

# Does Education Translate into Upward Social Mobility?

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**Abstract:-** This research paper focuses on the question as to whether education leads to upward social mobility or not. It addresses the concern that how likely is a person to climb up the social ladder if (s)he receives proper formal education, in comparison to the person who does not receive education. Throughout the research, literacy rate and IQ are used as measures of education. The value of IQ is assumed to represent the amount of time spent in education, as it is suggested by Stuart J Ritchie and Elliot M Tucker-Drob (2018) that IQ is positively correlated with the time spent in education. It analyses the secondary quantitative data available on the literacy rates and social mobility indexes to establish a relationship between education and social mobility. The research starts from macro-level, to establish a general trend by plotting social mobility indexes against literacy rates for twenty geographically stratified countries, and is then directed to micro-level where it discusses, specifically, about the relationship of education and upward social mobility in Pakistan by analysing secondary qualitative data.

**Keywords:-** Education, Social Mobility, Meritocracy.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In a society where education is linked directly to upward social mobility, the stereotypical beliefs of education translating into upward social mobility could be questioned; however, it is difficult to jump to a conclusion due to lack of available evidence. The biggest challenge is to find a suitable measure that quantifies education.

This paper relies on the usage of literacy rate and IQ as measures of education and social mobility index as a measure of upward social mobility, assuming that IQ represents time spent in education (the precedent of which is elaborated in the second last paragraph of literature review), so higher values of IQ correspond to more time spent in education. The biggest limitation of this is the inability of the literacy rate to correspond to secondary and technical/vocational education, as it only means the percentage of people who could read and write. Still, if there is any trend between education and social mobility it is likely to be captured using literacy rate as a measure of education. The use of literacy rates is also justified by the fact that data is collected by the World Bank, hence is reliable, also there is no other measure of education, data on which is readily available. Social mobility - in this context - means the likeliness of individuals to climb up the social hierarchy ladder. The social mobility indexes are taken from World Economic Forum's Global Social Mobility Report and are reliable. The index has a minimum value of 0 and

maximum value of 100; the closer a country is 100 the more likely it is for an individual to be upwardly mobile, and the closer a country is to 0 the less likely it is for an individual to be upwardly mobile.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The definition of education, throughout the research, is that received in schools by official curriculum. However, this approach does not consider vocational training - which can be thought of as a limitation. The use of term socio-economic class is consistent with Crompton (2003)'s suggestion; that is, occupation can be used as a measure of socio-economic class.

There are mixed views in the existing literature about the topic. Paterson and Ianelli (2005) have suggested that instead of allowing social mobility education reinforces class inequalities by ensuring that the economic and social advantages are passed on to the next generations of the middle and upper class. Aldridge (2004) argues that inter-generational mobility is highly unlikely, even if the new generation has more educational qualifications than their ancestors, as value of these qualifications decline overtime. Bowles and Gintis (1976) argue that education, instead of promoting contest mobility, promotes "sponsored mobility"; it is more a test of conformity than ability. Louis Althusser (1968) has regarded education as an "Ideological State Apparatus" that helps elite class to maintain its position in the society by making working class internalise the norms and values of the capitalist society.

World Economic Forum is of the view: "Education is a powerful 'equalizer' of chances. Ensuring that individuals have equal opportunities to access the best schools is essential to reviving social mobility (World Economic Forum, 2020)." Harris (2005b) argues that educational qualifications promise higher level of status in society. Davis and Moore (1945) suggest: social mobility ensures that social hierarchies are dominated by people who are most qualified for the job - that qualification being a result of education, and that education plays an important part in role allocation.

Stuart J Ritchie and Elliot M Tucker-Drob (2018) concluded that IQ is positively correlated with the time spent in education. If this is the case then average IQ scores for each country plotted against the social mobility index must give a graph that is similar to the graph of literacy rates plotted against social mobility index.

The existing literature on the topic has presented multiple views. Some link education to upward social mobility, while some argue that socio-economic class, ethnic background and gender are more important factors that determine whether an individual can climb up the ladder of social hierarchy.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative research methods is used; though, the research is majorly based on secondary quantitative data, aimed to establish a correlation between education and social mobility. Education is quantified, and literacy rates and IQ are used to measure it. Social mobility indexes are then plotted against both of the measures, for each country. A sample of twenty countries is chosen, based on random geographical stratification and opportunity sampling; five countries are selected from each region, the regions are: Asia, Middle East, Europe and North America, and Latin America and Caribbean. The sample is opportunistic in such a way that countries, on which data - for both literacy rate and social mobility index - is not available, are eliminated. The reason for using two different measures of education is to increase the validity of the research; if both of them establish the same trends then it is highly likely that the findings are not merely based on coincidence or statistical manipulation and are a true reflection of the link that I intend to capture - if there is any.

Qualitative data is used to explain the reasons of the trends, specifically for Pakistan. The purpose of research is not only to capture a trend, but also to explain why it exists in context of the society. Secondary qualitative data is used, including interviews of people who managed to escape from the vicious cycle of poverty by being upwardly mobile.

Primary data is not used in the research, as data on literacy rates, social mobility indexes and IQ was already available on internet, compiled by credible organisations such as, World Economic Forum, World Bank and World Population Review, so it is reliable. The data is based on large samples and is collected by the organisations which have a large amount of funds to organise such surveys. It was neither possible nor required for an individual - without funding from any organisation - to collect such data.

### IV. FINDINGS

#### Quantitative Data

As suggested by Figure 1, there is a strong positive correlation between literacy rates and upward social mobility, with a correlation coefficient of 0.838. Though, the data is scattered for countries with literacy rates above 90%. An increase in literacy rate causes an increase in social mobility. It emphasises that education translates into upward social mobility, for countries with literacy rates less than 90%. For countries with literacy rates more than that, there may be other factors which influence - to a greater extent than education - upward social mobility. These factors may include, but are not limited to, gender, socio-economic class and ethnic background.

The findings from Figure 1 presented some potential limitations. Firstly, the sample is not large enough to draw conclusions and generalise the findings. Secondly, the relationship may have resulted as a coincidence, and there may actually be no relation between education and upward social mobility. Therefore, I plotted a graph of IQ against Social Mobility Index, assuming that IQ translates in to time spent in education, for the same countries to cross-check the consistency of the findings. The graph is represented by Figure 2. An increase in IQ, and hence time spent in education, increases social mobility.

A similar trend is obtained from Figure 2. As the IQ increases the Social Mobility Index also increases, reinforcing the findings from Figure 1 that education translates into upward social mobility. Data for the average IQ of Cote d'Ivoire was not available, hence it is not included in Figure 2. It could affect the correlation coefficient but is unlikely to change the general trend. The correlation coefficient for this graph is 0.8071, being similar to that of graph in Figure 1 and hence indicating a close relationship. Though, the trend above 90% literacy rate in Figure 1 is not complimented by Figure 2. This may be due to the presence of extraneous variables.

The biggest limitation of both these graphs is the possibility that this relationship could be the other way around - rather than education being translated into upward social mobility, it could be upward social mobility that could be improving the standards of education. It can not be tested by quantitative data, but secondary qualitative data can provide deeper insight.

#### Qualitative Data

By probing deeper into the cases where people from working class background climbed up the social hierarchy, we can investigate the role of education in upward social mobility. Civil Superior Services (CSS) examination is considered the most competitive examination in Pakistan and one where merit plays an important role to allocate jobs to people, which are characterised by a higher social status. Almost every year, candidates from a working class background - topping the exam - make the headlines of the news. If we can assess the validity of these cases and the role played by the education in making them upwardly mobile, we can conclude that whether education was the independent variable for the relationship established through Figure 1 and Figure 2, or not.

Zohaib Ali, son of a small town car mechanic, passed the CSS examination of 2019 and made it to Pakistan's bureaucracy - being appointed as Assistant Commissioner (Desk, 2020). He lived in Larkana, a marginalised area of rural Sindh, and received his primary and secondary education from there. His father died in 2012, despite this setback Zohaib made it to the civil service of Pakistan. It is quite evident that because of being from a marginalised area, he is unlikely to have any cultural and social capital to have helped him on the way. Hence, he is the perfect example of what meritocracy can achieve. His example also serves as a hope and motivation for other working class

aspirants. Though, it should also be kept into consideration that he was the only one working class student, who was reported on news, among 372 others to have passed the test. However, it could be argued that if the provision a better education system, for the working class, this inequality is likely to end.

Muhammad Bilal, son of a daily wager from Khanewal, secured 85th position out of the 590 candidates that passed CSS in 2018 (Bashir, 2019). He is the first one from his family to have received post-secondary education, which helped him to climb up the ladder of social hierarchy. Having received primary education from a *Madrasah* and matriculation from Government High School, he did MPhil from University of Agriculture, Faisalabad (Bashir, 2019). On an interview with Hum News, Muhammad Bilal said: *“Money doesn’t matter for CSS. There’s nothing like that you had to have so much money or you need to belong to the elite class family. It doesn’t matter you belong to a family of bureaucrats or not. None of my family members is highly educated (Bashir, 2019).”* This serves as an example of inter-generational mobility and proves that education, as anticipated, was the independent factor for Figure 1 and Figure 2.

The limitation of these cases is that there is merely one such case reported each year, and that majority of the candidates who pass the test are from middle or upper class. So, one could argue that instead of allowing mobility, the education system reinforces the inequalities by ensuring that roles of middle and upper class are allocated to their children, and these cases are just anomalies.

## V. CONCLUSION

Figure 1 represents a strong correlation between literacy rate and upward social mobility, which suggest that education and upward social mobility are positively correlated. Figure 2 reinforces the established correlation, proving that the results are not a mere coincidence and the research is free from any sort of statistical manipulation. Therefore, the established trends are true reflection of what is intended to capture and are free from any sort of bias. This, along with analysis of the cases discussed above, concludes that education increases the chance of upward social mobility.

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Table 1

Country	Literacy Rate/ %	IQ	Social Mobility Index
Argentina	99.0	93.0	57.3
Bangladesh	73.0	82.0	40.2
China	95.0	105.0	61.5
Czek Republic	100.0	98.0	74.7
Costa Rica	97.0	89.0	61.6
Cote d'Ivoire	47.0		34.5
Egypt	71.0	81.0	44.8
Ghana	79.0	73.0	45.5
India	69.0	82.0	42.7
Israel	92.0	95.0	68.1
Mexico	95.0	88.0	52.6
Morocco	74.0	84.0	43.7
Pakistan	59.0	84.0	36.7
Saudi Arabia	95.0	84.0	57.1
Slovenia	100.0	96.0	76.4
South Africa	87.0	77.0	41.4
Spain	98.0	98.0	70.0
Tunisia	79.0	83.0	51.7
Turkey	96.0	90.0	51.3
Uruguay	99.0	96.0	67.1

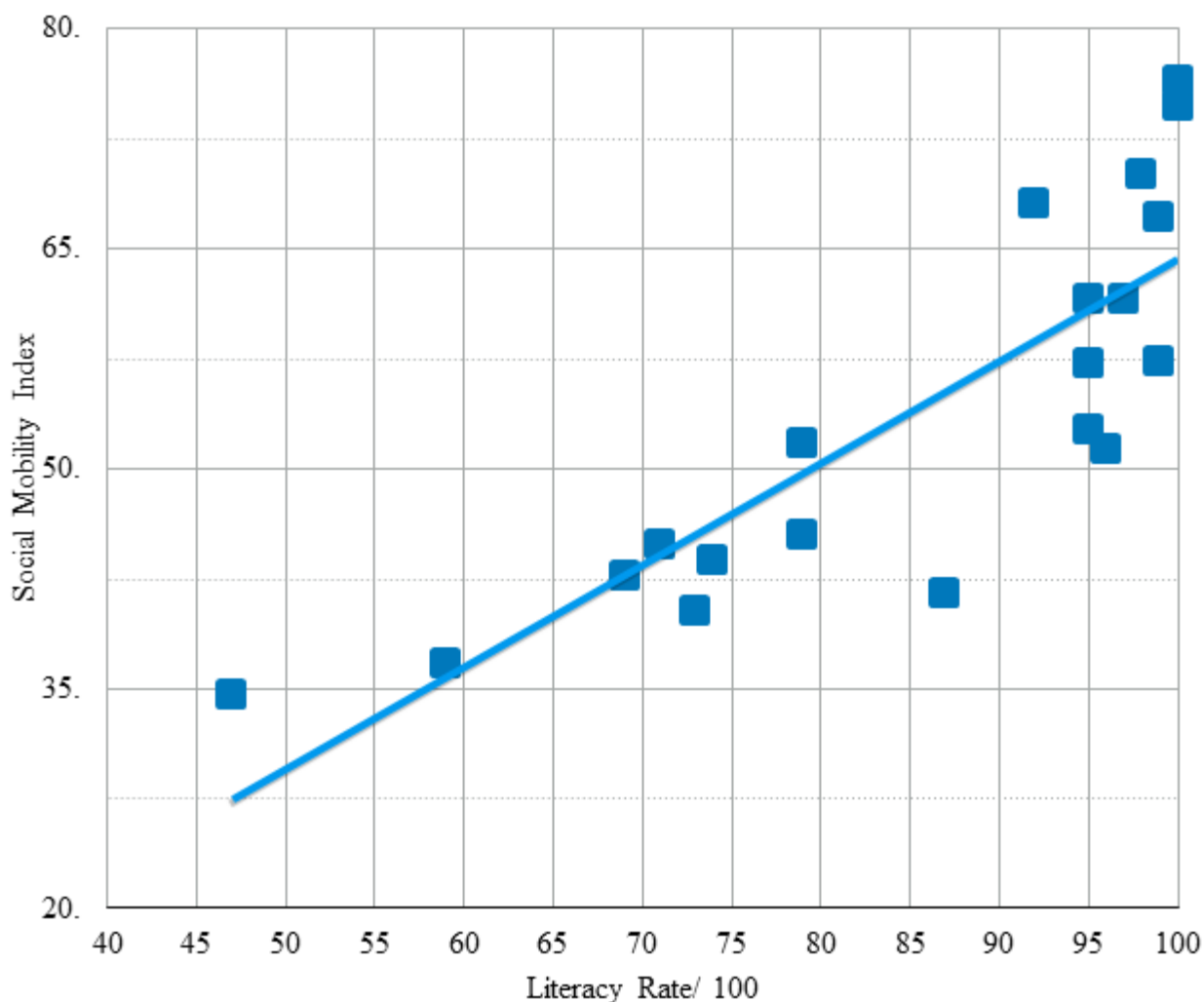


Fig 1

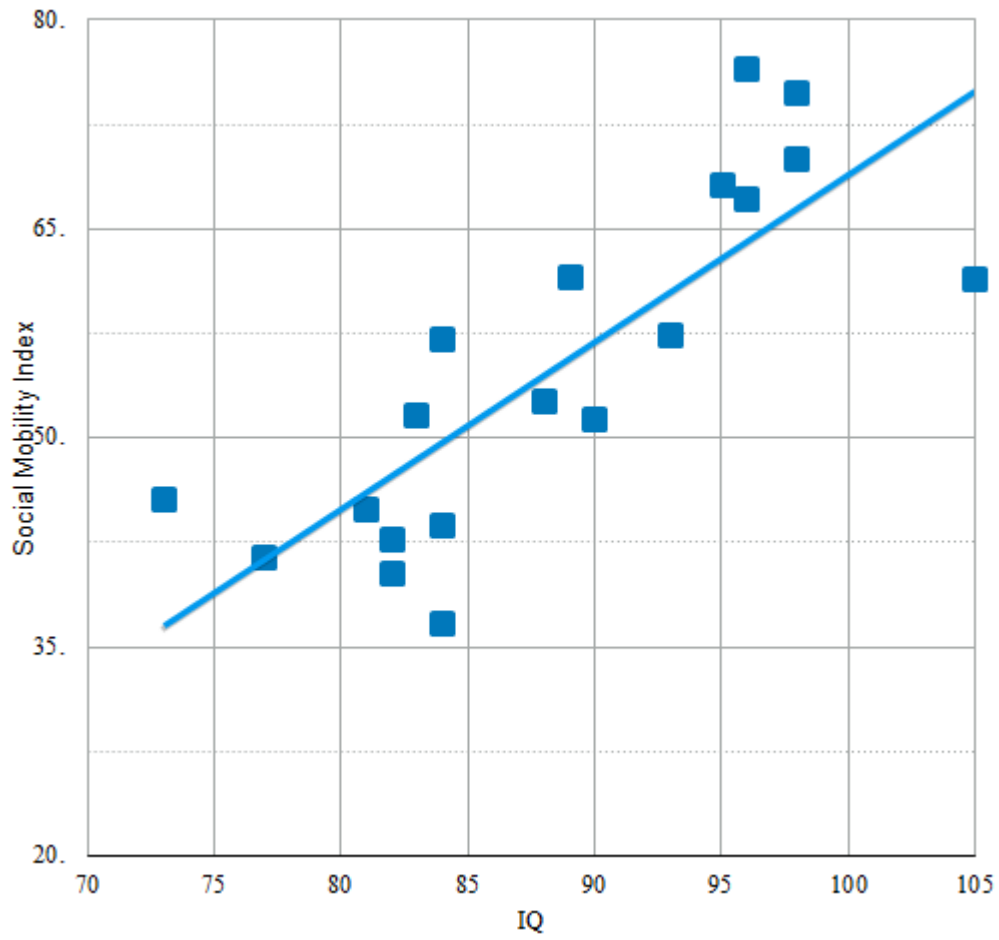


Fig 2