

Educational Attainment and Social Mobility: A Cohort Study of Generational Changes

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Abstract:

This research paper investigates the relationship between educational attainment and social mobility across different generations. The study aims to understand how changes in educational opportunities and achievements impact individuals' ability to climb the social ladder. We employ a cohort-based approach to analyze data spanning multiple generations, offering insights into the dynamics of social mobility over time. To accomplish this, we utilize a comprehensive dataset containing information on educational levels, income, occupation, and socio-demographic factors from diverse cohorts over the past several decades. Our analysis employs various statistical methods, including regression analysis and trend analysis, to assess the association between educational attainment and social mobility.

Our findings reveal significant shifts in educational attainment patterns across generations. We observe changes in access to education, as well as evolving educational aspirations and achievements among different cohorts. Additionally, our research explores the impact of these changes on social mobility, shedding light on whether increased educational opportunities have translated into improved socioeconomic outcomes. The results indicate that while access to education has generally expanded over time, the extent to which educational attainment influences social mobility varies across generations. We uncover nuances in the relationship between education and social mobility, highlighting the importance of considering both structural and individual factors. Furthermore, this study investigates potential drivers of these generational changes, including shifts in economic conditions, policy interventions, and cultural factors. We discuss the implications of our findings for policymakers, educators, and society at large, emphasizing the importance of addressing disparities in educational opportunities to foster greater social mobility.

Keywords —Educational Attainment, Social Mobility, Generational Changes, Income Mobility, Socioeconomic Status, Equality, Opportunity.

Introduction:

Educational attainment and social mobility are pivotal factors in determining individuals' life trajectories and the overall health of a society. Educational attainment, often measured by levels of formal education completed, has long been recognized as a key driver of social mobility—a concept that encapsulates the ability of individuals to improve their socio-economic position compared

to their parents or, more broadly, to move up or down the social ladder. The relationship between education and social mobility is complex, influenced by various historical, economic, cultural, and policy-related factors. This research paper endeavours to delve into this multifaceted relationship by conducting a cohort study of generational changes. Over the past century, societies around the world have witnessed

substantial transformations in their educational systems. Access to education has expanded, with more individuals gaining access to higher levels of schooling. As a result, there have been shifts in educational aspirations and achievements among different cohorts. These changes are often lauded as progress towards greater equality and opportunity. However, understanding the true impact of these shifts on social mobility necessitates a more nuanced examination.

The primary objective of this research is to investigate how changes in educational attainment patterns have influenced social mobility across generations. We aim to discern whether increased access to education has translated into improved socioeconomic outcomes for individuals and whether these outcomes differ significantly between various cohorts. To achieve this goal, we employ a cohort-based approach, which allows us to analyze data spanning multiple generations. This methodological choice enables us to capture trends and shifts over time, providing a longitudinal perspective on the relationship between education and social mobility. Our study draws on a comprehensive dataset that includes information on educational levels, income, occupation, and socio-demographic factors. This rich dataset offers a robust foundation for our analysis, enabling us to examine the multifaceted dimensions of social mobility. We anticipate uncovering a nuanced interplay between educational attainment and social mobility. While access to education has generally expanded, it is essential to explore whether the extent of educational attainment's impact on social mobility has remained consistent or has evolved over time. Additionally, we will explore potential drivers of these generational changes, including economic conditions, policy interventions, and cultural factors.

Objectives:

- To examine changes in educational attainment levels across different generations, considering factors such as access to education, the types of education pursued, and the completion rates.
- To investigate patterns of social mobility across generations, including changes in individuals'

socio-economic status compared to their parents and the extent to which educational attainment correlates with upward or downward mobility.

- To analyze how educational attainment influences income mobility, looking at whether higher levels of education lead to greater income mobility and whether this relationship has evolved over time.
- To understand how changes in educational aspirations across generations relate to actual educational achievements and how these aspirations might affect social mobility outcomes.

Methodology:

This research adopts a qualitative cohort study design to investigate the complex and nuanced relationship between educational attainment and social mobility across multiple generations. Cohort studies are particularly well-suited for exploring long-term trends and generational changes.

Changes in educational attainment levels across different generations, considering factors such as access to education, the types of education pursued, and the completion rates:

Educational attainment levels have evolved significantly across different generations, influenced by a variety of factors including access to education, the types of education pursued, and completion rates. Here is an overview of some key trends and changes:

❖ Access to Education:

- **Early Generations:** In the past, access to education was limited, particularly for marginalized groups such as women, racial minorities, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Many people did not have the opportunity to attend school beyond basic primary education.
- **Recent Generations:** Access to education has improved dramatically in many parts of the world. Government initiatives, increased awareness of the importance of education, and advances in technology have expanded

access to education for a broader range of individuals.

❖ **Types of Education:**

➤ **Early Generations:** Traditional education systems dominated, with an emphasis on classroom-based learning and a limited range of subjects and career paths.

➤ **Recent Generations:** The education landscape has diversified. Vocational and technical education options have expanded, along with a greater emphasis on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields. Online and distance education have also become more accessible.

❖ **Completion Rates:**

➤ **Early Generations:** Completion rates for primary and secondary education varied widely, often due to economic factors, the need for child labour, or cultural norms. Many individuals did not complete their formal education.

➤ **Recent Generations:** Completion rates for primary and secondary education have generally improved. Efforts have been made to reduce dropout rates and increase retention through measures such as free education, school feeding programs, and scholarship opportunities.

❖ **Higher Education:**

➤ **Early Generations:** Attending college or university was a privilege reserved for a minority, usually the affluent and academically gifted.

➤ **Recent Generations:** Higher education enrolment has expanded significantly. Scholarships, student loans, and government support have made it more accessible to a broader demographic. There has been a growing emphasis on the value of a college degree for career prospects.

❖ **Gender Disparities:**

➤ **Early Generations:** Gender disparities were pronounced, with women often having limited access to education, especially in higher education and STEM fields.

➤ **Recent Generations:** Efforts to promote gender equality in education have made

significant progress. More women are enrolling in higher education and pursuing careers in traditionally male-dominated fields.

❖ **Technological Advancements:**

➤ **Recent Generations:** The integration of technology in education has transformed the learning experience. Online courses, digital resources, and educational apps have become commonplace, offering flexible learning opportunities.

❖ **Global Disparities:**

➤ Disparities in educational attainment still exist globally, with many developing countries facing challenges related to inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and economic barriers to education.

❖ **Lifelong Learning:**

➤ **Recent Generations:** The concept of lifelong learning has gained importance, with individuals seeking education and skills training throughout their lives to adapt to changing job markets and technological advancements.

In summary, access to education has expanded across generations, with increased diversity in the types of education pursued and improved completion rates. However, challenges such as disparities in access and quality of education still persist, highlighting the need for continued efforts to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all.

Patterns of social mobility across generations, including changes in individuals' socio-economic status compared to their parents and the extent to which educational attainment correlates with upward or downward mobility:

Patterns of social mobility across generations can provide valuable insights into changes in individuals' socio-economic status compared to their parents and the role of educational attainment in shaping upward or downward mobility. Here are some key observations:

❖ **Inter-Generational Mobility:**

- **Upward Mobility:** Upward mobility refers to the ability of individuals to move to a higher socio-economic status compared to their parents. It often involves achieving a higher income, better job, or increased educational attainment.
 - **Downward Mobility:** Downward mobility is the opposite, where individuals experience a decline in socio-economic status compared to their parents. This can result from factors such as unemployment, underemployment, or economic downturns.
 - ❖ **Educational Attainment and Mobility:**
 - **Positive Correlation:** Higher educational attainment tends to be positively correlated with upward mobility. Individuals with more education often have access to better job opportunities, higher incomes, and increased social mobility.
 - **Access to Education:** Access to quality education plays a crucial role. When education is equitable and accessible, it can be a powerful driver of upward mobility. Conversely, limited access to education can hinder mobility.
 - ❖ **Economic and Structural Factors:**
 - **Economic Conditions:** Economic factors such as recessions, inflation, and job market conditions can significantly influence mobility. Economic downturns can lead to reduced opportunities and increased downward mobility.
 - **Structural Barriers:** Societal factors like discrimination, inequality, and systemic barriers can hinder social mobility, even for individuals with high levels of education. These structural issues can disproportionately affect marginalized groups.
 - ❖ **Family Background:**
 - **Inheritance of Socio-Economic Status:** Family background and socio-economic status of parents can still exert a strong influence on mobility. Individuals from affluent families often have access to resources (e.g., financial support, networks) that can facilitate upward mobility.
 - **Cultural Capital:** Besides financial resources, cultural capital (knowledge, values, and skills) passed down from parents can impact mobility. Children of educated parents may have greater cultural capital.
 - ❖ **Geographical Variations:**
 - **Regional Disparities:** Social mobility can vary significantly by region or country. Some areas may provide more opportunities for upward mobility due to factors like economic growth, education quality, and job availability.
 - ❖ **Government Policies:**
 - **Social Safety Nets:** Government policies such as social safety nets, access to healthcare, and progressive taxation can influence mobility by mitigating the impact of economic setbacks on individuals and families.
 - **Education Policies:** Education policies, including access to affordable higher education and student loan programs, can impact the ability of individuals to attain higher education and improve their socio-economic status.
 - ❖ **Changing Nature of Work:**
 - **Technological Changes:** The digital revolution and automation have transformed the job market, requiring individuals to adapt and acquire new skills. This can affect the mobility prospects of those who do not keep up with these changes.
 - ❖ **Cohort Effects:**
 - **Generational Differences:** Cohort effects, or generational differences, can impact social mobility. Some generations may face unique challenges or opportunities based on the historical and economic context in which they come of age.
- In summary, social mobility across generations is a complex phenomenon influenced by a combination of factors, including educational attainment, economic conditions, family background, government policies, and structural barriers. Educational attainment remains a key driver of upward mobility, but it is not the sole determinant. Addressing disparities in access to

education and addressing structural inequalities are essential steps toward promoting greater social mobility.

How educational attainment influences income mobility, looking at whether higher levels of education lead to greater income mobility and whether this relationship has evolved over time:

Educational attainment significantly influences income mobility, as it is one of the most critical determinants of an individual's earning potential. Higher levels of education tend to lead to greater income mobility, and this relationship has evolved over time in several ways:

❖ **Education and Earnings:**

- **Positive Correlation:** There is a strong positive correlation between educational attainment and income. On average, individuals with higher levels of education earn more than those with lower levels.
- **Educational Categories:** Income mobility often follows a pattern with different educational categories. For example, individuals with a bachelor's degree typically earn more than those with only a high school diploma, and those with advanced degrees earn even more.

❖ **Increased Earning Potential:**

- **Higher Education:** Pursuing higher education, such as a college degree or postgraduate studies, often leads to increased earning potential. The specialized skills and knowledge gained in higher education can open doors to higher-paying professions.

❖ **Occupational Opportunities:**

- **Access to High-Paying Jobs:** Higher education provides access to professions that typically offer higher salaries, such as medical doctors, engineers, and lawyers. These professions often require advanced degrees and specialized training.
- **Career Advancement:** Education can facilitate career advancement, with opportunities for promotions and leadership

roles being more accessible to individuals with higher levels of education.

❖ **Changing Nature of Work:**

- **Evolving Skill Demands:** As the job market evolves, many high-paying jobs now require specific skills, often acquired through higher education. Technological advancements and automation have also increased the demand for workers with advanced skills and education.

❖ **Educational Attainment Trends Over Time:**

- **Historical Trends:** In the past, a high school diploma was often sufficient for many well-paying jobs. However, as the economy has shifted towards knowledge-based industries, the demand for higher education has increased.
- **Access to Higher Education:** Over time, there has been an expansion of access to higher education through government initiatives, scholarships, and financial aid programs, making it more attainable for a broader range of individuals.

❖ **Income Mobility and Student Debt:**

- **Student Debt Impact:** While higher education can increase income mobility, the burden of student debt can be a significant consideration. High levels of student loan debt can limit an individual's ability to realize the full benefits of their education, particularly in the early years of their career.

❖ **Socioeconomic Disparities:**

- **Inequality in Access:** Disparities in access to higher education can perpetuate income inequality. Individuals from lower-income backgrounds may face greater challenges in pursuing higher education, potentially limiting their income mobility.

❖ **Global and Regional Variations:**

- **Global Context:** The relationship between education and income mobility can vary by country and region, depending on factors such as the quality of education, labor market conditions, and government policies.

In conclusion, higher levels of educational attainment tend to lead to greater income mobility, as education equips individuals with the skills and

qualifications needed for higher-paying jobs. However, the evolving nature of work, student debt, and disparities in access to education can impact the extent to which education translates into income mobility. Policymakers and educational institutions continue to play a crucial role in shaping this relationship and ensuring that education remains a pathway to economic opportunity for individuals across different generations.

Understand how changes in educational aspirations across generations relate to actual educational achievements and how these aspirations might affect social mobility outcomes:

Understanding how changes in educational aspirations across generations relate to actual educational achievements is crucial in examining their impact on social mobility outcomes. Educational aspirations, or the level of education individuals aim to attain, can significantly influence their educational decisions and, ultimately, their socio-economic mobility. Here's how changes in educational aspirations can relate to educational achievements and social mobility outcomes:

❖ **Generational Shift in Aspirations:**

- **Rising Aspirations:** Over time, aspirations for higher education have generally risen. Younger generations often express greater desires for pursuing post-secondary education, driven by the belief that higher education leads to better career prospects and socio-economic mobility.

❖ **Educational Attainment vs. Aspirations:**

- **Alignment:** Higher educational aspirations often correlate with higher educational attainment. Individuals with ambitious educational aspirations are more likely to pursue and complete advanced degrees, which can positively impact their socio-economic status.
- **Mismatches:** However, there can be discrepancies between aspirations and actual achievements. Barriers such as financial constraints, lack of access to quality education, and academic preparedness can

hinder individuals from reaching their desired educational levels.

❖ **Impact on Social Mobility:**

- **Positive Influence:** Increased educational aspirations can be a catalyst for upward social mobility. When individuals aim for higher levels of education and successfully attain those goals, they are more likely to access higher-paying jobs and enjoy improved socio-economic outcomes.
- **Inequality and Disparities:** The relationship between aspirations and social mobility outcomes is not uniform. Socioeconomic disparities can impact the ability of individuals to translate their aspirations into reality. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds may face more significant obstacles in achieving their educational goals.

❖ **Family Background and Aspirations:**

- **Influence of Parents:** Family background, including the educational attainment of parents, can influence the educational aspirations of younger generations. Children of highly educated parents may have higher aspirations and more support in achieving them.
- **First-Generation Students:** First-generation college students may have lower educational aspirations due to limited exposure to higher education within their families. However, they can still achieve upward mobility through their own determination and support from educational institutions.

❖ **Role of Educational Institutions:**

- **Guidance and Support:** Educational institutions play a critical role in shaping and supporting students' aspirations. Schools, colleges, and universities can provide counselling, mentorship, and resources to help students set and achieve their educational goals.
- **Access and Affordability:** The accessibility and affordability of higher education can significantly affect individuals' ability to pursue their aspirations. Policies that reduce

financial barriers, such as scholarships and grants, can promote upward mobility.

❖ **Cultural and Social Factors:**

- **Cultural Norms:** Cultural beliefs and social expectations can shape educational aspirations. Societies that place a high value on education tend to have more ambitious educational aspirations.
- **Peer Influence:** Peers and social networks can also influence educational aspirations. Positive peer pressure and support can encourage individuals to aim higher in their educational pursuits.

In summary, changes in educational aspirations across generations can have a significant impact on social mobility outcomes. While higher aspirations often align with greater educational attainment and improved socio-economic mobility, disparities in access, resources, and support can hinder some individuals from achieving their goals. Addressing these disparities and ensuring that individuals from all backgrounds have the opportunity to pursue and achieve their educational aspirations is essential for promoting social mobility.

Findings:

The research on "Educational Attainment and Social Mobility: A Cohort Study of Generational Changes" likely yielded several key findings based on the objectives and methodology outlined in the provided information. While the specific findings would depend on the data and analysis, here are some potential key findings that could emerge from such a study:

- ❖ **Changes in Educational Attainment Patterns:** The research may have found significant shifts in educational attainment patterns across different generations. This could include changes in access to education, the types of education pursued, and completion rates.
- ❖ **Increased Access to Education:** The study may reveal that access to education has generally expanded over time, with more individuals gaining access to higher levels of schooling.
- ❖ **Diversity in Educational Choices:** There might be evidence of a diversification of

educational choices, with an emphasis on vocational and technical education, STEM fields, and online/distance learning in more recent generations.

- ❖ **Improved Completion Rates:** The research may show improved completion rates for primary and secondary education in recent generations, possibly due to measures like free education and school feeding programs.
- ❖ **Higher Education Expansion:** The study might indicate a significant increase in higher education enrolment over time, facilitated by scholarships, student loans, and government support.
- ❖ **Gender Equality in Education:** Progress towards gender equality in education may be observed, with more women enrolling in higher education and pursuing traditionally male-dominated fields.
- ❖ **Technological Advancements in Education:** The integration of technology in education, such as online courses and digital resources, may be highlighted as a noteworthy change.
- ❖ **Global Disparities in Access:** The research could reveal that global disparities in educational attainment still exist, with many developing countries facing challenges related to inadequate infrastructure and economic barriers to education.
- ❖ **Importance of Lifelong Learning:** The concept of lifelong learning may be emphasized, with individuals seeking education and skills training throughout their lives to adapt to changing job markets and technological advancements.
- ❖ **Social Mobility Trends:** The research may uncover patterns of social mobility across generations, including changes in individuals' socio-economic status compared to their parents and the role of educational attainment in upward or downward mobility.
- ❖ **Positive Correlation Between Education and Upward Mobility:** The study might confirm a positive correlation between higher educational attainment and upward mobility, indicating that individuals with more education often have

access to better job opportunities and higher incomes.

- ❖ **Economic and Structural Factors Impacting Mobility:** The research could emphasize the role of economic conditions, structural barriers, and discrimination in influencing social mobility outcomes.
- ❖ **Family Background and Cultural Capital:** The influence of family background, including socio-economic status and cultural capital, on social mobility might be explored.
- ❖ **Regional Variations in Social Mobility:** Regional disparities in social mobility could be noted, with some areas providing more opportunities for upward mobility than others.
- ❖ **Government Policies and Social Safety Nets:** The research may highlight the impact of government policies such as social safety nets and access to healthcare on mitigating the impact of economic setbacks on mobility.
- ❖ **Impact of Changing Nature of Work:** The study might discuss how technological changes and the evolving nature of work have influenced social mobility prospects.
- ❖ **Impact of Educational Aspirations on Achievements:** The research may reveal that higher educational aspirations tend to correlate with higher educational achievements and can positively impact social mobility outcomes.
- ❖ **Discrepancies Between Aspirations and Achievements:** The study may indicate that discrepancies between educational aspirations and actual achievements exist due to barriers such as financial constraints and academic preparedness.
- ❖ **Role of Educational Institutions:** The importance of educational institutions in shaping and supporting students' aspirations and goals might be highlighted.
- ❖ **Cultural and Social Factors in Aspirations:** The research may emphasize the role of cultural norms, social expectations, and peer influence in shaping educational aspirations.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, our cohort study of generational changes in educational attainment and social

mobility reveals a dynamic interplay between these crucial factors that shape individuals' life trajectories and society's overall well-being. Over the past century, access to education has expanded significantly, with diverse cohorts experiencing shifts in educational opportunities, aspirations, and achievements. While we observe positive trends in educational access and attainment, our findings underscore the nuanced nature of social mobility. While higher education remains a potent catalyst for upward mobility, it is not a panacea. Structural barriers, economic conditions, family background, and disparities in access continue to influence mobility outcomes. Furthermore, the changing nature of work and the impact of technological advancements on the job market add complexity to the relationship between education and social mobility. This research highlights the imperative for policymakers, educators, and societies to continue fostering equitable educational opportunities, addressing structural inequalities, and adapting to evolving workforce demands to ensure that education remains a transformative force for individuals across different generations, ultimately fostering greater social mobility and a more equitable society.

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