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SOCIAL MOBILITY AND FURTHER EDUCATION INTENTIONS OF SELF-SPONSORED STUDENTS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of social mobility and further education intentions of self-sponsored students in public Universities in Rivers State. Three research questions were raised and two hypotheses formulated to guide the study. Correlational survey design was adopted in the study, while the population comprised all self-sponsored students in the three public Universities in Rivers State out of which 284 students (186 males and 98 females) were sampled for the study through snowballing sampling technique. A questionnaire tagged “Social Mobility and Further Education Intention Questionnaire” (SMFEIQ) was used for data gathering and scaled along the line of a four point modified Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with weighted values of 4, 3, 2 and 1. The questionnaire was face and content validated by experts in Rivers State University in Port Harcourt, Rivers State while the reliability of the questionnaire was estimated as 0.94 using Cronbach alpha statistics. The entire students sampled for the study responded to the questionnaire and returned their questionnaires immediately due to the sampling approach used. The research questions raised were answered using mean, standard deviation and ordinary least square regression while the hypotheses were tested using z-test at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the study found that the factors militating against the social mobility of self-sponsored students included financial constraints and inadequate support scheme. It was also revealed that income level was a significant determinant of students’ further education intentions. Strategies for improving further education intention of self-sponsored students included improved scholarship scheme and access to educational counselling. Perceived usefulness of education, income level and family size were significant determinants of

intention for further education. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that Universities should also set up a special fund to support the education of disadvantaged students.

Keywords: Further education, Self-sponsored students, Social mobility, Universities

Introduction

The human society is one that is characterized by mobility for social and economic reasons. Blackstone (2012) emphasizes that every child should have the potential to improve its social and economic status compared with that of its parents. This assertion underscores the fundamental belief that social mobility is a hallmark of a dynamic and fair society. To deny individuals this potential is to create a stultified society where effort and ambition are unrewarded, ultimately leading to rigid inequalities that become embedded and nearly impossible to overcome. Within the context of self-sponsored students, this notion resonates strongly, as their pursuit of further education often stems from a desire to transcend socioeconomic limitations inherent in their family backgrounds. The accessibility of education, thus, becomes more than an academic matter—it is deeply intertwined with societal structure and mobility.

The Office for Students (2018) supports the need for mobility as it noted that students from the lowest income backgrounds often incur the highest debts whilst they are in higher education because they have few other sources of support. This presents a paradox where the very individuals who stand to benefit the most from higher education face the greatest financial hurdles. For self-sponsored students, who do not have institutional or familial sponsorships, the debt burden can become a decisive factor in their educational journey. This financial strain potentially limits their educational aspirations, thus affecting their social mobility. It suggests that economic barriers remain a critical challenge to achieving the equitable opportunities that Blackstone (2012) advocates. Moreover, it highlights the pressing need for policies and institutional supports that mitigate financial inequities in higher education access.

Further evidence of this is found in Lisauskaite et al., (2021), who state that young people from a disadvantaged background are

more likely to move into employment and less likely to move into higher education. This tendency can be attributed to both immediate financial needs and a perceived lack of long-term returns from higher education, especially when juxtaposed against the high costs and debt concerns noted earlier. For self-sponsored students, this creates a tension between immediate economic survival and long-term socioeconomic advancement through education. The propensity to choose employment over education reinforces social stratification and diminishes the upward mobility that education is traditionally seen to provide. Consequently, understanding these dynamics is critical in analyzing the further education intentions of self-sponsored students.

Andersen (2022) argues that modern higher education has an obligation to form graduates who can work in new fields, deal with complex problems, and contribute with new angles to societal challenges. This highlights the evolving role of higher education not merely as a credentialing process but as a transformative tool equipping students for an increasingly complex world. For self-sponsored students, the promise of acquiring such competencies can serve as a compelling motivation to persist despite financial and social obstacles. Andersen's perspective also aligns with the broader societal expectations placed on higher education institutions to foster adaptable, innovative graduates capable of driving societal progress. Thus, promoting access to such transformative education is pivotal in enhancing social mobility, especially for those from less privileged backgrounds.

Social mobility has been a central tenet of social policy with cross-party support over the last two decades (Lawler and Payne, 2018). This sustained policy focus reflects a consensus on the importance of creating pathways for individuals to advance socially and economically, primarily through education. For self-sponsored students, such policies can offer structural support and institutional recognition of their unique challenges. However, the persistence of financial and social barriers, as previously discussed, indicates that policy intentions have not always translated into practical outcomes. This gap between policy and practice continues to shape the educational intentions and opportunities of self-sponsored learners, making it a crucial area of inquiry.

Skosana (2014) succinctly states that without intentions, action is unlikely. This underscores the importance of intention as a precursor to educational engagement. For self-sponsored students, forming a clear intention to pursue further education is fundamental to navigating the challenges they face. Intention bridges the gap between aspiration and action, serving as both a motivational driver and a psychological commitment. However, as earlier literature suggests, socioeconomic constraints can dampen these intentions, thereby limiting educational participation and, by extension, social mobility. Thus, understanding the formation and strength of educational intentions among self-sponsored students is central to any analysis of their further education trajectories.

Wang (2020) further elaborates on the factors influencing educational intentions, noting that students' attitudes towards entering higher education have the greatest influence on their intention of entering higher education, followed by perceived behavioral control, while subjective norms have the least influence. For self-sponsored students, positive attitudes towards education, coupled with a strong sense of personal agency (perceived behavioral control), can significantly shape their educational decisions. Given their often limited social and financial resources, these internal factors may compensate for weaker external social pressures (subjective norms). Wang's model provides a useful framework for examining how self-sponsored students navigate their educational aspirations in the face of structural challenges.

Lastly, Folkes (2022:139) notes that the common trope of social mobility constructs self-improvement as progression through education, employment, and income levels, resulting in improved living conditions and a new social class location. This conceptualization situates education as the linchpin of social mobility, reinforcing the narratives presented throughout the literature. For self-sponsored students, the pursuit of education embodies not just an academic goal but a transformative journey towards improved living standards and social repositioning. However, as earlier works highlight, this journey is fraught with obstacles that can deter or delay progress. Folkes' articulation encapsulates the aspirational dimension of education, framing it as both a means and an end in the broader quest for social mobility.

Researchers have attempted to investigate the relationship between social mobility and educational advancement across different scenarios. Davey (2025) investigated the decision-making processes of 16 high-achieving, working-class girls from northwest England regarding their applications to high-tariff universities. The study found that, although these girls had ambitious plans to improve their futures, their decisions were not primarily motivated by social mobility. Instead, they were driven by a broader understanding of the social benefits of higher education, indicating that their motivations were more nuanced, including concerns about personal development and contributing to the social good.

In a similar manner, Lin *et al.*, (2024) examined the relationship between social mobility beliefs and political engagement among 1,033 college students in Hong Kong. The findings revealed that belief in social mobility regarding average people (societal belief) was negatively related to youths' intentions to engage in normative political action. However, belief in personal social mobility was not significantly related to political engagement, suggesting that societal beliefs about mobility may influence political intentions more than personal beliefs.

On their part, Rosario *et al.*, (2014) investigated the factors influencing the intention to continue studying among nontraditional university students using a correlational design and data from 327 students. The study found that previous academic results were a determinant of the intention to continue studying, although the variance explained was relatively low (13%). The findings indicated that factors other than academic performance, such as personal circumstances or motivations, likely play a role in students' intention to persist in their studies.

The study by Arhin (2018) focused on the relationship between career aspirations and study behaviors among second-year distance learners at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. The findings revealed that most participants had positive career aspirations and good study behaviors. However, the statistical analysis showed a weak but significant positive correlation ($r = .273$, $p = .01$) between career aspirations and study behaviors, suggesting that while career goals do influence study habits, the relationship is not very strong.

On their part, Wang *et al.*, (2021) conducted a study on secondary vocational students' intentions to pursue higher education in

Western China, using a survey approach. The study found significant differences in students' intentions based on gender, grade, and academic performance. Additionally, students' attitudes towards higher education, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control were found to be significant predictors of their intention to enter higher education, highlighting the role of personal beliefs and external influences in shaping educational intentions.

Similarly, McCune *et al.*, (2010) examined the reasons why mature and younger students transition from further education to higher education using a mixed-methods approach. The quantitative data revealed that older students had different motivations for entering university compared to younger students, while the qualitative results showed that mature students possessed a deeper understanding of the relevance and meaning of their studies. This suggests that mature students approach higher education with more life experience and a stronger sense of purpose compared to their younger counterparts. These studies shows that several social mobility factors predict education intention of people across different social and economic orientation.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study was to investigate social mobility and further education intentions of self-sponsored students in public Universities in Rivers State. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. ascertain the factors militating against the social mobility of self-sponsored students in public Universities in Rivers State.
2. determine the effect of social mobility on the further education intention of self-sponsored students in public Universities in Rivers State.
3. find out the strategies of enhancing the further education intentions of self-sponsored students in public Universities in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. What are the factors militating against the social mobility of self-sponsored students in public Universities in Rivers State?

2. What is the effect of social mobility on the further education intention of self-sponsored students in public Universities in Rivers State?
3. What are the strategies of enhancing the further education intentions of self-sponsored students in public Universities in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using z-test statistics:

1. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the factors militating against the social mobility of self-sponsored students in public Universities in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the strategies of enhancing the further education intentions of self-sponsored students in public Universities in Rivers State.

Methodology

This study adopted a correlational survey design as it explores the effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable. Population of the study consisted of all self-sponsored students in the three public Universities in Rivers State which is currently unknown as no data is collected on such students while 284 students (186 males and 98 females) were sampled for the study through snowballing sampling technique. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire tagged "Social Mobility and Further Education Intention Questionnaire" (SMFEIQ) and scaled along the line of a four point modified Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with weighted values of 4, 3, 2 and 1. The questionnaire had a preliminary section for the collection of the respondents' demographic data. The questionnaires were face and content validated by an Educational Management expert at the Rivers State University in Port Harcourt, Rivers State while the reliability of the questionnaires were estimated as 0.94 and 0.88 respectively using Cronbach alpha statistics. The entire students sampled for the study responded to the questionnaire and returned their questionnaires immediately and this

resulted in a 100% retrieval rate as being sampled for the study was also based on availability to participate. The research questions raised were answered using mean, standard deviation and ordinary least square regression while the hypotheses were tested using z-test at 0.05 level of significance

Results

Answer to Research Questions

Research Question One: What are the factors militating against the social mobility of self-sponsored students in public Universities in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on the Factors Militating Against the Social Mobility of Self-Sponsored Students in Public Universities in Rivers State

S/No	Items	Male Students n=186		Female Students n=98		Mean Set	
		Mean $\bar{X}_1$	SD	Mean $\bar{X}_2$	SD	$\bar{X}$	Decision
1	Financial constraints as a result of high tuition	2.89	0.66	2.92	0.64	2.91	Agree
2	Limited access as a result of low University absorption rate	2.49	0.93	2.55	0.88	2.52	Agree
3	Inadequate support scheme in the Universities	2.91	0.65	2.97	0.60	2.94	Agree
4	Burnout from demanding academic and employment responsibilities	2.47	0.95	2.60	0.86	2.54	Agree
5	Inadequate learning resources for hybrid teaching and learning	2.87	0.67	2.64	0.83	2.76	Agree
	Average	2.73	0.77	2.74	0.76	2.73	Agree

Table 1 pointed out that the factors militating against the social mobility of self-sponsored students included financial constraints, limited University absorption rate, inadequate support scheme, burnout from academic and employment demands as well as inadequate learning resources.

Research Question Two: What is the effect of social mobility on the further education intention of self-sponsored students in public Universities in Rivers State?

Table 2: Regression Analysis on the Effect of Social Mobility on the Further Education Intention of Self-Sponsored Students in Public Universities in Rivers State

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	64.385	16.367		3.934	.011
Level_of_Education	3.246	2.571	.271	1.262	.263
Family_Size	4.587	1.842	.420	-2.490	.055
Perceived_Usefulness	10.353	4.077	.472	-2.540	.052
Income_Level	15.146	4.210	.552	3.597	.016

a. Dependent Variable: Further_Education_Intentions

Table 2 showed that family size, perceived usefulness and income level significantly predicted the further education intention of self-sponsored students. Income level contributed more to the students' further education intention with a coefficient of 0.552 and this was followed by perceived usefulness and family size at 0.472 and 0.420. The level of education was not significant to predicting the further education intention of self-sponsored students.

Research Question Three: What are the strategies of enhancing the further education intentions of self-sponsored students in public Universities in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on the Strategies of Enhancing the Further Education Intentions of Self-Sponsored Students in Public Universities in Rivers State

S/No	Items	Male Students n=186		Female Students n=98		Mean Set	
		Mean $\bar{X}_1$	SD	Mean $\bar{X}_2$	SD	$\bar{X}$	Decision
6	Improved scholarship scheme in the Universities	2.88	0.66	2.89	0.66	2.89	Agree
7	Institutionalization of hybrid education system	2.84	0.67	2.87	0.67	2.86	Agree
8	Access to academic counselling for proper career planning	2.65	0.82	2.77	0.71	2.71	Agree
9	Providing mentorship and internship programmes for students	2.68	0.81	2.80	0.70	2.74	Agree
10	Expansion of study loan schemes to cover more educational needs	2.80	0.71	2.78	0.72	2.79	Agree
	Average	2.77	0.73	2.82	0.69	2.80	Agree

Table 3 showed that the strategies for improving further education intention of self-sponsored students included improved scholarship scheme, institutionalizing hybrid education, access to educational counselling, providing mentorship and internship programmes and expansion of study loan schemes.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the factors militating against the social mobility of self-sponsored students in public Universities in Rivers State.

Table 4: z-test Analysis of no Significant Difference Between the Mean Ratings of Male and Female Respondents on the Factors Militating Against the Social Mobility of Self-Sponsored Students in Public Universities in Rivers State

Variable	n	Mean	SD	df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Level of Significance	Decision
Male Students	186	2.73	0.77	282	0.10	1.96	0.05	H ₀ Not Rejected
Female Students	98	2.74	0.76					

Table 4 revealed that the value of z-cal. of 0.10 was less than the value of z-crit. of 1.96 and on this note, the null hypothesis was not rejected and this implied that there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the factors militating against the social mobility of self-sponsored students in public Universities in Rivers State.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the strategies of enhancing the further education intentions of self-sponsored students in public Universities in Rivers State.

Table 5: z-test Analysis of no Significant Difference Between the Mean Ratings of Male and Female Respondents on the Strategies of Enhancing the Further Education Intentions of Self-Sponsored Students in Public Universities in Rivers State

Variable	n	Mean	SD	df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Level of Significance	Decision
Male Students	186	2.77	0.73	282	0.57	1.96	0.05	H ₀ Not Rejected
Female Students	98	2.82	0.69					

Table 5 showed that the value of z-cal. of 0.57 was less than the value of z-crit. of 1.96 and on this note, the null hypothesis was not rejected and this indicated that there was no significant difference between the

mean ratings of male and female respondents on the strategies of enhancing the further education intentions of self-sponsored students in public Universities in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

It was revealed from the findings of the study that level of education does not predict future educational intention. However, Rosário *et al.*, (2014) found that previous academic results were a determinant of the intention to continue studying among students. Arhin (2018) found that career aspiration was significant to future education intention and this agrees with the outcome of this study which showed that the perceived usefulness of the education being pursued will fuel the intention for further education. Furthermore, Davey (2025) stated that girls were more prone to further their education and this is closely related to the outcome of this study which indicated that family size can determine an individual's intention for further education. In a related manner, Wang *et al.*, (2021) puts it that other internal and external factors can determine how people perceive future education which is related to their family size which can be an influencing factor.

In the findings of the study, both male and female students expressed strong support for improved scholarship schemes at universities. They recognized scholarships as a critical component in alleviating the financial burdens of higher education, which allows students to focus more on their studies and less on financial concerns. Scholarships were seen as an essential tool to promote equal access to education, particularly for students who may face financial challenges. The institutionalization of a hybrid education system, which blends online and in-person learning, was also positively received. Both male and female students agreed on the benefits of a flexible learning environment, particularly in light of technological advancements and the disruptions caused by the global pandemic. The hybrid system allows students to balance their academic work with personal and professional responsibilities, offering a more adaptable and accessible educational experience.

Furthermore, the need for academic counselling, especially for career planning, was highlighted by both male and female students and this is essential as several societal factors determine students' educational aspirations (Lin *et al.*, 2024). Many students indicated that

proper guidance in choosing career paths and academic programs is crucial for academic success and future employment opportunities. Career counselling services were perceived as instrumental in helping students align their academic pursuits with their professional aspirations, ensuring that they make informed decisions about their futures. The provision of mentorship and internship opportunities was also seen as an essential component of students' academic and professional development. The male and female students alike agreed that mentorship provides valuable insights into their fields of interest, while internships offer hands-on experience that enhances their skills and employability. These programmes are crucial for bridging the gap between academic knowledge and real-world applications thereby helping students build networks and gain practical experience.

The male and female student groups also expressed strong support for expanding study loan schemes. Several students face financial barriers that can limit their access to education and hinder their academic progress. By expanding loan schemes to cover a broader range of educational needs, more students can receive the financial assistance they require to complete their studies. This is because several social and cultural factors determine the educational need of any student (McCune *et al.*, 2010). The expansion of such schemes would ensure that education is more accessible and equitable for all students, regardless of their financial backgrounds. The result of the study suggest that male and female students have similar views on the importance of these educational support measures. There were slight variations in the responses of the respondents. However, they both expressed agreement on the value of scholarships, hybrid learning, career counselling, mentorship, internships, and study loans. This indicates that these initiatives are broadly recognized as important for improving the quality of education and enhancing students' academic and professional development.

Conclusion

The result from the study showed a basis to conclude that social mobility was significant to the further education intention of self-sponsored students. The study showed that the students' access to support contributed significantly to their social mobility and by implication their further education intention. This means that students

who get the required support are more likely to proceed with their education to higher levels.

Recommendations

The recommendations made based on the findings of the study are as follows:

1. Universities need to set up a special fund in the form of institutional support for vulnerable students such as self-sponsored students as this has the capacity to increase their intention to proceed with their education.
2. The government needs to expand their scholarship support at all levels of education as this will go long way to increase students' transition to higher levels of education especially for less privileged students.
3. The government needs to revise some of its existing educational laws, especially those that will permit students to pick up part time employment while schooling, particularly for students who have financial challenges while in school as this will help to increase their chances of acquiring higher levels of education.

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