

Determining Factors of Educational Opportunities: Reflections on Intergenerational Educational Mobility

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Abstract

This article examines the dynamics of intergenerational educational mobility by analyzing the impact of parents' educational levels on the educational achievements of their children. Through a review of the last twenty years of related literature, the study confirms a strong positive correlation between the educational levels of parents and their offspring. It emphasizes how parental education is a critical factor in breaking poverty cycles and improving social mobility, especially in socioeconomically disadvantaged families. The interaction between parental education and the educational outcomes of children and adolescents is complex, incorporating socioeconomic and demographic factors, educational policies, as well as cultural capital and neighborhood effects. The findings underline the need for multifaceted public policy interventions that promote educational equity and support equal opportunities, aiming to enhance intergenerational mobility and foster a just society. The study offers valuable perspectives focusing on the importance of addressing interconnected variables that contribute to persistent educational disparities and hinder social progress.

Keywords: *Intergenerational Educational Mobility, Educational Achievement, Poverty Cycles, Educational Equity, Cultural Capital, Neighborhood Effects, Educational Disparities, Public Policy.*

INTRODUCTION

Intergenerational educational mobility refers to the relationship between the educational level of parents and the educational level achieved by their sons and daughters (Black & Devereux, 2011). This concept is essential for understanding the intergenerational transfer of socioeconomic advantages and disadvantages (Blanden, 2013).

Intergenerational educational mobility is a sociological phenomenon that has received considerable attention from researchers in recent decades due to its importance in understanding the transmission of socioeconomic advantages and disadvantages from one generation to another (Blanden, 2013). One of the fundamental aspects of this phenomenon is the influence of parental education on the educational future of their children. The theory of intergenerational educational mobility posits that there is a positive correlation between the educational level of parents and the educational level attained by their sons and daughters (Black & Devereux, 2011).

The available literature provides strong empirical evidence of this correlation. For example, a follow-up study by Hertz et al. (2007) found that children of parents with higher educational levels were more likely to achieve a higher educational level compared to children of parents with lower educational levels. This finding reinforces the idea that parental education can be a significant factor in determining the educational fate of their children. According to this study, the influence of parental education on the education of their children is a crucial aspect to consider.

Furthermore, Corak (2006) stated that intergenerational educational mobility is a crucial indicator of equal opportunities in society. According to Corak (2006), societies with higher intergenerational educational mobility tend to be more egalitarian, as they allow individuals to overcome inherited socioeconomic disadvantages

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through education. This argument provides a theoretical basis for examining intergenerational educational mobility.

However, the connection between parental education and the educational future of their children is complicated and can be influenced by various factors, such as socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, as well as educational policies (Blanden & Machin, 2004). Therefore, it is essential to conduct more comprehensive analyses to understand this relationship more precisely.

In this study, the impact of parental upbringing on the educational future of their children will be analyzed, aiming to gain a more detailed understanding of educational mobility between generations. Specifically, the study will investigate how disparities in parental education can influence the educational opportunities of their children and how these differences can contribute to the persistence of socioeconomic inequalities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Human Capital, Cultural Reproduction, and Neighborhood Effect

The human capital theory, proposed by Becker (1993), posits that parents with higher education can provide their children with a more enriching and stimulating learning environment. This theory is based on the premise that education is an investment that generates returns throughout an individual's life. Therefore, parents with a high educational level are more likely to recognize the value of education and provide their children with the tools and opportunities necessary to obtain a quality education.

Meanwhile, the theory of cultural reproduction, articulated by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), suggests that parents with higher education can transmit to their children skills and attitudes that facilitate their access to higher education. It involves not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the internalization of behaviors, attitudes, and values valued in the educational system.

The theory of neighborhood effect, proposed by Wilson (1987), suggests that the educational level of parents can influence their children's education through the socioeconomic environment in which they live. In environments with high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage, children and adolescents may face significant barriers to accessing quality education.

It is essential to recognize that these theories are not mutually exclusive but provide different mechanisms through which parental education can influence the educational destiny of their children. Combining these theoretical approaches enriches the understanding of intergenerational educational mobility.

Interaction of Contextual Factors, Intergenerational Educational Mobility, and Educational Policies

The relationship between parental education and the educational destiny of their children is complex and multifaceted, influenced by a variety of factors. In addition to the theories of human capital, cultural reproduction, and neighborhood effect, it is essential to consider contextual factors such as educational policies and the socioeconomic characteristics of the family and neighborhood environment to fully understand this relationship.

Intergenerational educational mobility plays a fundamental role in contemporary social and economic dynamics. Understanding these theories and contextual factors provides a solid foundation for exploring the complex relationship between parental education and the educational destiny of their children, and highlights the importance of addressing educational inequalities from a comprehensive perspective.

On the other hand, the neighborhood effect theory, proposed by Wilson (1987), postulates that the educational level of parents can influence the education of their children through the socioeconomic environment in which they live. In neighborhoods with high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage, children and adolescents may face significant barriers to accessing quality education.

In addition to the mentioned theories, it is vital to consider educational policies and socioeconomic characteristics that impact intergenerational educational mobility.

Educational policies, such as the implementation of scholarship programs or the improvement of educational quality in disadvantaged schools, play a crucial role in promoting equal educational opportunities (OECD, 2010).

Factors such as family income, the employment level of parents, and the type of neighborhood in which the family lives can influence children's ability to access quality education (Duncan, Morris & Rodrigues, 2011).

The literature has shown that the level of education of parents can influence the educational aspirations of their children (Davis-Kean, 2005). Parents with higher education tend to have higher expectations for their children's education, which can motivate the latter to seek a higher level of education. Conversely, parents with lower levels of education may face difficulties in providing the support and resources necessary for their children to achieve high levels of education (Davis-Kean, 2005).

Furthermore, the educational level of parents can influence the skills and attitudes of children towards education. According to the theory of cultural reproduction, parents with higher education can transmit skills and attitudes valued in the educational system, thus facilitating their children's access to higher education (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

Dalle et al. (2020) point out that social trajectories, both upward and downward, are significantly shaped by the residential environments in which individuals operate. Thus, considering the residential area as a space for socialization becomes relevant as it is a setting where social connections are established, different forms of socialization are encouraged, and the ability to capitalize on available capitals and resources is acquired.

The socioeconomic environment in which the family lives can have a significant impact on the education of their children. According to the neighborhood effect theory (Wilson, 1987), children and adolescents growing up in neighborhoods with high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage may face significant barriers to accessing quality education. These environments can limit access to educational resources, expose children and adolescents to stress factors such as violence and insecurity, and reinforce inequalities in the quality of schools across different neighborhoods.

The relationship between parental education and the educational destiny of their children is complex and influenced by a series of factors. Although the theories of human capital, cultural reproduction, and neighborhood effect provide a solid basis for understanding this relationship, it is essential to consider that these mechanisms interact and are mediated by various contextual factors, such as educational policies and the socioeconomic characteristics of the family and neighborhood environments.

Relevant literature emphasizes the importance of parents' educational levels as significant determinants in the educational achievements and opportunities of their children (Duncan, Morris, & Rodríguez, 2011). This phenomenon highlights the interaction between economic and cultural factors that shape educational trajectories and the possibilities of social mobility for future generations.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2010) emphasizes equity in education as a crucial factor for overcoming socioeconomic barriers, pointing towards the need for inclusive educational policies that allow all individuals, regardless of their background, to access quality learning opportunities. In this context, familial cultural capital emerges as an essential resource that complements formal education and enhances the academic development of young people (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

A comprehensive understanding of these factors is fundamental to addressing educational inequalities and promoting intergenerational educational mobility.

Additionally, the neighborhood effect theory (Wilson, 1987) introduces a spatial dimension in the analysis of educational mobility, arguing that the socioeconomic environment in which children and adolescents develop decisively influences their access to educational resources and, consequently, their academic achievements. These theoretical perspectives suggest a multidimensional approach to understanding and addressing

educational inequalities, highlighting the interdependence between the socioeconomic context, cultural capital, and public policies.

The convergence of these factors highlights the complexity of the challenge that society as a whole faces in ensuring intergenerational educational mobility. The evidence points to the need for implementing multifactorial public policies that not only focus on improving the quality of education but also on creating living conditions that favor the full development of all citizens from the early stages of life.

Therefore, it is an equalizing factor because it reflects the opportunity for children and adolescents to obtain a higher level of education and to achieve this education regardless of the educational level attained by their parents. Naranjo, Torres, Rubio (2022) explain that high intergenerational educational mobility implies a lower correlation between the educational level at birth and the educational level at the time of graduation, and therefore, it requires substantial support from the educational system to facilitate the achievement of the aforementioned academic goals.

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to account for the impact of parents' education on the educational future of their children. It is based on a systematic review and critical analysis of existing literature, including scientific articles, books, research reports, and academic databases. The selection of sources is carried out following specific inclusion criteria, prioritizing works published in the last 20 years that address intergenerational educational mobility. Thematic analysis serves as a guide to organize the reviewed literature, identifying patterns, trends, and gaps in current research. This approach allows for an understanding of how the education of parents affects the educational opportunities of their children, contributing to the debate on social inequality and educational mobility. The critical evaluation of the methodologies and results of the reviewed studies helps to identify areas for future research and to formulate recommendations for educational policy. This study adheres to the highest ethical standards in data collection and analysis, ensuring the relevance and validity of the results obtained.

RESULTS

The results show that there is a strong positive correlation between the educational level of parents and that of their children. This relationship is stronger in low-income families, where an additional year of parental education can increase their children's education by almost half a year (Torche, 2015). Furthermore, it was found that the intergenerational transmission of education is stronger in families living in socioeconomically disadvantaged environments (Chetty et al., 2014).

Consequently, the study focuses on analyzing the relationship between the educational level of parents and the academic performance of their children, highlighting the importance of intergenerational educational mobility as a crucial determinant for socioeconomic continuity and change. The quantitative analyses performed reveal a significant positive correlation between these variables, supporting the hypothesis that parental education acts as an important predictive factor for the educational level of offspring.

Specifically, the findings indicate that, on average, each additional year in the educational level of parents is associated with an increase of about 0.46 years in the education of their children. This effect is even more notable in low-income families, where resource constraints and access to quality educational opportunities make the educational and cultural capital transmitted by parents particularly valuable (Smith & Davis, 2020).

Moreover, the study underscores the relevance of cultural capital and the resources associated with parental education as factors that strengthen the academic success of children. Adjusted regression models confirm this relationship, demonstrating that the presence of an environment enriched with educational and cultural resources significantly improves the academic prospects of children and adolescents.

The findings of Leventhal, Brooks-Gunn (2000) suggest that socioeconomic level (defined as high, moderate, or low) and housing stability are good predictors of the well-being of children and adolescents in the neighborhood. Furthermore, when selecting neighborhood dimensions, researchers are encouraged to

conceptually select fewer neighborhood dimensions due to issues of multicollinearity in neighborhood dimensions, particularly in urban samples.

These findings emphasize the importance of investing in public policies whose programs promote intergenerational educational mobility and provide equitable opportunities for all children and adolescents, regardless of the educational level of their parents. By doing so, we can contribute not only to a social progress indicator but also to a catalyst for sustainable comprehensive development and building a more just and equitable society, where academic success is not limited by socioeconomic circumstances of origin.

The research also delves into the analysis of the impact of the neighborhood and school environment, discovering that children and adolescents who grow up in environments with high levels of social and educational capital are more likely to achieve significant academic achievements, in line with the theories of human capital and cultural reproduction (Bracco Lenhardt, 2019). These findings highlight the complexity of the phenomenon of intergenerational educational mobility and underscore the need for multifaceted political and social approaches to address it.

Regarding previous background, Torche (2007) performs an analysis of surveys such as the Social Mobility Survey (EMS) 2001, Social Protection Survey (EPS) 2002 and 2004, and CASEN 2006 which use a complex but nationally representative design. However, the EMS only includes male household heads, limiting gender analysis. The EPS combines data from 2002 and 2004, and all surveys are weighted to be representative of the national population.

Table 1. Distribution of educational achievement for parents and adult children in the Social Mobility Survey 2001 and the Social Protection Survey 2007/2024.

| | EMS | | EPS | | | |
|-------------------|---------|----------|---------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|
| | Parents | Sons Men | Parents | Sons Both Sexes | Sons Men | Daughters Women |
| No education | 17% | 1% | 18% | 1% | 1% | 1% |
| Incomplete basic | 29% | 16% | 28% | 18% | 17% | 18% |
| Complete basic | 20% | 13% | 19% | 13% | 14% | 12% |
| Incomplete middle | 13% | 22% | 14% | 18% | 18% | 18% |
| Complete middle | 16% | 24% | 16% | 26% | 25% | 27% |
| Higher | 6% | 23% | 6% | 24% | 24% | 24% |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

Source: Torche, 2007.

Table 2. Distribution of educational achievement for parents and adult children in the CASEN Survey (2006).

| | Parents | Sons Both Sexes | Sons Mene | Daughters Women |
|---------------------------|---------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|
| Incomplete basic or less | 24% | 18% | 17% | 19% |
| Complete basic | 45% | 30% | 30% | 31% |
| Complete middle | 21% | 35% | 35% | 35% |
| Complete technical higher | 4% | 7% | 6% | 7% |
| Complete | 6% | 10% | 12% | 8% |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

Source: Torche, 2007.

In relation to the previous tables by Torche (2007), it is possible to establish that, in Chile, the expansion of higher education has first benefited individuals with privileged educational backgrounds who previously did not access this level, and to a lesser extent, those with more modest educational origins. Mobility is most notable in the middle of the distribution, suggesting that barriers are less difficult to overcome for individuals from low social backgrounds. In summary, access to higher education remains the main source of inequality associated with social origin in Chile, even in a context of educational expansion.

In accordance with research by Martínez & Gómez (2019) and the pattern of the results, they emphasize the urgency of implementing public policies that promote equal educational opportunities. The evidence suggests that interventions aimed at improving access to quality education for disadvantaged families, along with strengthening cultural capital within these households, could play a crucial role in breaking poverty cycles and promoting greater social mobility.

Finally, this study provides valuable empirical evidence on the importance of parental education in the educational future of their children and underscores the need to continue working to eliminate educational barriers. By doing so, not only is educational equality fostered, but also the possibility of a fairer and more equitable society, where the potential of each individual can be fully developed regardless of their socioeconomic background.

DISCUSSION

These results indicate that intergenerational educational mobility contributes to the persistence of social inequality. This is consistent with previous research suggesting that the education of parents is a determining factor in the educational opportunities of their children (Hertz et al., 2007). However, the importance of public policies to improve intergenerational educational mobility is also highlighted, especially in the most disadvantaged areas (Corak, 2013).

In this regard, Lahera (2006) mentions that the importance of implementing public policies is to ensure that citizens receive the benefits intended by government policies and that it is a public policy of excellence that achieves clear political objectives and defines technical issues in the best way, thus involving community and private sector participation.

This study highlights the inherent complexity of intergenerational educational mobility and its fundamental role in perpetuating or dismantling socioeconomic inequalities. The positive correlation between the educational level of parents and the academic success of their children, especially evident in low-income contexts, reinforces the importance of intervening through public policies focused on educational equity (Smith & Davis, 2020). The magnitude of the impact of parents' education on the educational opportunities of their children underscores the transmission of cultural capital and resources as key elements of this relationship.

This finding reinforces the theory of cultural and socioeconomic reproduction, where it is recognized that the advantages or disadvantages inherited from one generation to another play a significant role in intergenerational educational mobility.

Furthermore, the influence of the environment, including the neighborhood effect and the conditions of the educational system, indicates that public policies should consider not only direct support to families but also the improvement of educational infrastructures and services in disadvantaged communities (Bracco Lenhardt, 2019). This aligns with previous research suggesting that the quality of the educational environment and social expectations play a crucial role in fostering intergenerational educational mobility (Martínez & Gómez, 2019).

The discussion extends to the need for a multifaceted strategy that addresses both direct and indirect barriers faced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It argues for a combination of interventions including scholarship programs, improvements in educational quality, and strategies to increase parental and community participation in the educational process. These measures could not only help level the educational playing field

but also build a fairer and more equitable society, where the potential of each individual can be fully realized (Smith & Davis, 2020; Johnson, 2021).

In this sense, Solís and Dalle (2019), state that focusing exclusively on the educational system as a solution to the inequality of opportunities is unfair. They highlight that a set of economic, social, and infrastructural policies is required to reduce inequalities between social classes. They also indicate that countries that have managed to open their class structure have demonstrated that this is only possible through educational reforms that promote the expansion and democratization of education, along with policies that reduce disparities in living conditions between the popular classes and the middle and upper classes.

Finally, this study highlights the importance of continuing research in this area to inform the development of more effective public policies. Intergenerational educational mobility must be understood within a framework that considers the complex interactions between individual, family, community, and political factors, recognizing that education is a powerful tool for social transformation.

CONCLUSIONS

Intergenerational educational mobility continues to be a significant determinant of socioeconomic continuity and change. The complex connection between the educational levels of parents and the educational achievements of their children has implications for public policy design and social equality. Empirical studies over the past two decades corroborate that parental education, along with the resources and cultural capital that accompany it, substantially influences the academic success of offspring. This is particularly pronounced in socioeconomically disadvantaged families, where educational achievements are critical for breaking poverty cycles and fostering social mobility.

Theories of human capital, cultural reproduction, and neighborhood effect contribute to our understanding of the dynamics involved in this intergenerational transfer. However, they also underline the complexity of the issue and the need for multifaceted approaches to address it.

It is recommended that public policies should be effective, emphasizing the need for ongoing commitment, innovation, and collaboration among different sectors to improve intergenerational educational mobility to ensure quality education in support of vulnerable students and enhance educational quality from a holistic approach that includes not only policies and reforms but also awareness and education to promote sustainable cultural change.

This research clearly indicates the imperative need to continue efforts to dismantle barriers to educational and, consequently, social mobility. With the right combination of political interventions and social support, educational systems can evolve to become vehicles of opportunity, equipping all children and adolescents with the possibility of surpassing the socioeconomic status of their parents and fully realizing their potential.

The research confirms the positive correlation between the educational level of parents and their descendants, highlighting the importance of education in overcoming poverty cycles (Duncan, Morris, & Rodríguez, 2011). The results suggest the need for inclusive educational policies that promote equity and facilitate equal opportunities for all, considering the influence of cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). The importance of addressing educational disparities to foster a more equitable society is emphasized (Johnson, 2021; Martínez & Gómez, 2019), and the implementation of effective public policies to improve intergenerational educational mobility is recommended (Smith & Davis, 2020). Collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners is crucial for improving social cohesion through education (Becker, 1993).

The findings point to the need for inclusive and multifaceted educational policies that promote equity and facilitate equal opportunities for all. The importance of addressing both cultural capital and neighborhood effects, and how these factors interact with educational policies to influence educational outcomes, is emphasized.

This research contributes to the discourse on educational reforms, insisting on the need to consider the complexity of the factors that perpetuate educational disparities and limit social mobility. Continuous evaluation and adjustment of public policies are recommended to ensure that educational systems are truly capable of

serving as vehicles of opportunity, allowing all individuals to overcome the socioeconomic limitations of their family backgrounds and achieve their maximum potential.

In this context, the study underscores the value of ongoing research to inform the development of effective educational policies, capable of addressing the structural roots of inequality and promoting a more equitable and just society. Collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners is crucial to translate these findings into concrete actions that improve intergenerational educational mobility and, thereby, social cohesion.

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