

**THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN PROMOTING SOCIAL MOBILITY AND  
REDUCING INEQUALITY A CASE STUDY OF THE OVIANORTH-EAST LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT.**

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY  
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## **CERTIFICATION**

We the undersigned certify that this project was carried out by Aigbogho Sarah of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin.

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**ASSOC PROF. GREG IGBINOMWANHIA**  
(HEAD OF DEPARTMENT)

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**DATE**

## **DEDICATION**

This project work is dedicated to God almighty for his love, mercy and grace bestowed on me throughout this academic journey. And to my wonderful parents, late Mr Aigbogho Osaro Morgan and Mrs Ehiwemman Aigbogho.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This project work looks into how higher education promotes social mobility and reduces inequality by equipping individuals with skills, knowledge, and social capital for economic and social advancement. However, this potential is limited by systemic barriers like financial constraints, geographic disparities, and the digital divide, which disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups. Overcoming these obstacles through equitable access and supportive policies is essential to ensuring higher education functions as a true pathway to upward mobility and a more just society.

Key words: Higher education, social mobility, inequality

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the study

Social mobility, a key concept in sociology, refers to the movement of individuals between different social strata over time. In contemporary societies, social mobility is often associated with educational attainment, rather than ascription or inheritance. The expansion of education systems globally has led to increased participation in higher education, with over 20% of young people now pursuing tertiary education. This expansion has coincided with the rise of sociological studies on social mobility, highlighting the pivotal role of education in facilitating social mobility, particularly in accessing high-status occupations and professions. (Boliver and Wakeling, 2016)

The nexus between education, social mobility and inequality in Nigeria is a complex and contentious issue. The country's colonial legacy and capitalist underpinnings have entrenched structural barriers that impede equal access to educational opportunities, thereby constraining social mobility. In the Nigerian context, Jacob and Samuel (2020) identify challenges in both policy formulation and execution as major barriers hindering smooth transitions within the education system. Moreover, the introduction of the Re-Entry Policy has played a significant role in addressing gender disparities and promoting greater equity in education. (Adesina, 2021). This conundrum raises fundamental questions about the role of education in facilitating social mobility in Nigeria, and by extension, Ovia North-East L.G.A Edo state, which serves as the focus of this study.

The post-colonial era in Nigeria has witnessed a significant valorization of education, with a growing emphasis on higher educational attainment as a means of securing socio-economic mobility. This phenomenon is closely tied to the concept of credentialism, wherein

educational credentials serve as a key indicator of social status. As educational levels continue to rise, the requirements for maintaining social standing also escalate, making education a key driver of upward social mobility in contemporary Nigerian society (Ekpenyong, Ukommi, and Agha, 2019).

According to (Tochhawng, Lalrampari, Humtsoe, Lalhriatpuii, 2024), education serves as a key strategy for tackling inequality, as it empowers individuals with the knowledge needed to improve their social and economic circumstances. By equipping people with relevant skills, education enables them to access opportunities beyond those of their ancestors and establish their own social status. Adolescents spend a considerable part of their lives in formal educational institutions, making education a primary agent of socialization. However, socialization extends beyond schooling, shaping individuals throughout their lives. Unlike informal socialization, education involves structured instruction within officially designated institutions and follows standardized procedures (Onyido and Duru, 2019).

Acquiring education enhances an individual's income, influence, and power, enabling them to achieve a status that grants certain privileges. Moreover, Scholars suggest that family background significantly influences educational opportunities worldwide. Proponents argue that higher educational qualifications serve as a bridge between social mobility and an individual's background, as those from wealthy and privileged classes are more likely to attain advanced education than those from less advantaged backgrounds. ((Onyido and Duru, 2019)

In sync with the above assertion, (Tochhawng, Lalrampari, Humtsoe, Lalhriatpuii, 2024) stated that, Students from higher socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds are better positioned to take advantage of educational opportunities due to access to quality schools, more learning resources, and possess valuable social networks that support academic success.

In contrast, individuals from less privileged backgrounds often face barriers that restrict their ability to fully utilize education as a means of moving into higher social classes.

Despite the global increase in higher education participation, socioeconomic background remains a potent predictor of access, reinforcing long-standing patterns of inequality. The persistence of these disparities underscores the complex interplay between socioeconomic status and educational opportunity, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to mitigate the barriers faced by marginalized groups and promote more equitable access to higher education (Ilie, Rose, and Vignoles, 2021).

Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria, occupying a total area of 2,301 square kilometres is distinguished by a notable concentration of tertiary educational institutions, encompassing both government-funded and private establishments. Specifically, the communities of Ekosodin, Okada, and Ekiadolor serve as host sites for prominent institutions, including the University of Benin (main campus), Igbinedion University Okada, and the Federal College of Education Technical, Ekiadolor (Rawlings and Ikediashi, 2020; Wikipedia contributors, 2024). Paradoxically, despite the presence of these institutions, residents of the LGA continue to encounter substantial structural and socioeconomic barriers that impede access to and success in higher education. These challenges are multifaceted, encompassing financial constraints, inadequate foundational education, gender disparities, and limited awareness of available educational opportunities.

This study therefore aims to critically examine the role of higher education in advancing social mobility and reducing inequality in Ovia North-East LGA , with particular attention to uncovering existing barriers and assessing the effectiveness of current policies and practices.

## **1.2 Statement of problem**

Although higher education is widely acknowledged as a tool for promoting social mobility and reducing inequality, many individuals in Ovia North-East L.G.A, Edo State, continue to encounter serious obstacles in accessing and benefiting from it. Ongoing socio-economic and institutional challenges have made equal access difficult, keeping many residents trapped in poverty and limiting opportunities for upward movement.

In addition, there is limited assessment of how well current policies and programs are working to address these challenges. Without a clear understanding of how higher education influences social mobility and inequality, and without identifying the core barriers affecting access, efforts to improve the situation may fall short.

This research aims to investigate these issues by analyzing the impact of higher education on social mobility, uncovering the main barriers that prevent access, and assessing how effective existing government policies and strategies have been in tackling inequality in Ovia North-East L.G.A, Edo State.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

1. What is the relationship between higher education, social mobility, and inequality in Ovia North East L.G.A, Edo State?
2. What are the major socio-economic and institutional barriers hindering equitable access to higher education in Ovia North East L.G.A?
3. How effective are existing policies and initiatives in promoting social mobility and reducing inequality through higher education in Ovia North East L.G.A, Edo State?

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

1. To examine the relationship between higher education, social mobility, and inequality in Ovia North East L.G.A, Edo State.
2. To identify the major socio-economic and institutional barriers hindering equitable access to higher education in Ovia North East L.G.A.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies and initiatives in promoting social mobility and reducing inequality through higher education in Ovia North East L.G.A, Edo State.

#### **1.5 Significance of study**

This study on the role of higher education in promoting social mobility and reducing inequality in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, covers key social and educational dimensions within the Nigerian context. It focuses on the current period of increased attention to inclusive development, exploring how access to and outcomes of higher education influence the socio-economic advancement of individuals, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Geographically, the research is centered on Ovia North-East LGA, a locality known for hosting several prominent tertiary institutions. Despite this, many residents still face structural barriers to accessing higher education. By examining both urban and semi-rural communities within the LGA, the study aims to uncover how socioeconomic factors such as income, gender, and foundational education affect the ability of individuals to benefit from the presence of nearby institutions.

This localized investigation is significant as it highlights the disconnect between educational availability and actual accessibility. It situates the findings within national education policies

and broader discussions on equity, development, and poverty reduction. The outcomes of this study will provide useful insights for policymakers, educational administrators, and development stakeholders seeking to make higher education a more effective tool for driving inclusive growth and upward mobility in Nigeria.

### **1.6 Scope of study**

This study on the role of higher education in promoting social mobility and reducing inequality in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, encompasses the following dimensions. The research focuses on the current state of higher education access and its impact on socio-economic advancement among residents. It explores how factors such as family background, income level, gender, and access to foundational education influence individuals' ability to enroll in and benefit from higher education.

Geographically, the study is focused on Ovia North-East Local Government Area, which hosts several prominent tertiary institutions, including the University of Benin, Igbinedion University Okada, and the Federal College of Education (Technical), Ekiadolor. By examining both urban and rural communities within the LGA, the study aims to capture the varying experiences of different social groups in accessing and utilizing higher education for social mobility. It also considers the role of national education policies and local institutional practices in either facilitating or hindering educational equity.

Through this localized and contextual approach, the study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how higher education contributes to or fails to contribute to social mobility and inequality reduction in Ovia North-East LGA, and by extension, in similar socio-educational settings across Nigeria.

## **1.7 Operational definition of terms**

### **Higher Education**

Higher education refers to any form of education that takes place after the completion of secondary (high school) education. It typically includes studies at universities, colleges, polytechnics, and other institutions that offer degrees, diplomas, certificates, or professional qualifications. According to Encyclopaedia Britannica (2025), Higher-educational institutions include not only universities and colleges but also various professional schools that provide preparation in such fields as law, theology, medicine, business, music, and art. Higher education also includes teacher-training schools, junior colleges, and institutes of technology. Higher education simply refers to learning undertaken at colleges or universities where subjects are explored in greater depth and at an advanced academic level. Higher education refers to lea

### **Social Mobility**

Social mobility is the movement of individuals or groups within a social structure from one social stratum to another, which can be either upward or downward. Social mobility refers to the extent to which a person's social status changes, typically measured in comparison to their family background or career trajectory. Social mobility refers to the movement of an individual or group from one social class or status to another. In every society, people are typically categorized into different classes or castes, each with its own roles and standing. Mole(2021).

### **Inequality**

According to the United Nations (UN, 2015), Inequality refers to a condition where individuals do not have the same level of status, rights, or access to opportunities. Inequality

typically refers to the unequal distribution of opportunities, resources, or outcomes among individuals or groups in a society.

### **Social Economic Status (SES)**

This is a combined measure of an individual's or family's economic and social position relative to others, based on income, education, and occupation. In sync with the above definition, APA(2017), asserted that Socioeconomic status (SES) refers to a person's overall social and economic standing, which includes factors such as income level, educational achievement, financial stability, and perceived social position. It also relates to quality-of-life indicators and the range of opportunities and advantages individuals have within a community.

### **Access to education**

Access to education involves the extent to which people can pursue and benefit from learning opportunities, no matter their personal or social background. It goes beyond simply being able to attend school, encompassing the availability of learning materials, supportive societal attitudes, and relevant government policies. Factors such as gender equity, economic status, and cultural expectations all play a role in either supporting or limiting one's ability to achieve an education (Fiveable, 2024).

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Education in Nigeria

The administration of education in Nigeria is primarily managed by the Federal Ministry of Education, with local government authorities responsible for executing policies formulated at the state level. The structure of the education system follows a formal progression that includes early childhood education (kindergarten), primary education, secondary education, and tertiary education. However, the Nigerian education sector continues to grapple with systemic challenges rooted in the country's historical and political context. Since gaining independence from British colonial rule, Nigeria has experienced recurrent political instability, which has significantly hindered the development and implementation of a cohesive and standardized national education policy. This lack of policy coherence has contributed to wide disparities in educational quality, curriculum design, and resource allocation across the various regions of the country. These regional inequalities reflect broader patterns of social stratification and structural inequality within Nigerian society (Okuomose, 2019).

Moreover, Nigeria is currently confronted with a severe educational crisis, as it holds the record for the largest number of out-of-school children and youth globally. This phenomenon not only signals systemic dysfunction within the formal education apparatus but also indicates deeper socio-economic issues, such as poverty, insecurity, and inadequate policy responses, all of which limit access to educational opportunities for large segments of the population. From a sociological perspective, the Nigerian education system can be analyzed as a reflection of the broader socio-political and economic conditions of the country. It serves as both a site of social reproduction and a potential avenue for social mobility, albeit one that

is currently constrained by institutional inefficiencies and entrenched inequalities (Okuomose,2019).

### **Primary education**

The National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) was re-established under Decree 96 in 1993, with its main administrative office located in Kaduna. It oversees the management of primary education across Nigeria and is led by an Executive Secretary, supported by a board headed by a part-time chairman. The commission operates through various departments and extends its influence beyond Kaduna via satellite offices in all states, local government areas, and wards. These include the State Primary Education Boards (SPEBs), Local Government Authorities, and District Education Committees, all of which play key roles in ensuring effective administration of primary education. According to Onoyase (1991), primary education serves as the bedrock of the entire educational system, and if this foundation is compromised, the whole structure is at risk of failure.

Primary education constitutes the foundational stage of formal education, where learners are initially socialized into essential academic and cognitive skills such as literacy, numeracy, and general knowledge. Within the sociological framework, this stage serves as a crucial agent of socialization, transmitting the cultural norms, values, and knowledge necessary for individual development and societal integration. This implies that systemic issues or strengths at the primary level whether in pedagogy, infrastructure, or policy inevitably permeate higher levels of the educational hierarchy. Therefore, primary education not only initiates academic development but also lays the groundwork for social mobility, equity, and human capital formation in any society (Aduwa, 2021).

In Nigeria, primary education is legally free and compulsory. Recognized as a fundamental human right, education plays a vital role in developing human capital, which is essential for long-term economic and social progress. Basic literacy at the primary level serves as the foundation for building essential reading, learning abilities, and competencies needed for future academic achievement. It also helps in fostering responsible citizenship and instilling core values that contribute to national economic growth. (Igwebueze, 2024).

Primary education holds a central place in the educational system and is as vital to the nation as the mind is to the body. When this foundational level is flawed, it jeopardizes the overall success of the education system. Derived from Nigeria's national educational goals, the objectives of primary education include:

- i. Instill lasting skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and effective communication.
- ii. Establish a strong foundation for logical, scientific, and thoughtful reasoning.
- iii. Provide civic education to support active and meaningful involvement in community life.
- iv. Shape the child's character and encourage positive morals and attitudes.
- v. Equip the child to adjust effectively to their evolving surroundings.
- vi. Offer chances to develop practical and manual skills for effective participation in society, based on the child's abilities.

Primary education serves as the basic foundation for all other levels of learning. However, in reviewing the progress of primary education in Nigeria, it is evident that the intended goals outlined in relevant policies have largely not been realized. Most public primary schools continue to struggle for survival, much like the Local Government Councils, even as Nigeria marks 61 years of independence. (Olaware and Bolarinwa, 2021).

## **Secondary education**

Secondary education in Nigeria, particularly at the junior level, is a key component of basic education. However, the implementation of the junior secondary school curriculum faces numerous challenges. This paper explores the obstacles hindering effective curriculum execution. Using both primary and secondary sources gathered from print and online platforms it identifies several critical issues: insufficient funding, shortage of qualified teachers, poor infrastructure, lack of teaching materials, weak supervision, corruption, limited professional development for teachers, and insecurity. (Ohiare-Udebu and Sarafadeen, 2021).

To overcome these challenges, the paper recommends increasing budgetary allocation for junior secondary schools, recruiting more qualified educators, providing necessary infrastructure and instructional resources, and ensuring adequate security in all schools. It also emphasizes the need to tackle corruption within education ministries and institutions through active involvement of anti-corruption agencies. Furthermore, teachers should undergo regular training and retraining, and schools must be subjected to consistent and effective supervision.

### **How Secondary School Education Benefits Individuals and Society**

1. **Lowers Incidence of Child Marriage.** When girls have access to secondary education, they gain exposure to better life options and decision-making skills. This significantly reduces the likelihood of entering into child marriage and, consequently, decreases early pregnancies by up to 50%. (Batra, 2021).

2. **Decreases Infant Mortality.** Children born to mothers without a secondary education face higher risks of early death compared to those whose mothers completed high school.

Educated women are more likely to make informed health decisions and provide better care for their families.

3. **Boosts Economic Well-being.** Each additional year of schooling can increase an individual's income by around 10%. Secondary and further education improve job prospects, leading to better economic outcomes both for the individual and the broader society.( Batra, 2021).

4. **Enhances Personal Development.** Secondary education offers opportunities to build social and practical skills through sports, extracurriculars, and co-curricular activities. These experiences foster confidence, adaptability, and social interaction, preparing students for real-world challenges.

5. **Opens Doors to Career Opportunities.** A solid secondary education allows students to explore various fields and potential careers. It equips them with the knowledge and skills necessary for higher education and makes them more attractive to future employers. (Batra, 2021).

### **Tertiary Education**

Tertiary education in Nigeria began in the 1930s with the establishment of Yaba College of Technology by Lord Cameron. However, Nigerians were dissatisfied with the limited academic offerings and considered the college's standards inferior to those of institutions abroad. There were also concerns about discrimination and the low quality of technical graduates (Adekunle, Toyo and Olugbenro, 2012). In response to public demands for better higher education, the Colonial Administration formed the Asquith and Elliot Commissions. The Asquith Commission was tasked with recommending principles for setting up university colleges in African colonies, while the Elliot Commission was to determine the number and

locations of such universities. Based on their findings, the University College Ibadan was established in 1948 as an affiliate of the University of London. Later, in 1959, the Ashby Commission was created to assess Nigeria's higher education needs for the first 20 years post-independence. Before its report was released, the Eastern Region government had already founded its own university—the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1960. (Ekpoh, Okpa, Egbe, and Terfa, 2024).

Tertiary institutions provide an opportunity for learners to gain further education beyond the primary and secondary levels. They offer students advanced knowledge, skills, and values that help them live successfully in society and make meaningful contributions to its development. Many parents aspire for their children to attend tertiary institutions in order for them to benefit from the advantages that higher education offers.

### **OBJECTIVES OF TERTIARY EDUCATION**

1. Supporting national development by training highly skilled professionals.
2. Offering quality and affordable education—both formal and informal—that meets the needs and interests of all Nigerians.
3. Providing effective career guidance and lifelong learning programs to equip students with the knowledge and skills needed for self-employment and the job market.
4. Addressing skill gaps by producing a workforce that meets labor market demands.
5. Promoting academic excellence, entrepreneurship, and active community involvement.
6. Strengthening national unity.
7. Enhancing both national and international cooperation and understanding.

These goals are expected to be achieved through high standards in teaching, research, infrastructure, and community engagement. Tertiary education is tasked with producing knowledgeable individuals and distributing expertise essential to various industries and sectors through its core roles of instruction, research, and public service. Ekpoh, Okpa, Egbe, and Terfa(2024).

Tertiary education is crucial as it contributes to the development of skilled human resources tailored to national demands, enhances overall well-being, and promotes innovation and advancement. This paper explores the objectives of higher education in Nigeria, identifies the challenges it encounters, and proposes potential solutions. The established connection between higher education and national progress underscores the need for increased federal government investment and wider efforts to strengthen the education sector's performance. (Ekpoh, Okpa, Egbe, and Terfa, 2024).

## **2.2 Social Mobility**

Social mobility can differ in various ways: they may concern upward or downward mobility, focus on the self or on others, and stem from either expectations or personal experiences. These differences in how mobility beliefs are formed and framed can influence both personal outcomes and societal dynamics (Fiske 2019).

Sociologists typically understand social mobility as involving a hierarchy within the social structure, emphasizing vertical movement—that is, movement upward or downward in social position. Horizontal mobility, such as shifts between roles within the same social class (like moving from a managerial to a professional role), tends to receive less attention. Along with assessing whether mobility is upward or downward and determining the overall (absolute) rate of mobility, sociologists also examine relative mobility, which refers to how likely individuals from different social backgrounds are to attain various social positions. This is

often called the level of social fluidity within a society. In many Western countries, the post-World War II era saw a significant growth in white-collar employment, while manual labor and industrial jobs declined. This created more high-status job openings, enabling people from working-class backgrounds to enter middle-class occupations(Boliver, 2016).

The idea of social mobility has become increasingly central to education policy, particularly in higher education. Over the past 50 years, the focus has shifted from simply expanding access (adding more spaces), to broadening participation (involving more diverse groups), and finally to using education as a tool to promote mobility outcomes. Still, public understanding of the link between higher education and social mobility is often vague or inconsistent. In some countries, the term is widely used but poorly defined, while in others, the concept is present without the term, often under ideas like affirmative action. Despite differences in how policies and public discourse frame the issue, the patterns and trends of social mobility related to higher education show strong similarities across countries(Boliver, 2016)

### **Types of social mobility**

Social mobility manifests in various forms, influenced by the direction of movement (either upward or downward), the temporal frame (whether it occurs within an individual's lifetime or across generations), and the extent of change in one's socio-economic position. The principal categories of social mobility include the following.

#### **1. Upward Social Mobility**

Upward social mobility describes a situation in which individuals or groups ascend to a higher socio-economic status than their previous standing. This form of mobility is typically linked to educational attainment, improved occupational opportunities, or notable individual

accomplishments. In societies that emphasize meritocratic principles, upward mobility serves as a critical indicator of social progress, wherein success is believed to stem from personal effort and capability rather than inherited privilege. Illustrative examples include: A student from a working-class background who completes higher education and enters a prestigious profession, such as law or medicine. A laborer who launches a thriving business and transitions into the upper-middle class. Migrants with limited initial resources who achieve significant socio-economic success through education and entrepreneurship. Upward mobility is often associated with the ideal of the "American Dream," which posits that individuals, regardless of their social origins, can attain prosperity through diligence and ambition.( Ricardo, 2024).

## 2. Downward Social Mobility

Downward social mobility occurs when individuals or groups experience a decline in their socio-economic standing relative to a previous position. This downward movement can result from a range of structural and personal factors, including economic crises, unemployment, ill health, or broader societal disruptions that limit opportunities for maintaining one's social position. Common examples include: A family formerly considered middle-class that experiences financial collapse and enters poverty due to job displacement or foreclosure. A skilled worker whose occupational relevance diminishes due to technological change, resulting in loss of income and social prestige. An entrepreneur who suffers business failure, leading to economic hardship and a reduction in social status. Such downward shifts often carry psychosocial consequences, such as heightened stress, emotional distress, and feelings of marginalization, and may contribute to increased vulnerability and social exclusion.(Ricardo, 2024).

### 3. Horizontal Mobility

Horizontal mobility occurs when a person changes their role or job without experiencing a shift in social standing. In other words, it involves movement from one position to another that holds similar social prestige. For example, professions such as Medicine, Engineering, and Education may hold comparable status. If a lecturer moves from one university to another to continue teaching, their social status remains unchanged—they have simply transitioned within the same occupational category. Such movements, including those related to politics, occupation, religion, or region, do not lead to any significant change in social rank. (Onyido, 2019).

### 4. Vertical mobility

Vertical mobility refers to the movement of an individual or group up or down the social hierarchy due to changes in their economic, political, or occupational standing. In simple terms, it involves a rise or fall in one's social status. This form of mobility occurs when a person shifts from one social level to another. For example, a successful businessman who experiences financial collapse and becomes bankrupt moves downward in social rank. Conversely, a small business owner who effectively seizes opportunities and manages finances well may expand into a large-scale enterprise, thus rising to a higher social status than before. (Duru, 2019).

### 5. Intra-Generational Mobility

This type of social mobility takes place within the lifetime of a single individual. It refers to a person who starts off in a low-status job—for example, as a steward but over time, through the acquisition of education and professional skills, progresses into a much higher-ranking position, such as a professor. This upward movement from one social level to another during the individual's career illustrates intra-generational mobility. ( Onyido, 2019).

## 5. Inter-Generational Mobility

Inter-generational mobility refers to changes in social status that occur from one generation to the next. This means that a child achieves a different social position than that of their parents either higher or lower. For instance, if parents belonging to a lower class or caste invest in their children's education or skill development, and these children later secure jobs that elevate them into a higher social class, this represents upward inter-generational mobility. (Duru, 2019).

### **2.3 Social inequality**

Some sociologists interpret social inequality as a mechanism of functional integration. From a functionalist perspective, unequal distribution of rewards serves to stratify society in a way that motivates individuals to occupy social roles critical to the survival of the system. Higher rewards are seen as incentives that ensure role allocation based on merit and ability, contributing to social order and system stability. Conversely, proponents of the conflict perspective argue that inequality reinforces structural disparities and power imbalances between dominant and subordinate groups—such as the bourgeoisie and proletariat, men and women, or ethnic majorities and minorities. These groups experience different levels of access to economic, social, and cultural capital, which shapes their perception of the system's legitimacy. As a result, inequality often leads to social fragmentation, class antagonism, and group conflict, undermining social cohesion rather than reinforcing. (Heather, Gibbon, Anne, Hurst, 2022).

Social inequality describes a condition where individuals do not have equal access to essential resources, services, or positions within society. It reflects the unequal distribution of opportunities and benefits based on one's social status or position within a group or community. These inequalities are not random but follow systematic and recurring patterns in

how resources, opportunities, benefits, and sanctions are distributed. This phenomenon arises from societal structures built around categories such as age, gender, class, and race. These social hierarchies influence who gains access to resources and privileges, leading to uneven outcomes across different groups. Social inequality can manifest in many forms, including differences in income and wealth, unequal access to education and healthcare, and discriminatory practices in social institutions. Researchers typically identify five key dimensions of social inequality: (1) inequality in wealth, (2) inequality in treatment and responsibility, (3) political inequality, (4) inequality in life chances, and (5) inequality in group membership. This particular discussion places emphasis on treatment and responsibility inequality where individuals are treated differently and held to varying levels of responsibility, resulting in unequal access to benefits and opportunities for certain groups over others (Dovie and Klimczuk, 2022).

From a sociological standpoint, social inequality is understood as a multidimensional social phenomenon, analyzed through the lenses of structural determinants, ideological legitimations, and agents of social change. Structural determinants are objective and quantifiable social indicators—such as educational attainment, income levels, occupational stratification, poverty rates, and differential access to power—that produce and reproduce patterns of social stratification. Sociologists examine how these institutionalized structures systematically create hierarchical relationships among individuals and social groups. Ideological legitimations consist of dominant belief systems, cultural narratives, and institutionalized norms that serve to naturalize and justify unequal social arrangements. These include legal frameworks, policy regimes, and hegemonic values that legitimize privilege and marginalization. The sociology of language also highlights how discourse shapes public consciousness and reinforces existing power relations. (Crossman, 2018).

Agents of social change, such as social movements, grassroots activism, and organized collective action, challenge hegemonic structures and seek to transform entrenched inequalities. Sociologists analyze the emergence, mobilization strategies, and sociopolitical impact of these reform efforts. In the digital age, platforms like social media serve now as tools for collective action as seen in the global gender justice movement #HeForShe, initiated in 2014 by UN Women ambassador Emma Watson. (Crossman, 2018).

### **Main Drivers of Inequality in Nigeria**

#### **1. Unfair Tax System**

In Nigeria, the tax system disproportionately affects the poor while offering undue advantages to the wealthy and multinational corporations. While everyday citizens and small businesses face heavy taxation, large multinational companies benefit from tax breaks, waivers, and legal loopholes that allow them to avoid paying fair taxes. This leads to massive revenue losses, with an estimated \$2.9 billion lost annually due to questionable tax incentives — a figure equivalent to about three times the national health budget in 2015. Additionally, some companies shift profits to foreign offices in low-tax countries. In contrast, governments, particularly at the state level, resort to harsh tax collection from informal sector workers, often imposing inconsistent taxes that sometimes involve human rights abuses. (Dawodu, 2021).

#### **2. Weak Budgeting and Allocation**

Government spending in critical areas such as education, healthcare, and social protection is significantly low compared to other African nations. For instance, only 6.5% of Nigeria's 2012 budget went to education, 3.5% to health, and 6.7% to social protection in 2010. In comparison, Ghana allocated 18.5% to education and 13.8% to health in 2015. Despite Nigeria budgeting N77 trillion for development between 2005 and 2015, basic infrastructure

like roads, electricity, and water remains grossly inadequate for much of the population. (Osagie, 2021).

### 3. Mismanagement and Poor Execution of Policies

Even the limited funds allocated for development are often poorly managed, resulting in service delivery failures. The report highlights cases where citizens, such as an 18-year-old woman, are unable to afford basic healthcare and suffer as a result. The misuse of public resources means that large segments of the population are denied access to essential services. For example, over 57 million Nigerians lack safe drinking water, and more than 130 million have no access to decent sanitation. Despite substantial investment, regions remain underdeveloped with persistent poverty, environmental degradation, and high youth. (Osagie, 2021)

### 4. Elite Control, Patronage, and Corruption

Public policies and resources are frequently hijacked by elites, leading to misallocation and inefficiency. A notable example includes the misappropriation of \$16 billion meant for improving power supply during the Obasanjo administration (1999–2006). In the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), some contractors, in collusion with politicians, abandon projects. Elite capture also affects agriculture, where import quotas intended for small rice millers ended up with politically connected individuals who sold them off, hurting the original beneficiaries—local farmers and millers. (Dawodu, 2021).

### 5. High Cost of Governance and Income Disparities

Nigeria's political system is expensive to maintain, with the majority of national wealth benefiting a small political elite. This group manipulates the property system and state institutions to control income and opportunities. (Dawodu, 2021).

## **2.4 OviaNorth-East L.G.A**

Ovia North East Local Government Area, located in Edo State, Nigeria, was established in 1991 during the Babangida regime as part of a broader reorganization of local government areas. Before its creation, it was part of the former Ovia Local Government Area. The administrative headquarters is situated in Okada, a town positioned along the Benin-Lagos Expressway.

The area has experienced notable progress in sectors such as education, healthcare, agriculture, and infrastructure. Authorities have made efforts to enhance living conditions by providing essential services like clean water, electricity, and improved road networks. Ovia North East is recognized for its vibrant cultural heritage and several tourist sites, including Okomu National Park, Ogbemudia Farm, and Igbinedion University Teaching Hospital. It is also an agricultural hub known for producing crops such as oil palm, rubber, cocoa, and cassava. In recent times, the local government has prioritized enhancing security by partnering with law enforcement agencies and local vigilante groups to tackle crime and promote safety for both residents and visitors. (NP 2025)

Ovia North-East Local Government Area has its LGA headquarter in Okada town which consists of Adolor, Iguoshodin, Isiuwa, Kokhuo, Oduna, Ofunm-Wengbe, Oghede, Okada, Oluku, Uhen, Uhiere and Utoka(finelib, 2026). Ovia North East Local Government Area covers a landmass of 2,301 square kilometers and experiences an average temperature of 28°C. The area has two major seasons the dry and rainy seasons with an average humidity level of about 52%. (MPN, 2025).

## **ECONOMY OF OVIA NORTH EAST**

Farming plays a significant role in the economy of Ovia North East, with major crops including oil palm, banana, plantain, sugarcane, cassava, and maize. The area is also home to various industries, hotels, banks, private educational institutions, and government establishments. Additionally, key economic activities in the LGA include trading, wood processing (lumbering), and the production of crafts.

The role of higher education in promoting social mobility and reducing social inequality in Nigeria.

One of the major issues confronting Nigeria today is the challenge of social mobility in relation to education. As a country born out of colonial rule and driven by capitalist interests, Nigeria is marked by structural barriers that hinder equal access to education and limit the movement of individuals within the social hierarchy. While some researchers believe that policy efforts such as the National Policy on Education are contributing to increased social mobility, others argue that significant challenges to equal educational access still remain firmly in place, despite numerous governmental interventions. Although both sides of the debate present meaningful insights, the authors believe that these perspectives overlook the importance of class analysis and are therefore not fully grounded in a clear conceptual framework.

Functionalist scholars have often argued that education plays a key role in promoting upward social mobility and reducing poverty. They believe that in an open society, individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to move up the social ladder and stay above the poverty line. However, this connection is difficult to prove in Nigeria due to the country's high unemployment rate. Many educated Nigerians, including those with doctorate degrees,

remain jobless. This widespread unemployment contributes to persistent poverty, which in turn limits access to formal education for many people. Reviews of various poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria show that these initiatives have largely failed to reduce poverty, mainly because of structural and policy-related issues such as poor funding, corruption, weak coordination, political instability, lack of infrastructure, and unclear objectives. (Ekpenyong, 2019).

Higher education plays a key role in promoting social mobility and reducing inequality in OviaNorth-east local government area through several initiatives:

1. Vocational Education and Training (VET): These programs equip students with practical and technical skills relevant to sectors like agriculture, ICT, and manufacturing, boosting employability and entrepreneurship. VET also fosters innovation and helps students access credit, aligning with Okafor's (2008) view that VET is vital for national development.
2. Scholarship Programs: Universities, in partnership with governments, NGOs, alumni, and private organizations, offer scholarships to financially disadvantaged students, enabling access to education and helping to break the poverty cycle.
3. Free Hostel Accommodation: Some universities, like the University of Ilorin, receive philanthropic support to provide free housing for indigent students, easing their financial burdens.
4. Community-Focused Curriculum: The Nigerian Universities Commission's CCMAS initiative mandates that 30% of a university's curriculum address the unique needs of its host community, ensuring education is locally relevant.

5. Innovation and Creativity Exhibitions: Programs like the University of Ilorin's innovation fair encourage students to develop creative solutions, with financial rewards to motivate participation.

Higher education contributes to social mobility and equality by offering practical training, financial aid, community-relevant curricula, and innovation support to empower disadvantaged students and communities. (Mohammed 2024).

### **Challenges of acquiring higher education in OviaNorth-east local government area**

1. Inadequate infrastructure: During a press briefing, the community spokesperson, Macaulay Amaokosuwei-Gboluwei, disclosed that residents had taken it upon themselves to employ and fund teachers using communal resources because of a shortage of qualified teaching staff. This is an unusual and unacceptable situation. "Even though we are part of an oil-producing region, we are deprived of essential amenities that such a status should guarantee. (NAN, 2025).

2. Financial Barriers to Higher Education in Ovia North-East: Many residents face economic hardship, making it difficult to afford tuition fees, learning materials, and other costs associated with higher education. This limits access, especially among rural and low-income families.

3. Students' Attitudes Toward Higher Education: Some students lack motivation or do not see the long-term value of pursuing tertiary education. Peer influence, distractions, and a desire for quick income contribute to apathy toward academic advancement.

4. Parental Perception of Higher Education: In some households, parents may undervalue formal education due to poverty, illiteracy, or a preference for vocational paths. This leads to limited support for their children's pursuit of higher education.

5. Cultural and Religious Beliefs as Barriers: Certain cultural or religious beliefs discourage higher education, especially for girls. Early marriage, gender roles, or fatalistic views can prevent individuals from seeking further academic development. ( Shehu and Qulsum, 2025).

## **2.5 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is hinged on the Functionalist theory and the Conflict theory.

The Functionalist theory: Functionalism in sociology is a theoretical framework that examines society by analyzing its different components and how they work together to ensure the smooth operation of the entire social system. It highlights the interconnectedness of social institutions and their roles in preserving social stability and order. To understand the foundations of functionalism, it's important to look at its historical evolution and the major thinkers who shaped the theory. The roots of functionalism can be found in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly in the work of French sociologist Émile Durkheim, who is regarded as one of sociology's founding figures. In his influential book *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), Durkheim emphasized the significance of social solidarity and the vital role institutions play in maintaining societal cohesion and order. (Easy Sociology, 2024).

Functionalism gained further traction in the mid-20th century through structural functionalism, also referred to as consensus theory. This version focused on the functions of social structures and their contribution to societal balance. American sociologist Talcott Parsons was central to advancing this approach, offering a more formal and systematic interpretation of how institutions maintain social order. Another key figure in the development of functionalism was English sociologist and philosopher Herbert Spencer. Spencer introduced the idea of social evolution, comparing society to a living organism where different parts perform specialized roles. He suggested that, just as bodily organs serve

distinct purposes to sustain life, social institutions function to support the survival and development of society.

The Functionalist theory is based on several core assumptions:

1. Society has an existing structure that operates independently of individuals. This structure is made up of norms and values that are transmitted through institutions and play a role in shaping people's behavior.
2. Sociology should be approached scientifically, focusing on identifying general laws that explain human actions at a large-scale (macro) level.
3. Socialization is essential because it helps regulate individuals, promoting order and stability, which benefits everyone in society.
4. Society should be viewed as a system, where each part (institution or practice) contributes to the stability and functioning of the whole. Talcott Parsons compared society to a human body, where social institutions are like organs interrelated and interdependent all working together to sustain the system.
5. Institutions usually have positive functions, such as promoting shared values (value consensus), integrating individuals into the social order, maintaining control, and preventing breakdown (anomie). (McLeod and Evans, 2024).

Some of the criticism of the Functionalist theory are as follows

1. Static Outlook on Society: Functionalism is often faulted for portraying society as unchanging and overly stable. It places emphasis on preserving the current social order, often ignoring the impact of social change, historical developments, and evolving societal

dynamics. However, societies are dynamic and undergo constant transformation. ( Prasain, 2023).

2. Underestimation of Individual Agency: This perspective tends to emphasize the influence of social structures while downplaying the active role individuals can play in shaping and transforming society. Functionalism overlooks how people can resist, challenge, or reform societal norms and institutions.

3. Conservative Leanings: Functionalism is sometimes seen as having a conservative slant because it prioritizes stability and consensus. By focusing on the beneficial aspects of institutions, it may justify existing inequalities and power imbalances, rather than questioning or addressing them.

4. Simplification of Social Realities: The theory is criticized for reducing complex and diverse social realities into simplified functions that serve the system as a whole. In doing so, it may fail to capture the multiple, and sometimes conflicting, roles that institutions and structures play.

5. Lack of Focus on Micro-Level Interactions: While functionalism provides useful insights at the macro level, it often neglects small-scale, everyday social interactions and personal experiences. This limits its ability to explain how individuals experience and respond to broader societal structures in their daily lives. (Prasain, 2023).

To apply this theoretical framework in examining the role of higher education in promoting social mobility and reducing inequality a case study of OviaNorth-east local government area, we will be looking into some functionalist scholars perspective on education and the society.

Durkheim didn't focus extensively on education, but he emphasized its importance in the process of socialization. He noted that primary socialization begins at home, where family

and close caregivers teach children the basic norms, values, and behaviors of society. When children enter school, education acts as a secondary agent of socialization, reinforcing what they've learned at home and also correcting any negative or subcultural influences. According to Durkheim, this role of education is essential for promoting social cohesion and ensuring that individuals function harmoniously within society. (HTR, 2023).

Talcott Parsons expanded on Durkheim's ideas by introducing the concept of the "bridge effect" of education. He argued that the education system serves as a link between the family and the wider society. At home, children are socialized with \*particularistic values\* behaviors and norms specific to their family or personal context. In contrast, \*universalistic values\* are the broader norms and expectations shared by society as a whole. Parsons believed schools help children transition from the home environment to society by teaching these universalistic values. Schools allow young people to learn appropriate social behaviors, make mistakes in a controlled setting, and understand the difference between acceptable behavior at home and in public. This process helps individuals integrate into society, promoting social order and cohesion by ensuring everyone adheres to common rules and values. (HTR, 2023).

Shultz introduced the concept of \*human capital\*, emphasizing the role of education in building a skilled and adaptable workforce. He argued that investing in education strengthens the economy, which in turn benefits society by reducing social divisions and promoting cohesion. According to Shultz, schools are essential in developing individuals who are properly trained, qualified, and flexible enough to meet the evolving needs of the labor market. By equipping people with the necessary skills and knowledge, the education system ensures that everyone can contribute meaningfully to society, playing roles that match Theory abilities and supporting the overall stability and progress of the community. (HTR, 2023).

Davis and Moore proposed the idea of \*role allocation\*, where the education system functions to sift and sort individuals into roles within the social hierarchy based on merit. This aligns with the concept of \*meritocracy\*, suggesting that individuals achieve success, status, and access to top jobs through their abilities and efforts, not through social background, class, ethnicity, or gender. According to their functionalist view, education rewards talent and hard work, assigning people to positions best suited to their skills, ensuring that society operates efficiently by placing the most capable individuals in the most important roles.(HTR, 2023).

Functionalist theorists emphasize studying social institutions rather than focusing on individuals. They are concerned with how these institutions shape individual behavior and influence the broader structure of society. According to functionalism, all parts of society like education, family, and government function together harmoniously, much like organs in a human body, to maintain stability and order. They believe education plays a key role in promoting social solidarity and cohesion, serving as a foundation that helps society function effectively and remain unified and stable for the benefit of all its members.

### **Conflict Theory**

Conflict theory emerged as a major sociological perspective in the 19th and early 20th centuries, largely shaped by the contributions of Karl Marx and Max Weber, who focused on power dynamics and social inequality.

1. Karl Marx: In collaboration with Friedrich Engels, Marx developed the concepts of historical materialism and communism, forming the foundation of conflict theory. He argued that capitalist societies are characterized by a constant struggle between the bourgeoisie (owners of production) and the proletariat (working class), where the former exploits the labor of the latter. Marx believed that class conflict drives societal change and that a classless

society would eventually emerge, ending oppression and exploitation. His emphasis on economic systems and class relations heavily influenced Marxist sociology.( Prasain, 2023).

2. Max Weber: Unlike Marx, Weber broadened the theory by exploring additional forms of inequality beyond class, such as social status and political power. He highlighted how authority and power operate within society and how these factors also generate conflict. Weber's concept of the "Protestant ethic" linked religious values to the development of capitalism. He also examined bureaucracy as a modern structure where power is concentrated, often causing tensions between leaders and workers. His insights deepened the understanding of how authority and institutional structures contribute to social conflict. (Prasain, 2023).

Conflict theory isn't a single, unified framework but rather a broad category that includes multiple perspectives sharing three key assumptions:

1. Humans are rational and act to serve their own self-interest.
2. The resources they desire are limited in availability.
3. The competition for these scarce resources among self-interested individuals inevitably leads to conflict.

In contrast, consensus theories in sociology, while agreeing that people act rationally and that resources are limited, differ in their interpretation of outcomes. Consensus theorists argue that rather than leading only to conflict, the distribution of limited resources can be managed through cooperative and mutually beneficial agreements between individuals or groups. Drew(2024).

A widely recognized criticism of conflict theory is its tendency to focus primarily on opposition and struggle between social classes, often neglecting the possibility of cooperation

and mutual benefit. The theory typically frames the relationship between employers and employees as inherently adversarial employers aim to pay workers as little as possible to maximize profit, while workers aim to secure higher wages and better conditions. According to this view, the two groups are locked in a constant power struggle. However, this perspective can be overly simplistic and does not fully reflect the complexities of modern economic interactions. In many cases, employers and employees share a mutually beneficial relationship. Employers rely on a satisfied and productive workforce to ensure the success and profitability of their business, while employees benefit from stable employment, career growth, and improved working conditions. This mutual dependency can foster cooperation, trust, and long-term commitment rather than conflict. (Hayes, 2024).

Furthermore, modern organizational structures and compensation models often blur the traditional lines of class distinction. For example, pension plans, profit-sharing, and stock-based compensation give employees a financial stake in the success of the company. When workers become shareholders or receive bonuses tied to company performance, their interests can align more closely with those of the employer, reducing the sense of division and antagonism. (Hayes, 2024).

From the conflict theory standpoint, education is seen as a tool that upholds existing social hierarchies and reinforces the power of dominant groups, especially within capitalist societies. This view holds that schools do more than just impart knowledge they subtly promote inequality by embedding a sense of inferiority in less privileged students while preserving the status quo of the elite. A key concept here is the "hidden curriculum," referring to the unspoken rules, behaviors, and values that students absorb, which often mirror broader social divisions and expectations. (Wienclaw, 2021).

Conflict theorists are especially critical of practices like \*tracking\*, where students are divided into academic paths based on perceived ability. This system tends to disadvantage lower-income or marginalized students by limiting their future prospects and steering them toward lower-paying jobs. Similarly, \*credentialism\* the growing emphasis on degrees and certificates serves as a barrier to employment, benefiting those who can afford higher education while sidelining others whose skills may be equal but less formally recognized. As education increasingly functions like an industry, access and success within it are often skewed in favor of the privileged. Conflict theorists argue that genuine reform must go beyond surface-level policies and instead challenge the broader capitalist structures that produce and sustain educational inequality. In essence, this perspective calls for a deep rethinking of the role of education in society and how it can either reinforce or resist social injustice. (Wienclaw, 2021).

Overall, while conflict theory provides valuable insights into issues of power and inequality, it may overlook the ways in which economic systems can promote interdependence, shared goals, and collaborative relationships between different groups in society.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the methodology adopted for investigating how higher education contributes to social mobility and the reduction of inequality in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State. It includes the research design, target population, sample size, sampling method, data sources, methods of administering instruments, tools used for data analysis, and the research instruments themselves. The objective is to clearly describe the research process to ensure the results are both valid and reliable.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

This research employs a mixed-method design, combining both quantitative and qualitative strategies to explore how higher education influences social mobility and reduces inequality in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State.

The quantitative aspect involves gathering numerical data using structured questionnaires. This data will be statistically analyzed to reveal patterns and relationships between higher education and factors such as income levels, household spending, and access to basic services.

The qualitative component includes open-ended questions aimed at capturing the personal experiences and opinions of respondents. This provides a deeper understanding of how higher education affects their upward mobility.

Using both methods offers a well-rounded perspective, combining measurable data with individual insights to give a fuller picture of the issues

### **3.3 Population of Study**

This study focuses on residents of Ovia North-East Local Government Area in Edo State. Based on the 2006 census, the population was around 153,849. It includes individuals from various occupational backgrounds such as households, traders, business owners, civil servants, transport operators, and informal workers. The location was chosen for its blend of urban and rural communities, offering a broad range of views on the impact of subsidy removal on living standards.

### **3.4 Sample Size**

A total of 100 participants will be selected for this research. The sample size is calculated using Yamane's formula to ensure it accurately reflects the larger population.

### **3.5 Sampling Technique**

The study will utilize stratified random sampling to guarantee equal representation across different groups. The population will be grouped into strata based on profession (such as civil servants, traders, transporters, and informal workers), and participants will be randomly chosen from each category.

### **3.6 Sources of Data**

This research will make use of both primary and secondary sources of data.

Primary data will be obtained through the distribution of structured questionnaires to residents of Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State.

Secondary data will be gathered from existing literature such as academic journals, government reports, statistical bulletins, and relevant publications.

### **3.7 Administration of Research Instruments**

Questionnaires will be distributed directly to participants through physical (face-to-face) means. In cases where direct access is limited, online methods will be employed to enhance the reach and response rate.

### **3.8 Statistical Tools for Data Analysis**

The study will analyze both quantitative and qualitative data for a balanced understanding of the effects of fuel subsidy removal. Quantitative data obtained from closed-ended questions will be analyzed using simple percentages to identify patterns and trends. Qualitative data from open-ended responses will be analyzed thematically to extract meaningful insights from participants' views and experiences.

### **3.9 Research Instrument**

This study utilizes a structured questionnaire as its primary data collection instrument, designed to obtain detailed and relevant responses from participants. The questionnaire features Likert scale questions, multiple-choice (closed-ended) items, and a single open-ended question. It focuses on critical aspects such as levels of education, income distribution, and social inequality. Additionally, it explores the approaches taken to strengthen the influence of higher education within the local government area. The instrument also gathers insights into how residents of Ovia North-East L.G.A., Edo State perceive higher education and assesses public sentiment toward government policies and initiatives aimed at addressing its impact.

### **3.10 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument**

To establish validity, the questionnaire will undergo expert review by academic professionals to confirm that it aligns with the research objectives. The content will be critically assessed to

ensure it accurately gathers the intended data and avoids vague or misleading questions. Measures will also be put in place to check the honesty of respondents, enhancing the precision and relevance of the responses. The questionnaire is designed to be clear, thorough, and dependable in producing data that supports the study's aims.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyzes the data collected from respondents in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, on the role of higher education in promoting social mobility and reducing inequality. The analysis is conducted using the simple percentage method for closed-ended questions, which shows the proportion of respondents for each category, providing a clear understanding of the prevailing trends and perceptions. Additionally, qualitative thematic analysis is employed for open-ended responses to explore deeper insights into how Education can be improved in OviaNorth-east. The data is systematically organized into demographic information, access to higher education, impact of higher education on inequality. This approach ensures a comprehensive analysis of how higher education can lead to social mobility and reduce inequality.

#### 4.2 Demographic Data of Respondents

**Table 1: gender distribution of respondents**

Responses	No of respondents	Percentage
Male	33	33%
Female	67	67%
Total	100	100%

**Source: Field survey, September 2025**

Result from the table above shows that majority of the respondents are female, as they constitute 67%, while the male constitute 40%

**Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents**

Responses	No response	Percentage
18-25	100	100%
26-35	0	0%
36-45	0	0%
46 and above	0	0%
Total	100	100%

**Source: Field survey, September 2025**

The results above shows that all the respondents fall within the range of 18-26

**Table 3: Academic qualifications respondents**

Responses	No of Respondents	Percentage
Primary	0	0%
Secondary	0	0%
Tertiary	100	100%
None	0	0%
Total	100	100%

**Source: Field survey, September 2025**

From the table above, results shows that all the respondents are in tertiary level of education.

**Table 4: Employment status of respondents**

Responses	No of respondents	Percentage
Employed	2	2%
Self-employed	11	11%
Unemployed	8	8%
Student	79	79%
Total	100	100%

**Source: Field survey, September 2025**

The above table shows that majority of the respondents are students, with a percentage of 79, followed by self- employed 11%, unemployed is 8%, and employed are 2%.

## **SECTION B; ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION**

**Table 5: How would you rate access to higher education in your are**

Responses	No of respondents	Percentage
Very good	25	25%
Good	37	37%
Fair	17	17%
Poor	3	3%
Very poor	1	1%
Total	100	100%

**Source: Field survey, September 2025**

The result showing in the table above states that access to higher education is not very good because just 25% of the respondents says it's very good, while 37% said Good, the Fair has 17%, the poor has 3% and the very poor has 1%.

**Table 6: Do you believe higher education improves people's status?**

Responses	No of respondents	Percentage
Yes	91	91%
No	2	2%
Not sure	7	7%
Total	100	100%

**Source: Field survey, September 2025**

The statistics above shows that higher education can improves people's status because majority of the respondents said Yes with 91%, while the No is 2% and the not sure is 7%

**Table 7: Has higher education helped you or someone you know to earn more?**

Responses	No of respondents	Percentage
Yes	89	89%
No	9	9%
Not sure	11	11%
Total	100	100%

**Source: Field survey, September 2025**

With the responses above, we can say higher education has helped many people to earn more money and value, majority of the respondents has 89%, the No has 9% and the not sure has 11%.

**Table 8: What are the major Barriers to accessing higher education**

Responses	No of Respondents	Percentage
Financial constraints	81	81%
Distance	0	0%
Lack of awareness	9	9%
Others	10	10%
Total	Total	100%

**Source: Field survey, September 2025**

Financial constraints is a major Barrier to accessing higher education as shown on the table above because 81% of the respondents said so, while lack of awareness is 9%, others is 10% and Distance is 0%.

#### SECTION C: IMPACT OF HIGHER EDUCATION ON INEQUALITY

**Table 9: Are educational opportunities in your area equal for all income groups?**

Responses	No of respondents	Percentage
Yes	66	66%
No	19	19%
Not sure	15	15%
Total	100	100%

**Source: Field survey, September 2025**

From the results above, 66% of the respondents said educational opportunities in their areas are equal for all income groups, while 19% said No and 15% said are not sure

**Table 10: How effective are government initiatives in promoting higher education**

Responses	No of respondents	Percentage
Very effective	3	3%
Effective	20	20%
Neutral	53	53%
Ineffective	20	20%
Very ineffective	4	4%
Total	100	100%

**Source: Field survey, September 2025**

Statistics above shows that 53% of the respondents are Neutral about government initiatives in promoting higher education, 3% said very effective, 20% said Effective, 20% said Ineffective while 4% said very ineffective.

**Table 11: Lack of education contributes to poverty**

Responses	No of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly agree	30	30%
Agree	26	26%
Neutral	19	19%
Disagree	13	13%
Strongly disagree	12	12%
Total	100	100%

**Source: Field survey, September 2025**

From the table above, majority of the respondents with the percentage of 30 strongly agreed that Lack of education contributes to poverty, while 26% Agree, 19% said Neutral, 13% disagree, and 12% strongly disagree.

**Table 12: Who benefits most from higher education**

Responses	No of Respondents	Percentage
Rich	56	56%
Poor	8	8%
All equally	27	27%
Not sure	9	9%
Total	100	100%

**Source: Field survey, September 2025**

From the table above, majority of the respondents with the percentage of 56 said the rich are the most beneficiary of higher education, 8% said the Poor, 27% said all equally, 9% are not sure.

**Table 13: Has education reduced inequality?**

Responses	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	31	31%
No	52	52%
Not sure	17	17%
Total	100	100%

**Source: Field survey, September 2025**

According to the result above, education has not been able to reduce inequality because majority of the respondents with 52% said so, 31% said yes, while 17% are not sure.

**Table 14: Are there support programmes for education in your area?**

Responses	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	32	32%
No	50	50%
Not sure	18	18%
Total	100	100%

**Source: Field survey, September 2025**

Support programmes for education are not very much in OviaNorth-east local government area because majority of the respondents with 50% said so, while 32% said yes and 18% are not sure

#### SECTION D: SUGGESTIONS

**Table 15: What are your suggestions for improving education**

Responses	No of respondents	Percentage
Adequate teachers/ good payment	9	9%
Improvement of educational facilities	20	20%
Increment of scholarship scheme and educational awareness	58	58%
Provision of Jobs opportunities for the graduates	13	13%
Total	100	100%

**Source: Field survey, September 2025**

Increment is a scholarship scheme and educational awareness is one of the way in which higher education can be promoted because majority of the respondents suggest so with the percentage of 58, 13% said provisions of job opportunities for the already graduated students, 20% suggest that improvement of educational facilities will help in the improvement of higher education, and 9% of the respondents said Adequate teachers and good payment can also helps to improve higher education.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Summary of Findings

This research explored the role of higher education in promoting social mobility and reducing inequality in Ovia North-East Local Government Area of Edo State. The study was guided by the understanding that education, particularly at the tertiary level, is a key instrument for personal and societal transformation. Using a combination of survey data, interviews, and secondary sources, the study examined the extent to which higher education empowers individuals to improve their socio-economic status and whether it effectively bridges the gap between the rich and the poor in the local context. Findings revealed that access to higher education has a direct positive impact on employment opportunities, income levels, and social advancement. Respondents who had attained tertiary education were more likely to secure formal jobs, have stable incomes, and participate in decision-making processes in their communities. Many viewed education as a pathway out of poverty and a means of achieving upward mobility.

Key findings include:

1. 1 Higher education significantly contributes to upward social mobility by providing access to better employment opportunities and income levels.
2. 2 There is a clear disparity in access to higher education between low-income and high-income households.
3. 3 Government support programs exist but are either poorly implemented or not widely known.

4. Respondents agreed that education reduces inequality, but many still face financial and institutional barriers.
5. The community strongly believes that improving access to higher education can uplift families and reduce poverty.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

The study concludes that higher education is a powerful tool for promoting social mobility and reducing inequality. However, its impact is limited by poor access among disadvantaged groups. Socio-economic barriers such as poverty, lack of awareness, inadequate infrastructure, and ineffective policy implementation continue to hinder equitable access to education. Unless these issues are addressed, the gap between the rich and the poor will persist, despite the potential of education. This study contributes to the understanding of how higher education affects socio-economic advancement in rural Nigerian communities. It highlights both the potential and limitations of education as a tool for equality, especially at the grassroots level.

However, the research also uncovered several systemic challenges that limit the equalizing potential of education. These include inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, limited access to scholarships or financial aid, and socio-cultural barriers that discourage some groups especially women and rural dwellers—from pursuing higher education. Moreover, the cost of tuition and living expenses often discourages students from low-income families, thereby reinforcing existing inequalities. Additionally, the study noted that while the government has introduced some policies aimed at improving access to education, these measures are either poorly implemented or fail to reach those who need them most. There is a significant awareness gap, as many residents are unaware of the educational opportunities and support programs available to them.

Overall, the findings indicate that although higher education has the potential to be a powerful tool for social mobility and reducing inequality, this potential is far from fully realized in Ovia North-East. The current system disproportionately benefits individuals from wealthier backgrounds, leaving others behind and widening the socio-economic divide.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Increase Funding and Support:** Government and stakeholders should invest more in higher education through scholarships, grants, and infrastructural development.
2. **Improve Awareness Campaigns:** Many residents are unaware of existing programs. Public education and sensitization campaigns should be strengthened.
3. **Policy Implementation and Monitoring:** Educational policies must be enforced with strong monitoring and evaluation frameworks to ensure effectiveness.
4. **Encourage Public-Private Partnerships:** The private sector should be involved in providing educational support such as bursaries, mentorship, and internship programs.
5. **Target Rural and Marginalized Groups:** Programs should be designed to specifically support students from rural areas and underprivileged backgrounds.

#### **Policy and strategy solutions:**

Financial aid reform: Implementing policies to increase needs-based financial aid and potentially reallocating subsidies to lower-income students attending less well-endowed schools, as suggested by this ResearchGate PDF.

Improving access and support: Developing outreach programs, scholarships, and mentorship programs to support disadvantaged students throughout their academic journey, as mentioned in this ResearchGate PDF and this Whioce Publishing article.

Addressing the digital divide: Creating initiatives that promote digital literacy and provide access to technology to ensure everyone has the skills needed for the digital age, according to this Longdom Publishing SL article.

Institutional reforms: Encouraging universities and colleges to implement reforms that promote greater equity, ensuring that higher education becomes a more effective tool for social mobility for all, says this Whioce Publishing article.

#### **5.4 Suggestions for Further Study**

1. A comparative study between urban and rural communities on access to higher education.
2. An in-depth analysis of how gender affects social mobility through education.
3. Evaluation of the long-term impact of educational support programs in Edo State.

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## APPENDIX

### RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Topic: The Role of Higher Education in Promoting Social Mobility and Reducing Inequality in Ovia North-East L.G.A, Edo State

Dear Respondents

I am an undergraduate of the department of Sociology and anthropology, University of Benin, Benin City. I am carrying out a research on the "Role of higher education in promoting social mobility and reducing inequality, a case study of OviaNorth-east" in faculty of social sciences, University of Benin.

I will be so grateful if you would answer a few questions to help in the realization of the study objectives. You are warmly requested to provide your response freely and truly. Any information you provide will be treated with confidential, as the study is solely for academic purpose. Thanks for your anticipated co-operation.

Instructions: Please answer the questions honestly. Your responses will be confidential and for academic purposes only.

#### SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. What is your gender? Male  Female
2. What is your age group? 18–25  26–35  36–45  46 and above
3. What is your highest level of education? Primary  Secondary  Tertiary   
None
4. What is your employment status? Employed  Self-employed  Unemployed   
Student

#### SECTION B: ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

5. How would you rate access to higher education in your area? Very good  Good   
Fair  Poor  Very poor
6. Do you believe higher education improves people's social status? Yes  No   
Not sure
7. Has higher education helped you or someone you know to earn more? Yes  No   
Not sure

8. What are the major barriers to accessing higher education? Financial constraints   
Distance  Lack of awareness  Others

### **SECTION C: IMPACT OF HIGHER EDUCATION ON INEQUALITY**

9. Are educational opportunities in your area equal for all income groups? Yes  No   
Not sure
10. How effective are government initiatives in promoting higher education? Very effective  Effective  Neutral  Ineffective  Very ineffective
11. Lack of education contributes to poverty: Strongly agree  Agree  Neutral   
Disagree  Strongly disagree
12. Who benefits most from higher education? Rich  Poor  All equally  Not sure
13. Has education reduced inequality? Yes  No  Not sure
14. Are there support programs for education in your area? Yes  No  Not aware

### **SECTION D: SUGGESTIONS**

15. Suggestions for improving education:
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