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A conceptual framework for enhancing
accountability in public schooling

MPONANA ABEDNEGO SEAKAMELA

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Promoter: Prof. P.J. Mentz

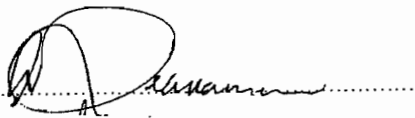
Co-promoter: Prof. E.J. Spamer

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis for the Doctor of Philosophy in Education Management at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North West University has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university, that is is my own work in design and execution. All sources quoted have been duly acknowledged and indicated by means of a comprehensive list of references



Abednego Mponana Seakamela

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my late parents, Hosea Matladi and Dorcas Matlhodi Seakamela who always believed in me and taught me the values of honesty and integrity; my brothers Nelson and Betshael for always being there for me; my loving wife Mphoentle, who inputted technically in this work and also encouraged me to soldier on even when the going was difficult, and all my children for the confidence they have in me.

Finally I also commit this work to the Almighty for giving me the strength and intellect to complete this work.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS USED IN THE STUDY

| | |
|---------------|---|
| ADP | Africa Development Plan |
| ANC | African National Congress |
| APRM | Africa Peer Review Mechanism |
| AU | African Union |
| CDE | Center for Development and Enterprise |
| CMEC | Committee of Education Ministers |
| CPSI | Centre for Public Service Innovation |
| CSR | Comprehensive Spending Review |
| DBE | Department of Basic Education |
| DPSA | Department of Public Service and Administration |
| GEAR | The Growth, Employment and Redistribution Policy |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| HEDCOM | Heads of Education Committee |
| HOD | Head of Department |
| HSRC | Human Sciences Research Council |
| ICC | International Convention Center (Durban) |
| IFI's | International Financial Institutions |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| IRPS | International Relations Peace and Security |
| MDG's | Millenium Development Goals |
| MEC | Member of Executive Council |
| MLA | Monitoring Learner Achievement |
| MoES | Ministry of Education and Sport (Uganda) |
| NEEDU | National Education Evaluation Unit |

| | |
|---------------|---|
| NEPA | National Education Policy Act no.27 of 1996 |
| NEPAD | The New Partnership for Africa's Development |
| NGO | Non government Organisation |
| NWED | North-West Education Department |
| OBA | Outcomes Based Approach |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| PCAS | Policy Co-ordination and Advisory Services |
| PFMA | Public Finance Management Act of 1999 (Act no. 29 of 1999) |
| PSA's | Public Service Agreements |
| PRA | Participatory Rural Approach |
| RSA | Republic of South Africa |
| SASA | South African Schools act, as Amended, 1996 (Act no. 84 of 1996) |
| SAQMEC | Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Education quality |
| SBM(T) | School Based Management (Team) |
| SGB | School Governing Body |
| SMS | Senior Management Service |
| SPSS | Statistical Programme for the Social Sciences |
| SRM | School Reform Movement |
| TBCS | Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat |
| TIMSS | Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study |
| TYR | Ten Year Review |
| WDR | World Development Report |
| UN | United Nations |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |

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SUMMARY

The notion of accountability assumes different meanings and emphasis in different contexts depending on the purpose for which it is used. In essence, accountability has to do with the demand for improved services, operations and products. In the public sector in particular, the spread of democratization has led to growing public demand for improved and better services and standards. This demand led many governments to introduce administrative reforms to bring about the desired changes in the delivery of services to the general public.

Education, as a public service, and against the backdrop of poor learning outcomes, has over the years been subjected to intensive public scrutiny leading to increased demand for education accountability. The huge expectations imposed on educational establishments have led to a significant change in the nature and scale of education accountability. Equally, the lack of confidence in public schools to meet the educational needs of society is a further justification for the demand for accountability in education. Education accountability, in the final analysis, has as its primary goal, the need to improve learning outcomes.

This study is about the development of a conceptual framework to enhance accountability in public schooling. Existing accountability processes and practises fall far too short of making public education accountable. Partly because approaches to accountability are not grounded on fundamental values and principles. Accountability in general and education accountability in particular, must be underpinned by sound values and principles to be effective and developmental. This study takes as its point of departure, the view that education accountability is both necessary and desirable if the growing educational needs of communities, particularly the poor, are to be met. To that effect, the conceptual framework has to afford every learning institution, regardless of its unique characteristics and circumstances, the opportunity to meet its accountability obligations.

In this study, the quantitative and qualitative designs were employed to gather information relating to accountability processes and practises in the North-West education system and schools in particular. A survey questionnaire (quantitative) was used to compile data regarding the views and perspectives of principals on education accountability. Focus group interviews (qualitative) were conducted with both district officials and teacher unions to

solicit their views and perspectives on the processes and practises of accountability in the North-West education department.

The sample involved 222 principals from both primary and secondary schools in the province. Nine (9) union representatives drawn from the three major unions in the province participated in the focused group interviews. In addition, 7 district officials, drawn from the four education districts in the province also participated in the focus group interviews.

The research, as stipulated above, yielded the following results:

- Most of the principals surveyed managed schools that are located in rural and generally poor areas. These demographic challenges imposed serious limitations on the capacity of principals to manage effectively since rural schools are often geographically dispersed and poorly resourced. Consequently, accountability processes and practises must be sensitive to the context within which these schools operate.
- Most of the principals sampled have the requisite qualifications and managerial experience suggesting that they are reasonably equipped to do their work. There is also evidence that provision is made for in-service training in management. It could therefore be concluded that if experience and qualifications alone were taken as key determinants in securing effective management, many of the sampled schools would be performing reasonably well. This finding however, is inconsistent with the widespread school level dysfunctionality that characterise the North-West schooling system. Effective accountability would therefore go beyond the principal to find answers to this incongruecy.
- Teacher quality and teacher professionalism were identified as key levers of educational quality and school level accountability
- There is a clear and direct link between an accountable school and the role of the principal. The characteristic features of an accountable school tended to overlap with the roles and responsibilities of the principals.

- The role of stakeholders in enhancing education accountability was supported by most respondents, suggesting therefore that schools must strive to develop healthy relationships with all stakeholders, both internal and external.
- Collaboration and networking among principals were seen as important in providing principals with opportunities to share ideas and thereby enhance their own capabilities
- Accountability was seen by most respondents in a positive light, however, participants maintained that accountability processes and practises were poorly understood and implemented in the North-West education system.
- There was general concern that the various parties to the accountability relationship did not understand their respective roles and responsibilities and thus diluting instead of enhancing accountability.
- The views of participants on the importance of performance agreements as a way of enhancing accountability were generally negative. Fear was expressed that these agreements would be abused. This finding is consistent with the finding that accountability practises were poorly understood and implemented.

The general conclusion from this study is that education accountability is both necessary and desirable. However, the complex contexts within which education is delivered must be fully appreciated if accountability practices and processes are to be effective.

Key Terms: Accountability relationships, effective accountability, holistic accountability, good governance, devolution, decentralisation and service delivery.

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Appendix 5: A Transcript of Focus Group Interview with Teacher Unions

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