

**LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY PERSPECTIVES IN A CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY.A
NIGERIA SECONDARY SCHOOL FOCUS.**

Nwanguma Timothy Kelechi Ph.D. and Wike Ruth Ejuwa Ph.D.
**Department of Educational Management, Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oruworokwu, Port
Harcourt, Rivers State**

EMAIL: timsetch01@gmail.com, ruth.wike@ust.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

The basis of this study was to x-ray the different concepts and perceptions of people in relation to leadership and school accountability management as a determinant to students' academic performance. *For those who have been involved in the governance or leadership of schools for several years, you will be aware of the ever-increasing level of responsibility being imposed on school governing bodies (leaders) by regulators (education ministries & boards). Administrative languages has moved from terms such as "obligations" to "responsibility" and recently, to "accountability of school governing body". However, this should not be considered as abnormal. School leadership should be accountable for student and staff safety at school and through the principal, for the education of the children. They are also accountable for enterprise risk management, finances, teaching and learning facilities and, above all, for being the drivers of school culture, hence the term accountability was considered as answering for one's actions, and particularly the results of those actions. It is a concept which defines a relationship of control between different parties, and has a connection to trust. To this extent, information gathering model was oral interview with some principals, teachers, local and state schools board members with some political appointees and leaderships. The writer also interviewed community leaders for in-depth information on school practice and accountability, all these culminated to the successful conclusion of this write up. To this, after due diligence and consideration of the information gathered, there was a clear evidence that government (local & state) are not always accountable for not providing required facility, equipment and conducive environment for effective teaching and learning rather teachers and principals are always blamed for all shortcomings in school management issues hence this work was eminent.*

INTRODUCTION

In making policies in education, schools are increasingly perceived as the unit of measurement which clearly shows that new expectations of public reporting is required. In Nigeria as well as internationally, accountability has become a popular concept. The term accountability is however, becoming more difficult to put into practice because most educators and managers has confused accountability with responsibility, but this two can be well differentiated through their meaning. Whereas accountability is the acceptance of responsibility for honest and ethical conduct towards others. In educational world, accountability should extends to its shareholders, employees, and the wider community in which it operates. In a wider sense, accountability implies a willingness to be judged on performances. Responsibility in the other hand is the state or fact of having a duty to deal with something or of having control over someone, a true leader takes charge of its team, helping them to deliver a task and achieve a goals. Most often accountability to some extent has replaced responsibility. To most Nigerian administrators both concepts refer to the same meaning, which is not correct. Responsibility concerns the obligations of teachers and school leaders, as part of their profession, while accountability with the the answering of questions about what has happened within one's area of responsibility and provide a reliable story of what has happened and why it should happen, accountability is located in a hierarchical practices of bureaucracy. Public trust is to be secured by specifying performance compliance through accountability. Both Blackmore (2001) and Ranson (2003) have argued that new Educational accountability has been more about regulation and performance than educational improvement, local capacity building and the encouragement of democracy in schools. It seems like accountability has become not only a tool within the system, but has constituted the system itself. Thus, the bureaucratic State has been changed into the evaluative State. Part of this change is related to the movement towards decentralization which has focused questions around the professional ability of teachers. The diffuse borderline between political and professional responsibility seems to present a major problem. Conservatives see opportunities for potential abuse in school-level Control, particularly if teachers are able to capture the

process of school governance. If school-based management is to be introduced, they suggest that school leader actions must be regulated. It is argued that deregulation, choice, local control will ultimately favor those with greater personal and family resources. Greater inequality will result, with the best getting better; the education gap between rich and poor will widen. At the same time, blame will be decentralized. Central agencies will no longer carry the political burden of confronting those who accuse them of ineffectiveness and inefficiency. Thus, decentralization of the educational system, irrespective of motives, puts in focus the balance between political and professional power over education (Lundgren 1990). In a modern society it is reasonable that stakeholders require information about curricular processes and educational results. How do teachers and school leadership execute the societal mandate established in policy decisions? Are teachers working efficiently and appropriately with students, and are school leadership in control of optimal resource allocation and staff support? Are students learning what they should, in our schools? How do teachers and leadership accept the responsibility they have for student- and institutional results? Although these questions are no new issues, the multifaceted level of accountability requirements to show a top-down control. During the 80s both politicians and top administrators have raised doubt about the extent to which teachers are making claims on behalf of their clients, or perhaps on behalf of their own interest as a group. This is probably the reason why external evaluation of education at various levels has become a focus in recent years. Education policy could no longer be based on widespread trust in the professional competence of educators their performance should be controlled and judged according to criteria established for the profession. The new understanding of accountability includes using student results as the unit for evaluating teachers' instructional practice, ability as well as establishing the individual school's institutional achievement. To this extent, this paper tend to anchor on school leadership accountability in he following sub areas thus:-

The concept of accountability, performativity culture, accountability and school improvement etc.

Background of the study

Obligation and responsibility assignment is a mantra in every contemporary organizations even the school not left out, a nation and leaderships cannot succeed without role assignment to subordinates for efficient and effective organizational management, base on this axiom, accounting for ones roles and actions has become very imperative to determine the effectiveness and activeness of subordinates at work places, in their assigned roles. Most recently, assumptions arose that accounting expectations are only teachers and principals with government (state & local) been overlooked. If this is correct then accounting process in school as an organization is incomplete. Therefore, this work is acting as a buffer, to investigate on this assumption as stated above to note the extend, government account for theirs action in school management.

Statement of problem

Generally, public schools are established by the government and its agencies with community support, while the financing is with public funds. The management of the school to some extend is with government while the principals and teachers are fully in charge of day to day administration of the school, recently there has being a strong claim that the government and its agencies are not providing the required support expected of them to effectively and efficiently run the school system, as they account to nobody and all accounting pressures of the school system are on the principals and teachers which has generated a quagmire in the school accounting process, hence this work was necessitated to ascertain the authenticity of this claim.

The Concept of Accountability and school leadership

Accountability here refers to answering for one's actions, and particularly the

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results of those actions. It is a multilayered concept which defines a relationship of control between different parties, and has a connection to trust. As such, accountability is a social practice pursuing particular purposes, defined by distinctive relationships and evaluative procedures (Ranson 2003). One has to answer questions about what has happened within one's area of responsibility and provide a story or an account of practice; what has happened and why it has to happen. Leadership act of being in charge of others, directing their actions to actualize a set goal, a person who convinces other people to follow is a leader. A great leader inspires confidence in other people and moves them to action and because he is in charge, he is also answerable for his actions or inactions that may lead to good input and output in the system or face consequence manage on his failure to achieve a target within specified period of time. Within the school system often, the answers are

evaluated by a superior against some standards or some expectations, which means that accountability is located within hierarchical practices of bureaucracy. But accountability is also an important dimension of professionalism. This dimension highlights that the teacher is morally responsible to the student's and the parents' needs, as well as responsible to the public through the mechanism of the state. In moral terms accountability can be seen as keeping to ethical standards held by teachers as a group and as individuals (Moller 2005; Sockett 1993). Discussion on accountability are often a mixture of several forms. The redefinition of different forms of accountability by (Elmore 2003, Sirotnik 2005, Sinclair's 1995) offers a lens through which we may more closely examine the manifestations of accountability in every responsibility assigned. A distinction between five forms of accountability are presented herein as follows.

- **POLITICAL**
- **PUBLIC**
- **MANAGERIAL**
- **PROFESSIONAL**
- **PERSONAL**

Political and public accountability concerns being responsible to the mandate and function of that particular organization in society, and being responsible towards the local community of which one is a part. Managerial accountability refers to a person's position in a hierarchy and responsibility towards superiors concerning tasks that are delegated. The point is that schools as collective entities are accountable to the higher levels in the educational system, that focuses mainly on monitoring inputs and outputs. There is also a professional accountability, where a person's commitment to a community of professionals that makes him/her perceive a duty to adhere to the standards of the profession. This is about teaching as a moral endeavor. Codes of ethics have for instance become a familiar part of the rhetoric of professional control of the work in schools, even though the influence of these codes is uncertain. Professional accountability implies that teachers acquire and apply the knowledge and skills needed for successful practice of its profession. In addition, it involves the ideals of putting the needs of the students at the Centre of their work, collaborating and sharing of knowledge, and a commitment to the improvement of professional practice. Finally, the personal accountability category can included the values that are sacred to a person. It concerns fidelity to personal conscience in basic values such as respect for human dignity and acting in a manner that accepts responsibility for affecting the lives of others. This kind of accountability is regarded as powerful and binding. It is likely to expect that emotional labor will be stressful if personal values are in conflict with other kinds of accountability. However, personal standards of good teaching are to a great extent implicit. Collective and critical reflection, which could serve as a protection against arbitrariness in teaching is needed. Schools administers in a contemporary situation cannot rely on personal accountability alone to give credence to teachers effectiveness and performance. It is not the individual that is awarded autonomy in school, but the profession. As a profession teachers and school leaders should be in public schools with sound mind and internally defined criteria of their profession. In this circumstance, the tension between managerial and professional accountability is focused. From the foregoing therefore, the government and local communities who are the provider of finances, facilities and equipment for the business with the principals and teachers involved in the teaching and learning process should promote an all-round accountability culture that will involve all shareholders in the school management including the government. At this juncture, a definition of accountability culture and some benefits of accountability will be posited thereof.

Accountability culture

Accountability culture in this instance entails that employees (principals & teachers) are answerable for their actions in course of performing an assigned task or roles, this culture involves clear expectations and goals, open lines of communication and strong leadership, where this is well established, the following will be evidenced.

- Increased trust; - Open communication increases trust among teachers and government as well as among teachers and their principals which could result to job satisfaction and quality teaching and learning outcomes.

- Moral boost: - This accountability culture which makes principals and teachers accountable to each other with increasing communication can boost the moral teachers and even the principals at school.
- Increased input and output;- Often accountability in a work place makes workers feel more engaged with their work and also help them understand consequences that may occur in poor delivery and performance, by this, they input more for better outcomes.
- Improved work quality: - Creating a culture of accountability in schools will encourage principal and teachers to improve on the quality of delivery hence they are more involved and well attached to their role to avert poor delivery that may attract consequence management.
- Enhance creativity: - A well-coordinated accountability process can improve teachers and principals confidence in teaching and learning situation, the more the confidence a teacher or principal, the more comfortable and Creative he will be, which in turn results to new innovations.

Having gone this far, leadership performativity culture judgment will be emphasized;-

Performativity culture

Performativity can be defined as ‘a mode of regulation that employs judgments, comparisons and displays as a means of incentive, control, attrition and change’ (Ball, 2003, p.216). In education, it usually refers to a set of rigid conventions that teachers must adhere to, in order to be considered ‘good’ teachers. The strictures of performativity can prevent more eccentric or innovative approaches to teaching due to a fear of being deemed ‘unsatisfactory’. Ruitenberg asserts that ‘teaching is an embodied performance, a discursive act that has performative effects through its “unfaithful” citation’ (2007, p.265). This performative element can result in a suppression of creativity and innovation in teaching methods which may result in missed opportunities to engage learners. As Ball notes, ‘we become uncertain about the reasons for actions. Are we doing this because it is important, because we believe in it, because it is worthwhile? Or is it being done ultimately because it will be measured or compared?’ (2003, p.220). The term as used by Ball also encompasses the tendency for teachers to ‘teach to test’ to ensure that grades and statistics align with preconceived notions about what should be achieved by learners at a certain point. This can result in teachers feeling as though they cannot connect with their students in the ways they would like to, and that they are ‘working at their students instead of working with them’ (Jeffrey and Woods, 1998, cited in Ball, 2003). This Standards have become a central issue of educational reform in Nigeria. It is almost like a mantra for school reformers in Nigeria, there is a trend towards developing a culture of performativity, borrowing frameworks and ideas particularly from western world which does not anyway match or suit the educational system of Nigeria as a country. There seem to be numerous examples of policy copying such as the policy on E- learning without the provision of adequate facilities for effective delivery by national agencies and authorities. Professional standards for teachers and principals have been developed,

Benchmarked on performance assessment. These standards represent detail expectations of what is considered as preferred practice among school leaders and teachers, and in practice they provide new forms of regulation and control of preparation programs for school leaders as well as of accreditation and professional upgrading. Gronn (2003) applies the concept “designer leadership” to underscore how standards for school leaders have become a defining theme for leadership in the appearance of regimes of assessment. Although performance standards can provide comprehensive description of the elements of principals’ and teachers’ work, and the development processes used in validating the Standards are often hugely consultative, there are several important weaknesses connected to it. A main criticism is related to its decontextualized feature (Louden and Wildy 1999). The approach tends to privilege the demand side rather than the supply side of the solutions to problems; the language of standards tends to privilege an individualistic leadership notion through its stories of “turn around” mostly for failing schools. In addition, standardized evaluation policies and protocols tend to create as many problems as they solve (MacBeath 2006). Therefore, a critical focus on accountability and school improvement is eminent at this point.

Accountability and School Improvement

When people talk about holding schools accountable for results, the dominating discourse tends to be related to managerial accountability. This has changed accountability policy directions during the last decades; from

a direction of providing educational inputs and processes, to a direction of measurable outcomes. It means that schools are held accountable for generating improvement in student learning outcomes, and is based on a view that school will do better if they are given clear information about their performance on national tests. Test scores are used as evidences of how well the system is performing at an aggregate level. However, by this shift in focus there is a risk of ignoring some of the most critical purposes of public schools, for example preparation for participation in a democratic society or processes that creates and sustain social justice, which is not easily or cheaply measured (Soder 2005). Many valued educational objectives cannot be captured for measurement within this perspective of performance-contracting. For example, how can external control by means of tests measure the students' curiosity and creativity, or the results of the school's work in creating personal identities? There is also a risk of ignoring that students in order to be educated require basic educational tools and Resources like qualified teachers, books, high-quality instructional materials, facilities and safe schools. These conditions vary significantly across different areas in Nigeria and some of the most important conditions are beyond the control of the local school, Therefore politicians and state officials should be held accountable for not providing these necessary conditions. Resources and opportunities matters and it is highly dubious that we have this absence of accountability for anyone above the level of schools. Nigeria as a countries have established an accountability system that seems to be rooted in the assumption that rewards and punishments based on test score outcomes only, will improve schools and school system. However, a closer look into practice shows the failure of this postulation (Oakes et al. 2005). Some evidence of the impact of outcome based accountability is beginning to accumulate, particularly based on studies within the western context. Obvious limitations of this approach is it's lack of validity of the outcome measured on which improvement is to be based, and the measure of outcomes is too distant from the complexities of what is central to teaching and learning. Secondly, instead of motivating for improvement, problems of motivation increased in some low-performing schools. Negative incentives actually undermined innovation and risk-taking in threatened schools. Attentions are drawn to the survival of the school rather than student learning. In addition, the reallocation of resources seemed inadequate and weakly specified. One big problem with test-driven reform models is that they are rooted in the assumptions that all children are ready to be assessed at the same time in the same way on the same things. In addition, teachers don't have useful information for making good and professional instructional decisions about individual students (O'Day 2002; Sirotnik 2005) Elmore (2006) in his work on accountability and school improvement, has shown how school leaders use the accountability system to position themselves and their organizations in a favorable place to gain resources and capacity. However, this is not the same as saying they are successful leaders for the students or for society as a whole. Elmore argues that the problem is that many schools have little knowledge about how to respond to accountability policy effectively. His studies have demonstrated that the success of an accountability system depends on how it facilitates in engaging the knowledge, skill, and commitment of people who work in the schools. Therefore, it is important to know if there is an over investment in testing and control, knowledge and skill will be under invested. It is not sufficient to establish a policy of accountability if it is not followed by a practice of school improvement. Is professional accountability a more promising alternative? At least it seems to address problems of motivation more productively and it draws attention both to teaching as practice and to teachers' collective responsibility for student learning. The information which is shared is more immediate. Hence, it is easier to discover the links between strategies and their effects. For teachers it seems to strengthen the emphasis on their identities as educators. It is also argued that there is some evidence that professional accountability is essential for a school's ability to respond effectively to outcomes-based accountability. However, there are some weakness of professionalism as indicated in some studies which has raised serious limitation to this form of accountability. Also, it does not help ensuring equal opportunities for all students (O'Day 2002). However, there is a tension between the teachers' demand for autonomy, for an independent right to draw up and discuss the ethics of professional practice, and the control of this practice in a democratic state. However, a professional role entails professional accountability, this implies that teachers must make their experience more visible an alternative accountability forms of must be publicly acceptable. That's why it is important to distinguish between professional and personal accountability. The first implies that the teaching profession has the right and duty to construct and uphold. Standards of good teaching. An individual right to set one's own standards for teaching does not correspond with the conditions of professionalism. It is not the individual who is awarded autonomy, but the profession. In addition to their efforts of voicing protests against more managerialism in schools, teachers

should lead the drive to resolve the tension between managerial and professional control by promoting forms of accountability that are publicly acceptable. The leaders and the teachers had worked for years with systemic school based evaluation for the benefit of school development. Such evaluation is a way of being accountable (Moller et al. 2007). What should accountability systems include? Firstly, there should be a focus on accounting for conditions as well as outcomes, standards must specify both learning outcomes, what students are expected to achieve, the resources and conditions necessary to support teachers and students to produce those outcomes. Secondly, state officials should be made accountable to students and parents in the failure of the mentioned conditions above. In other words, an accountability system should include measures of student learning and about the conditions and learning opportunities at the classroom level, so that policy makers have the opportunity to assess whether inputs as well as outcomes are meeting expectations. It should include information about the performance of the officials above the level of the school in providing the resources, conditions and opportunities that learning requires.

Moreover, it should include procedures for responding to failures and incentives that will induce better performance by these actors in the future (Oakes et al 2005). A sensible solution seems to be a combination of professional and outcomes-based school accountability. There is need to find a balance between professional and political control over education for effective delivery and proper accountability in Nigeria schools.

CONCLUSION

The struggle between political and professional control over education includes a power struggle in society about who should set the standards in teaching. From a political perspective, there are other social groups wishing to define educational quality, yet they have had little bearing upon the practice in schools. Intensified administration, in the form of external regulation, might solve some problems, but new problems will undoubtedly appear. In the long term, there is the risk that teachers' enthusiasm and commitment will be lost which is a greater problem for schools. It has to prove that intensified administration produces better schools. Education cannot be developed mechanically with administrative decrees and regulations. The public has a right to know how well our schools are educating future citizens. But at the same time, those who shape accountability systems for school leadership must do it in a responsible way. It is crucial to operate on two fronts simultaneously. Improve the education for children in schools is a hard work, and it is crucial to demand that policy makers and school officials invest the necessary resources where they are needed most and provide professional development so that teachers can do a good job. I follow Elmore (2006) when he argues that the present accountability policy will not increase school performance without a substantial investment in human capital aimed at developing the practice of school improvement in a diverse population of school leaders and teachers. The present model of managerial accountability, particularly in Nigeria does not work because it does not focus on school improvement. The way schools respond to the accountability is probably dependent on their capacity for being professionals and involving themselves in internal evaluation of practice. Schools improve by engaging in practices that lead them to be successful with specific students in a specific context which requires collaborating and sharing of knowledge, and a commitment to the improvement of practice. Time and space is required for reflection of current practice in schools, and principals have delegated power and mandate to deal with such structural preconditions. Providing structures is necessary, but not sufficient. Teachers must be offered systematic prospects of competence enhancement to benefit from such structures. They need an opportunity to acquire both subject-related Knowledge as well as analytical tools for quality assurance and evaluation. School principals have a great responsibility in this regard. We know how competence contributes to increased confidence in professional practice and teacher-student interaction. Moreover, confidence often accommodates Innovative exploration of structural options, and increased openness towards student suggestions and feedback. In other words, leadership accommodation for systematic competence development in school staff facilitates increased potential for student learning and institutional development. Demands for change have heightened in modern times. In addition, work-life is more intense than before, illustrated by the increasingly urgent requests for reorganization and efficiency within the school sector. Numerous teachers experience a pressure on time in accomplishing a wide range of tasks. This is less the exception than the common rule within organizations dominated by conflicts and contrasts. Insecurity and risk being a prominent feature of societal development, lack of confidence in own ability and competence, added to organizational conflicts directs attention and energy to aspects of educational change preventing institutional development. Attempts to enhance quality in education should include evaluation on how local

government areas execute their role as beneficiary of schools. It should focus on their understanding and execution in accepting the mandate of education, as well as how support structures for goal realization within schools are established at this level of governance. Through deliberated priorities, the chief executives and superintendents at different levels hold the power to affect and control the individual school through selections of important issues and corresponding incentives. I will end by quoting some claims for developing more responsible accountability systems, put forward by Kenneth Sirotnik in his book about “Holding Accountability Accountable” (2005:10-14). They are built on what we know about good teaching, learning and assessment, and about the necessary conditions within which good education can prosper. Also, they illustrate how patterns of accountability should be reciprocal. - Responsible accountability systems must pay attention to lessons of the history of accountability paradigms and critical analyses of their successes and failures - Responsible accountability systems must pay attention to the history of schooling and attempts to change and standardize behaviour through impositions of consequences - Responsible accountability systems must be as focused on schooling conditions and equitable opportunities for student learning as on what students should be learning - Responsible accountability systems must attend to all the core purposes of public schooling in a political and social democracy - Responsible accountability systems for educational practices must themselves be guided by sound educational practices - Responsible accountability systems must be as focused on the continued learning of educators with less focus on outcome measures that can easily push schools back into more conservative patterns. Generally a good educational accountability pattern should aim at providing quality teaching and learning outcome and promote good education for all children at the same space.

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