

Poverty, Educational Access and Intergenerational Social Mobility: Moderating Role of Family Background

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Abstract

Poverty remains one of the most persistent barriers to human development, particularly in developing and urbanizing societies. It significantly influences access to education and shapes opportunities for intergenerational social mobility. Social mobility refers to the ability of individuals to improve their socioeconomic status relative to their parents, and education is widely recognized as a key driver of upward mobility. However, unequal access to quality education continues to reinforce cycles of poverty across generations. This study examines the relationship between poverty, educational access, and intergenerational social mobility, with a particular focus on the moderating role of family background. Drawing upon human capital theory and social reproduction theory, the study argues that poverty restricts access to educational opportunities, thereby limiting upward mobility. At the same time, family background, including parental education, income, and social capital, influences how individuals benefit from educational access. A quantitative research design was employed, and data were collected from 300 respondents through structured questionnaires. Structural Equation Modeling using Smart PLS was used to test the hypothesized relationships. The findings reveal that poverty has a significant negative impact on educational access, which in turn affects intergenerational social mobility. Empirical evidence suggests that limited access to education remains a major constraint for upward mobility, particularly among low-income populations. Furthermore, family background was found to significantly moderate the relationship between educational access and social mobility. Individuals from supportive family environments are more likely to translate educational opportunities into upward mobility, while disadvantaged family contexts weaken this effect. Research indicates that disparities in education access and quality continue to shape mobility outcomes across generations. The study concludes that addressing poverty and improving educational access are essential for enhancing social mobility. However, interventions must also consider family level factors to ensure equitable outcomes.

Keywords: Poverty, Educational Access, Social Mobility, Family Background, Inequality

Introduction

Poverty continues to be one of the most pressing socioeconomic challenges affecting societies worldwide. It is not merely a lack of income but a multidimensional phenomenon that includes limited access to education, healthcare, and opportunities for advancement. One of the most critical consequences of poverty is its impact on intergenerational social mobility, which refers to the ability of individuals to achieve a higher socioeconomic status than their parents.

Education has long been recognized as a powerful tool for breaking the cycle of poverty and promoting social mobility. By enhancing skills, knowledge, and employability, education provides individuals with opportunities to improve their socioeconomic status. However, access to education is often unevenly distributed, particularly in developing countries and urban

marginalized communities. Educational inequality remains a major barrier to achieving equitable social mobility.

Research shows that access to education plays a crucial role in determining social mobility outcomes. Individuals who have access to quality education are more likely to secure better employment opportunities and achieve upward mobility. However, those from low-income backgrounds often face significant barriers, including financial constraints, lack of infrastructure, and social and cultural limitations.

Moreover, poverty has a direct impact on educational attainment. Families living in poverty may struggle to afford educational expenses, leading to lower enrollment and higher dropout rates. This creates a cycle in which poverty limits education, and lack of education perpetuates poverty across generations.

Intergenerational social mobility is influenced not only by individual efforts but also by structural and contextual factors. One such factor is family background, which includes parental education, income, occupation, and social networks. Family background plays a crucial role in shaping educational opportunities and outcomes. Children from educated and financially stable families are more likely to receive support, guidance, and resources that enhance their educational success. In contrast, children from disadvantaged families often face multiple challenges, including limited access to learning resources, lower parental involvement, and reduced exposure to opportunities. These factors can significantly affect their educational attainment and, consequently, their social mobility.

Recent research highlights that educational systems can either mitigate or reinforce inequality depending on access and quality. Educational reforms, such as improved school funding and access to higher education, have been shown to enhance long term social mobility. However, disparities in educational access and quality continue to persist, particularly in low-income communities.

The COVID 19 pandemic further exacerbated these challenges by disrupting educational systems and widening existing inequalities. Studies indicate that disruptions in education have negatively affected social mobility, particularly for children from low educated families.

Despite the importance of these factors, limited research has examined the moderating role of family background in the relationship between educational access and social mobility. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of these relationships.

Literature Review

Poverty is widely recognized as a key determinant of educational access and social mobility. It affects individuals' ability to access educational resources, which in turn influences their opportunities for upward mobility. Studies show that poverty creates structural barriers that limit access to quality education, including financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and social inequalities.

Educational access refers to the availability and affordability of educational opportunities. It is a critical factor in determining social mobility, as education enhances individuals' skills and

employability. Research indicates that education is one of the most effective tools for reducing inequality and promoting social mobility.

However, access to education is often unequal, particularly in developing countries. Individuals from low-income backgrounds are less likely to have access to quality education, which limits their opportunities for advancement. This inequality in educational access contributes to the persistence of poverty across generations.

Intergenerational social mobility is influenced by both individual and structural factors. While education plays a central role, other factors such as family background, social networks, and institutional support also play a significant role. Studies have shown that children from disadvantaged families are less likely to achieve upward mobility due to limited access to resources and opportunities.

Family background is a critical factor that influences educational outcomes and social mobility. Parental education, income, and social capital can significantly affect children's educational attainment and career opportunities. Children from educated families are more likely to receive support and guidance that enhance their educational success.

Research also highlights the role of cultural and social factors in shaping educational outcomes. In many societies, social norms and expectations influence educational attainment, particularly for marginalized groups. These factors can either facilitate or hinder social mobility. The relationship between poverty, education, and social mobility is complex and multidimensional. Poverty not only limits access to education but also affects the quality of education received. Studies indicate that educational inequality remains a major barrier to social mobility, particularly in low-income communities.

Recent research also emphasizes the importance of addressing structural inequalities to promote social mobility. Policies aimed at improving educational access and quality can significantly enhance mobility outcomes. However, these policies must also consider family level factors to ensure equitable outcomes.

Conceptual Model / Theoretical Framework

Independent Variable

- Poverty

Mediator

- Educational access

Dependent Variable

- Intergenerational social mobility

Moderating Variable

- Family background

Theories Used

- Human capital theory
- Social reproduction theory
- Capability approach

Methodology

A quantitative cross sectional research design was adopted. Data were collected from 300 respondents through structured questionnaires using Likert scales. Smart PLS was used to test measurement and structural models.

Analysis

Table 1 Measurement Model

Construct	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Poverty	0.91	0.94	0.72
Educational Access	0.89	0.92	0.70
Social Mobility	0.88	0.91	0.68
Family Background	0.90	0.93	0.71

Table 2 Structural Model

Path	Beta	t value	p value
Poverty → Educational Access	-0.52	7.10	0.000
Educational Access → Social Mobility	0.48	6.40	0.000

Table 3 Moderation

Path	Beta	t value
Family Background moderates EA → SM	0.27	3.90

Interpretation of Table 1: Measurement Model

The measurement model results provide strong evidence of the reliability and validity of the constructs included in this study, namely poverty, educational access, intergenerational social mobility, and family background. Reliability was first assessed using Cronbach alpha, and all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70. Specifically, poverty reported a value of 0.91, educational access 0.89, social mobility 0.88, and family background 0.90. These values indicate a high level of internal consistency, suggesting that the items used to measure each construct are stable and consistently reflect the underlying theoretical dimensions.

Composite reliability values further strengthen the reliability assessment, with all constructs exceeding 0.90. Composite reliability is particularly relevant in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling because it accounts for differences in indicator loadings and provides a more accurate estimate of construct reliability (Hair et al., 2021). The high composite reliability values indicate that the indicators collectively form a coherent and reliable measurement of each latent construct.

Convergent validity was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted. All constructs reported AVE values above the recommended threshold of 0.50, with poverty at 0.72, educational access at 0.70, social mobility at 0.68, and family background at 0.71. These results indicate that more than half of the variance in the observed indicators is explained by their respective constructs, confirming that the measurement items are strongly associated with the intended latent variables.

The establishment of strong convergent validity is essential because it ensures that the constructs are accurately captured by the measurement items. This reduces the likelihood of measurement error influencing the results of the structural model. Moreover, the robustness of the measurement

model enhances the credibility of the study and ensures that the relationships observed in subsequent analyses are meaningful and reliable.

Overall, the results demonstrate that the measurement model meets all the necessary criteria for reliability and validity. This provides a solid foundation for proceeding with the structural model analysis and supports the integrity of the study findings.

Interpretation of Table 2: Structural Model

The structural model results provide significant insights into the relationships among poverty, educational access, and intergenerational social mobility. The findings reveal that poverty has a strong and statistically significant negative effect on educational access ($\beta = -0.52, p < 0.001$). This indicates that individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face substantial barriers in accessing education, which may include financial constraints, lack of infrastructure, and limited institutional support.

This finding is consistent with human capital theory, which emphasizes the importance of investment in education for enhancing individual productivity and economic outcomes. Poverty restricts such investment by limiting access to educational resources, thereby reducing opportunities for skill development and upward mobility. The results highlight that poverty is not merely an economic condition but also a structural barrier that limits access to opportunities.

Furthermore, the results show that educational access has a strong positive effect on intergenerational social mobility ($\beta = 0.48, p < 0.001$). This suggests that individuals who have greater access to education are more likely to achieve upward mobility relative to their parents. Education enhances skills, knowledge, and employability, which increases the likelihood of obtaining higher income and better occupational status.

The mediation effect of educational access is particularly important, as it demonstrates that education serves as a critical pathway through which poverty influences social mobility. Without adequate access to education, individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to escape poverty, leading to the persistence of inequality across generations.

The strength of the path coefficients indicates that both relationships are substantial and statistically robust. The findings underscore the importance of addressing educational inequality as a means of promoting social mobility. Policies aimed at improving access to education can play a crucial role in breaking the cycle of poverty.

Overall, the structural model provides strong empirical support for the hypothesized relationships and highlights the central role of education in mediating the impact of poverty on social mobility.

Interpretation of Table 3: Moderation Analysis

The moderation analysis provides critical insights into the role of family background in shaping the relationship between educational access and intergenerational social mobility. The results indicate that family background significantly moderates this relationship ($\beta = 0.27, t = 3.90$), suggesting that the effect of educational access on social mobility varies depending on the characteristics of the family environment.

Family background encompasses factors such as parental education, income, occupation, and social capital. These factors play a crucial role in determining how effectively individuals can utilize educational opportunities. The positive moderation effect indicates that individuals from more advantaged family backgrounds are better able to translate educational access into upward social mobility.

One explanation for this finding is that families with higher socioeconomic status can provide additional resources and support that enhance the benefits of education. These may include financial support, access to networks, guidance, and exposure to opportunities. As a result, individuals from such backgrounds are more likely to achieve higher levels of social mobility.

In contrast, individuals from disadvantaged family backgrounds may face additional barriers that limit the effectiveness of educational access. These barriers may include lack of financial resources, limited parental support, and restricted access to social networks. Even when educational opportunities are available, these individuals may struggle to fully benefit from them. The moderation effect also highlights the role of social reproduction theory, which suggests that inequality is transmitted across generations through family structures and resources. Family background not only influences access to education but also shapes the outcomes of educational attainment.

The findings emphasize that educational access alone is not sufficient to ensure social mobility. The broader family context must also be considered. Policies aimed at promoting social mobility should therefore address both educational inequality and family level disparities.

Overall, the moderation analysis demonstrates that family background is a critical factor in understanding the relationship between education and social mobility. It highlights the need for comprehensive interventions that address both individual and structural factors.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong empirical evidence for the complex relationship between poverty, educational access, and intergenerational social mobility. The results confirm that poverty significantly restricts access to education, which in turn limits opportunities for upward mobility. This aligns with existing literature that identifies education as a key mechanism for breaking the cycle of poverty.

The study also highlights the critical role of educational access as a mediating factor. Education serves as a pathway through which individuals can improve their socioeconomic status. However, unequal access to education continues to reinforce social inequalities, particularly among disadvantaged populations.

One of the key contributions of this study is the identification of family background as a moderating factor. The findings suggest that the benefits of education are not equally distributed across individuals. Those from advantaged family backgrounds are better able to leverage educational opportunities to achieve upward mobility, while those from disadvantaged backgrounds face additional challenges.

This finding is consistent with social reproduction theory, which emphasizes the role of family resources in perpetuating inequality across generations. It also highlights the importance of considering both individual and contextual factors in understanding social mobility.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that efforts to improve educational access must be accompanied by interventions that address family level disparities. This may include financial support, parental education programs, and community-based initiatives.

Overall, the study contributes to the existing literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing social mobility and highlighting the need for integrated policy approaches.

Conclusion with recommendations

This study concludes that poverty, educational access, and family background are key determinants of intergenerational social mobility. Poverty acts as a significant barrier to educational access, limiting individuals' ability to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for upward mobility. Educational access, in turn, plays a crucial role in facilitating social mobility by enhancing opportunities for economic advancement.

However, the study also demonstrates that the relationship between educational access and social mobility is not uniform. Family background significantly moderates this relationship, influencing how effectively individuals can benefit from educational opportunities. This highlights the importance of considering both structural and contextual factors in addressing social inequality.

Practical Recommendations

- Governments should implement policies aimed at reducing poverty and improving access to quality education. This includes increasing funding for education, providing scholarships, and improving infrastructure in underserved areas.
- Interventions should also focus on supporting disadvantaged families. Programs that enhance parental education, provide financial assistance, and promote community engagement can help mitigate the effects of family background.
- Policymakers should adopt a holistic approach that integrates education, social welfare, and economic policies to promote social mobility.

Future Research Directions

Future studies should explore additional moderating variables, such as cultural norms and institutional factors. Longitudinal research designs can provide deeper insights into the dynamic nature of social mobility.

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