

# Rural-Urban Dynamics And Their Impact On Social Mobility: A Review Study

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the interconnections between rural and urban contexts and their Influence on social mobility. Social mobility, understood as the capacity of individuals or Groups to improve their socio-economic status, is shaped by disparities in opportunities and Resources across these environments. Rural regions, often constrained by limited Infrastructure, poverty, gender inequalities, and inadequate educational access, contrast sharply with urban centres that provide diverse employment options, advanced education, and modern amenities. The study highlights how rural-to-urban migration serves as a Pathway for upward mobility, while simultaneously creating challenges such as cultural Adjustment, urban pressures, and social stratification. Furthermore, urban influences extend beyond migration, reshaping rural aspirations, social structures, and economic Practices. Findings underscore the need for inclusive development strategies aimed at reducing rural–urban disparities, enhancing education and skill formation, and ensuring Equitable access to opportunities. By addressing these dynamics, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms that foster sustainable social mobility and Balanced socio-economic development.

**Key words:** Rural development; Urbanisation; Migration; Socio-economic inequality; Education; Social Mobility; Policy interventions.

## Introduction

The education system in India has undergone a long historical journey shaped by cultural, social, religious, and political developments. Its evolution from the ancient Gurukul system to the contemporary framework of modern universities reflects the changing aspirations of Indian society. Education has not only been a means of transmitting knowledge but also a tool for shaping values, fostering social mobility, and building the foundations of national development.

In ancient India, the Gurukul system played a central role in transmitting knowledge across generations. Students lived with their teachers, imbibing moral, spiritual, and intellectual values. This form of education emphasised discipline, character building, and respect for nature and society. Knowledge was transmitted orally and often focused on the Vedas, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, and Ayurveda. Institutions such as gurukuls, Viharas and temples were centres of learning, while universities like Nalanda and Taksha Shila attracted scholars from across Asia. However, the system had limitations, including dependence on the guru, restricted access for marginalized communities, and a lack of exposure to scientific and technological advancements. The medieval period saw the emergence of Islamic educational institutions, particularly madrasas, which introduced subjects such as logic, grammar, astronomy, and medicine, alongside religious studies. Persian and Arabic became important languages of instruction, broadening the scope of education. However, access remained limited to certain groups, and disparities between rural and urban areas widened. The British colonial period marked a turning point with the introduction of Western-style education. English became the medium of instruction, and subjects like science, mathematics, and history gained importance. Policy initiatives such as Wood's Despatch of 1854 and the Hunter Commission of 1882 laid the foundation for structured modern education. While this system helped create an educated elite and introduced scientific learning, it also marginalized indigenous traditions and promoted a narrow utilitarian approach. Despite these limitations, reformers such as Savitribai Phule worked to expand access, particularly for women and marginalized communities. After independence in 1947, India faced the immense task of building a national education system suited to the needs of a democratic and diverse country. The government emphasized universalization of primary education, expansion of higher education, and vocational training. Initiatives such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Right to Education Act underscored the commitment to inclusivity. The National Education Policies (1968, 1986, 2020) and the National Curriculum Framework have provided blueprints for modernizing Indian education, making it more skill-oriented and globally competitive. Institutions of higher learning, including the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), have contributed to India's emergence as a global hub for knowledge and innovation. At the same time, India continues to face challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teacher training, lack of infrastructure in rural areas, and a persistent rural–urban divide. Rural areas are often marked by poor access to quality education, low literacy rates, and higher dropout levels, whereas urban areas benefit from better infrastructure, technology integration, and greater exposure to global opportunities. Bridging this divide remains crucial for achieving equity in education.

The establishment of new institutions, such as Maa Shakumbhari University in Uttar Pradesh, highlights the ongoing efforts to improve access to higher education, especially for women and rural populations. Such developments not only bring opportunities closer to underserved communities but also stimulate local economic and social development. In the context of social mobility, education acts as the bridge between rural roots and urban wings. For many individuals from agrarian or small-town backgrounds, migration to urban centres in pursuit of higher education and employment opportunities represents a pathway toward upward mobility. Cities, with their concentration of industries, services, and advanced institutions, often serve as gateways to new aspirations and lifestyles, while rural areas continue to provide cultural identity and foundational values. This movement from villages to cities is not merely geographic but also symbolic of the larger transformation of Indian society, where education empowers individuals to transcend generational barriers of poverty, caste, and occupation. Thus, the evolution of India's education system must also be seen through the lens of rural-urban mobility, where the classroom becomes a site of transition from tradition to modernity. The challenge ahead lies in ensuring that rural communities are not left behind, and that education continues to function as an equalizer, offering wings of opportunity while preserving the roots of identity.

### **Review of literature**

According to George Mathew Varughese (2025), this research paper explores the intricate relationship between educational attainment and economic mobility in rural households and how education influences income levels, employment opportunities, and intergenerational socio-economic progression. This paper aims to unpack how education can act as a lever of economic transformation in rural households. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 20192021), Rural male literacy is at 81%, whereas female literacy lags at 65%. The annual status of education report (ASER, 2022) identifies significant gaps in learning outcomes. In many schools, fifth-grade students can't read basic texts or perform simple arithmetic. A considerable number of rural schools still operate without basic facilities such as separate toilets for girls, functional libraries, or consistent electricity. High pupil-teacher ratios and a lack of subject-specialist educators. Educational attainment is both a driver and a reflection of economic progress in rural households. It holds the power to disrupt cycles of poverty and social exclusion, fostering empowerment, Innovation, and resilience. However, the extent to which education translates into economic mobility is contingent on the removal of structural barriers and the provision of enabling ecosystems. Iyer and Bhattacharya (2025) underscore that intergenerational mobility is significantly higher in rural families where both parents have completed at least a second education. They also highlight that social mobility remains limited among Scheduled Tribe(ST) households, even with similar educational credentials, pointing to the need for intersectional policy interventions.

By Madhvi Bagla (Student of Master's in UX Design, Vivekananda Global University, Jaipur, Rajasthan), (2025). Rural education forms the backbone of India's socio-economic progress, yet it faces persistent challenges like poor infrastructure, teacher shortages, and high dropout rates, especially among girls. About 65% of India's population lives in rural areas, making rural education crucial for inclusive growth. Dropout rates remain high (17% at the secondary level), with gender disparity being a major concern; female literacy is just 58.75% compared to 78.57% for males. Infrastructure gaps persist—only 80.15% of rural schools have electricity, and just 15% have internet access. Socio-economic factors like poverty, early marriages, and household responsibilities hinder students, particularly girls, from continuing their education. Teacher shortages, poor working conditions, and low pay lead to high absenteeism and poor retention, further lowering education quality. Government initiatives like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2001) aimed at universalizing elementary education, improving access, but suffered from underfunding and uneven implementation. CT in Schools (2004, revised 2010) introduced digital literacy, but only 15% of rural schools have internet connectivity, limiting its impact. Digital India (2015) targeted digital literacy and internet access, yet infrastructure delays and low digital skills remain obstacles. National Education Policy (2020) emphasizes experiential learning, vocational training, and teacher development, but faces implementation and funding challenges in rural areas. EdTech platforms like Byju's and Unacademy offer potential but are limited by poor internet access and low digital literacy in villages. A hybrid model combining traditional classroom teaching with digital tools could improve outcomes if infrastructure and localized content are developed. Community-based strategies and digital hubs can strengthen technology adoption and reduce rural-urban educational divides. Future directions include strengthening teacher retention with incentives, enhancing digital infrastructure, and adapting content for rural learners. Despite various initiatives, rural education continues to face deep-rooted structural barriers, and sustainable reforms are essential. The study calls for scalable solutions and stronger policy implementation to ensure inclusive, equitable, and technology-supported rural education.

By Carmen Gloria Núñez, Víctor Salinas-Silva, Pablo Cáceres-Serrano, and Bryan González-Niculcar (2024). The study explores whether rising student mobility to rural schools in Chile signals an early stage of rural revival. Rural education is highlighted as crucial for sustaining rural communities' social, economic, and ecological futures. Data from Chile's Ministry of Education (2015–2020) shows rural school enrolment grew by about 1%. Around 25% of students in rural schools by 2020 were originally from urban schools. Growth in enrolments occurred across most regions, with notable increases in Maule, Los Lagos, and Los Ríos. Families' preference for rural schools challenges the dominance of urban schools in Chile's market-based education system. The findings suggest this trend is not just a byproduct of urban school saturation but a deliberate choice by the family. While the COVID-19 pandemic amplified rural mobility, the trend existed before 2019. The increase may reshape rural narratives, reversing long-held views of inevitable decline. However, the study warns it is too early to confirm a full rural revival; changes are modest and uneven.

Dr. Lalrammawia Tochwawng, Ms. Eva Lalrampari, Ms Lalremsangi, Dr. Agnes Humtsoe, Dr. F Laldinzuali, Dr. Lalhriatpuii (2024). They explain that education is widely recognized as the key to social opportunities, but it also reproduces social inequality when access and quality differ by class. The study used cross-sectional surveys, databases and interviews across developed and developing countries to analyze education and mobility. Findings show that the rich benefit more from education than the poor, due to barriers such as high cost, low-quality schools, and limited resources. Developed countries like the UK and the USA! While developing nations like India and South Africa display low upward mobility, especially for the poorest groups. Barriers identified: lack of financial resources (65%), poor quality rural schools (58%), limited access to higher education (42%), inadequate career guidance (35%) and cultural barriers (28%). Education correlates strongly with higher Income and job security, but returns on education are lower for poor groups in developing countries due to labor market discrimination and unequal opportunities. Cultural and social capital (family support, network, guidance) play a crucial role in enabling the rich to leverage education for mobility. The study concludes that education alone cannot erase inequality; supportive policies and labor market reforms are needed. Policies Implications: the government must reduce tuition fees, expand scholarships and provide vocational/ early education. Recommendation: partnerships between policymakers, educators and communities are necessary to make education a genuine tool for upward social mobility.

By Hamdan Koswara(2024), the study examines how education influences social mobility in rural areas, where opportunities are limited. Social mobility is often restricted by poverty, weak infrastructure, gender bias, and cultural norms. Education is identified as a key driver for improving economic conditions and breaking cycles of disadvantage. Rural schools face challenges such as underfunding, a lack of teachers, and inadequate resources. Many children from poor families drop out early to contribute to household income. Gender disparities are severe—girls often face early marriage, domestic roles, and a lack of facilities. Socio-economic background strongly affects access to higher education and job opportunities. Government programs like scholarships, free meals, and school transport improve access but remain uneven. Vocational and technical education are highlighted as promising tools for rural upliftment. He suggested that technology and online education provide new opportunities, but digital divides hinder full benefits. The research confirms a strong link between higher education and upward mobility. However, rural communities still lag behind urban populations due to structural inequalities. Social mobility gaps persist across generations, reinforcing cycles of poverty. Addressing educational inequalities is crucial for sustainable development in rural regions. The study calls for comprehensive reforms to ensure inclusive, quality education for all. Education is vital for social mobility and economic growth, yet rural India suffers from severe inequalities. The study focuses on Barwani (Madhya Pradesh) and Kalahandi (Odisha), both marked by poverty and low literacy. 72% of schools in Barwani lack science labs, while 65% in Kalahandi lack digital tools, showing infrastructure gaps. Student–teacher ratios are alarming: 70:1 in Barwani and 60:1 in Kalahandi, far above recommended norms. Many teachers lack training or subject specialization, lowering education quality. Poor internet access and a lack of digital resources deepen the digital divide in rural education. These inequalities reduce students' chances for higher education, employment, and economic advancement. Girls and marginalized communities face additional barriers due to caste, gender bias, and poverty. Government schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Mid-Day Meal have improved enrollment but show poor implementation in remote regions. Scholarship programs help marginalized groups, yet awareness and delays weaken their impact. Policies such as Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan and Digital India show progress but remain uneven. According to them, the study reveals systemic neglect of rural education, widening the urban–rural gap. Inequality in education perpetuates poverty, limits social mobility, and stifles local economic growth. The authors stress the need for targeted policies, teacher training, and digital infrastructure in rural schools. Future research should explore technology-driven solutions and localized strategies to achieve sustainable educational equity.

P. K. V. Kishan (Institute of Rural Management Anand, Gujarat) and Abhinav Rajverma (Institute of Rural Management Anand, Gujarat) (2024). According to the authors, Intergenerational education mobility measures how far a child's education is independent of parental education, a key indicator of equality of opportunity. The study uses data from the Indian Human Development Survey (IHDS-II, 2011–12) covering 44,532 father–son pairs. It shows a high but declining persistence of education across generations in India. Urban, upper-caste, and Hindu families show significantly higher mobility compared to rural, lower-caste, and Muslim households. Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) have seen faster improvements than upper castes, though gaps remain. Muslim educational mobility lags behind Hindus, with lower gains across generations. Nonlinearities are evident: mobility is lowest at the bottom and top ends of the education spectrum, but higher in the middle. Quantile regressions confirm that the advantages of educated fathers pass on strongly, widening gaps in higher educational levels. The study validates the Great Gatsby Curve— higher inequality in one generation reduces mobility in the next. States with higher educational inequality show stronger persistence of disadvantage. Public expenditure on education and higher economic growth correlate positively with better intergenerational mobility. Policy reforms like affirmative action, scholarships, and universal education programs have helped, but learning outcomes remain weak. The schooling gap between rural and urban areas remains one of the strongest barriers to equal mobility. The paper argues for targeted interventions, equitable resource distribution, and reforms to bridge these widening gaps. It concludes that improving educational quality, especially for disadvantaged groups, is key to enhancing social equity in India.

Sudeshna Rana (2024), SACT-I, Department of Education, Raja Narendra Lal Khan Women's College, West Bengal, India. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a major reform in Indian education, replacing the 1986 policy. It emphasizes equity, inclusivity, and quality, with special focus on rural education, where disparities are most visible. Rural education faces challenges like poor infrastructure, teacher shortages, socio-economic barriers, and a digital divide. NEP 2020 proposes solutions such as holistic learning, multilingual education, vocational training, and the use of technology. Teacher training and capacity building are highlighted as critical for improving rural learning outcomes. Flexible curriculum frameworks can integrate local knowledge and vocational skills, making education contextually relevant. The policy envisions digital classrooms, mobile-based learning, and online resources, though connectivity gaps remain. Community engagement is stressed to ensure accountability, local participation, and sustainability in rural schools. NEP 2020 aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goal of Quality Education, aiming to reduce urban–rural divides. Recommendations include strengthening infrastructure, bridging the digital gap, promoting inclusive education, and enhancing teacher

recruitment. Policy coherence across education, rural development, and poverty alleviation programs is necessary for long-term impact. Overall, NEP 2020 presents opportunities for transformative rural education but requires strong implementation and resource support.

According to Dr Hetal H. Soni (2023), education is a cornerstone of growth and an instrument to dismantle entrenched social hierarchies in India. The Right to Education (2009) recognized education as a fundamental Right for Children aged 6-14 to address disparities. Quality of education is a decisive factor: good education enables upward mobility, while poor education perpetuates poverty. Social background, especially caste, significantly influences how education translates into opportunities and mobility. Affirmative action policies (reservation for SCs, STs, etc) provide opportunities but also generate debates on fairness. Economic disparities restrict access to quality schooling and higher education, worsening social inequalities. Employment inequalities, wage gaps, and hiring biases hinder social mobility even for educated individuals. So, education has transformative potential, but India must improve quality, expand higher education access, ensure fair affirmative action, and create inclusive job markets to Foster a just society.

Wineman, Alia, and Anderson (2020) highlight that effective development policies require distinguishing rural and urban populations, yet no universal definition exists. According to Wineman et al. (2020), definitions of “urban” vary by country, often based on settlement size, population density, or economic activity. The authors (Wineman et al.,2020)

demonstrate that applying alternative urban definitions in Tanzania changes estimates of urbanization and economic transformation. Wineman et al. (2020) use Tanzanian household survey data from 2008 and 2014, testing seven different definitions of rural/urban. They report (Wineman et al., 2020) that in 2014, 28% of the population was officially urban, but the figure ranges from 12% to 39% depending on the definition. The study (Wineman et al., 2020) shows that development indicators like rural poverty and electrification rates vary significantly with the chosen definition. Wineman et al. (2020) argue that fixed rural/urban boundaries suggest faster poverty decline than administrative reclassifications indicate. The authors (Wineman et al., 2020) note that certain definitions make rural areas appear more similar to urban areas in infrastructure and opportunities. Wineman et al. (2020) caution that policy statistics may give very different impressions of progress depending on which definitions are used. They conclude (Wineman et al., 2020) that policymakers must be transparent about the definitions applied and consider harmonization for accurate strategy and measurement.

Dr. IVY De explains that education is the backbone of society, and in India, where most people live in rural villages, education is crucial for economic growth. According to the 2011 census, literacy in rural areas is 68.91 % compared to 84.98 % in Urban areas, showing a huge gap. According to him, rural education helps eradicate poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy while raising living standards and providing employment. The condition of Rural schools is poor, lacking transport, infrastructure, drinking water, electricity and motivated teachers. Students in Urban areas perform better due to better schools, facilities, trained teachers, technology use and extracurricular opportunities. Low performance of rural students is caused by family literacy, poverty, lack of resources, untrained teachers and poor Infrastructure. Government initiatives include the Right to Education Act (2009), Mid-day meal scheme, Lok Jumbish project, Shiksha karmi project, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, DPEP, Operation Blackboard, and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalya. These programs aim to improve enrollment, retention, quality teaching, nutrition, girls’ education and access to basic facilities. Education is the birthright of every Human being, and rural children must have equal access without discrimination by caste, creed, or gender. “Rural life remains incomplete without basic education; a satisfactory education gives a satisfactory life.”

The conclusive table of review of literature is given below-

S.N.	Name	Year	Worked	Result
1.	Georgi Mathew Varughese	2025	Infrastructure Deficits, teacher shortages, poverty and untrained staff.	Policymakers, educators and communities must Collaborate to reimagine rural education.
2.	Madhvi Bagla	2025	Bridging gender and social disparities	Progress in increasing enrollment rates
3.	Carmen Gloria Núñez, Víctor Salinas-Silva, Pablo Cáceres-Serrano and Bryan González-Niculcar	2024	Student Mobility in Chile.	Found a 1 % increase in rural school enrollment between 2015 and 2020
4.	Dr. Lalrammawia Toichhawng and others	2024	To analyze policy implications, the relationship between education and mobility	Education Policies that aim to increase student enrollment, provide financial aid, and improve the quality of schools
5.	Hamdan Koswara	2024	Explore the Influence of education and social mobility in rural areas	The identification of persistent barriers to Education.
6.	P. K. V. Kishan and Abhinav Rajverma	2024	Intergenerational education mobility	High degree of intergenerational persistence in education.
7.	Sudeshna Rana	2024	Cultural and linguistic Diversity lacks adequate.	Teacher training and capacity building, technology



				integration monitoring and evaluation.
8.	Dr. Hetal H. Soni	2023	Caste, social stratification, disparities between rural and urban areas	Improve their socio-economic status, systemic inequalities and economic barriers
9.	Jessica S. Wineman, along with Andrew L. Bell and J. Edward	2020	Periodic rural/urban recategorization affects the pace of rural poverty decline, Population density-based definitions.	Welfare / poverty measures change depending on which definition is used, Agricultural / rural economic transformation indicators also depend on definitions.
10.	Dr.IVY De	2011	Present condition of Rural education, Government initiatives ( like RTE Act 2009, Mid-day meal, SSA, Operation Blackboard, KGBV, etc.).	A Satisfactory education gives a satisfactory life, Government programs ( SSA, Mid-day meal, DPEP, etc) have helped increase enrollment and retention, but quality gaps remain.

### Conclusion

The historical evolution of India's education system reveals a continuous journey from traditional, localized learning to a modern, structured framework that deeply impacts the nation's social fabric. While the ancient Gurukul system prioritized holistic development and moral values, it was constrained by limited accessibility. The subsequent introduction of madrasas during the medieval period and Western-style education under British rule broadened the scope of knowledge but also created disparities and marginalized indigenous learning traditions. Post-independence, India made a concerted effort to expand access to education, a commitment enshrined in policies like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Right to Education Act.

Despite these advances, a significant rural-urban divide persists, with rural areas facing persistent challenges in educational quality and access. This disparity makes education a key driver of rural-urban mobility, as individuals from villages increasingly migrate to cities to pursue higher learning and employment. Institutions like Maa Shakumbhari University represent a vital step in bridging this gap, bringing opportunities closer to underserved communities. Ultimately, the classroom in India has become more than just a place of learning; it is a critical space of social transition where individuals from traditional backgrounds gain the skills and credentials to navigate a modern, urbanized world. Ensuring that this system continues to serve as an equalizer and provides genuine opportunities for all remains a crucial challenge for India's future.

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