

CHAPTER 7

OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The increasing demand for the provision of quality service to the general public has led to increased demand for accountability on the part of the politicians and the bureaucrats administering public resources. This demand led to a number of innovative approaches to service delivery. One approach that tended to provide an answer to service delivery challenges was to decentralise authority to lower levels of the system because it is an accepted fact that the closer the services are to people the easier it will be to respond to the local needs of the recipients of the service. Education accountability has to do with ensuring that learners get what is due to them: quality education.

This chapter provides an overview of this study, its main findings and recommendations as well as areas for further study.

7.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

In chapter one an orientation and explanation of the problem statement on the notion of accountability in general and education accountability in particular was given.

In chapter two particular focus was given to education accountability with specific reference to lessons drawn from other systems and models.

Chapter three provided a historical overview of accountability processes and practices in the South African education system and delineated the key features of education accountability in the South African education system.

In chapter four the views and perspectives of the various education stakeholders on education accountability were explored. The research design, population, sampling and data analysis were discussed. Two approaches, viz. the quantitative and qualitative, were selected to collect data in relation to the perspectives of principals, education officials and educator unions on education accountability.

In Chapter five the results of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches were analysed. The data was presented in terms (a) frequency and percentage analysis (quantitative) and (b) thematic analysis (qualitative). The results offered ample data on the perspectives of principals, the perspectives and perceptions of education officials and educator unions on education accountability. The results of the empirical study and literature review informed the development of a conceptual framework for public schooling.

Chapter six provides a theoretical framework for enhancing public education accountability. The framework presented is context sensitive and development orientated, suggesting that it can be implemented in different contexts and conditions. The theoretical framework is derived from the literature study in chapters one to three and supported by the qualitative and quantitative research in chapter five.

7.3 MAIN FINDINGS

The following are the main findings pertaining to the study:

7.3.1 Major findings pertaining to research question no. 1 (What constitute accountability in the public sector?)

The following were identified as some of the major issues relating to the notion of accountability in the public sector:

- Modern governance and public administration literature see accountability as a positive incentive, as an integral part of establishing effective relationships for getting things done and taking responsibility (cf.2.2.1).
- Accountability in the public sector strengthening the relationship between government and citizens. To that effect accountability relationships must be governed by enforceable agreement or contracts to ensure that the agreed upon objectives are realised (cf. 2.2.1).
- Accountability is a multi-dimensional, multi-faceted concept and its application will vary from country to country and context to context (cf.2.2.2).
- The notion of accountability is closely linked to the notion of developmental as encapsulated in a developmental state. (cf.2.2.2.6) and the basic needs approach (cf. 2.2.2.7).
- Accountability can only be effective if underpinned by values and principles (cf.2.4).
- There is an inextricable link between accountability and good governance, i.e governments that adhere to the principles of good governance tend to be more accountable (cf. 2.7)
- Accountability is a legitimate demand in a democratic state. The spread of democracy and globalisation has forced many governments to find ways of responding to increased demands for accountability in the delivery of services to the general public (cf.2.9).

In summary, goal 1 confirms that accountability in the public sector is both necessary and desirable if the citizens are to receive timely and quality service. Good governance enhances accountability.

7.3.2 Major findings pertaining to research question no. 2 (Accountability in education: What are the issues and lessons from other systems?)

The following were identified as some of the major findings in relation to lessons learned from other systems

- This chapter confirmed the link between education and politics, and that education provisioning has been used as a powerful tool to achieve political accountability by making it accessible to the majority of citizens and also as a tool to promote national unity (cf.2.3).
- Education economics as a discipline points to the fact that the notion of human capital is essentially about labour quality. The reasons for the failure of education systems to promote economic development in most developing countries is because of the low internal efficiencies of the schooling system. (cf. 3.4). Education systems globally, and particularly in developing countries, face common problems in the provisioning of quality education to their communities (cf.3.6).
- The school effectiveness research and the school reform movement that gained prominence in the early 1990s was a direct response to pressures brought to bear by growing global demands for educational quality and accountability (cf.3.5).
- Decentralisation of decision making and authority to lower levels of the system has been adopted by most countries as an effective way of enhancing accountability (cf.3.7). Many countries, including those studied in this work,

adopted different models of decentralization with a view to enhancing school level accountability (cf.3.9.6.1.1 and 3.9.6.1.2).

- The three levels of accountability (macro, meso and micro) are critical in enhancing education accountability. Micro level accountability is largely impacted upon by the other two levels (meso and micro). The extent to which schools can transform is largely dependent on their relationships with the district office (cf. 3.8).
- The core characteristics that define education accountability across many countries, including those studied, are listed in paragraph 3.10

In summary, research goal no.2 confirmed the fact that education accountability is generally embraced in other education systems. Different countries have adopted different strategies to promote public school accountability. Devolution of authority to schools is one of the most commonly used models to enhance school level accountability.

7.3.3 Major findings pertaining to research question no. 3 (What are the characteristic features of education accountability in South Africa?)

The following were identified as key characteristic features of education accountability in South Africa:

- The South African education system has evolved over different historical periods. This evolution was dictated by several factors that impacted differently on the system at different times. Even though the fundamental goals of education did not alter drastically as a result of these changes, questions about the relevance, quality of outcomes and the overall performance of the system remained critical as reflected by the many education commissions (cf.4.2.2.2) The general neglect of education provisioning for blacks prior to 1948 had dire consequences for quality

and therefore fell short of meeting accountability criteria as discussed in this study (cf.4.2.2.1).

- Two distinct periods, named pre-democracy (before 1994) and post democracy (after 1994), serve as defining landmarks for education governance and accountability in South Africa. It could be argued that since South Africa's political dispensation prior to 1994 was exclusionary, and therefore undemocratic. It has been stated in this work that accountability and democracy are inextricably linked. The contestation in education pre-1994 was largely over education governance and control (cf.4.2.2.4).
- Education governance post 1994 became a concurrent responsibility between the national department and provinces, with greater authority devolved to school governing bodies via the South African Schools' Act of 1996 as amended (cf. 4.3).
- The distribution of powers of educational administration at national, provincial, district and school levels has been the characteristic feature of the South African education system post 1994 (cf. 4.4 p. and Table 4.1).
- Apart from the formal governance structures, education legislation also makes provision for the establishment of advisory and oversight structures to promote accountability in education (cf.4.4.4).
- The demand for education accountability in South Africa is exerted from both internal and external pressures (cf.4.5.1).
- Many studies, both local and international, point to the poor state of public schooling in South Africa. This led to a lack of trust in the public schooling system (cf.4.5.2).

- The role of the print media in holding the education system accountable has intensified over the years. There is intense public pressure on the Minister of Education to account for the poor state of education in the country.

In summary, research goal no.3 traced the historical development of education governance and accountability in South Africa with a particular focus on the pre- and post- democracy trends. Education accountability has become even more urgent given the poor state of schooling in the post-democratic dispensation. The South African response to the pressure for education accountability is generally similar to that of other countries studied. The South African education legislation also points to a decentralised model of education provisioning.

7.3.4 Major findings pertaining to research question no. 4.1 (What are the views and perspectives of principals on school level accountability?)

The following views and perspectives were given by principals on school level on accountability:

- Teacher quality and professionalism were identified as key levers of educational quality and school level accountability. Networking and collaboration with other professionals were also regarded as important in promoting professional growth for enhanced learning outcomes (cf. 6.2.12).
- There is a clear and direct link between an accountable school and the roles and responsibilities of principals (cf. 6.2.12).
- The role of stakeholders in enhancing education accountability is supported by most principals. However, the view expressed by most principals was that the involvement of stakeholders in school must be properly managed.
- A general view among principals is that public schools and principals in particular, are held accountable in the North-West Province.

In summary, research goal no.4.1 confirmed the findings from the literature study. Teachers and principals have a collective responsibility in enhancing school level accountability. Education stakeholders also play a critical role in supporting schools to achieve quality learning outcomes.

7.3.5 Major findings pertaining to research question no. 4.2 (What are the views and perspectives of departmental officials on school level accountability?)

- Participants acknowledged the need for school accountability but also expressed concern that the notion of accountability is poorly understood and implemented.
- There was a general consensus that the roles of the different stakeholders in education had to be clarified if accountability relationships are to be effective.
- The view that performance agreements were necessary to enhance accountability was not well supported for fear that these agreements would be used to victimise people.

In summary, the views and perspectives of departmental officials as expressed under research goal no 4, point to the fact that while accountability policies and procedures are necessary and desirable, the poor implementation thereof is a cause for concern. Consequently, the departmental officials tended to be negatively disposed to performance agreements for fear that these may lead to the victimisation of staff.

7.3.6 Major findings pertaining to research question no. 4.3 (What are the views and perspectives of teacher unions on school level accountability?)

- The need for accountability was well received by teacher unions. However, like the departmental officials, they also held the view that the notion of accountability was generally poorly understood and therefore poorly implemented (cf.6.3.5).

- There was a general feeling that the roles and responsibilities of the different education stakeholders were often not clear at a practical level.
- The participants agreed that delegation of responsibility was essential in securing effective accountability. As was the case with departmental officials, training and support were identified as critical in enhancing accountability (cf. 6.3.5).
- The views of participants on performance contracts were generally negative. They contended that performance contracts would be abused and that the system was not ready to implement performance contracts.

In summary, the views expressed by the departmental officials were echoed by teacher unions under research goal no 4.3. The teacher unions added however, that delegation of responsibility is crucial in securing accountability at school level.

7.3.7 Major findings pertaining to research question no. 5 (What conceptual framework could best enhance public schooling accountability?)

The conceptual framework that is recommended in chapter eighties aimed at enhancing school level accountability. It is anticipated that if implemented, this framework would go a long way towards enhancing school level accountability. Chapter eight provides the full details of the framework.

7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the recommendations of the literature review and the empirical research on the framework for public school accountability, the following recommendations are made:

7.4.1 Recommendation no.1 (Major Finding no.1)

Enhance existing performance management processes and practices by eliminating the negative perceptions towards performance management.

Motivation

The negative views expressed by respondents towards performance management practices in the North-West Department emanate from the fact that performance management has been poorly implemented. The good intention to manage performance for improvement and development is lost because performance management has been linked to monetary rewards. Accountability can only be effective and developmental if a credible performance management system is in place. This includes the need and necessity for performance contracts.

7.4.2 Recommendation no.2 (Major Finding no.2)

Capacitate schools and their SGBs to attain section 21 status. Particular attention must be paid to combined and middle schools (cf. 6.2.10)

Motivation

There is sufficient evidence that suggests that schools are capable of managing their own affairs if supported and encouraged to do so. Schools can only be held accountable if given authority to manage their affairs. Linked to the devolution of authority to schools, are issues of capability and capacity. This means that school leaders have to be capacitated to perform their responsibilities as expected. Section 21 status will enable schools to manage their resources effectively and to plan better.

Given that schools are at different stages of development, a phased approach is recommended. Different strategies can be used to build the capacity of schools. They

could include twinning arrangements with successful schools and networking arrangements with others.

7.4.3 Recommendation no.3 (Major Finding no.3)

The Schooling system to institutionalise accountability processes and practices in their planning.

Motivation

Education accountability is essentially about school improvement, and school improvement research has as its goal the desire to improve learning outcomes. Schools are therefore expected to develop school improvement plans in which they set achievement targets against which their performance will be measured. For the improvement plans to work, principals are to sign performance agreements that are informed by their contextual variables. The SGB is expected to oversee and monitor the implementation of the plan. All schools are to be held accountable for the performance of their learners. In essence, accountability processes and practices must always be context sensitive and development focused.

7.4.4 Recommendation no. 4 (Major Finding no 4 bullets no.1 and no.3)

Elevate the status of teaching as a career.

Motivation

Teaching as a career of choice has suffered great setbacks in this country. The role played by some teacher unions over the past decade has not helped the cause of the profession either. The continuous bashing of teachers by the media adds insult to injury. It will therefore take a great effort on the part of everybody to lift the profession to its former glory in this country. Education accountability is premised on a strong commitment to teaching as a profession. Professional accountability is at the heart of quality learning

outcomes. Without teacher commitment and competence the main goal of achieving qualitative learning outcomes will not be realised.

Dedicate time and resources to capacitate principals.

Motivation

It has been established during the empirical study that there is a close relation between an accountable school and the role of the principal. It has been pointed out that an outstanding head-teacher is the most important characteristic of a good school. It is for this reason that greater empowerment of head-teachers, together with a fair system of accountability, are the most effective ways to raise standards in schools as well as to attract more able head-teachers.

Optimise stakeholder involvement in the delivery of education programmes.

Motivation

Stakeholder involvement in the delivery of education programmes has been embraced by many successful schools. In order to benefit from stakeholders and partners alike, schools must develop clear guidelines on how the stakeholder relations are going to be managed. The instruments developed for this purpose could include the delineation of roles and responsibilities as well as entering into memoranda of understanding. If well managed, stakeholder inputs can add leverage in assisting schools to achieve their goals and thereby enhance school level accountability.

7.4.5 Recommendation no.5 (Major Finding no.5)

Refer to recommendation no.3.

7.4.6 Recommendation no.6 (Major Finding no.6).

Delegate to secure effective accountability.

Motivation

It is often stated that a person cannot be held accountable for something over which he/she has no authority. It is true that without delegation there can be no expectation of accountability. Proper delegation of responsibility is therefore fundamental to secure effective accountability. Related to the need for delegation is the need for recruiting competent staff so that the work delegated can be executed effectively.

7.4.7 Recommendation no.7 (Major Finding no. 7)

Implement the conceptual framework proposed in chapter eight.

7.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTHER STUDY

- Given the complexities around school level accountability, a qualitative study on how schools in the North-West Province respond to or cope with accountability demands could be undertaken. This study would advance our understanding of the issues that should inform our approach to school level accountability as well as how best we can in turn support schools to become more responsive to the needs of their learners and the general communities they serve.
- Accountability versus Autonomy: consequences for School leadership and effectiveness.
- A Critical Appraisal of Middle Schools in the North-West Education System.

7.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Overall this study proceeded as planned. The school governing bodies were initially included in the sample but were later withdrawn for the following reasons:

Given their different backgrounds and orientations, it was not possible to have them constitute a focus group. Consideration was given to the fact, apart from being members of their respective schools, they had very little in common in terms of their educational background and language skills. It was on the basis of these considerations that the researcher finally excluded them.

7.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study sought to develop a theoretical framework to enhance public school accountability in the North-West province. It became evident during this study that the schooling landscape in the province is not only uneven, it is also varied. Implementing accountability procedures and processes under these conditions could pose huge challenges if the contextual variables are not taken into account. To that extent, the researcher, from the outset, adopted the view that accountability processes and practices must be context sensitive but development orientated.

The accountability framework that is proposed in the final chapter of this study was carefully designed to allow for application in different and varied context. The researcher holds the view that if carefully implemented, and if due consideration is given to all its facets and principles; it would assist schools that are committed to improvement to realise the full potential of their learners, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is also my belief that every school, regardless of its location and circumstances, can and must embrace the notion of accountability as an incentive to get their schools working for their communities.