

Education and the Workforce: A Comparative Analysis of the United States, Britain, and Germany

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Abstract

Education has often been perceived as the great equalizer, providing the skills and knowledge needed to compete in an ever increasingly competitive world. Nations are driven to create education systems that will foster a successful economy by producing appropriately skilled and educated citizens to facilitate domestic growth and global competition. This study will engage case studies and survey analysis to explore why despite this common goal of prosperity, the United States, Germany, and Britain took different routes in creating education systems that each country felt would best serve its needs. Analysis of primary and secondary documents will be conducted to examine education funding sources, private sector interests in education, and cultural attitudes towards education. Cross-national differences will then be discussed in regards to their influence in the development of diverse education systems. A survey will be used to explore differences in cultural attitudes towards education, the individual, and society as a whole in Britain and the United States. Qualitative and quantitative analyses of cross-national differences are documented in order to analyze distinctions and similarities in cultural attitudes that affect the development of education systems. I find that these attitudes play a large role in the development of each country's education systems. These case studies will advance our understanding of how funding sources, the private sector, and cultural attitudes influence the development of policies within a country and by understanding the political frameworks, further research regarding educational policy and education frameworks can be conducted.

Hypotheses

- 1) Education funding source dictates presence of education uniformity or lack thereof
- 2) Private sector interests are reflected in the education emphasis
- 3) Cultural attitudes are reflected in a country's education design

Methodology

This study examines factors that have led to the development of different education systems aimed at closing the achievement gap across different socioeconomic groups in order to increase global competition.

Qualitative Analysis: I first analyzed primary and secondary documents regarding education funding sources, private sector interests in education, and cultural attitudes towards education and noted cross-national differences between the United States, Germany, and Britain. These countries were used as case studies to explore their unique education systems aimed at creating productive and competitive members of society.

Survey: I then used a survey to explore cross-national differences in cultural attitudes towards education, the individual, and society as a whole in Britain and the United States. I measured the public opinion of 273 American respondents and 250 British respondents. Qualitative and quantitative analyses of cross-national differences were documented in order to analyze distinctions and similarities in cultural attitudes that affect the development of education systems in each country.

Results

Main Findings

Sources of education funding, private sector interests, and cultural attitudes found within a country influence the political framework on which different education systems develop.

Qualitative Results

Britain: Unitary

- Federal education funding
- Strong unitary education system
- Weak private sector involvement in both academic and vocational education

United States: decentralized system

- State and municipal level education funding which has led to educational disparities
- Federal assistance dependent on student enrollment and performance based results
- Private sector invested in STEM to become an intellectual giant
- Information business-school partnerships (donations and volunteering)

Germany: centralized system

- Federal education funding has led to uniformity across schools
- National legislation and standards
- Invested in a strong labor market to become an industrial giant
- Strong state and private sector coordination for education design and implementation

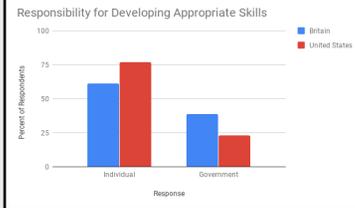


Figure 2a: Responsibility for Skill Development Britain vs. the United States

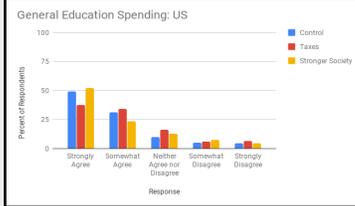


Figure 3a: Experimental Question General Education Spending in the United States

Survey Results: The United States and Britain

- Both countries reported support for increased spending on general education, but this support decreased slightly when the need for taxes and benefit of a global competition were introduced
- Both countries reported majority support for VET spending
- Both countries reported narrowing of the achievement gap between income groups, but not racial groups
- United States reported more individualistic attitudes than Britain, citing more support for the individual being responsible for developing appropriate skills for the market than the government

Country	Education Type	Funding Type	Private Interest
United States	Formal	Local	Weak
Germany	Dual	Federal	Strong
Britain	Unitary	Federal	Weak

Figure 1: Education Systems and Funding Sources

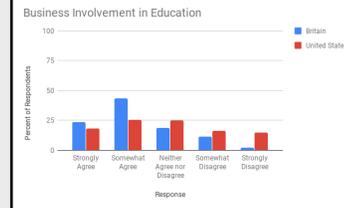


Figure 2b: Comparison of Business Involvement in Britain vs. the United States

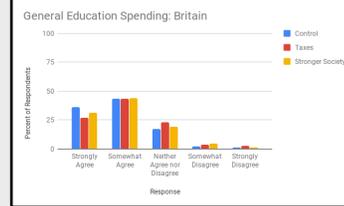


Figure 3b: Experimental Question General Education Spending in Britain

Conclusions

- Findings from the United States and Britain do not support the idea that when prompted by the increase in global competition, citizens voice greater support for spending on education (often been the case)
- Cultural attitudes do in fact align with the type of education system that developed within these countries
- Private sector is more directly involved in education in Germany than in the United States
- Germany created a centralized system for education funding, which created uniformity in schools across the country
- Decentralized funding has led to educational disparities among different groups of students in the United States

Further Research

- Advances our understanding of how funding sources, the private sector, and cultural attitudes influence the development of policies within a country
- Provides additional insight into the making of educational policy that different countries have today
- Offers new insight into the path dependency trajectory education appears to take

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