

Educational Inequality and Economic Mobility in Bangladesh: A Socioeconomic Analysis

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Abstract:

Education plays a pivotal role in personal advancement and national economic development, serving as a key driver of social and economic mobility. Although Bangladesh has made notable progress in expanding access to education, significant inequalities persist across geographical regions, gender groups, and socioeconomic classes. These disparities limit access to quality education and constrain upward economic mobility, particularly among marginalized communities. The paper examines the multifaceted relationship between educational inequality and economic mobility in Bangladesh using secondary data and thematic analysis. The findings highlight several crucial determinants such as the rural-urban divide, gender-based disparities, and socioeconomic barriers that continue to impede equitable access to education. These structural challenges perpetuate cycles of poverty, restrict labor market opportunities, and hinder national productivity. The study underscores the urgent need for comprehensive policy reforms, equitable resource distribution, and inclusive educational initiatives to reduce educational disparities and foster a more just and sustainable economic future for Bangladesh.

Keywords: *Education inequality; economic mobility; social stratification; gender disparity; rural-urban divide; human capital theory; social mobility theory*

I. Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a critical catalyst for individual empowerment and national socio-economic development. Education in Bangladesh which is a country with a booming economy and a vibrant social change has remained significant in dictating economic mobility which is the ability of individuals or families to advance economically in the long run. Nevertheless, the problem of disparity in education is one of the hindrances to reaching this potential by a vast number of Bangladeshis. Inequality in education access, quality and outcomes remains one of the major detriments to equality of opportunity, although further converging with socioeconomic disparity and posing a restriction to upward mobility.

Education inequality in Bangladesh is a multifaceted problem because it is characterized by a birthplace location, gender, socioeconomic and financial status, and ethnicity (Khan et al. 2023). One such case is the countryside, which in most instances do not have adequate buildings and learning facilities, less qualified teachers and other resources, as compared with urban centres. High or low levels of literacy, attendance and performance in schools, are some of the factors that constitute such urban-rural disparity. Similarly, the girls and the marginalized communities usually face social and economic disadvantages which restrict their access to education and they are in a vicious cycle of poverty and marginalization.

These inequalities are not only causing individual miseries, but also extend to the economy and the society in general. When portions of the population fail to access high quality education, the output in terms of acquisition of marketable skills is also limited and this translates to low labour productivity and innovation. This limits the overall prospects of economic growth in Bangladesh and augments inequality in incomes (Ullah et al. 2021). Also, the unequal access to education undermines the integrity of society by cultivating a sense of exclusion, and silencing the multiplicity of voices in the process of making economic and political decisions.

The insights related to the impact of inequality in education which affects economic mobility in Bangladesh would thus have been highly important to policy-makers, educationists, and development professionals. These disparities ought to be resolved with dedicated interventions to augment access and quality to education to those at a disadvantage, gender equality and the usefulness of education in the labour market. By such efforts, individuals will be able to be holders of skills and knowledge that will see them free themselves out of poverty, become more active participants in the economy, and also be part of how a country can be built. The main aims of this research are the following:

- a. To examine the associated effects of education inequality on urban and rural Bangladesh on economic mobility by exploring the differences in access to quality education by urban and rural areas, gender, and socioeconomic classes.
- b. To find out the barriers that suffocate access to quality education among disadvantaged population and the role that the barriers play in poverty and poor economic mobility between the economic strata.
- c. To examine the relationship between education inequality and socio-economic stratification, and accent on the implications of labour productivity, innovation, and income distribution.

Moreover, this research provides a scope to question the current education policies and introduce certain improvements or intervention changes, which could help lessen these disparities and suggest policy recommendations, which would help decrease the educational inequalities, improve social mobility and be a part of the overall economic development of Bangladesh.

II. Review of Literatures

It is a universally accepted fact that education is one of the drivers of social development and economic growth. Many researchers have examined the role of education inequality in promoting inequality in the outcomes of the economy. Kaftan et al. (2023) also argue that education is a major catalyst to economic mobility, by way of which people enhance their socio-economic position and, therefore, causes broader development in the country. The educational gaps in Bangladesh continue to exist especially between the urban and rural areas and amongst the different classes of the society-economic classes though the field of accessing education has made tremendous improvements in the region. The implications of such differences in access and quality of education about the prospect of economic mobility are far-reaching, since they often establish a new cycle of poverty and discomfort, and opportunities of upward mobility in social and economic circumstances.

Despite the efforts to make education universal, there are still severe disparities. Literacy rate in Bangladesh is 74.66% with a higher literacy level in the urban areas compared to the rural ones. The following are some of the challenges of rural schools: poor infrastructure, overcrowding in schools, lack of qualified employees to provide quality education. Also, due to the influence of socio-cultural orientation, like early marriages and gender biases, there is an

overrepresentation of girls in educational institutions, where a larger number of female students are likely to drop out of school.

Intergenerational mobility is the explanation that gives individuals the way to have a better socio-economic status when compared to the one they had before their parents. As stated by Murshed & Uddin, (2024), in Bangladesh, through its research, it has been found that although a certain number of improvements have been recorded in terms of absolute intergenerational educational mobility, relative mobility levels are quite low. A nationally representative study based on data collected in a household survey revealed that there had been declining intergenerational education mobility from 2005 to 2016, indicating that the growth of education was not equally conducive to all social strata. This blight accentuates the continuance of instructional disparities and how they prompt labour mobility.

There is a direct economic implication to educational inequalities. This is because, due to the lack of access to good education, such people can only work in informal sectors of the economy that pay low wages and have no future in terms of careers. This phenomenon of absenteeism of the upwardly mobile lowers income disparities and stagnation. Moreover, according to the Global Social Mobility Report 2020, Bangladesh was in position 78 (out of 82) in terms of the economic mobility blockings despite economic growth.

Masum, (2025), the government of Bangladesh has established several policies to curb the situation of educational inequalities, which include the provision of free primary education and the distribution of stipends to female students. Nonetheless, the implementation of such initiatives has been hampered by the inefficiencies in terms of inadequate funding of the initiatives, political instability, among others. As an example, the budgetary allocation to the education sector is very low (far from what is recommended), hence the quality of education offered. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have also contributed a lot in the event of reducing educational inequalities. Targeted programs that address the needs of poor kids, for example Underprivileged Children's Educational Programme (UCEP), have offered vocational training and educational opportunities to underprivileged sections, which proves that even when it comes to those who have been marginalized, targeted measures help.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

a. Theory of Human Capital

One theory that explains that any capital investment in education enhances the skills and knowledge of an individual, making him/her a better person in terms of productivity and economic value, is the Human Capital Theory. Education in the Bangladesh context is a starting point in determining how an individual can advance his or her economic status since it prepares an individual with the skills needed to get a better-paid job as well as social mobility. But due to the inequality in education, such as rural-urban disparities, gender differences, and socio-economic differences, inequality arises in the development of human capital. Lack of access to quality education among the marginalized groups implies that most people in the population lack skills and therefore cannot even compete for the better-paying jobs (Germain, 2022). Such insufficient investment in human resources also promotes non-progressive social mobility, wherein those with poor backgrounds can hardly escape poverty. Thus, the theory points to the significance of equal access to quality education as a means of empowering people to use their skills to achieve economic success and emphasises the role of education inequality in perpetuating the social and economic gaps.



Fig. 1: Human Capital Theory
(Source: Self-created)

Social Mobility Theory

Social Mobility Theory is concerned about the capability of people to either climb down or up the ladder in terms of socio-economic status, depending on their merits, including educational qualifications. Education in Bangladesh is regarded as the greatest instrument of social mobility. Nevertheless, there are structural factors that block access to upward mobility by most of the population, especially those at the rural level or low-income population, due to unequal distribution of educational resources. This theory observes that educational inequality limits the opportunities of such individuals to surpass their predetermined socioeconomic situation to initiate a poverty cycle (Kirkbride et al. 2024). The theory shows that the poor will have a less likely opportunity to seek higher levels of income due to the disparity in access to high quality education, thereby contributing to the perpetuation of inequality which is economic stratification. It is among the structures that will be useful in the description of how systematic inequalities placed in the education system constrain the general opportunities of economic mobility in Bangladesh, perpetuates socio-economic inequalities between the generations.

III. Research Methods

The proposed study on the impact of education inequality on economic mobility in Bangladesh will adopt the inductive method because it relies on the philosophy of interpretivism. The thematic analysis of secondary data will be incorporated into the study in a more precise exploratory research strategy with a complicated correlation between education disparity and economic mobility. The purposeful sampling will also be applied to ensure that all the selected data is relevant and representative of the issues that ought to be taken care of.

3.1 Inductive Approach

It uses an inductive research method since it will allow us to establish new theories and discoveries, and not to test the theories that have already been established. It is particularly useful where the investigator attempts to research an under-studied phenomenon or de-pack a very complex phenomenon such as the influence of education inequality on the economic mobility of the Bangladesh population (Lu et al. 2025). The research shall attempt to identify patterns, themes and relationships developing out of the data, through the inductive method that may serve to explain why education disparities characterize economic performance of individuals.

The same will make the research resourceful and simple to adjust to the data as it unfolds enabling the research to explore the issue deep into it.

3.2 Interpretivism Philosophy

The interpretivist philosophy is pertinent (Sanchez et al. 2023). It highlights how a person should be able to understand the social world, in light of the subject of matter. Indeterminate spirit of thoughts and ideas. An interpretivist approach, in the subject of such research, will aid in understanding the perception of the individuals and societies in Bangladesh and how the issue of education inequality is perceived and experienced within the populations of these countries and how that perception shapes their economic mobility. Interpretivism opposes the assumption that such objective, quantifiable measures are sufficient to explain human behaviour, especially in complicated social systems (Irshaidat, 2022). Emphasis was thus made in the study to get an insight into how those afflicted with educational disparity experience the world and what they have come to know and associate their experiences with. The research will be able to give more insightful and more concerned findings regarding the relationship between education inequality and economic mobility because it will focus on the subjective reality of the individuals.

3.4 Exploratory Research Design

An exploratory design was conducted to examine the phenomenon of education inequality and its effect on economic mobility in Bangladesh (Bhuiya et al. 2024). The nature of the topic is complicated and not necessarily well-understood or researched within the local environment; therefore, the research should be explorative to obtain preliminary knowledge and hypothesise about this phenomenon to conduct further study. The design will enable the researcher to investigate several aspects of the problem and study socio-economic differences, regional, and gender differentiation in the accessibility to education (Khalikova et al. 2021). Moreover, exploratory research is not rigid but accommodative in that adjustments and improvements are easy to implement whenever new information comes to the foreground. Future research efforts can also be based on conclusions that were reached due to this exploratory phase.

3.5 Secondary methods of Data Collection

The present study is based on the secondary way of data collection, which includes analysing existing data sets to establish the connection between inequality in education and economic mobility in Bangladesh. Government reports, national surveys, academic articles or reports by not-for-profit organisations (NGOs), specialising in education and economic mobility, are possible sources of secondary data (Vaicurgis et al. 2024). Such secondary data is really helpful when the collection of primary data is not tenable because of time or financial constraints. This provides us an idea of the patterns and trends of educational access, quality and outcomes in Bangladesh and how they relate to economic mobility. It also presents historical insights that can provide background implications to the prevailing dispensation of education inequality.

3.6 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis shall enable the researcher to closely explore the secondary information gathered in the study, and group the data according to topics that are pertinent to the area of study, which is education inequality and economic mobility. This approach assisted in identifying possible common issues or stories regarding the obstacles to education, the socio-economic consequences of educational inequality, which lead to the restriction of economic mobility (Gaidelys et al. 2022). Thematic analysis is specifically appropriate in exploratory research since it gives flexibility in determining anticipated and unanticipated themes that arise regarding the data.

The analysis started with the familiarisation process of data, a generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining themes and at the end writing of final analysis.

3.7 Purposeful Sampling

The selected secondary data constitute purposeful sampling to reflect on the research questions in the best aspect (Cash et al. 2022). In this sampling method, one selects the sources of data that, when used, will yield a lot of material that is relevant to the topic under investigation. In this study, the researcher paid attention to the information on important sources, i.e., government education reports, demographic surveys, and scholarly works, which study the combination of education inequality and economic mobility in Bangladesh. Purposeful sampling has the difference that the data chosen is no longer random, but the one chosen according to a certain strategy that leads to a thorough understanding of specific elements of a research question. As an example, statistics related to rural-urban gaps in education or education barriers against the background of gender were given priority. The practice assisted in making the research appropriately capture information that is most relevant in gaining insights into the role of education inequality in economic mobility.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Access to Quality Education

Quality education is one of the predictors of economic mobility of people in Bangladesh. Good education is determinant of future economic prospects (Zheng et al. 2024). Most cities possess superior infrastructure, qualified educators, and learning facilities, whereas rural schools face the danger of neglect. Moreover, children who are raised in families that are challenged economically may not be availed of extra-curricular activities or even the possibility of hiring the services of a private tutor, which makes it even more difficult to achieve academic excellence.

The inequality in access to education introduces an inequality in education opportunities, which brings about a wide gap in skills acquisition in students (Mahony, 2022). Due to this fact, children who are born in more well-off families and who are able to afford better educational aids, have a higher chance to perform better at school and have a greater selection of well-paid jobs. Quite to the contrary, children belonging to disadvantaged groups cannot escape poverty due to the lack of a sufficient education level. The consequences of the inability to access education, consequently, replicate economic disparities and the impediment of social mobility.

4.2 Social Class and Educational Attainment

The intersection of the social stratum and education degree play a huge role in determining the economical mobility in Bangladesh. Individuals belonging to higher socioeconomic positions possess a superior education level that is directly connected to the academic achievements of the children (Yan & Gai, 2022). This creates a vicious circle where the children of wealthy parents tend to attend the best schools where they get extra education and stand a better opportunity of acquiring higher education in their country and abroad.

On the other hand, low-income families have been known to interfere with the education process not only in the primary and secondary education programs, but even secondary education. This is also the case because of economic needs, high dropout rates are also an order of the day whereby in rural and poor urban areas, children are forced into the labor market at a very young age in an attempt to augment the family earnings. Due to the low education base, the

children will not have skills to venture into well-paying jobs, and they are anthropologically entrenched in their current position.

Such educational disparity based on the social strata results in extended economic disparity where there is increasing gap between the wealthy and the impoverished (Du et al. 2022). It promotes the current state of social stratification, with the lower classes unable to access most opportunities and keeps the poverty chain moving. In order to end this trend, we need to launch certain educational programs and policies that should decrease the number of dropouts, improve the performance of the schools that are located in less developed districts, and support the students who represent the disadvantaged demographics.

4.3 Gender Disparities in Education

Gender inequality in education is a prerequisite to economic mobility to many people, especially women living in rural and conservative societies in Bangladesh. Regardless of gains in the increased female rates in both primary and tertiary school enrolment, women continue to encounter numerous barriers to quality education when compared to their male counterparts. There are cultural norms and gender biases, wherein the level of education, particularly the female students, may be prioritised compared to that of girls, and attendance rate and drop-out rates are often much higher among girls than among boys.

Most girls are expected to contribute to domestic work, take care of younger siblings or marry, and as such, they miss some important moments of their education (Musizvingoza et al. 2022). This systematic devaluation of female education has a direct effect on their gettable jobs in the future. Lack of proper education and development of skills may restrain women from accessible engagements that are poorly paid or are of an informal, or even unpaid, low socio-economic nature, thus limiting women in possessing economic freedom or uplifting the socio-economic status of their families.

Moreover, the women who are successful enough to achieve higher education often face gender-based discrimination in the job market, where they receive low earnings, and chances of occupying higher ranks compared to their male counterparts. To narrow these disparities between the two sexes, investments have to be made in activities that appeal to the female children such as providing them with scholarships and learning environments that are conducive and secure, besides launching awareness campaigns that can sensitize people that female education is worth protecting. These would assist in emancipating women and enable them to develop superior financial chances and, therefore, their general economic mobility.

4.4 Educational Policy and Role of Government

Educational inequality in Bangladesh persists despite government efforts to expand primary education and improve literacy. Current policies have not fully addressed disparities in educational quality, particularly between urban and rural areas, leaving marginalized and low-income groups at a disadvantage. These challenges are intensified by underinvestment in public education, inadequate teacher training, outdated curricula, and weak institutional enforcement of policies (Yu et al., 2024).

Limited inclusive measures such as financial support for poor families and dropout-prevention programs further restrict access for disadvantaged students. To promote a more equitable system, the government must enhance policy implementation, increase funding for underserved schools, ensure equitable resource distribution, and invest in teacher development. Public-private partnerships, scholarships, and vocational training can also support low-income

learners. Strengthened and targeted interventions will help Bangladesh move toward an education system that provides fair opportunities for all children.

4.5 Discussion

The contribution of educational inequality to the economic mobility in Bangladesh is a complex issue that turns out to be highly encircled with the availability of quality education, social class, gender disparity and government policies. Based on the reported high-quality education, it is a determinant factor of upward response in the economy. The chances of cities possessing good educational infrastructure are higher, and the rural and disadvantaged areas possess dreadful facilities, few professional instructors, and no means of access to educational services (Cao et al. 2023). This high contrast limits the opportunities of the residents of the rural or poor economically neighbourhoods, which, in its turn, helps in the further spread of poverty and creates the shortage of the social ladder.

It is worsened by the social class-educational attainment relationship. Children of affluent families also have resources at their disposal and a tutor and quality education, therefore, they can take advantage of the better opportunities in the job market (Mahmud, 2021). In low-income families, children on the other hand, have more elements to hurdle as they might be required to work and earn their family money or leave school at a tender age, thereby having little to indulge themselves in. This also strengthens inequality that already exists in the economy and creates a cycle that is difficult to break without an economic system change.

A gender disparity has also been an issue of significant concern (Su et al. 2022). Though this has been seen to be slightly better, female children, especially the rural ones, are left to be handled by culture and family traditions which hold back their economic attachment to education. Arranged marriage at very tender ages and gender bias demands tend to deny the female gender the right to higher education levels as well as to pursue professional employment lines and this further curtails her economic potential.

Finally, despite the efforts of the government of Bangladesh to improve education, the lack of specific policies and investments in the rural areas continues to deteriorate the inequity of education (Gehl Sampath, 2021). The governments can do more to ensure that there is a balanced education system which includes investing in infrastructure, provision of scholarships as well as encouraging gender equality in education. These concerted efforts, however, will be the only way that Bangladesh will be able to achieve its objective of making education ultimately a means of economic mobility in an actual sense.

V. Conclusion

In a nutshell, the impacts of inequality in education on economic mobility in Bangladesh are severe in relation to social and economic development of the nation. Unequal access to good education in urban and rural areas and socio-economic aspects have not only increased poverty but it has also curtailed further upward mobility opportunities. The disparities in distribution of the resources to different regions have severe effects on the lives of the children residing in the poorer areas, and having more opportunities to attend the schools of lesser funding, without competent educators, or enough teaching resources. This decreases their likelihood of learning skills which are quantifiable to earn wages in better paying jobs, therefore depriving them of the possibility of being able to attain a high socio-economic status.

The interplay of social status and education level is a self-sustaining power of inequality since the children of wealthier families receive a superior degree of education that gives them the

benefit of economic success. Conversely, low-income household children will drop out of school at an early age due to economic demands forcing them, and this denies them an opportunity to have a good career thereby perpetuating low living standards in disadvantaged societies.

The aspect of gender inequities also matters in the limitation of economic mobility. Cultural norms surrounding gender continue to serve as an impeding factor to girls acquiring education particularly in the rural set ups although efforts have been made to ensure that girls increase their enrolment in education. The related child marriages and the demand that women prioritize the home duties above all other academic and professional affairs result in their diminishing potential of being economically self-reliant.

In conclusion, although the Government of Bangladesh has implemented notable reforms in the education sector, further policy innovation and sustained investment are urgently required, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Strengthening educational infrastructure, providing long-term financial support for children from low-income families, and promoting gender equity should remain central priorities. These measures will not only improve access and quality but also reinforce education as a catalyst for social transformation. With comprehensive and inclusive policy initiatives, Bangladesh can leverage education to reduce inequality, promote upward economic mobility, and advance long-term sustainable development.

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