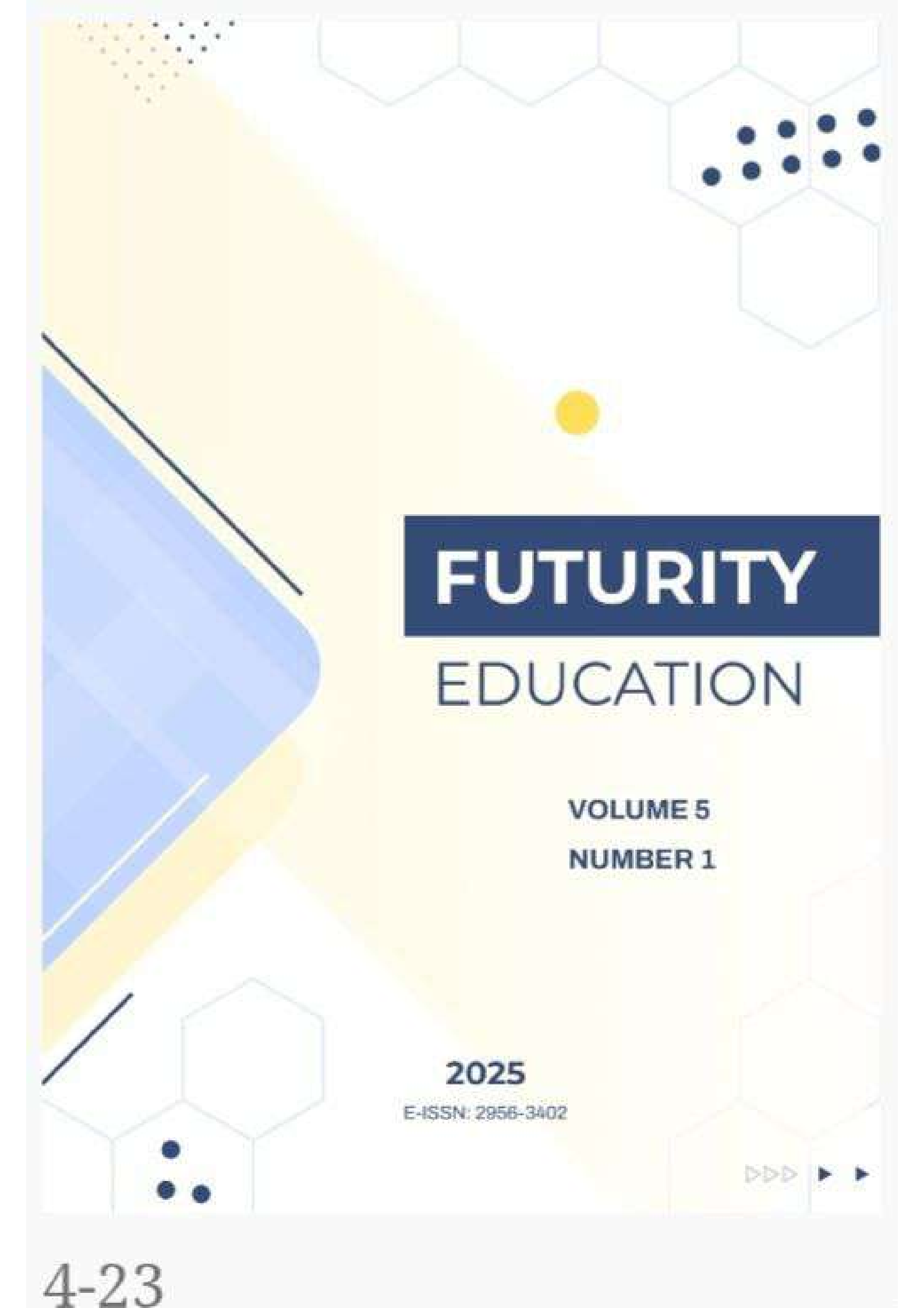




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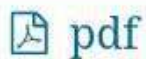
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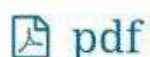
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The Role of Higher Education in Promoting Socio-Economic Mobility: A Bibliographic Review

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Abstract: The purpose of the article is to conduct a comprehensive bibliometric review of the existing scientific literature on the role of higher education in fostering socio-economic mobility. The study seeks to outline the key themes, trends, and findings in the field. The research is to achieve the following objectives: to present the key trends regarding the relationship between higher education and socio-economic mobility; to describe the factors that influence the effectiveness of higher education in promoting upward mobility; to analyze the impact of higher education on social stratification; and to investigate the effects of human capital on socio-economic mobility of individuals with higher education. to achieve the objectives, 467 articles indexed in the Scopus and Web of Science during the recent five years were extracted. The investigation was conducted according to the PRISMA 2020 statement. In the bibliometric review the following methods were applied: citation analysis, keywords analysis, trend analysis and mapping analysis. The results showed that the role of higher education in fostering socio-economic mobility has become a widely studied topic in contemporary research. Also, it was revealed that most articles examining the relationship between higher education and socio-economic mobility are authored by European scholars. During the investigation, the key trends regarding the relationship between higher education and socio-economic mobility were identified. Besides, the factors influencing the effectiveness of higher education in promoting mobility were described. They refer to digital divide, urban-rural divide, family background, gender disparities, social perceptions of education, economic inequalities, labor market demands, affordability of education, secondary education preparedness, and quality of higher education institutions. Special attention was paid to the analysis of human capital and its impact upon socio-economic mobility. The findings can be used by policymakers and educational practitioners for the development of targeted policies to increase accessibility and inclusivity in higher education.

Keywords: inequality to education access, influence of education policy, career development, dimensions of social stratification, effects of human capital, social mobility.

Introduction

Currently, socio-economic mobility, the ability of individuals or groups to move between different social and economic layers, is a basic principle of democratic societies (Gugushvili, 2020). According to Neidhöfer, Ciaschi, Gasparini, and Serrano (2024), this mobility and equality of opportunity are values are very important policy objectives rooted in the constitution of most countries.

In the modern world, this phenomenon is deeply influenced by globalization and digitalization, which have created both numerous opportunities and challenges. Under modern conditions, globalization expands access to international markets, education, and employment, enabling social and economic changes for those who can adapt to global demands (Xin, 2019). And digitalization revolutionizes access to information, education, and remote work, increasing opportunities for skill development and career advancement (Krupko & Ternopilska, 2024). Obviously, together, globalization and digitalization have redefined socio-economic mobility, emphasizing the importance of adaptability, digital literacy, and balanced interventions to ensure inclusive growth and sustainability.

Analyzing the key factors influencing socio-economic mobility, it was found that they include access to education, job opportunities, economic systems, and various social networks. At the same time, basic principles of socio-economic mobility refer to equality of opportunity, which ensures that all individuals have fair access to education and job opportunities, and supportive social safety protecting individuals from downward mobility (Neidhöfer et al., 2024). Chan, Cheung, Lau, and Ma (2021) describing global trends of socio-economic mobility in 167 countries indicate that it is characterized by

increased intergenerational movement in emerging economies, rising inequality and stagnation in developed countries, digitalization and changing the peculiarities of employment.

Modern higher education is closely linked to the phenomenon of socio-economic mobility, serving as both a mechanism and a catalyst for advancing individuals' social and economic status (Jha & Wharton, 2023). Since higher education provides specialized knowledge, critical thinking skills, digital literacy, and recognized qualifications, it enhances human capital, which is aimed to increase human potential for career development and social integration. Access to higher education allows people to penetrate more competitive job markets and improve their socio-economic position. It is important to note that the relationship between education and socio-economic mobility is dynamic, where professional competence serves as a key determinant of an individual's social opportunities and their ability to counteract various socio-economic barriers.

At the same time, social and economic inequalities, such as income disparities, limited access to educational resources, and institutional biases, often constrain the mobility effects of higher education (Schofield et al., 2023). This leads to unequal opportunities and outcomes. Additionally, the ability of higher education to foster socio-economic mobility is highly influenced by the labor market demands concerning specific qualifications and the necessity to coordinate the training courses and learning opportunities with industry needs (Xin, 2019).

All this suggests that studying the impact of higher education on socio-economic mobility is required for both theoretical and practical reasons. Firstly, it deepens the understanding of the notions of higher education and social stratification as well as their interplay, providing valuable data on perpetuation or mitigation of inequality by means of education. It helps analyze the mechanisms related to higher education which impact graduates' professional chances. Secondly, such research discusses the policy decisions aimed at making education more accessible and ensures that higher education obviously serves as a valuable tool for socio-economic mobility. The exploration of mobility within the educational context may contribute the development of strategies to enhance the inclusivity of higher education as well. In addition, a more skilled workforce will be prepared due to inclusive higher education, and it will be capable of responding to global challenges.

Research Problem

The necessity of analyzing the role of higher education in fostering socio-economic mobility is required in the current global context (Jha & Wharton, 2023). Rising inequality, changing labor markets, and the rapid development of technology highlight the importance of education as an efficient instrument for mobility (Zhai & Gao, 2021). Considering the problem of access to quality education in scientific discourse, the investigation of the ability of higher education to counteract poverty and promote socio-economic advancement is essential.

Besides, in the face of economic uncertainty, the role of higher education in preparing future specialists for professional activities and in creating equal opportunities for success is even more important (Donohue et al., 2024; Kuzmina et al., 2024). This analysis will provide scientific data on redesigning education systems or their enhancement to address contemporary challenges effectively. At the same time, the identification of key factors that influence socio-economic mobility through education can contribute to making higher education systems more accessible, equitable, and responsive to the needs of all individuals regardless of their socio-economic background.

Importantly, a bibliometric review provides a valuable overview of existing research, enabling them to outline the gaps in literature and propose new approaches for their investigation. The evolving nature of socio-economic mobility – driven by global events like the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise of

digitalization, and, importantly, armed conflicts in different parts of the world – proves that the problem is still insufficiently developed. New perspectives can be gained after the analysis of interrelation between education, technology, and social structures, offering different views on the role of higher education in fostering long-term socio-economic mobility.

Research Focus

Through a bibliometric review, the study focuses on outline the scholarly trends, identify key themes, and assess the current state of problem related to the contribution of higher education on the social and economic progress. On the basis of a wide range of studies, the research seeks to describe the role that higher education in providing extensive access to resources, skill development, and necessary career opportunities, which can enable socio-economic mobility and reduce inequalities (Karantoni, 2019; Palmisano et al., 2022).

The study is also oriented towards the analysis of higher education as a tool for socio-economic mobility, emphasizing its potential to mitigate social stratification and economic disparities (Czarnecki & Sauer, 2025; Zamfir et al., 2024). It is argued that higher education has the potential to act as a powerful driver for upward mobility and it is influenced by socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors, such as access to education, quality of educational institutions, and the development of training programs in accordance with the requirements of modern labor market.

The authors state that understanding these complex dynamics is essential for the creation of more inclusive education policies that promote equal opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their socio-economic background. Their analysis clarifies the approaches of optimization of higher education to foster greater socio-economic mobility, ensuring that it serves as an effective means of reducing the social and economic distinctions between different social and economic groups.

Research Aim and Research Questions

The **purpose of this study** is to conduct a bibliometric review of the relevant scientific literature on the role of higher education in fostering socio-economic mobility. The study seeks to outline the key themes, trends, and findings in the field. The synthesis and analysis of scholarly works is to carry out a comprehensive study of the impact of higher education on individuals' socio-economic advancement and its potential to reduce inequalities.

The **main questions** that this research aims to address are:

- 1) What are key trends in the context of higher education and socio-economic mobility?
- 2) What are the factors that influence the effectiveness of higher education and contribute to promotion of socio-economic mobility?
- 3) How does higher education impact social stratification?
- 4) What are the effects of human capital on socio-economic mobility? Does it differ when employers possess higher education degrees?

Literature Review

The role of higher education in fostering socio-economic mobility has become a widely studied topic in contemporary research (Jha & Wharton, 2023; Schofield et al., 2023). Scholars are increasingly focusing on the access to quality education, implementation of effective policies, and enhancement of social mobility (Acharya, 2024; Sahek & Nasri, 2019). This area of study examines the impact of higher

education on individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds focusing on various related aspects, particularly the building of pathways to better career opportunities, income equality, and reduced social stratification (McCowan et al., 2023). The analysis of scientific sources proves that there are growing concerns about inequality, globalization, and the digital economy (Ndoye & Asongu, 2024). Taking this into consideration it is obvious that the exploration of the role of higher education in socio-economic mobility is relevant nowadays.

In the content of access to education the scholars studied economic factors (Abuselidze & Zoidze, 2023), sociocultural challenges (Wanti et al., 2023), and the access to higher educational institutions in rural, remote, or conflict-affected areas (Wen et al., 2023). Availability of devices, Internet connectivity, and formation of the appropriate level of digital literacy for e-learning and hybrid education models were discussed by Nikou and Aavakare (2021). Certain works revealed the access to education for students with disabilities, including adaptive technologies and inclusive pedagogies (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022). The effect of wars, natural disasters, and pandemics on the ability to sustain educational access and infrastructure was presented in research by Kuzmina, Popova, and Bachurina (2024).

Besides, some sources indicated that access to education is closely related to the formation of professional competencies and development of relevant curricula to prepare future specialists to navigate in the modern work environment (Anselmo et al., 2024; Kutsak et al., 2023). At the same time, it was found that educational policies significantly impact the quality, accessibility, and equity of learning opportunities (Acharya, 2024). They shape resource allocation, curriculum standards, teacher training, and infrastructure development, directly influencing students' educational outcomes. Some recent findings were devoted to the policies that promote inclusive education, such as subsidized tuition, scholarships, or digital infrastructure initiatives (Massouti et al., 2023; Salmi & D'Addio, 2020). Kioupi, Nawire, Musungu, Nzuve, and Giannopoulos (2023) stated that these policies are to remove the barriers and extend learning opportunities to marginalized groups. Neidhöfer et al. (2024) explored the creation of more opportunities for socio-economic mobility through different policy interventions.

The findings show that socio-economic mobility and social stratification are interrelated (Nico, 2021; Wang et al., 2024). In literature, stratification determines access to education or employment opportunities that are defined as essential constituents of positive socio-economic mobility (Barozet et al., 2021). The contribution of educational opportunities to stratification is studied in the works of Traini (2022), Zamfir, Aldea, and Molea (2024). Barone, Hertel, and Smullenbroek (2022) explored the factors influencing socio-economic mobility.

Some sources examined the role of higher education in reinforcement or challenging the existing social inequalities (Karantoni, 2019). Since higher education is a key driver in enhancing professional skills, theoretical and practical knowledge as well as productivity of individuals, it fosters economic advancement (Trinh, 2023). Also, higher education contributes to human capital development by equipping individuals with advanced competencies and qualifications that improve their employability and earning potential (Woo, 2024). This directly influences socio-economic mobility, enabling individuals to move upward in the social hierarchy by accessing better job opportunities, achieving financial stability, and growing economically. It was revealed that the transformative power of higher education extends beyond individuals to society, as educated populations drive innovation, reduce income inequalities, and create more equitable access to resources (Deroncele-Acosta et al., 2023; McManus et al., 2024).

In this context, some findings showed that disparities in educational access are often under effects of social stratification (Fitzgerald et al., 2024; Nazrul, 2024). As a result, it is necessary to emphasize the

need for improvement of inclusive policies to ensure that higher education serves as a bridge to socio-economic mobility. Additionally, some works describe career development through the transformative role of education which builds professional trajectories and enables upward movement within the social hierarchy (Glover-Chambers et al., 2024). Håkansson Lindqvist, Mozelius, Jaldemark, and Cleveland Innes (2023) indicated that higher education increases adaptability and lifelong learning, empowering students to achieve sustained career growth.

Also, the scientific literature proves that globalization and digitalization profoundly impact higher education and socio-economic mobility, transforming access to knowledge, skills, and economic opportunities through interconnected systems (Chatterjee, 2024; Díaz-García et al., 2022). Ping and Wang (2023) showed that globalization facilitates the exchange of ideas, increased cross-border collaborations, and fostered the internationalization of curricula and so that students can acquire global competencies critical for modern labor markets.

To compare, digitalization expands access to education with the use of a number of online platforms, massive open online courses, and digital tools, democratizing learning opportunities for individuals worldwide (Díaz-García et al., 2022). The findings demonstrate that these advancements can enhance socio-economic mobility since they provide marginalized populations with flexible pathways to acquire necessary skills (Xiao et al., 2024). However, it was found that the digital divide – unequal access to digital infrastructure – remains a significant challenge, limiting the benefits of these transformations for disadvantaged groups (Yu et al., 2024).

Skulmowski and Rey (2020) revealed that globalization and digitalization contribute to broader participation in education, improvement of skill acquisition, and increase of employability, particularly in technology-driven industries. In the era of globalization and digitalization lifelong education is an integral requirement. Certain works investigate the adaption to diverse work environments and development of intercultural competencies among future specialists (Håkansson Lindqvist et al., 2023). Some studies describe the technological advancements in higher education and the impact of digitalization upon students' professional competence (Tverdokhlib et al., 2022). Under such conditions lifelong education empowers individuals to continuously update their expertise, embrace innovation, and remain adaptable in the face of such changes.

A number of academic findings prove that ongoing learning improves employability, fosters resilience, and enhances socio-economic mobility by bridging skill gaps and opening pathways to emerging opportunities (Kaputa et al., 2022; Ezeonwumelu et al., 2024). Saleh and AlAli (2024) emphasized that lifelong education positively transforms personal growth and civic engagement, enabling individuals to navigate the complexities of a globalized, digitally interconnected world more effectively.

The given analysis of scientific sources shows that the role of higher education in fostering socio-economic mobility has not been extensively explored in recent scientific discourse. Higher education serves as an effective mechanism for counteracting poverty and enabling upward mobility by equipping individuals with advanced professional competences that enhance employability. At the modern stage of development, marked by rapid globalization, digitalization, and economic restructuring, the importance of this topic has grown significantly. Higher education institutions are not only learning centers but also key players in providing equitable access to labor opportunities. Considering this, it is important to direct all the scientific efforts on developing workable policies and practices that maximize the potential of higher education and help ensure inclusive growth as well as social equity in the interconnected and dynamic world.

Materials and Methods

The research used a bibliometric review to track the key trends regarding the relationship between higher education and socio-economic mobility by extracting metadata from the Scopus and Web of Science databases. The investigation was conducted according to the PRISMA 2020 statement which provides a conceptual framework, emphasizing transparency, replicability, and rigor as well as establishing the guidelines for the identification, screening, and inclusion of studies (Page et al., 2021).

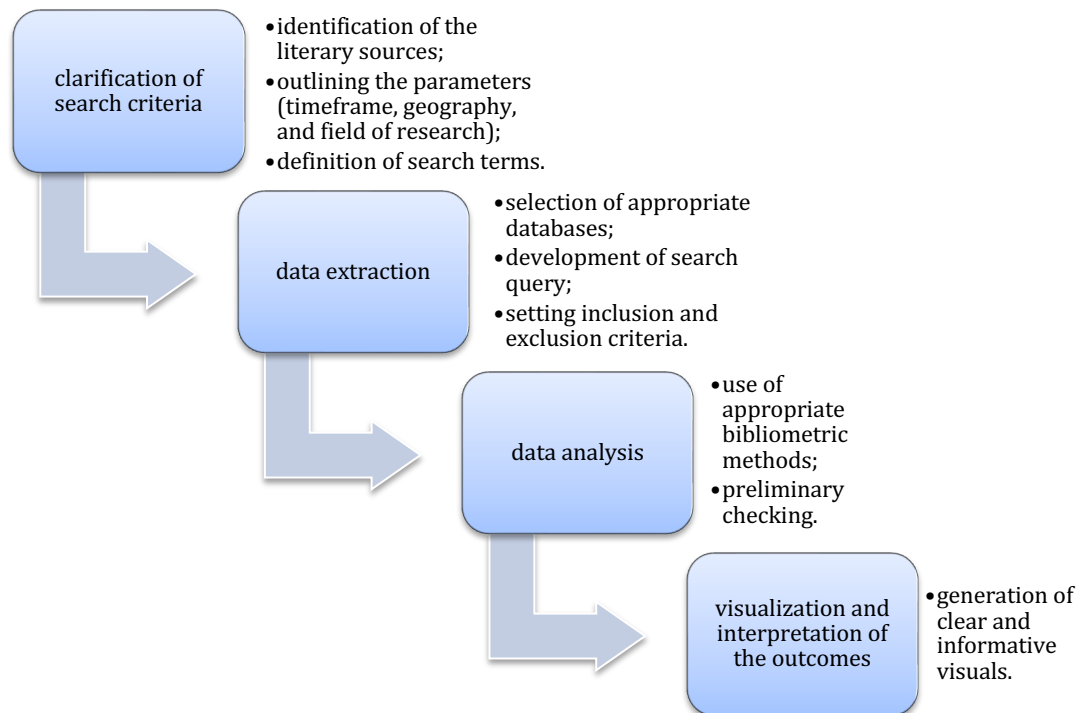
The bibliometric review was organized on the basis of certain theoretical principles, including quantitative analysis of citation data, network theory to visualize relationships within scientific article (e.g., co-authorship, keyword co-occurrence), and longitudinal analysis to track temporal trends (Öztürk et al., 2024; Passas, 2024). Applying these principles to understand the connection between higher education and socio-economic mobility enabled the researchers to identify main themes and patterns, influential works, and geographical focus areas, substantiating the impact of educational access and educational policies upon socio-economic mobility under the conditions of globalization and digitalization. The research was conducted in four steps (figure 1). The first step related the clarification of the search criteria and the identification of the relevant literary sources. Also, this step was implied to define search terms which are linked to the research objective. At the second step the data from Scopus and Web of Science were extracted. The third step concerned the data analysis through bibliometric methods (citation analysis, keywords analysis, trend analysis and mapping analysis). The fourth step was applied to interpret and visualize the outcomes to the research questions.

Data Collection

The PRISMA flow diagram was used to illustrate the data collection strategies employed in the bibliometric review on the role of higher education in fostering socio-economic mobility. For the data extraction, the keyword search was carried out. The following keywords or keyword blocks were used: "higher education", "educational access", "education policy", "career development", "socio-economic mobility", "social mobility", "economic mobility", and "social stratification". The article search was also filtered by the years 2019–2024 to track key trends that have occurred when higher education and socio-economic mobility interplay during the recent five years. Also, the documents were filtered based on their type – "research article" or "review article" and source type – "peer-reviewed journal". It resulted in 467 documents which were analyzed in this bibliometric review. The articles were restricted by English language and field (education and sociology) as well.

Figure 1

Bibliometric Review Stages

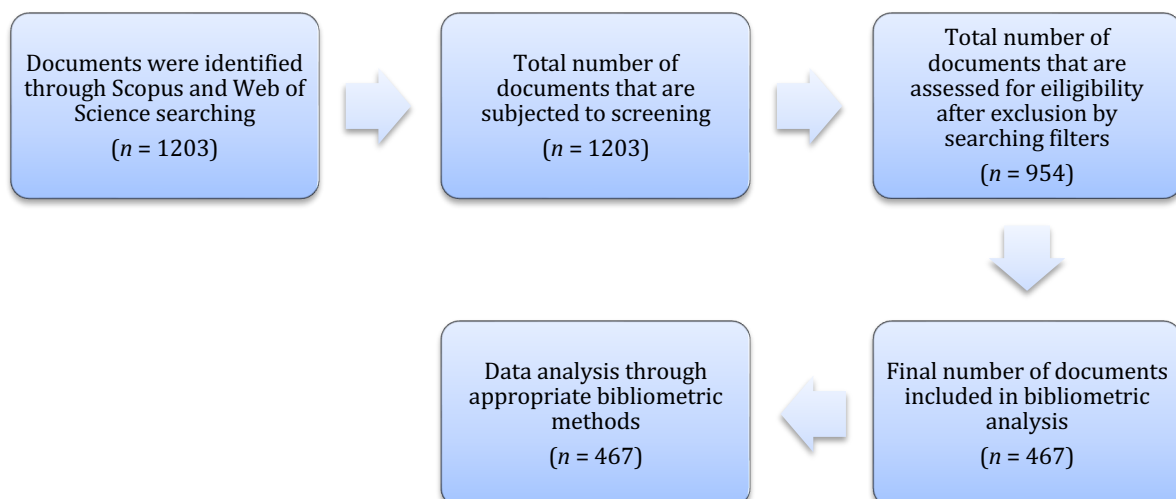


Source: Author's development.

Figure 2 illustrates the data collection strategies applied in the bibliometric review where n means number of documents.

Figure 2

The PRISMA flow diagram illustrating the data collection strategies



Source: Author's development.

Data Analysis

In the bibliometric review studying the role of higher education in fostering socio-economic mobility, a number of methods were applied. They included citation analysis, keywords analysis, trend analysis and mapping analysis. Table 1 shows the use of bibliometric methods regarding research questions.

Table 1

Data Analysis Methods used in the Bibliometric Review

Research questions	Method	Objectives
RQ1	Keywords analysis	to uncover the thematic trends and key areas focusing on the relevant scientific literature.
	Trend analysis	to understand the research landscape in the context of higher education and socio-economic mobility.
RQ2	Citation analysis	to highlight the key studies on the impact of higher education in the context socio-economic mobility.
	Trend analysis	to understand the existing factors affecting modern higher education.
RQ3	Mapping analysis	to interpret the phenomenon of social stratification; to offer a detailed overview of socio-economic mobility in the context of higher education and social stratification.
	Keywords analysis	to represent the relationships between key concepts regarding social stratification, socio-economic mobility, and higher education.
RQ4	Citation analysis	to identify the scientific works that have set the research basis, enabling them to trace the modern transformations of human capital.

Source: Author's development.

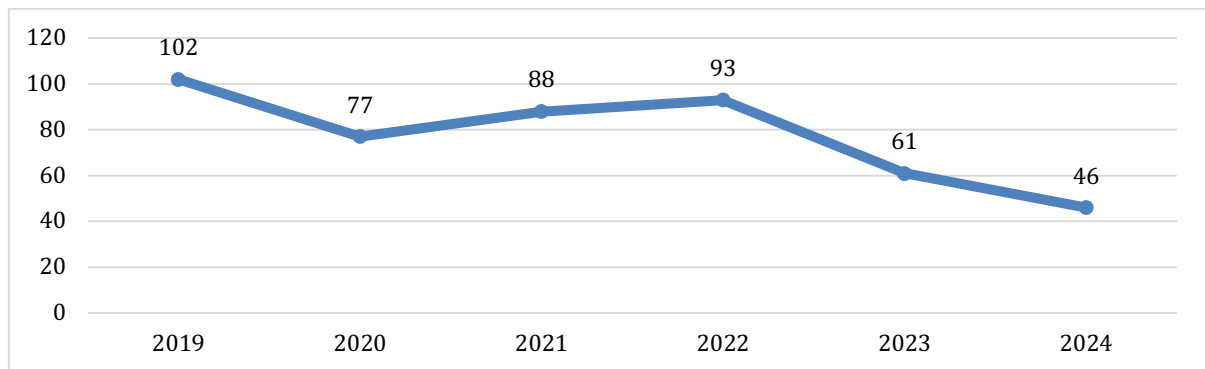
Results

Key trends in the context of higher education and socio-economic mobility

The findings showed that over the past five years, the role of higher education in fostering socio-economic mobility has been a widely studied topic, reflecting growing global interest in addressing educational inequality and its impact on social progress. Scholars have extensively explored themes such as access to education, the affordability of higher education, and its alignment with labor market demands. However, in 2024, there was a noticeable decrease in the number of articles published on this topic compared to previous years. This may be attributed to shifts in academic focus toward emerging global challenges, such as post-pandemic recovery efforts, geopolitical tensions, and climate-related concerns, which diverted attention from socio-economic mobility as a central issue. The findings prove that, despite this temporary decline, the topic remains significant, with ongoing discussions emphasizing its relevance to long-term economic stability and social development. Figure 3 shows the tendency in representing the topic on the role of higher education in fostering socio-economic mobility between 2019-2024.

Figure 3

Tendency in representing the role of higher education in fostering socio-economic mobility



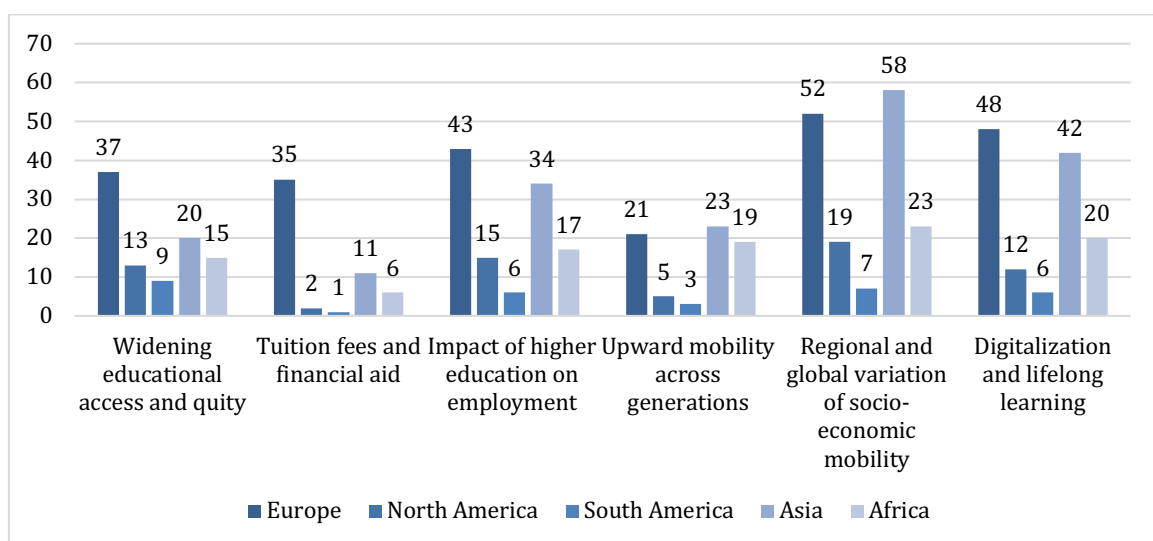
Source: Author's development.

Most articles examining higher education and socio-economic mobility are authored by European scholars (Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom), emphasizing the region's attitudes on social equity, economic development, and educational access. European research often focuses on themes such as widening access to higher education, reducing inequality, and the long-term economic benefits of education systems that promote socio-economic mobility.

In contrast, Asian scholars tend to emphasize the peculiarities of higher education systems, their involvement in economic development, and the contribution of higher education to positive transformations within the society. African scholars, meanwhile, often focus on the challenges of educational access, the ability of higher education in poverty elimination, and the impact of global initiatives and funding on socio-economic disparities. They also address the interplay between higher education and the unique socio-economic realities of African nations, such as rural development and addressing systemic inequality. These regional variations highlight the global diversity of perspectives on higher education's role in fostering socio-economic mobility. Figure 4 shows key trends regarding the relationship between higher education and socio-economic mobility in different regions.

Figure 4

Key trends regarding the relationship between higher education and socio-economic mobility



Source: Author's development

Further, the analysis of factors influencing higher education and promoting socio-economic mobility should be conducted because these factors determine the response of education systems to socio-economic disparities.

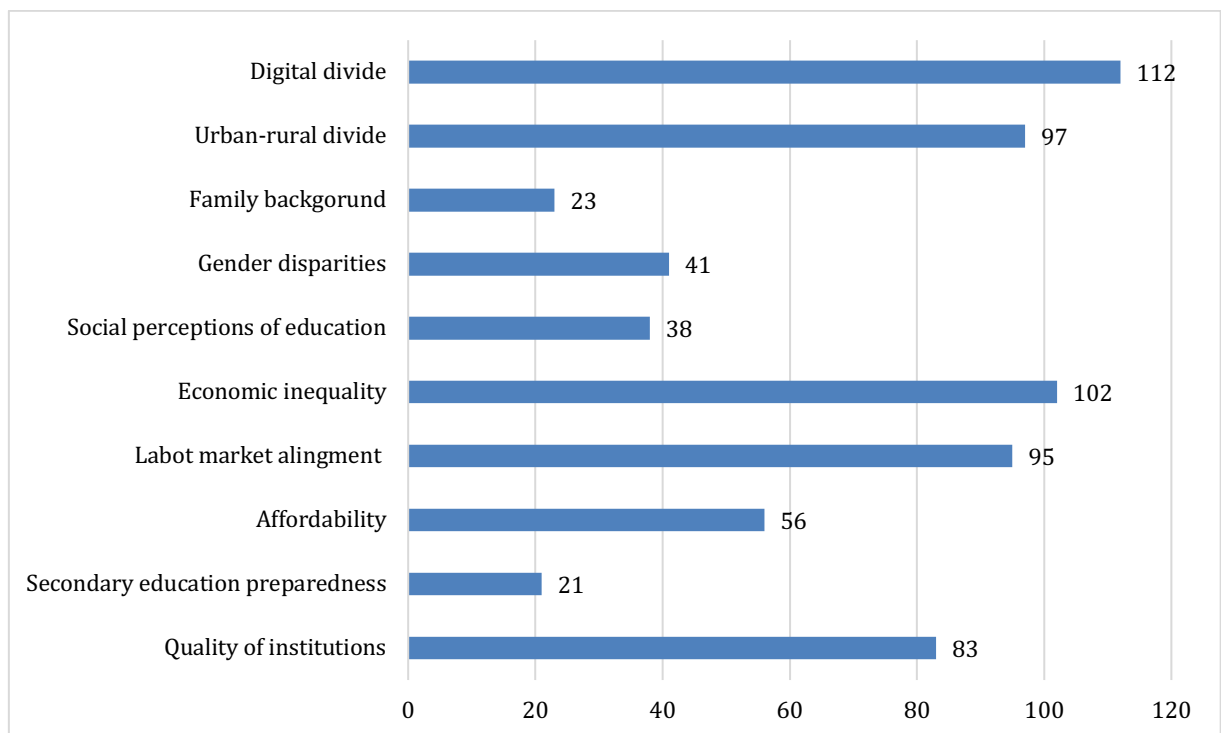
Factors of effectiveness of higher education and promoting socio-economic mobility

The research outcomes demonstrated that higher education contributes to the increasing socio-economic mobility, but this contribution varies across countries and regions significantly. Besides, it was found that such mobility is greatly influenced by a range of structural, economic, and cultural factors. In developed nations such as those in Europe, key factors include accessibility, affordability, and the quality of educational process within the institutions of higher education for all students (Stamatopoulou et al., 2024). European countries with strong public funding and policies aimed at widening participation, such as Germany or other neighboring nations, have more equitable systems that better enable upward mobility (Dodin et al., 2024).

It was found that Asian higher education systems created wide opportunities for socio-economic mobility, but certain challenges do not disappear (Chan & Zhang, 2021). In countries such as Malaysia, government initiatives are applied to promote inclusivity in higher education, but the issues like affordability and unequal access to high-quality institutions remain for some groups (Muftahu, 2023). At the same time, studying the factors in African nations, it was revealed that they concern limited funding, poor infrastructure, and significant economic disparities (Tochhawng et al., 2024). The bibliometric review emphasized that they severely affect the ability of higher education to promote socio-economic mobility. To summarize, Figure 5 presents the most spread factors revealed during the investigation and they were proved to have a significant influence upon the effectiveness of higher education and socio-economic mobility as well.

Figure 5

Factors influencing higher education and socio-economic mobility



Source: Author's development

During the investigation it was discovered that the analysis of the impact of higher education on social stratification is an important research objective as it serves as a powerful tool to reduce socio-economic inequalities by providing equitable opportunities for mobility and counteracting poverty.

Impact of higher education on social stratification and its role in reducing socio-economic inequalities

The findings outlined that higher education impacts social stratification since it is considered to be a tool for reducing socio-economic inequalities and a potential mechanism for reinforcing them. It was highlighted that higher education mitigates inequalities and provides individuals with opportunities for upward mobility, often through increased access to well-paid jobs and improved social status. It was also argued that the potential of higher education to reduce inequalities is closely linked to its ability to coordinate with the requirements of labor market. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that higher education reinforces social stratification when access is unevenly distributed or when systemic barriers exist.

According to some cases described in scientific literature, privatization trends in higher education bring inequalities by favoring those who can afford private schooling. Despite these challenges, many researchers advocate targeted interventions, such as need-based scholarships (Wanti et al., 2023), rural outreach programs (Wen et al., 2023), and policies promoting diversity (Woo, 2024). Concerning the impact of higher education on social stratification and its role in reducing socio-economic inequalities, this bibliometric analysis underlines the importance of overcoming the systemic inequities within higher education systems to achieve its transformative potential in creating more equitable societies. Table 2 analyzes the impact of higher education on social stratification according to scientific literature and describes its role in reducing socio-economic inequalities.

Table 2

Impact of higher education on social stratification and its role in reducing socio-economic inequalities

Effect	Description	Number of articles
Creation of an educated workforce	Higher education provides graduates with necessary professional competences, improving their employability.	124
Widening educational access	Unequal educational access increases social stratification by privileging wealthier groups.	42
Urban-rural disparities	Rural students often do not have educational access, and this fact deepens regional inequalities significantly.	97
Economic empowerment	Higher education increases earning potential, narrowing income gaps between socio-economic groups.	110
Gender equality	Higher education contributes to gender equality in income and leadership.	99
Skill-based mobility	Programs developed considering the requirements of labor market allow all the graduates to apply their professional competences through socio-economic mobility processes.	83
Lifelong learning opportunities	Flexible and online learning pathways make education accessible to all students, reducing barriers to socio-economic advancement.	127

Source: Author's development.

As a result, higher education reduces socio-economic inequalities since it provides a platform for future specialists to enhance their skills and improve their socio-economic status. Besides, education systems that coordinate with the requirements of the modern labor market ensure that all graduates gain employable skills, thus fostering economic equality.

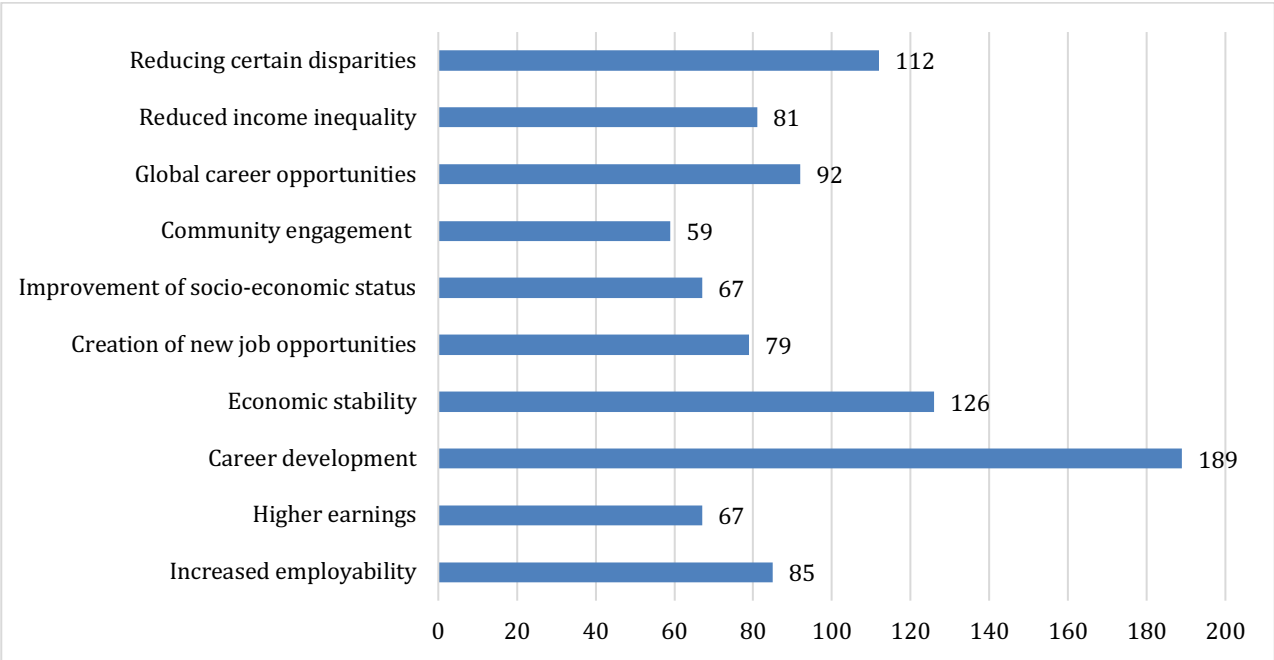
Effects of human capital on socio-economic mobility of individuals with higher education

Numerous studies demonstrated that individuals with higher levels of human capital tend to secure better job opportunities, experience faster career advancement, and enjoy higher lifetime earnings (Sahek & Nasri, 2019; Woo, 2024). Certain findings indicated that the more specialized the education and skills acquired, the significant the impact on socio-economic mobility. The emphasis on acquiring high-demand, industry-specific skills during higher education has become an increasingly important factor in reducing income inequality and fostering upward mobility.

In developing regions, the effects of human capital on socio-economic mobility are particularly vital in combating poverty and enabling social advancement (Muftahu, 2023; Zhai & Gao, 2021). Obviously, the findings demonstrated the positive impact of human capital on mobility, but it was stated that it is influenced by factors such as regional disparities in educational quality, labor market conditions, and access to job opportunities. Research also shows that human capital, being essential for upward mobility, must be supported by government policies to ensure equal access to education, employment opportunities, and a functioning labor market, particularly in less developed economies. Figure 6 outlines the effects of human capital on socio-economic mobility of individuals with higher education.

Figure 6

Effects of human capital on socio-economic mobility



Source: Author's development.

Therefore, the examination of higher education underlines its positive effect on socio-economic mobility under the modern stage of development of society. It was emphasized that higher education significantly enhances socio-economic mobility through providing individuals with the skills and qualifications necessary to access better stable job opportunities.

Discussion

The bibliometric review demonstrated the special focus of contemporary educational discourse to the topic concerning the role of higher education in fostering socio-economic mobility (Krupko & Ternopilska, 2024; Wanti et al., 2023). It was clearly demonstrated that higher education enhances socio-economic mobility, particularly in the context of digitalization and globalization (Skulmowski & Rey, 2020). Firstly, special attention was paid to the key trends in the context of higher education and socio-economic mobility. The analysis of various scientific sources showed that these trends include widening educational access and quality, affordability of educational access through tuition fees and financial aid from government funds or non-governmental organizations. Besides, it was revealed that higher education has a unique effect on employment of future specialists and creates positive opportunities for socio-economic mobility across generations. Other trends refer to both regional and global variations of socio-economic mobility, and the necessity to implement lifelong learning schemes, particularly under the influence of digitalization.

Secondly, the factors of higher education that are able to promote socio-economic mobility were analyzed in detail. Certain findings revealed that these factors can be structural, economic, and cultural factors. According to the literature analysis, structural factors refer to the mechanisms of social and institutional frameworks (Jha & Wharton, 2023; Wang et al., 2024). These factors usually include access to quality education, the availability of employment opportunities, government policies, and social services. Economic factors relate to the financial conditions and systems within a society that affect opportunities for mobility (Neidhöfer et al., 2024). At the same time, cultural factors involve the beliefs, values, and social norms that shape individuals' behaviors within the society (Traini, 2022). Besides, it was found that there are a number of factors influencing the effectiveness of higher education and promoting socio-economic mobility. They tend to differ regarding the regions or countries they take place in. For example, in developed countries, the factors include accessibility, affordability, and the quality of higher education institutions (Stamatopoulou et al., 2024). And in developing regions, higher education created both opportunities and challenges for socio-economic mobility (Zamfir et al., 2024). Summarizing the data, the following factors were revealed: digital divide, urban-rural divide, family background, gender disparities, social perceptions of education, economic inequalities, requirement of labor market, affordability of education, secondary education preparedness, and quality of higher education institutions.

Thirdly, social stratification was thoroughly analyzed. According to Barozet, Boado, and Marqués-Perales (2021), it is the arrangement of individuals or groups in society based on different criteria such as wealth, income, education, occupation, and social status. This system divides society into distinct layers, where individuals have unequal access to resources and opportunities. Modern peculiarities of social stratification include increasing complexity due to globalization, digitalization, and changing labor markets, which create new forms of inequality (Barone et al., 2022). Importantly, the investigation proves the impact of higher education on social stratification. According to the recent findings higher education was described as a tool for reducing socio-economic inequalities and a potential mechanism for their reinforcement (Fitzgerald et al., 2024; Karantoni, 2019). While studying the problem described, it was found that higher education causes certain impacts on social stratification, particularly creation of an educated workforce, widening educational access, urban-rural disparities, economic empowerment, gender equality, skill-based mobility, and lifelong learning opportunities. The results stressed that through these impacts higher education is able to reduce socio-economic inequalities and contributes to enhancement of students' professional skills. It was revealed that alignment of curriculum with labor market demands ensures that all graduates gain necessary skills.

And fourthly, recent findings demonstrated the positive impact of human capital on socio-economic mobility (Woo, 2024). At the same time, certain scientific sources proved that socio-economic mobility is affected by regional disparities (Kioupi et al., 2023), labor market conditions (Zhai & Gao, 2021), and other external factors like the pandemic or the full-fledged invasion (Kuzmina et al., 2024). The analysis of the interplay between human capital and socio-economic mobility of individuals with higher education demonstrated that certain phenomena appear and transform the professional landscape (McCowan et al., 2023). Besides, this interplay was described as a basis of modern economic and social development (Ping & Wang, 2023; Tochwang et al., 2024). Considering the role of higher education, enhanced human capital improves individual productivity and employability, creating pathways for socio-economic mobility (Palmisano et al., 2022). And higher education fosters innovation, critical thinking, and adaptability, which are essential in an increasingly globalized and technology-driven economy (Nikou & Aavakare, 2021). According to the bibliometric review human capital impacts socio-economic mobility through increase employability, higher earnings, career development, economic stability, creation of new job opportunities, including abroad, improvement of socio-economic status, community engagement, and reducing inequalities or disparities.

Conclusions and Implications

Through a bibliometric review, it was proved that the role of higher education in fostering socio-economic mobility has become a widely studied topic in contemporary scientific discourse. A number of scholars have extensively explored themes such as educational access, affordability of higher education, and its coordination with the requirement of labor market. However, in 2024, there was a noticeable decrease in the scientific publications because of emerging global challenges, such as post-pandemic recovery efforts, geopolitical tensions, armed conflicts, and climate-related concerns. Also, it was revealed that most peer-reviewed articles examining the relationship between higher education and socio-economic mobility are authored by European scholars, showing that the region has strong attitudes towards social equity, economic development, and educational access. In contrast, Asian scholars tend to emphasize the improvement of higher education systems and their role in economic development. African scholars often focus on the challenges of educational, the ability of higher education in poverty elimination and reduction of other disparities typical for the contemporary society.

The key trends regarding the relationship between higher education and socio-economic mobility include widening educational access and quality, affordability of educational access, effect on employment of future specialists, creation of positive opportunities for socio-economic mobility across generations, the existence of regional and global variations of socio-economic mobility, and spread of lifelong learning. Besides, the factors influencing the effectiveness of higher education in promoting mobility refer to digital divide, urban-rural divide, family background, gender disparities, social perceptions of education, economic inequalities, labor market demands, affordability of education, secondary education preparedness, and quality of higher education institutions. Special attention was paid to the analysis of human capital and its impact upon socio-economic mobility. The findings demonstrated that they interplay through increase employability, higher earnings, career development, economic stability, creation of new job opportunities, improvement of socio-economic status, community engagement, and reducing inequalities.

The bibliometric review highlights important implications for policymakers and educational practitioners. It stresses upon the need for targeted policies to increase accessibility and inclusivity in higher education, particularly for underprivileged communities. Higher education institutions may imply the results to reduce financial, structural, and cultural barriers to ensure that educational process serves as a pathway for socio-economic mobility. Besides, certain findings can be used while developing the training programs in accordance with the requirements of labor. Definitely, the study reveals

significant trends and gaps in scientific literature and these outcomes can be used to better understand the interdisciplinary factors of higher education influencing socio-economic mobility.

Suggestions for Future Research

The bibliometric analysis emphasizes the significance of studying the impacts of higher education on socio-economic mobility within specific regional contexts. It means that future research should focus on understanding the influence of cultural dynamics and different economic peculiarities. Also, in future, research should analyze the effectiveness of higher education systems in different conflict-affected regions, examining the contribution of higher education to economic stability.

Another suggestion for future research should refer to the investigation of the influence of digitalization and technological advancements on higher education and its ability to foster socio-economic mobility within contemporary society. Future studies should analyze the role of online learning platforms, blended education models, and peer learning in increasing access to education for different groups of populations as well. The focus should be on the use of various digital tools while forming professional competence among graduates.

Additionally, research should concentrate on the integration of innovative teaching methodologies, such as gamification and AI-driven personalized learning, and their impact on enhancing employability and professional skill development. Obviously, future research should investigate the barriers to socio-economic mobility, particularly structural, financial, and cultural barriers. Scholars should analyze the approaches to overcome these barriers through higher education. Considering the fact that studying different aspects of national policies is essential for understanding the reduction of socio-economic disparities, future research should examine the possible public initiatives to develop efficient measures oriented towards the enhancement of socio-economic mobility under the conditions of digitalization and globalization.

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Conflict of Interest

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