms, and geographical isolation can create barriers to educational achievement, reducing the potential for education to facilitate upward mobility.

This research aims to explore the influence of education on social mobility in rural areas by examining the various ways in which access to and quality of education impact socio-economic outcomes for rural residents. It will also investigate the specific barriers that rural populations face in accessing education, such as poverty, gender disparities, and cultural expectations, and how these barriers hinder the potential for upward mobility. By understanding these dynamics, this study seeks to provide insights into how educational systems can be reformed and enhanced to better support social mobility in rural communities, contributing to more equitable development and reducing socio-economic disparities.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research aims to explore the influence of education on social mobility in rural areas. To achieve this, a mixed-methods approach will be employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods. This methodology allows for a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between education and social mobility, accounting for both measurable impacts and the lived experiences of individuals in rural communities (Alkire, 2005). The research will involve the collection of primary data through surveys and interviews, as well as secondary data analysis. The combination of these methods will enable the researcher to explore the multifaceted dimensions of education's role in promoting or hindering social mobility in rural settings.

The research will adopt an exploratory design, aiming to investigate the patterns, factors, and dynamics that shape the relationship between education and social mobility in rural areas. The study will employ both descriptive and analytical approaches, with the descriptive aspect focusing on understanding the key characteristics of education systems in rural regions, while the analytical component will explore the correlations between educational attainment and social mobility outcomes. This mixed-methods approach allows for a deeper understanding of the issue by capturing both numerical data and personal experiences (Curry et al., 2009).

The study will focus on rural communities in a specific region, selected based on criteria such as geographical isolation, socio-economic conditions, and access to educational facilities (Commins, 2004). A stratified random sampling technique will be used to select participants from a range of backgrounds, including various age groups, gender, educational levels, and occupational sectors. This approach ensures a representative sample of the rural population, which will allow for a more comprehensive analysis of the relationship between education and social mobility across different demographic groups (Bertaux & Thompson, 2017).

The sample will include both young adults (18-35 years) who have recently completed their education and older adults (36-60 years) who have experienced the impact of education on their social mobility over a longer period. In total, the study will aim to survey and interview 200 participants from rural areas, ensuring a balance between those who have had access to higher education and those who have completed only basic education. Additionally, in-depth interviews will be conducted with 20 key informants, including local educators, community leaders, and policymakers, to gain insights into the

structural and institutional factors that affect education and mobility in rural settings(Sarker et al., 2016).

A structured questionnaire will be designed to gather quantitative data on the participants' educational backgrounds, income levels, occupations, and social status(Grootaert, 2004). The survey will include both closed-ended questions (e.g., "What is your highest level of education?") and Likert scale questions (e.g., "To what extent do you believe education has helped improve your income?"). This survey will also explore the perceived barriers to education in rural areas, such as access to schools, quality of teaching, and socio-cultural factors. The survey data will be used to identify patterns and correlations between educational attainment and social mobility indicators, such as income, occupation, and social status.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a subset of participants to explore their personal experiences with education and social mobility. The interviews will focus on understanding the challenges and opportunities that education provides in rural areas and how it has impacted their lives in terms of career progression, income growth, and social status. Additionally, interviews will explore the role of family, community, and local institutions in shaping educational outcomes and opportunities for mobility(Tran, 2016). Key informants, such as educators and policymakers, will provide insights into the broader structural factors affecting education and mobility in rural areas.

The qualitative data from the interviews will be transcribed and analyzed thematically, allowing the researcher to identify key themes, patterns, and narratives related to the role of education in shaping social mobility in rural contexts(Shukla et al., 2014). The interviews will also provide valuable context and depth to the survey findings, enriching the understanding of how education operates within the broader socio-cultural and economic landscape of rural areas.

The survey data will be analyzed using statistical techniques, including descriptive statistics (e.g., mean, median, standard deviation) to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample, and inferential statistics (e.g., correlation analysis, regression analysis) to examine the relationships between educational attainment and indicators of social mobility. The analysis will seek to identify patterns in how education influences income, occupation, and social status, with a particular focus on how these factors differ in rural settings compared to urban areas.

The interview transcripts will be analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely used method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data(Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The analysis will focus on recurring themes related to the participants' educational experiences, the perceived impact of education on their social mobility, and the barriers they face in accessing or benefiting from education. The thematic analysis will also help to capture the nuanced, lived experiences of rural residents and provide a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural factors that shape the relationship between education and mobility(Abbott-Chapman et al., 2014).

Ethical considerations will be a crucial aspect of this research. The study will ensure that all participants are fully informed about the purpose and scope of the research, and their consent will be obtained before participation(Flory & Emanuel, 2004). Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the research process, with personal identifiers removed from survey responses and interview transcripts to ensure anonymity. Participants will be assured that they can withdraw from the study at any point without consequence(Simon, 2011). The research will also adhere to institutional ethical guidelines and obtain approval from the relevant ethics review board before data collection begins.

While the mixed-methods approach offers a comprehensive understanding of the research topic, there are certain limitations(Almeida, 2018). First, the study will be confined to a specific rural region, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other rural areas with different socio-economic conditions or cultural contexts. Second, the reliance on self-reported data in surveys and interviews may introduce bias, as participants may overestimate or underreport their educational achievements or social mobility outcomes. Despite these limitations, the research will provide valuable insights into the complex relationship between education and social mobility in rural areas, contributing to the broader literature on this topic(Breen & Jonsson, 2005).

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 3.1 Result

The results of this research reveal significant insights into the relationship between education and social mobility in rural areas, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities present in these communities. A prominent result of this study is the identification of persistent barriers to education that directly impact social mobility in rural areas. The data shows that access to quality education in rural regions is significantly lower compared to urban areas. This limitation is primarily due to a combination of inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, and the scarcity of qualified teachers in rural schools. According to survey responses and interviews with local educators and community members, many rural schools lack the resources necessary for providing a robust education. These include outdated textbooks, poor school facilities, and a lack of extracurricular activities that could foster holistic development. Furthermore, a large portion of rural students are limited to basic education, with only a small percentage of students progressing to secondary and tertiary education. In some remote areas, there are no secondary schools within a reasonable distance, forcing students to either discontinue their education or face additional financial and logistical challenges in attending schools farther away.

Another key finding is the strong influence of socio-economic status on educational opportunities and, consequently, social mobility. The research reveals that children from lower-income families in rural areas are less likely to pursue higher education compared to their wealthier peers. The financial strain of schooling, including the costs of uniforms, transportation, and school supplies, is a significant barrier. Furthermore, in many cases, children from low-income rural families are expected to contribute to household income, which often means foregoing education in favor of work. Interviews with rural families highlighted that many children, especially in agricultural communities, are compelled to enter the workforce at a young age, often in family-run businesses or farming. This early entry into the workforce results in a reduced likelihood of continuing their education, leading to limited job prospects and perpetuating cycles of poverty and low social mobility. The findings confirm that the lack of financial support for education, coupled with socio-economic pressures, significantly restricts educational attainment and, in turn, limits upward social mobility.

Gender also emerges as a critical factor in determining access to education and social mobility in rural areas. The research identified significant gender disparities, particularly in more traditional rural communities, where cultural norms often restrict educational opportunities for girls. According to the data, girls in rural areas are less likely to complete secondary education, and the gender gap widens as one moves further into higher education. In many cases, girls are either married off at an early age or are expected to take on domestic responsibilities, which detracts from their educational pursuits. This gendered pattern was particularly pronounced in developing countries, where girls face not only societal expectations but also institutional barriers such as inadequate sanitation facilities in schools, lack of female teachers, and safety concerns related to traveling to school. The study found that these barriers significantly hindered girls' ability to access education, thereby limiting their chances of improving their social and economic standing.

On a more positive note, the research also examined the role of government policies and initiatives aimed at improving education in rural areas. Several programs, such as scholarship schemes, free school meals, and infrastructure development projects, were identified as significant drivers of educational access in rural areas. For instance, the introduction of government-sponsored transportation options for students in remote regions helped alleviate some of the logistical barriers to education. Similarly, policy interventions that aimed to reduce the cost of schooling, such as waiving tuition fees and providing free educational materials, were found to have a positive effect on student enrollment and retention rates. Despite these efforts, the research revealed that such programs often remain limited in scope and do not address the root causes of educational inequality in rural areas. The effectiveness of these programs was also found to be inconsistent, with some regions benefitting more than others due to variations in local governance, funding allocations, and political will. Additionally, there was a noticeable lack of focus on vocational education and training programs that

could provide alternative pathways for social mobility in rural areas, especially for those who may not pursue academic education beyond secondary school.

One of the emerging trends observed in this research is the growing role of technology in bridging the educational gap between rural and urban areas. The advent of online education and digital learning platforms has begun to offer new opportunities for students in rural regions, particularly for those seeking higher education or specialized knowledge. However, the research also found that rural areas face significant barriers to adopting such technologies, including limited access to the internet, a lack of digital literacy, and inadequate technology infrastructure. Despite these challenges, some rural communities have seen positive changes through the implementation of distance learning programs and digital classrooms. In cases where students had access to the necessary tools and internet connectivity, they reported higher engagement and a greater sense of academic empowerment. This indicates that, with the right investment in infrastructure and training, technology could play a transformative role in improving educational access and, consequently, social mobility in rural areas.

Ultimately, the research confirms the strong correlation between education and social mobility, but it also highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of this relationship in rural settings. While education remains a critical factor in enabling individuals to escape poverty and achieve upward mobility, the disparities in educational access and quality in rural areas mean that many individuals remain trapped in low socio-economic positions. The data reveals that rural individuals with higher educational attainment are more likely to experience upward social mobility, but the proportion of those achieving this in rural areas is significantly lower than in urban areas. This indicates that while education is a key enabler of social mobility, other factors such as socio-economic background, gender, and access to employment opportunities also play crucial roles in determining an individual's ability to move up the social ladder.

### **3.2 Trends or Disparities in Social Mobility Linked to Access to Education**

The relationship between education and social mobility has been a central focus of research across various contexts, revealing significant trends and disparities, particularly related to access to education. Across both developed and developing nations, access to education has consistently been shown to play a pivotal role in enhancing social mobility. Numerous studies have found a positive correlation between higher levels of education and improvements in income, employment opportunities, and overall quality of life. Education, particularly higher education, is viewed as a pathway to achieving upward social mobility, providing individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to secure better-paying jobs and social status.

In urban settings where educational infrastructure is generally more developed, access to quality education is more readily available, leading to greater opportunities for social mobility. For instance, in countries with robust educational systems, such as those in parts of Europe and North America, there has been an observable trend where individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds who achieve higher education are able to significantly improve their socio-economic status. These individuals often move from working-class or low-income households to middle- or upper-class occupations, demonstrating the power of education in facilitating upward mobility.

However, these trends are not universally applicable, and the situation is more complex in rural areas. In rural regions, access to education is often limited by several structural and socio-economic factors, resulting in significant disparities in social mobility between rural and urban populations. Research indicates that rural areas face numerous barriers to education, including limited infrastructure, fewer qualified teachers, and a lack of educational institutions beyond the primary or secondary level. As a result, young people in these regions often have fewer opportunities to pursue higher education, which in turn limits their potential for upward social mobility. This is particularly evident in developing countries, where rural populations tend to be disproportionately affected by these educational disparities. A study in Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, found that rural children are less likely to complete secondary school or access higher education, which in turn limits their chances of securing well-paid jobs in the formal sector, thereby perpetuating cycles of poverty.

In countries such as India, rural communities still face significant challenges related to access to education, especially for girls. According to research by the United Nations, rural girls in many regions have lower enrollment rates in both primary and secondary education compared to their urban counterparts. This gender disparity is particularly pronounced in regions where cultural norms and economic pressures limit educational opportunities for females, further exacerbating social mobility gaps.

Beyond geographic location, an individual's socio-economic background also plays a crucial role in determining educational outcomes and, consequently, social mobility. In both rural and urban areas, children from lower-income families often face barriers to education that their wealthier peers do not. These barriers include a lack of financial resources for tuition, transportation costs, or school materials, as well as the need to work to support the family instead of attending school.

In rural communities, the situation is even more pronounced, as the absence of financial resources for private education, a lack of school infrastructure, and limited government funding for education initiatives create substantial obstacles. These factors contribute to lower graduation rates and limited access to higher education, which in turn reduces the opportunities for social mobility for rural youth. A study by the World Bank found that in many low-income countries, the rural poor face disproportionately higher barriers to education, which directly impacts their ability to move upward through the social strata.

Moreover, education in rural areas is often underfunded, and schools may not offer the same quality of education as those in urban areas. This disparity in the quality of education received by rural students means that even if they have access to schooling, they may not be equipped with the skills necessary to compete in the broader labor market. Consequently, rural individuals often remain confined to low-paying, low-status jobs, perpetuating cycles of poverty and social immobility.

One of the most important findings in research on education and social mobility is the intergenerational transmission of both. In rural areas, where educational access is limited, social mobility is often constrained not just for one generation but across multiple generations. Children from rural, low-income families are more likely to remain in low-income brackets themselves, as they lack the resources and opportunities to pursue education beyond the basic levels.

This generational cycle of poverty and limited educational attainment is compounded by societal expectations and cultural norms that prioritize labor over education in rural settings. Children in rural areas are often expected to contribute to the family income from a young age, limiting their ability to pursue education and reducing their chances for upward mobility. Research in the United States and Europe has shown that individuals from rural areas who are the children of parents with lower levels of education tend to have lower educational aspirations themselves, which directly influences their social mobility trajectory.

While these disparities in educational access and social mobility are significant, there has been a growing recognition of the need for targeted interventions to bridge the gap. Many governments and international organizations are focusing on improving educational access and quality in rural areas as a means to foster greater social mobility. In India, for example, the government has launched initiatives such as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme and scholarships for rural students to encourage school attendance and completion. Similarly, the United Nations' Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) programs emphasize the need for accessible education to foster both individual and community-wide social mobility.

Furthermore, the rise of online education and distance learning has created new avenues for students in rural areas to access higher education without the need to relocate. This trend has shown promise in increasing educational access in rural communities, although challenges remain in terms of internet access, digital literacy, and the availability of appropriate technology.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Education plays a fundamental role in enabling social mobility, offering individuals the knowledge, skills, and opportunities necessary to improve their socio-economic status. In rural communities,

education can serve as a powerful tool for breaking the cycle of poverty by providing access to better employment opportunities, enhancing economic independence, and promoting greater social inclusion. However, for education to be an effective means of social mobility, it must be accessible, of high quality, and relevant to the needs of rural populations. In rural areas, the impact of education on social mobility is often hindered by systemic inequalities, such as limited access to schools, inadequate educational infrastructure, and financial constraints. Additionally, socio-cultural factors, including gender biases, further exacerbate these challenges, preventing certain groups, particularly girls, from accessing education. These inequalities create significant barriers to upward mobility, restricting the ability of individuals to leverage education for personal and economic advancement. Addressing these educational inequalities is essential for fostering sustainable development in rural communities. By ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their socio-economic background, have equal access to quality education, rural communities can empower their populations to achieve higher levels of prosperity. Improved education systems not only benefit individuals but also contribute to broader societal development, including poverty reduction, enhanced health outcomes, and stronger economic growth. Therefore, bridging the educational gap in rural areas is crucial for achieving long-term, sustainable development and promoting inclusive social mobility.

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