



## Social Inequality in Accessing Tertiary Level Education- A Bane to the Present Generation

*Ms Sumitra Gahan<sup>1\*</sup>, Prof. Mumtaz Begum<sup>\*\*2</sup>*

<sup>1\*</sup>Ph.D. Research Scholar, School of Education, Pondicherry University

<sup>2\*\*</sup>Professor, School of Education, Pondicherry University

\* Mail Id: [sumitragahan85@gmail.com](mailto:sumitragahan85@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT:

Tertiary education is frequently viewed as a route to professional achievement, social mobility, and personal improvement. It is crucial in determining a person's possibilities for the future. But there are many obstacles standing in the way of those from underprivileged backgrounds, making the path to higher education far from egalitarian. Financial hurdles, differences in educational preparedness, and structural prejudices are only a few of the difficulties that this phenomenon of social inequality entails. Thus, social inequality in access to higher education refers to the unequal chances that exist among various socioeconomic classes to pursue and receive a Higher Education Degree. The causes of social inequality include financial hurdles, differences in educational preparedness, and structural prejudices are only a few of the difficulties that this phenomenon of social inequality entails. Thus, social inequality in access to higher education refers to the unequal chances that exist among various socioeconomic classes to pursue and receive a Higher Education Degree. The causes of social inequality include financial constraints, differences in stereotyping, a lack of knowledge of social and cultural capital, and restrictions based on language and culture.

**Key Words:** Social inequality, Higher education, Barriers, Upward Mobility, Social Progress.

### Introduction

Social inequality in accessing higher education is a pressing issue that reflects the uneven distribution of educational opportunities among the different social groups accessing the globe. Higher education/Tertiary Level Education, often seen as a pathway to personal growth, socioeconomic mobility, and professional success, is a pivotal factor in shaping an individual's future prospects. However, the journey to higher education is far from equitable, with numerous barriers obstructing the aspirations of individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. This phenomenon of social inequality encompasses a range of challenges, including financial barriers, disparities in educational preparation, and structural biases, all of which collectively contribute to an unequal educational landscape. In this complex landscape, various factors intersect to create a gap in accessing higher education. Economic disparities, unequal access to quality primary and secondary education, and systemic biases all play a role in perpetuating the cycle of inequality. This extends beyond the confines of individual aspirations, affecting societal progress as a whole. When segments of the population are systematically denied the opportunity to access higher education, the potential for innovation, diverse perspectives, and social mobility is stifled.

This paper delves into the multifaceted nature of social inequality in accessing higher education. We can better understand how urgent it is to solve this issue by looking at the causes of these gaps, the systems that keep them going, and the possible repercussions for both people and society. Moreover, exploring strategies and policies aimed at dismantling barriers and promoting equitable access is essential for fostering a more inclusive and just educational landscape. By acknowledging and confronting these challenges, society can work towards upward mobility.

### Studies Around the Globe

**Simovicova, Simona & Vrbancikova, Natasa (2022)** Encompassed the effects of Social, economic, and gender inequality on economic development in European Union Member Nations. The purpose of this article is to investigate the relationship between the three categories of social inequality and to identify the key elements that boost the prosperity of the nations and regions of the European Union. The article investigates the connections between economic, gender, and social inequality in addition to concentrating on a specific form of inequality. It provides insights into how inequality affects society and a nation's prosperity.

**Kopycka, Katarzyna (2020)** Studied the System reform, increased higher education, and socioeconomic inequalities. Effects of social origin on tertiary education completion in Poland for birth cohorts 1960 to 1988. Utilizing Information from the Polish General Socioeconomic Survey, the author examines how Socioeconomic disparity evolved within Poland's H.E system as it expanded after 1990. This research exposes the micro-level factors that underpin the inequality dynamic by focusing on the unique instance of a former communist nation where H.E development has been extremely rapid and

accomplished mostly through marketization. Last but not least, this article offers proof that underprivileged strata are redirected into second-tier, lower-prestige lines with the effectively maintained inequality theory.

**Madan, Amman (2020)** Wrote about the Enrolments in Higher Education by Caste and Class Conceptualising Social Inequality: Problems and Solutions. Data from the National Sample Survey 2014 are used to examine the nature of class disparity in addition to caste inequality, (which appears to be worse among the more educated groups, according to the caste breakdown of different socioeconomic classes). To comprehend the true roles of caste and class in educational and social inequalities, Sub-Jati networks must be conceptualized and experimentally explored. Caste and class must be regarded as generating processes.

**Luo, Yan et al., (2018)** Wrote on “Higher education expansion and inequality in China: How likely are impoverished Chinese students to succeed?” This article evaluates how well-maintained inequality theory holds up in the context of China. This study elaborates on the reasons and factors behind the growth of higher education over the last 20 years and the effects this has had on the system using data from the 2012 Chinese College Students Survey. The results demonstrate that the growth of Chinese H.E. has not succeeded in reducing inequality in China, especially in terms of giving students from low socioeconomic status access to prominent Chinese Universities and assisting them high-paying employment.

**Morely, Louise et al., (2009)** Studied the “widening participation in higher education in Ghana and Tanzania: Creating an Equity Scorecard,” which was supported by the ESRC & DFID. Widening involvement in higher education raises the question of whether it will promote democratization or differentiation. Despite rising participation rate world-wise, little sociocultural theory or research has been done on how disparate institutions of inequality interact in the developing world. Utilizing statistical information and personal history interviews with students at two public universities and two private institutions, the author examine the involvement of the individuals in Higher Education. It focuses on the interactions between gender and socioeconomic position and how these affect whether or not people can enrol in H.E. According to research so far, opportunity structures mirror societal inequalities.

**Naidoo, Rajani (2004)** Conducted a study titled Bourdieu on the connection between higher education, inequality, and society: fields and institutional strategy. This article focuses on the idea which has got somewhat less consideration in the Sociological aspect of education than Bourdieu’s other ideas, such as cultural capital and habitus. The concept is described to demonstrate Bourdieu’s view of higher education as a system made up of cognitive and structural processes that moderate sociopolitical and economic pressures while also repeating the core ideas of social stratification. The author draws the conclusion that Bourdieu’s theory may be seen to have transcended more crude conceptions of universities as closed systems divorced from the sociopolitical complex or as simple representation of external power relations. It draws insights from the South African case study and Bourdieu’s empirical research. The extent to which Bourdieu’s theory can provide a more in-depth analysis of the link between higher education and society, however, has been constrained by the rigid relational structure of his framework and his definition of the “arbitrary”

---

## Social Inequality Factors

Social inequality in accessing higher education refers to the unequal opportunities that exist among different social groups when it comes to pursuing and obtaining a Higher Education Degree. The disparities can manifest in various ways and at different stages of the educational process, from primary education, crossing the secondary level, and to higher education. Some of the key aspects of social inequality in accessing higher education include:

- 1. Financial Barriers:** Higher education often comes with significant costs, including tuition fees, textbooks, housing, and other related expenses. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds might struggle to afford these costs, leading to a situation where only those with financial means can access higher education. People from underprivileged origins could find it difficult to escape their dire financial situations as a result, creating a vicious circle of inequity.
- 2. Educational Preparation- Quality Means:** Unequal access to quality primary and secondary education can affect students’ readiness for higher education. Students from underprivileged areas may attend schools with fewer resources, experienced teachers, and advanced curricula. Because of this, they might not have been as academically prepared as their more privileged peers, making it harder to gain admission to higher education institutions.
- 3. Less Awareness about Cultural and Social Capital:** Students from families with a history of higher education are more likely to have access to valuable cultural and social capital, such as knowledge about the application process, networking opportunities, and exposure to academic environments. This gives them an advantage in navigating the complexities of applying to and succeeding in higher education, whereas disadvantaged groups have less awareness.
- 4. Geographic Disparities:** Access to higher education can also be affected by geographical location. Students in rural or remote areas might have limited access to educational resources, institutions, and infrastructure, making it more difficult for them to pursue higher education.
- 5. Affirmative Action and Diversity Policies:** In some cases, policies designed to promote diversity and inclusion can also lead to debates about social inequality. Increased participation of historically marginalized groups in higher education is one goal of affirmative action legislation, for instance. However, these policies can be contentious and can sometimes be perceived as favoring certain groups over others.
- 6. Stereotyping and Bias:** Discrimination, bias, and stereotypes can impact individuals’ perceptions of their own abilities and potential. This can lead to self-doubt and discourage individuals from under represented groups from pursuing higher education.
- 7. Language and Cultural Barriers:** Students from non-dominant language backgrounds face language and cultural barriers that hinder their access to higher education. These barriers can affect their performance on standardized tests and other admission requirements.

---

Addressing social inequality in higher education requires a multi-phased approach including improvements in primary and secondary education quality, financial aid scholarship programs, mentorship and support networks, and efforts to raise awareness and combat biases within educational systems.

---

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the issue of social inequality in accessing higher education is a deeply entrenched challenge that demands urgent attention and comprehensive solutions. The inequalities that persist in this realm reflect the progress of individuals, communities, and society as a whole. As long as financial barriers, educational inequalities, and biases persist, we are depriving ourselves of the innovative ideas, talents, and skills that could drive positive change and development. Addressing social inequality in accessing higher education requires a collective effort. Governments, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) educational institutions, policymakers, and civil society must collaborate to quality primary and secondary education, expanding scholarship and financial programs, offering mentorship and guidance, and challenging discriminatory practices are crucial steps towards dismantling the barriers that hinder progress.

Furthermore, fostering a culture of inclusivity and diversity within educational institutions can create an environment where individuals from all walks of life feel valued and empowered. By embracing differences and ensuring that representation reflects society's diversity, we can begin to counteract the deep-seated biases that perpetuate inequality. Ultimately, addressing social inequality in accessing higher education is not just a matter of fairness; it is an investment in the future. When we remove barriers and create pathways for everyone to pursue higher education, we unlock untapped potential and contribute to a more just and prosperous.

## **References:**

---

<https://www.proquest.com/index?parentSessionId=iD5iXnxSjYhxNNCTpP%2BmVjCcxo8yXdA0EyMPt414AYw%3D>

[https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as\\_sdt=0%2C5&q=social+inequality+in+higher+education&oq=](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=social+inequality+in+higher+education&oq=)

<https://eric.ed.gov/?q=impact+of+e+learning>

<https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/simple-search?query=social+inequality+in+accessing+higher+education&go=>