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## Social Inequality in Modern Higher Education

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### Abstract

One of the urgent problems of modern society is the accessibility and quality of higher education for various population groups. The importance of the knowledge and skills acquired in the process of education to achieve social success is proved by a large number of studies. However, the value of higher education for the representatives of different social groups is an open to debate issue. Many researchers point out that the function of education as a channel of the social mobility is gradually neutralized. On the contrary, education becomes an institute of strengthening and reproduction of the inequality. This process contributes to another socio-cultural effect – dislocation of the value scale for those who are deprived of access to quality higher education. As a result we can observe the erosion of basic mental values in the society, the growth of resentment sentiment and social tension. The given article discusses some aspects of the above mentioned problems.

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**Keywords:** educational inequality; access to higher education; vertical social mobility; quality of higher education; efficiency of higher education; labor market; resentment; educational policy

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### 1. Introduction

One of the key problems of modern higher education is quality of education and ensuring equal access to it, regardless social, economic and cultural condition of people.

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There is a wide range of international researches showing how the acquired educational capital (in particular, duration of training and quality of the academic results) defines successful socialization and vital achievements. Thus, in many researches it is noted that the function of education as a social elevator will gradually atrophy, thereby turning education into the social institute of fixing and reproduction of inequality.

This problem is given full attention by Russian authors, however these researches have generally stated the character while there is still a greater demand for listing the real reasons of educational inequality and how it's influenced by the character of national education systems. There is also a demand for the comparative analysis that might reveal how it is influenced by the politics carried out by the developed and developing countries.

This analysis will allow allocating the groups of countries that can serve as an example of a successful combination of reducing inequality policy in relation to higher education action and improvement of quality of education in various social, economic and cultural contexts. It will also help to describe the best practices most corresponding to the Russian social field, reveal opportunities for domestic educational policy. The data of the international comparative researches (like TIMMS, PISA) can become a perspective information base for identification of the best strategies of educational policy providing decrease in educational inequality.

The initial prerequisite of this research is the idea that additional educational opportunities can be considered by more successful and more safe social groups as a way of providing additional benefits in the education system (from the point of view of transition to higher educational step and/or enrolling in more prestigious educational institutions).

In the situation of unequal access to these services (owing to restrictions from the offer (of the corresponding infrastructure), and from demand (material prosperity of families) it can cause serious damage to the principle of equal opportunities and promote preservation of the social and economic inequality.

New opportunities for research of the specified questions are opened by using the data collected by "Long-term research of educational and labour trajectories" (The study of educational and labour trajectories of pupils and students, 2015). In recent years there were a number of attempts of adaptation and application in Russia of the "school-effectiveness" and "school-improvement" models aimed at strengthening the capacity of schools in providing quality of education for children from families with the low social status.

The case-analysis of these models' use in Russia is important because the research of practice and effects of realization of the "school-effectiveness" and "school-improvement" models in the cross-national context is one of the most up-to date methods of the world-wide researches (Bert & Creemers, 2007).

This research will hopefully add to the understanding of the reasons that lead to inequality of access to higher education and ambiguity of educational results. It will expand the ideas of educational policy strategies and concrete organizational and administrative models that strengthen the capacity of the higher school as the channel of vertical social mobility.

## **2. Research novelty**

The given article presents the results obtained in the longitudinal study. The authors give the analysis of the unique empirical material (longitudinal studies of educational and labor trajectories of university students on the basis of the Russian part of the PISA project), the correlation patterns of higher education and socio-economic situation of families, the school context and overall level of development of the local educational infrastructure is also considered in this study. The study makes it possible to obtain new information about the institutional arrangement features of national educational systems, types of education policies and specific strategies that promote or hinder the emergence of educational inequality. The article represents these results in the summarized form. The novelty of this article is stressed by the fact that this publication presents the conclusions about the possible mechanisms of transformation of higher education system as a channel of upward mobility in the countries with different types of economic and social policy for the first time.

## **3. Objectives, methodology and research design**

The object of the research is the phenomenon of inequality in the higher education. The research objective is to reveal key regularities in the reproduction of inequality in higher education in various demographic and socio-

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