

Adams O. Nwaka

**Contemporary Issues  
in Educational  
Management:**

**A Book of Honour**

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## PREFACE

Jesus Christ did not give a Gospel of perfection only to His apostles. He says to every man "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect". This principle guides the production of this book in honour of Professor Remi Solape Longe to mark her successful retirement from the Department of Educational Management, University of Ibadan in September, 2003.

This book is edited and published by the Department of Educational Management where Professor Longe spent the very cream of her career life. Scholars from various universities particularly those who have benefited from the meritorious services of Professor Longe have contributed in no small way to the production of this book.

Considering the quality and variety of issues raised in this book as well as the principles behind its production, this publication will be of interest to all students, teachers and practitioners not only in education but also in other disciplines requiring the knowledge and application of management.

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Acting Head of Department.

# ACCOUNTABILITY IN EDUCATION: PROGRAMME FOR IMPROVING STUDENT PERFORMANCE

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## Introduction

The word *accountability* is commonly used to express a high level of prudence in financial management in terms of the proper use of funds. However, the Bible makes it clear that it is much more than that when it states: "Everyone shall give account of himself": (Romans 14:12). The content in which the statement was made very succinctly shows that it covers all our actions in a lifetime. The Oxford Concise Dictionary defines "accountable" as bound to give account, or responsible (for things or to persons). Thus accountability implies responsibility for or to, in the generic meaning/sense.

Thomas (1977) views the idea of managerial accountability as having come up as a result of the fact that management should not be left alone with the management of the firm without acknowledging obligation to the shareholders and other stakeholders that constitute a constraint on its actions. In business parlance where the term *Accountability* was first applied, seven groups were identified in the report of the accounting standards steering committee, which according to Thomas are as follows:

- (1) Equity investors,
- (2) Loan creditors,
- (3) Employees,
- (4) Analysts and advisers,
- (5) Business Contacts,
- (6) The government, and
- (7) The Public.



Dressel (1976) opines that evaluation and accountability are interrelated concepts as applied in education. While evaluation is primarily concerned with effects or impacts and is a means of the determining accountability. The latter relates outcome to resource utilization. Traditionally accountability is regarded as a legal concept defined by recommended or required procedures in record keeping and financial transactions. In a sense it implies a kind of auditing and it is to ascertain whether resources were used for specified purposes according to specified requirement or practices.

According to Umoru-Onuka (1990) Harlen (undated manuscript) opined that the concept of accountability arose because of the public's right to know what goes on in the education system, of a nation, in which the public has substantial interest and possibly colossal investment.

To avoid conflict in the implementation of accountability concept, the two important criteria of *justice* and *benefit* to schools should be applied.

### **The concept of accountability**

In evaluation it implies that the evaluator should be ethnically responsible and prudent in the allocation and expenditure of resources.

Thus the evaluation will be fiscally accountable when funds are used for the purposes they were meant and the appropriate procedures followed as stated in the agreement.

Cooley & Lonnes (1976) view accountability as the notion that the educator should be held responsible to the public on how well their schools are performing. According to them: Accountability can be conceptualised as a continuous process for obtaining, interpreting, and using information, to improve students educational performance.

In this regard, the concept has three components as follows:

- (1) Assessment of the performance and progress of student in school.
- (2) Diagnosis of differences among schools with respect to students' performance.

- (3) And corrective action to improve the students' performance and progress

It is this last component that has taken accountability beyond the realms of evaluation which provides feedback on performance. The concept of accountability results in the establishment of students' performance objectives; measuring the attainment of students' performance objectives, describe the discrepancies between actual performance and the performance objectives. You then proceed to identify the relative influence of the process variables on the student development. The real process is the diagnosis of the possible causes of these discrepancies from the array of process variables. This leads to the next step of planning corrective action in terms of staff performance, objective, resources, programmes and facilities. Then implement these corrective action plans at the school and district levels. Finally evaluate the effects of the corrective action strategies.

Generally, "accountability" in education is considered as "responsibility", "explicability", "answerability" and "responsiveness" (Jonathan-Ibeagha (1986), Babarinde (1992), and Umoru-Onuka (1996).

It is a term that has been traditionally used with respect to service in the public interest, where stewardship of public fund requires obligatory accounting. It is thus, as far as education is concerned, representing the acceptance of responsibility of consequences by those to whom the citizens have entrusted the public service of education (Anderson et al 1976). It, therefore, connotes concerns for furthering the educational effectiveness and efficiency of the school system. Implied, in the concept with regards to the education industry are the quest for efficiency – wisely expending public fund and the democratic quest for equality of educational opportunity. The inference from this second implication is that the benefits of education be equally be shared by all irrespective of other student variables.

The concept of accountability in education is the acknowledgement of the right of the public and all stakeholders to know what actions have been taken in schools, which they support, and to know how effective and efficient these actions have been



(Umoru-Onuka 1990). It thus puts educators and students on the alert and also makes them very responsive to societal changes and it also causes the system to be innovative; in views of penalty for failure and reward for achievement. And by extension and implication, it ultimately improve the educational system and all its components.

Jonathan-Ibeagha (1986) also views accountability in education as a kind of contract of reciprocal commitment between the employer (the public and the employee – (the educator), that ought to be executed to the mutual satisfaction of both parties.

Unless the desired performance level(s) is(are) clearly stated the educators cannot be held accountable for student achievement or otherwise. The concept of accountability in education, therefore, involves stating in very clear terms, in advance, of the expected level(s) of performance expressed in terms of goals and objectives. Performance must be measurable in terms of reliability and validity. Thus a properly conceived accountability system has an in built evaluation in it (Sturm, 1995).

By implication, therefore, accountability is a continuous monitoring system for public information, which is provided by evaluation through the presentation of information, expenditure and return on investment and information on alternative ways of effectively and efficiently achieving goals within the time and budget constraints in the school system.

Accountability is the joint responsibility of all stakeholders in education viz legislature, proprietor, examination bodies, Government, principal, teachers, managers, teachers, parents and students.

Umoru-Onuka (1990) citing Thorndike and Hagen (1977) reports that the concept of accountability gave rise to accreditation of schools to ensure emergence of only high standard schools. Ehindero (1986) identifies four conditions and characteristics for a good and an effective accountability system as follows:

- (1) Well defined and acceptable outcomes or intents by the institutions
- (2) Existence of standards that define acceptable level; of performance in relation to outcomes or intents.
- (3) Existence of accepted and valid ways to determine the level of achievement of objectives.

(4) Mechanism for reward or penalty must be devised.

Accountability programme often results in making distinction between transactions and outcomes as the focus of information required for its objectives to be used as basis for accounting process.

Accountability information is capable of being described as process and products in terms of experience and achievement (Umoru-Onuka 1990). Transactions are the things that happen in the classroom, teaching methods, materials, activities and classroom and material organization, a pupil's experience and whatever else happens in the school that may affect the pupil directly or indirectly including curriculum decisions, drawing of time-table, infrastructure, etc.

By outcomes we mean intended outcomes (results) as opposed to actual outcomes, which are measurable or quantifiable. There are also immeasurable outcomes that are not accounted for in the outcome focused accountability.

Accountability in education means that the government is accountable to a large extent for providing school buildings, policy statements, administrators and teachers, training opportunities for teachers for personal advancement and of the children, materials as has been the case in Nigeria in some time past. The Guardian (Aug. 21, 1990 p. 3) reported that the Federal Government opened Technical Colleges in some states as part of her accountability in the education industry.

The parent is accountable to his ward for advice and the provision of clothing, school fees, books and other forms of support. The pupil is held accountable to the society and parent for good performance, and service to the society and humanity after his educational training. The principal is held accountable for good organization and management of both human and material resources, such that they are directed towards the realization of the societal educational goals and objectives. The industrialist is responsible for the provision of the opportunity of service for the educated man. On her own part the society is accountable by being active participants in important educational matters and policy making.



## **Accountability and student achievement**

From the foregoing, it is obvious that accountability puts every stakeholder in education on guard and thus makes for improved educational outcome/performance in general and higher level of student achievement (Umoru-Onuka, 2001).

Overall, accountability in education is measured by the achievement of the student, since the major purpose of education is to produce educated person, which Drucker as quoted by Umoru-Onuka (1997) says is the wealth of a nation. It promotes learning and hence performance because it is a monitoring system which reminds stakeholders in the system of their responsibility to be responsible and responsive. Because of the awareness of the fact that someday the society would demand that they present to her their reports of performance, every stakeholder ensures that he improves the performance of his own assignment in the industry so that he would not be found wanting on the reckoning day. The expectation leads to all hands being on deck, thus resulting in the improved performance of the students.

Walters & Fetler (1991) report that the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges was mandated to develop and implement a comprehensive community college educational and fiscal accountability in order to improve student and institutional performance.

Sturn (1995) also reported that accountability programme has the tremendous impact of improving student performance if scrupulously designed and implemented. Since according to Cooley and Lohnes accountability programme diagnoses and designs corrective action for improvement of performance of the student, there is no gainsaying that it improves, student performance and thus educational outcomes.

### **Accountability as a programme for improved student performance**

By the foregoing discussions we can conclude that educational programme accountability necessarily leads to improved student performances. Umoru-Onuka (2000) asserts that feedback and

accountability which are the product of evaluation are twin concepts that are aimed at programme improvement. Thus, if a programme improves, the student for whom the programme is meant also invariably improves.

This is so because programme accountability exercise put the teacher on his toe and so plays his role very effectively beginning with preparation through delivery to supervision and follow-up as the teachers' progress may be hinged on performance.

The student in turn becomes industrious and hardworking to the extent that he would always like to excel as he has to give account to the parent and the society as to his responsiveness to the investment on him as well as to the teachers effort. The parent will take up his responsibility of providing fees, books and uniform for his ward thus making study easier for the ward and also creating the enabling environment through these provisions. The government and stakeholders will also be alert to their own responsibility to ensure that the education industry improves and also ensures thereby that the student performance improves.

The bottomline of accountability programme in education is the holistic improvement of the sector in general and of the student in particular.

### **Evaluation as a means of achieving accountability**

Sturn (1995) opines that student achievement scores and standardized tests are some of the means for measuring accountability in the school system. Umoru-Onuka (1996; 2000; 2001) repeatedly says that evaluation rather than fiscal procedures is the authentic measure of educational accountability, in that evaluation does not take cognizance only of how money is spent. It also take into account how funds are raised, spent, and the outcome and ultimate impact of the education system on its clientele.

Alberta Department of Education, Edmonton (1995) reports that Alberta (Canada) designated in 1994 the formation of a MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly) team for the implementation of educational accountability. The findings include the fact that parents



want better access to results at all levels of reporting, people felt that accountability data must be used to improve education and that results should reflect the range of both academic and non-academic performance and achievement among others. This stresses the fact that accountability programme is meant to improve the student performance and that it is best measured by evaluative tools which include examinations.

Thus, the important role of examination bodies like West African Examinations Council (WAEC) which had garnered over 40 years of experience in conducting all sorts of examinations in promoting accountability programme in education and hence the improvement of the student achievement/performance cannot be overemphasized. National Examinations Council (NECO) should not only compete with WAEC but learn from its experiences including failures and successes, in order to improve its own performance and avoid the pitfalls of WAEC.

We must state very clearly and unambiguously that financial approach to accountability is just but one means especially with regard to accountability in education. Umoru-Onuka (2000) says this much, when he said that accountability in education goes beyond financial accountability, hence evaluation is the means of attaining educational accountability. He identifies accountability as the chief purpose of evaluation as it does keep executors of educational programmes on the alert and hence on track.

Abdulkadiri (1988) supports this assertion that financial accountability-determination may not necessarily be the same as educational accountability when he states thus:

*Accountability entails not only financial accountability but also accountability for the quality and quantity of educational output and accounting for their contribution to community development.*

This further buttresses the claim by Umoru-Onuka that Accountability is the determination of the responsiveness of a programme to the dynamics of its environment both in terms of context and time.



Therefore, the major tools/means of achieving educational accountability are invariably the educational evaluation tools such as questionnaires, observation techniques, continuous assessment, testing, rating scales, checklist and the like of them. These tools including interviews are used severally and jointly rather than individually and singly to determine the accountability or responsiveness of an educational programme towards realizing its goals/objectives.

Umoru-Onuka (1996) used checklist, observation techniques, questionnaires, interview, among others, to determine the degree of accountability or responsiveness of the Agricultural and Rural Management Training Institute, Ilorin to the realization of its mandate resulting in the finding that it did so substantially (70%) and that given the status of parastatal A, it could do better.

He also used interviews, questionnaire, checklist and tests to determine the degree of responsiveness or accountability of the Clergy School of the Diocese of Kwara – (Church of Nigeria – Anglican Communion) in 1997 in an unpublished exercise and found that it was well over 60% accountable for the realization of its objectives.

In these exercises, both the assessments by the teachers, and the students as well as those of the other stakeholders were taken cognizance of. The Teachers and the taught were also assessed.

In another exercise carried out to determine the degree of accountability of the Resurrection Youth Education Centre of the Chapel of the Resurrection of the University of Ibadan (also an unpublished personal exercise taken from a report) ex post facto data which involved entry behaviour and the external examinations, level of funding, the quality of the teachers, availability of the necessary infrastructural facilities, the conduciveness of the environment etc, were considered and the finding was that the programme was responsive (about 65%) hence its sustenance to date.

But financial accounting could never have revealed the level of responsiveness of programme except for the level of efficient and prudent management of funds.

The effect of the accountability concept on education generally is that it makes all the stakeholders in the industry

responsible since they are aware that they would be held responsible for their action or inaction. This leads to improvement in educational performances.

## Conclusion

The concept of accountability as it relates to educational performance was thoroughly discussed in this paper. It was pointed out that accountability is a holistic approach to performance improvement because it involves all stakeholders in the education industry. Each of them has his own responsibility and he is held accountable for either his actions or inactions. Dimensions of taking responsibility for one's action or inaction has put every stakeholder on his toe and thus he becomes alert to his own responsibility with regard to improving educational performance. Thus whether it is the parent or government or the school manager or teacher or student or the education board everybody is awake to his responsibility and performs effectively and efficiently so that they can each give good account of themselves. It was also noted that the real method of determining educational accountability is evaluation rather than financial accounting alone. The general conclusion is that if an educational accountability programme is effectively put in place, it will lead to both improved student and the entire education system's performances.

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