

EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY: THE BASIS FOR A REALISTIC EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

The concept of educational accountability has been relegated to the background within the ambit of Nigeria education. This paper made a conscious attempt to explore the scene by exposing the obvious deficiencies, failures, and weaknesses found in our educational system, which are not being accounted for. The position of this paper is that teachers who are at the Vanguard of teaching/learning transactions are being over spared for the deteriorating standard of education. The paper however advocates for a functional operation of educational accountability where teachers contracted with educational performance are held answerable either by being rewarded or penalised accordingly as this will form the basic substratum for a realistic education in the dawn of the new era.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of educational accountability has not been given the desired concern in the context of Nigeria educational system and so not much has been written on it. The public is generally aware of the need for public social institutions such as schools to be accountable for their activities, but with the growing general dissatisfaction with many public institutions, accountability is likely to become a prime issue in curriculum evaluation (Sola, 1980). Teachers, administrators, and others employed to provide educational programmes for children and youths have always been accountable to the citizens for the quality of their work. Crediting the above statement, Saylor and Alexander (1974) observed that, Socrates the famous philosopher was put to death as a result of his accounting and that the earliest

schoolmaster on record in this country, one Philemon Pomont, was accountable to the citizens of the Massachusetts Bay Colony who employed him in 1655 "to become schoolmaster for the teaching and nurturing of children with us".

It is worthy of note that instruction; is the implementation of curriculum plans and a whole host of decisions by policy-makers, the outcome of instruction therefore constitute .the starting point in accounting of result. According to Saylor and Alexander (1974), the term "accountability" denotes the meaning of the concept someone "having to report, explain, or justify" to someone else, obviously in authority over the individual. Thus accountability is a master-servant, employer-employee, voter-office holder, citizens-public servant, tax payer-government, contractor-contractedrelation that is one party answering to another party. Its use in educational management and planning circles means that those employed .to operate the schools must report, explain, or justify what they do to persons superior to them, not-only within the system itself but to the legal authorities vested with control of the school - a board of education, a-state department of education, a state department of education, a state legislature and in certain aspects, agencies of the federal government. Accountability must involve assessment, appraisal, and evaluation, whichever is appropriate.

The concept of accountability is similar to payment by result. It has as its origin in the United States of America and it is practice in many parts of the world. It achieved considerable significance as a tool in education since the last three decades as a result of a wave of educational projects especially in the United States of America. This was after the launching of the "SPUTNIK" and associated insecurity among the Americans about the scientific achievement of USSR (Uche, 1999).

Essentially, accountability as a concept seeks to ascertain what gains or results are recorded after commitment of specific resources towards the educational programme. It was

on this basis that the concept was developed into a new dimension within the discipline of educational evaluation.

Uche (1999), observed that .in all educational programmes, the inputs are the students, teachers, classrooms, instructional materials and time, etc. These inputs must be transformed into a product or output that which in the final analysis must be related to the input. An example of input/output relationship is examination results. With such a conceptualization, a new dimension has been developed under what is now known as the system analysis. That is the understanding that every organisation and their component units constitute the parts just like the parts of the body. These parts are related and function together in a co-ordinated manner to make the unit what it is. This implies that, any abnormality within the system must be addressed through identification process of the problem within the system.

Nevertheless, since students, teachers, classrooms instructional materials, time etc. constitute the inputs in all educational programmes, it is the position of this paper to explore the scene of educational accountability by exposing the existing weaknesses, failures, deficiencies the inputs/outputs interactions despite their vanguard position in the curriculum process.

CONDITIONS FOR AN EFFECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

Every educational process must have some conditions for its success. The same applies to accountability as a process in education. On this strength, Hay man and Stenner (1971) identified the following conditions for and characteristics of an effective accountability.

1. There must be specific products, outcomes, or intents which are clearly defined and accepted as responsibilities of the institutions or agents being accountable;

2. There must be standards which define acceptable levels of performance relative to these products, outcomes, or intents;
3. There must be accepted and valid ways to determine the extent to which the products or outcomes have been achieved;
4. There must be some reinforcement system i.e. an incentive penalty mechanism for rewarding the responsible agent if performance exceeds specifications and penalising the responsible agent if performance falls below specifications and;
5. There must be a relationship between input and output and thus they defined accountability in terms of cost/benefit analysis. That is what do we benefit from the amount of money sank into an educational programme.

EVALUATION AS THE MIRROR OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Combs (1972) stated that the function of the school is to contribute to the development of intelligent persons who behave in an intelligent manner. That intelligent behaviour is based on "(a) the provision of new information or experience and (b) the personal discovery by the learner of its personal meaning for him". The school must be held accountable for both of these aspects of education. Goals and objectives for instruction to fulfil the first responsibility may be stated behaviourally, and measured accordingly.

The most inclusive concept of accountability holds that the school should provide evidence of how well it is fulfilling the total set of purpose and functions for which it has accepted responsibility; this is, how well is it enabling every child, youth, and young adult in the community to achieve the general goals as encompassed within the scope of accountability. Since it is quite obvious to account for the money invested into an educational programme, the only realistic standard of measuring whether the educational goals and

objectives have been achieved is through evaluation. It is on this basis that evaluation is being referred to in this paper as the mirror of accountability.

The big question is how and to what extent does evaluation perform the function of a mirror? One or two definitions of evaluation will suffice before elaborating. Stufflebeam (1971) defined evaluation as "the process of delineating, obtaining, and providing useful information for judging decision alternatives". Furthermore, Hopkins and Antes (1985) advanced a more encompassing definition of evaluation to mean:

... the continuous inspection of all available information concerning the teacher, student, educational programme, and teaching learning process to ascertain the degree of change in students and form valid judgement about the students and the effectiveness of the programme (p. 105).

The above definition is more akin to the context of this research as it underlines the major inputs in all educational programmes. The fact is that teachers are contractors who are contracted on the basis of students' performance improvement. The irony in this contract is that the principles of the contract are never respected by either the contractor or the contractee. This is evident from the falling standard of educational values in Nigeria and non has been summoned to account for. We should not be oblivious of the fact that as far as performance contracting is concerned the teachers are held accountable for any falling standard and rewarded accordingly and so within the context, the dwindling state of our education is a discredit to the teaching industry. Putting it the other way, the major failures, deficiencies and weaknesses in the system which is referred to as outputs are due to absolute lack of seriousness on the part of the teachers either as a result of wrong methodologies in

approaching the teaching learning transactions or no effective supervision on the part of the overseeing body for such contract.

The input/output result can only be ascertained in any systems through evaluation. This evaluation could be the formative or the summative type. The formative evaluation is concerned with the curriculum and instruction in and of themselves. Its purpose is to contribute to the improvement of the educational programme while the programme is on course. Summative evaluation measures the effectiveness of the curriculum plan and of instruction carried out in accordance with the plan. It is primarily concerned with what happened to learners as a result of instruction; it is concerned with the merits of the plan itself.

It is a thorough application of evaluation either formatively or summatively that the performance of an educational system is reflected on the Scoreboard herein regarded as the mirror.

CONCLUSION

The major thrust of this paper is on curriculum accountability as a realistic base for education in the 21st century. This paper strongly advocates... for the adoption of the popular approach in the United States of America in our educational system. This approach views curriculum accountability as negotiated agreement between two parties for the execution of a particular programme to the extent that the responsibilities of each and the reward associated and punishment are clearly stated. The approach grew upon what is called performance contracting in which specialist teachers are hired to improve the abilities and skills of specific groups of learners over a given period why payments are made systematically based on the level of achievement of the stated goals.

It is the view of the writer that if realistic education is to be achieved in the dawn of this new era, the government and other appropriate bodies charged with overseeing the educational, sub-sector should as a matter of necessity enforce proper accounting system in the Nigeria education system.

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