

Parents' Preferred Locus of Responsibility for Funding Secondary Education: A Test of Four Models

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find out from parents whom they expect to bear the cost of secondary education in Ghana. The study was designed to test four models that are used in the sociological literature to explain parents' behaviour regarding the education of their children. A pen-and-paper questionnaire was used to collect the data from a random sample of 509 subjects from a Ghanaian administrative district. The results of the data analysis showed that the preferred locus of responsibility for funding secondary education was both parents and government. The results showed further that the 'vested-interest' and the 'group identification' models seemed to explain the preferences of the subjects in this study.

Keywords: Education Funding; Vested- Interest; Group Identification.

Introduction

The mode of financing education in Ghana since the European mercantile era has been virtually the same. When formal education started in the castles it was free of charge. This was probably because the schools were meant for the "mullato" children of the European merchants (McWilliam & Kwamena-Poh, 1975; Graham, 1976). When the missionary bodies entered the field of education parents only had to pay token fees. This was so because the mission schools received financial support from the home missions and local church contributions to supplement the paltry sums charged students (McWilliam & Kwamena-Poh, 1975; Graham, 1976).

When the colonial government also entered the field it began to extend financial assistance in the form of grants to the missions to develop their schools. The Guggisberg administration in particular introduced free education at the basic level while at the secondary level students paid token fees (McWilliam & Kwamena-Poh, 1975; Graham, 1976). In addition, that administration introduced a scholarship scheme for brilliant secondary school students who came from disadvantaged backgrounds. Huge sums of money were also paid to subsidize all levels of education in the country (Graham, 1976).

The first government after independence introduced fee-free primary education in the country. Parents only had to provide their children with school uniforms, money for transportation and lodging and boarding. The government also introduced the Cocoa Marketing Board Scholarship Scheme to support needy, brilliant and promising students from deprived homes to have secondary education. This was to address the imbalances arising from the limited and unequal access to education (Quist, 1999). The government also introduced the Northern Special Scholarship Scheme to help bridge the education and development gap that had existed

between the North and South of the country (Quist, 1999). Students who were not on any form of scholarship only had to pay token fees for boarding and lodging.

This method of financing education did not change under successive governments. In 1996, the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) programme was introduced making basic education compulsory and virtually free. In September, 2005, payment of capitation grants to all public basic schools was introduced. By this the fees paid by each pupil in public basic school were absorbed by government. Thus, within these past ten years government subsidies on education have progressively led to a reduction in parents' share of the cost of basic education.

Secondary education, on the other hand, has not enjoyed as much support from government since the 1990's. Gradually the subsidies paid to support secondary education have been reduced, if not withdrawn, and as a result, parents have had to bear progressively greater proportions of the cost of secondary education.

Statement of the problem

Due, probably, to the phenomenal rise in the cost of secondary education, substantial numbers of junior high school leavers who are supposed to be in senior high school are not in school. Available data show that since 1990, only about 44% of junior high school leavers enrolled in senior high school leaving a whopping 56% (who have no skills) on the streets (Report of the President's Committee on Review of Education Reforms, 2002). This low access to secondary education tends to suggest two things: either parents have been so used to subsidized education that they find it unthinkable to bear a large chunk of the cost of their children's secondary education, or parents just cannot afford secondary education for their children at the current price. Attitude and ability to pay are thus an issue. The question then is: who do parents prefer to bear the cost of secondary education. Is it parents, government, or both?

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to find out from parents who, in their view, is or must be responsible for the education of their children in secondary school. In other words, the study was designed to find out parents' preferred locus of responsibility for funding secondary education.

Literature review

Different groups of people approve or disapprove of various types of intervention facilities designed to facilitate access and participation in secondary education. Four different models are generally used to explain parents' preference for mode of funding education. These are the deficit model, the vested-interest model, the group-identification model and the dominant-ideology model. The "deficit model" is about the apparent tendency of some people to neglect the education of their wards and expect someone else to do it for them. In the USA, ethnic minorities such as Blacks and Hispanics who are generally poor are said to lack the sense of responsibility for their children's education (Nobles, 1988; Taylor, Chather, Turker and Lewis, 1990). In the Ghana case, parents who, like their Black and Hispanic counterparts in the USA, are apparently not committed to the education of their children or lack the willingness to send their wards to secondary school could be expected to back public funding of secondary education. Thus, in Ghana, the 'deficit model' may be applicable to parents who fail to execute their legal and parental duty to their wards and instead expect the state to do it for them. Parents in the low socio-economic bracket could be postulated to portray this tendency by their apparent overdependence on government for the education of their children.

The "vested-interest model" explains the differences in the predisposition to policies, decisions and programmes concerning funding education and other social welfare services. The model posits that those

who stand to gain from certain policies tend to readily favour such policies while those who can make it even without the 'free' element tend to be less predisposed to such policies. This implies that acceptance of such intervention facilities stems from self-interest. The "vulnerable" or "underdog" groups are motivated to back social welfare programmes more than their better-placed counterparts. This connotes that social class membership determines who will or will not support social welfare programmes. In Ghana, free education, scholarships and grants to students are likely to be supported more readily by those who cannot afford the full cost of secondary education. Those who can afford the cost of secondary education will not be excited about such interventions since they can make it even without welfare support. The model thus suggests that the economically better placed would be inward looking and will not be supportive of welfare programmes. Again, the "vested-interest model" suggests that parents would support alternative sources of funding education that would not affect their pocket directly and would disapprove of those that would directly or indirectly impinge on their financial resources (Steelman & Powell, 1993).

The "dominant-ideology model" explains the opinion that some people have concerning the education of children. Some people hold the view that the education of children is the responsibility of parents themselves. Such people have a strong belief in individualism, which emphasizes personal responsibility. Such parents are said to be nonchalant or even opposed to government intervention in education and other welfare services (Huber & Form, 1973). It is postulated that in Ghana, highly educated parents, most of who are in the high socio-economic class, may harbour such an idea and may wish that parents are made solely responsible for the secondary education of their children.

The "group-identification model" explains people's support for programmes and policies that favour members of the group they belong to, and not necessarily that they themselves stand to benefit from such programmes and policies. Some individuals, therefore, identify with the generalized experience of the groups to which they belong and respond accordingly. This tendency connotes that some people tend to consider the plight of others who relate to them when making decisions to support policies. Implicit in this line of reasoning is that minority group members regardless of whether they experience difficulties or not closely identifies and sympathize with the troubles that afflict their fellow members (Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989).

In the USA, where racial sentiments are very high, the minority, irrespective of their social status tend to support social welfare services that are geared towards improving the standard of living of minority groups. That is why Blackwell (1985) contends that the strong ties that upwardly mobile blacks retain with extended kin, the church and the black community continue to fuel their liberal political views. Schuman, Steeh and Bobo (1989) think that, in USA impoverished whites as members of the more privileged racial group tend to be less predisposed to collective policy, while well-to-do Blacks tend to support government interventions since such interventions go to benefit their black brothers who live on the fringes of life.

Research questions

Two research questions guided the study. These are:

1. Which of the methods of funding secondary education do parents support?
2. What major alternative sources of funding secondary education do parents support?

Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were tested. These are:

1. Parents' preferred locus of responsibility for funding secondary education does not differ by type of community.

2. Parents' preferred locus of responsibility for funding secondary education does not differ by level of education.

Method

This study aims at finding out who parents expect to bear the cost of secondary education in Ghana. The Assin District of the Central Region of Ghana was selected as the site for testing the models. In the first place, the Central Region ranks 4th of all the 10 regions on the poverty continuum in Ghana (GLSS, 2003). This presupposes that Assin District which is within the Central Region also has poor communities and is likely to have populations that could exhibit some of the characteristics described in the deficit and vested-interest models. Naturally also, there are a few urban and educated communities that are well off enough to exhibit some of the characteristics portrayed in the dominant-ideology model.

Data were collected from a sample of 509 subjects randomly selected from the communities. The stratified and systematic random sampling techniques were adopted. Thirteen settlements made up of villages, small towns and a large town was systematically selected from a list of settlements collected from the district administration. The sampled communities were grouped into urban, semi-urban and rural on the basis of their geo-social proximity to the centre of urban life. Availability of modern social amenities such as potable water, good access roads, tele-communication facilities, health centres, police station, electricity, schools with modern facilities, modern sector employment opportunities, among others, formed the basis for the classification.

Communities such as towns that possess urban characteristics were classified as urban communities. Communities that are progressive but do not have all the facilities in the centre of urban life were classified as semi-urban communities. Rural communities are the villages, which are geo-socially far from the centre of urban life in the sense that they lack most of the aforementioned facilities. The deficit model and the vested-interest model are postulated to be dominant in the rural and semi-urban communities, while the dominant-ideology model is postulated to be dominant in the urban and educated communities.

Instrumentation

A pen-and-paper questionnaire was used to collect the data for the study. The questionnaire had four sections. Section A sought details of bio-data; Section B sought information on type of community, while Section C sought information on parents' preferred locus of responsibility for funding secondary education. Section D sought information on alternative sources of funding secondary education preferred by parents.

Variables and measurement

The variables in question are level of education, type of community, methods of funding secondary education preferred, and alternative sources of funding preferred. Level of education was measured on a 6-point scale from 'no schooling, with a value of '1', to postgraduate education with a value of '6'. Type of community was classified as '1', urban, '2', semi-urban, and '3', rural. Preferred methods of funding were elicited with statements that called for the answers 'totally disagree'(1), 'strongly disagree'(2), "disagree"(3), "agree"(4), 'strongly agree'(5), and 'totally agree'(6). Questions on alternative sources of funding also elicited responses that were measured on the same scale as above.

However, for the purpose of seeking answers to the research questions, all response categories in the negative form were pooled together and labeled 'Disagree' responses, while those in the positive form

were pooled together and labeled ‘Agree’ responses. In testing the hypotheses, the data were converted back into the original 6-point Likert scale in order to make analysis by one-way ANOVA valid.

Results and Discussion

As already indicated, the study was guided by two research questions. Two hypotheses were also tested. Frequencies and percentages were used to present the data for answering the research questions while the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test the hypotheses.

Research question 1

Which of the methods of funding secondary education do parents support?

This question was intended to ascertain whether parents in the various communities wish that the responsibility for funding secondary education should fall on parents themselves or the state. In order to answer this question, all the response categories in the positive direction were counted together and classified under ‘Agree’. Table 1 presents respondents’ agreement with the statements that indicate the methods of funding secondary education.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of preferred method of funding secondary education

Statement	Agree		Disagree	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1. The responsibility for bearing the cost of secondary education should be on both parents and government.	397	78.0	112	22.0
2. The responsibility for bearing the cost of secondary education should be on government.	93	18.3	416	81.7
3. The responsibility for bearing the cost of secondary education should be on parents.	11	2.2	498	97.8

The results shown in Table 1 indicate that the subjects do not support the idea that only one main stakeholder in secondary education should single-handedly finance that level of education in the country. This is evidenced by the fact that, in Table 1, 78% of the respondents agreed to the suggestion that the responsibility for bearing the cost of secondary education should fall on both parents and government. The respondents offered several explanations for their preference for shared responsibility for funding secondary education. The gist of them all is that if the state bears the cost all by itself, the coffers of the state would be drained to the extent that government would be incapable of providing other equally important services. Secondly, school quality will be diluted if the state is unable to raise enough revenue to support the schools.

On the basis of the results of the data analysis, it is concluded that parents in this study prefer that the responsibility for bearing the cost of secondary education in the country should fall on both parents and government.

Research question 2

What major alternative sources of funding secondary education do parents support?

This question was designed to find out whether parents in the various communities would support other means of raising funds to finance secondary education in the country. The alternative sources and their corresponding responses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: **Alternative sources of funding secondary education**

Source of funding	Agree		Disagree	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1. District Assemblies and Traditional Councils should increase their donations and bursaries to fund secondary education	492	96.3	17	3.3
2. The business community should be made to bear part of the cost of secondary education	474	93.1	35	6.9
3. A special tax should be levied to raise funds for secondary education	141	27.7	368	72.3

The majority (96.3) of the respondents agree that the district assemblies and traditional councils should increase their donations and bursaries to secondary schools and students. This is because such a gesture will broaden access to secondary education and thereby produce highly educated citizens who will become able ambassadors of the communities. Such citizens will also be committed to serve their communities when they complete their studies.

Again, the data in Table 2 show that majority (93.1) of the respondents support the idea that the business community should participate in funding secondary education. They are of the view that as part of its corporate social responsibility, the business community should contribute to the development of the community it operates in so it should compensate them through this means. A reasonable number (72.3%) of the respondents, however, disagreed that an educational tax should be levied specifically to finance secondary education. They indicated that the citizens are already saddled with payment of taxes so an additional one will worsen their plight.

In the light of the above, it is clear that the “vested-interest model” explains parents’ preference for alternative sources of funding secondary education. As already indicated, the “vested-interest argument” posits that people whose pockets are not likely to be affected negatively by certain policies and programmes tend to readily accept them while those whose pockets are likely to be affected negatively by those policies and programmes tend to disapprove them. This is underscored by the fact that the parents in the study support alternative sources of funding that, if adopted, will not directly affect their pockets and reject those that would directly or indirectly affect their pockets, if adopted. Hence, the parents support the idea that the business community should be made to participate in funding secondary education. It is, therefore, concluded that parents support contributions by the district assembly, traditional councils and the business community.

Testing of the Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Parents' preferred locus of responsibility for funding secondary education does not differ by type of community.

The one-way ANOVA was used to analyze the data for testing hypothesis one. The results of the data analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Analysis of parents' preferred locus of responsibility using ANOVA descriptive

		N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval Mean		Mini	Max
						L. Bound	U. Bound		
The responsibility for bearing the cost of secondary education should fall on government	Rural	189	1.8571	.35086	.02552	1.8068	1.9075	1	2
	Semi-urban	164	1.8293	.37743	.02947	1.7711	1.8875	1	2
	Urban	156	1.7564	.43063	.03448	1.6883	1.8245	1	2
	Total	509	1.8173	.38681	.01715	1.7836	1.8510	1	2
The responsibility for funding secondary education should fall on parents	Rural	189	1.9630	.18935	.01377	1.9358	1.9075	1	2
	Semi-urban	164	1.9878	.11009	.00860	1.9708	1.8875	1	2
	Urban	156	1.9872	.11286	.00904	1.9693	1.8245	1	2
	Total	509	1.9784	.14555	.00645	1.9657	1.8510	1	2
The responsibility for funding secondary education should fall on both parents and government	Rural	189	4.2063	.40576	.02951	1.1481	1.2646	1	2
	Semi-urban	164	4.1829	.38779	.03029	1.1231	1.2427	1	2
	Urban	156	4.2756	.44828	.03589	1.2047	1.3465	1	2
	Total	509	4.2200	.41468	.01838	1.1839	1.2562	1	2

ANOVA

		Sums of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
The responsibility for bearing cost of secondary education should fall on government.	Between Groups	.902	2	.451	3.038	.049*
	Within Groups	75.106	506	.148		
	Total	76.008	508			
The responsibility for funding secondary education should fall on parents	Between Groups	.072	2	.036	1.694	.185
	Within Groups	10.691	506	.021		
	Total	10.763	508			
The responsibility funding secondary education should fall on both parents and government.	Between Groups	.744	2	.372	2.172	.115
	Within Groups	86.612	506	.171		
	Total	87.356	508			

Of the three statements tested under parents' preferred locus of responsibility for funding secondary education, differences were found among the communities with respect to the statement that the responsibility for funding secondary education should fall on government $F(2,509) = 3.038, p < .049$. However, the means indicate clearly that all the communities disagree with that statement. They all also disagree with the statement that the responsibility should fall on parents only.

The result indicate that in all the communities, parents do not support the idea that the responsibility for funding secondary education should fall on government. Neither do they support the idea that the responsibility for funding secondary education should fall on parents. In all the communities, the overwhelming preference is for parents/government partnership. We, therefore, fail to reject the null hypothesis that parents' preferred locus of responsibility for funding secondary education does not differ by type of community.

Majority of the parents (416) in the various communities disagree with the suggestion that the responsibility for bearing the cost of secondary education should fall squarely on government. One would have expected parents in the rural communities, most of who are assumed to be economically disadvantaged, to shift the burden of financing secondary education to the government. Yet, most of these "vulnerables" or "underdogs" showed a very high degree of willingness to collaborate with the state to finance their children's secondary education. This preference for funding secondary education really fails to support the "deficit model" which posits that the poor usually fail to recognize their legal and parental duty to their wards' education and do expect someone else to do it for them. Thus, the above demonstrates that the "deficit model" does not explain the preferred locus of responsibility for funding secondary education of rural and disadvantaged parents in this study. Parents obviously are alive to their responsibility to their children's secondary education.

Hypothesis 2: Parents' preferred locus of responsibility for funding secondary education does not differ by level of education. One-way ANOVA was used to analyze the data for testing hypothesis two. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Analysis of parents' preferred locus of responsibility using ANOVA

		N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval Mean		Mini	Max
						L. Bound	U. Bound		
The responsibility for bearing the cost of secondary education should fall on government	No schooling	311	1.7717	.42041	.02384	1.7248	1.8186	1	2
	Secondary education	147	1.8980	.34754	.02505	1.8484	1.9475	1	2
	Postsecondary education	51	1.8173	.34754	.04867	1.7650	1.9605	1	2
	Total	509	1.8173	.38681	.01715	1.7836	1.8510	1	2
The responsibility for bearing the cost of secondary education should fall on parents	No schooling	311	1.9839	.12598	.00714	1.9699	1.9980	1	2
	Secondary education	147	1.9932	.08248	.00680	1.9798	2.0066	1	2
	Postsecondary education	51	1.9020	.30033	.04205	1.8175	1.9864	1	2
	Total	509	1.9784	.14555	.00645	1.9657	1.9911	1	2
The responsibility for bearing the cost of secondary education should fall on both parents and government	No schooling	311	4.2637	.44133	.02503	1.2144	1.3129	1	2
	Secondary education	147	4.1224	.32892	.02713	1.0688	1.1761	1	2
	Postsecondary education	51	4.2353	.42840	.05999	1.1148	1.3558	1	2
	Total	509	4.2200	.41468	.01838	1.1839	1.2562	1	2

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
The responsibility for funding secondary education should fall on both parents and government	Between Groups	1.708	2	.854	5.817	.003*
	Within Groups	74.300	506	.147		
	Total	76.008	508			
The responsibility for funding secondary education should fall on both parents and parents	Between Groups	.340	2	.170	8.245	.000*
	Within Groups	10.423	506	.021		
	Total	10.762	508			
The responsibility for funding secondary education should fall on both parents and parents and government	Between Groups	2.004	2	1.002	5.940	.003*
	Within Groups	85.352	506	.169		
	Total	87.356	508			

All the three statements tested under parents' preferred locus of responsibility for funding secondary education by level of education showed statistically significant differences. In spite of this the means show clearly that all the groups disagree with the first two statements while they all support the third. The statistically significant differences are thus not relevant, since they portray the degree of difference or similarity in agreement/disagreement. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that the three groups do not differ significantly in their preference for forms of funding secondary education. One would have expected parents with post-secondary education (most of whom are gainfully employed and can afford to pay for the cost of their children's secondary education) to agree that the responsibility for funding secondary education should fall squarely on parents. However, these parents disagreed with this suggestion just as their counterparts who have lower education or none at all did. This tendency thus fails to support the "dominant-ideology thesis". Some high class people are said to overtly display this attitude obviously because they regard government intervention in their wards' education as a failing in their duty. This implies that the highly educated parents in this study do not portray this dominant- ideology tendency. The group identification model rather tends to better explain the attitude of the well educated in this study. This group apparently shows solidarity and sympathy with their poorer compatriots and therefore tends to identify with them.

In conclusion, the study has revealed that most parents support the idea of shared responsibility for funding secondary education. It has also shown that the "vested-interest model" which posits that people tend to endorse policies and programmes that favour them and tend to disapprove those that directly or indirectly negatively affect them, seems to underlie the behaviour of parents in this study. This is evidenced by the fact that while they accept the suggestion that the district assemblies, traditional councils and the business community should participate in funding secondary education, they tend to reject the suggestion that a tax should be levied to raise funds for the same purpose. They tend to think this way probably because they are taxpayers who will be affected directly or indirectly if such a tax became a reality.

However, the "deficit model" which posits that low income earners tend to look up to someone else for the education of their children does not seem to explain the preference of rural parents in this study, most of whom are assumed to be low income earners. This is because they did not shift the full burden of funding

secondary education to the government. Though, they expect the state to bear part of the cost of secondary education, they see the responsibility as theirs too.

Similarly, the “dominant-ideology model” which posits that the education of children should be the responsibility of parents does not seem to explain the behaviour of the highly educated parents in this study. The highly educated parents, most of who are gainfully employed settled on shared responsibility for funding secondary education just as those with little or no formal education did. This implies that the “dominant-ideology thesis” does not explain the preferred locus of responsibility for funding secondary education of the well-to-do parents in the study.

In sum it can be concluded that parents in this study, irrespective of their location, and irrespective of their socio-economic status, tend to prefer the locus of responsibility for funding secondary education to be on both parents and government. On the basis of this we cannot claim that parents have been so pampered with subsidies that they are now unwilling to pay more for their own children’s education in secondary school. Rather, a plausible explanation for the poor access to secondary education of many a junior high school graduate is the inability to pay for the proportions of the cost involved. Naturally therefore, owing to poverty, parents who cannot afford would wish that government bears a proportion of the cost of secondary education.

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