

SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY CHAIRPERSONS' PERCEPTION ON THEIR ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE RUNNING OF SCHOOLS

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Abstract. *The concept of accountability has been portrayed as vital and pertinent in the field of public administration in general and education management in particular for several years. This is important at a time that stakeholders like educators have misconceptualised the purpose of accountability to mean inspection or the lack of trust which makes them uncomfortable. This study sought to develop a conceptual framework of School Governing Body (SGB) Chairperson's perception of their accountability in selected schools with the purpose of facilitating learning and teaching outcomes. A qualitative paradigm using a multiple case study design was adopted. Data were collected through in-depth individual interviews with 3 chairpersons. The participants were purposively selected because of our discernment that as representatives on the school governing boards, they were accountable to parents as part of their managerial responsibilities. Thematic analysis of the data was used to identify emerging themes and categories. The findings reveal clarity on the practice of accountability in the broad spectrum of school management and administration as well as with policy making and implementation.*

Keywords: *Accountability; Education management; Responsibility; School base management; SGB Chairpersons; School governing board.*

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Introduction

The concept of accountability has been portrayed as vital and pertinent towards the improvement of public service like the educational sector for many years (Steiner, Kaiser, Tapscott, & Navarro, 2018). Coupled with this development, the dawn of democracy in South Africa heralded a new culture and approach to service delivery that has taken the form of decentration with accountability at the centre stage of education management (Nxumalo, Gilson, Goudge, Tsofa, Cleary, Barasa, & Molyneux, 2018). Implicit in this new culture is the acknowledgement that public service must be re-engineered to meet the imperatives of an emerging developmental state. To this effect, accountability and responsiveness have become central organising principles for service delivery (Nxumalo et al., 2018) in what Seakamela, (2011) previously describes as the lack of trust in the ability of schools to meet the needs of society. Subsequently, different meaning and purpose of accountability have been linked to different people depending on the context to which it is applied with different objectives. At its most basic, accountability means to hold someone to account or to have the obligation to deliver an account as well as being able to do so. According to West, Mattei, and Roberts (2011), accountability is a circumstance under which individual stakeholders are liable to review performance and the application of sanctions if their decisions and actions fall short of satisfying those with whom they are in an accountability relationship. Another description is that to be accountable is to be required to explain or justify one's action or behaviour. These perhaps explain why Hall, Frink, and Buckley (2015) say that accountability

remains a fundamental element of every community and the organisations that operate within them with both constructive and destructive tendencies. In effect the whole idea about accountability should be used for the right reasons which amongst others is to improve on the welfare of the organisation which of course is part of the responsibility of the SGB.

In an earlier confirmation to the relevance of accountability, Young (2016) alludes that School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in the case of England have substantial control and responsibilities regarding the education of learners. Thus, with such responsibilities conferred on the SGBs through decentralisation, they deserve to account to a designated authority. Nonetheless, Young (2016) mention that despite increased school autonomy, SGBs are increasingly constrained in considering the aims of education, as their focus is now placed on the intrinsic and or extrinsic goods of effectiveness which according to Ryan (2019) are very complex and could result in a series of challenges. These challenges of accountability to SGB among others include the lack of technically qualified human cadres (personnel) who are needed for the implementation of accountability, rarity of training programs that are directed to the implementation of accountability in work, limited availability of appropriate measures to measure performance (Kentab, 2016), the manipulation of accountability requirements and less rational decision making (Ryan, 2019) Notwithstanding, accountability has a whole range of benefits and interests which include working on improving the performance and encouraging employees to participate more in the making of administrative decisions.

Just like in politics and the legal sector, those charged with the responsibility of managing other public sectors like the school principal (Skedsmo & Huber, 2019), is equally expected to give an account or be answerable to the public or community which it serves. With learner performance being one of the key areas of concern for stakeholders in Schools of Africa, Smith and Holloway (2020) are of the concern that the process of evaluating school performance based on learner performance measures narrowly defines educator quality. Hence, the drive to raise standard by school authorities according to Lewis, and Hardy, (2015) has therefore resulted in a more tightly curricula frameworks and testing regimes measured by test scores though not limited to those. Regarding school properties which is amongst the jurisdiction of SGB chairpersons, Wellington (2015) earlier explain that if learners for instance, contributes to any form of destruction, a strategy for the collection of damages would be initiated which may include withholding the learners report until the required compensation is made. Such decisions have proven to be problematic to the SGBs because in some instances, they are challenged by parents of these learners in favour of their loved ones (Maphosa & Shumba, 2010). Seemingly, this could further become a huge set back to the very measure(s) of accountability to which the SGB is bound to protect. In consideration with the above scenario, qualitative case study approach was adopted for the study involving experienced SGB chairpersons through face to face interviews. The objectives of the study among others include the following:

- To ascertain the connotation and notion of accountability to the SGB chairpersons in secondary schools of South Africa.
- To ascertain the pattern of accountability as implemented by SGB in secondary schools of South Africa.
- To ascertain the magnitude of accountability in secondary schools of South Africa.
- To ascertain specific responsibilities by SGB chairpersons regarding accountability.

Review of Literature

In addressing the literature on accountability in schools, the authors took into considerable the fact that a greater part of the existing review covers mostly Europe and America as indicated by various authors (Wellington, 2015; West et al., 2011; Suspitsyna, 2010). This is opposed to Africa and South Africa in particular where most of the existing literature centres around school governance and public service delivery (Nxumalo et al., 2018; Steiner et al., 2018; Heystek, 2011). According to Suspitsyna (2010) for more than a decade, quality assurance and accountability have reigned over education policy agendas on a vast geographic territory like the United States of America (USA) characterised by the production of policies and practices that are aimed at controlling and managing educational quality. In recent times across Africa, accountability has mostly been associated to service delivery in public institutions and organisation like the school (Nxumalo et al., 2018). Such institutional changes according to Skedsmo and Huber (2019) result from concerns relating to performance, fairness, and efficiency of the education system to which key reform elements such as standardised testing, monitoring, evaluation, and accountability become a necessity. Expounding from an educational management perspective the authors believe that school principals for instance are exposed to new controls and regulations, growth, increasing competition, technological developments, and changes in the work force. In the middle of these changing circumstances, the SGBs still have that responsibility to ensure that learner performance amongst other things is improved with or without which they would be called to account.

In South Africa, the implementation of no fee policy for schools and the move towards School Based Management (SBM) reform in education has been a concomitant development in the South African educational system that has necessitated the increased need for accountability from school authorities. Such institutional changes and or development which according to Skedsmo, and Huber (2019) are unavoidable, is like Wilkins (2015) allusion that since the 1980s in England, state schools have been required to ensure maximum transparency and accountability through the use of indicators (also known as performance matric) resulting from the private sector and globally circulating discourses of good governance. The move towards SBM or democracy in the school governance of SA is further reiterated in Moorosi, Bantwini, Molale, and Diko (2020), when they posit that the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 provided for democratic governance of schools and targeted redress as one of the policies ushered in by the new democratic dispensation to bridge the gap of inequalities. Though this was partly done with the intension to ensure uniformity in a school context, its implementation varies from one school location to the other. This is important as Heystek (2011) clarifies that the decentralisation of powers to the schools communities does not in any way mean that the schools have become autonomous but rather, it assumes that the school community is in a better place to make certain decisions about the school. Hence, it would work well for school communities where both the SMT and SGBs comprises of educated individuals.

Moreover, the task team report on education management development (RSA, 1996b) and the legislation such as the South African School Act (RSA, 1996a) advocates the establishment of a democratic system of school governance in the form of SGB. The body comprises of stakeholders including parents, school principals (ex-officio member), educators, learner representatives and non-members of staff who administer the management of schools (Bagarette, 2014), with parents constituting most of the members. Hence, the introduction of SBM and a related change such as the introduction of SGBs can be regarded as issues that have many sides to investigate. This article is further inspired by Moorosi et al. (2020) in their study on school governance where they reveal that SASA propagates the establishment of SGBs whose role among others include budgeting, maintenance of school property, the implementation of policy and the authority to employ teaching

and non-teaching staff. Executing these task involves the sharing of responsibilities with other stakeholders including parents, with considerable powers on improving the quality of education in the hands of the SGB. This by implication means that managerial hierarchies in the form of managerial leadership (Romme, 2019) as well as understanding the concept of accountability and its implementation are core components of school governance that should be investigated. The degree to which SGB chairpersons are required to render an account is indeed a central issue for investigation through their perspective.

The Nature and Purpose of Educational Accountability

When the historical development of accountability in Education is reviewed, it must be kept in mind that in general terms, it has to do with a state of being answerable for something to someone (Spaull, 2013). Although the idea of accountability would denote different meanings depending on the context, in practice ‘being accountable’ means performing certain functions to the satisfaction of a person or interest group whilst complying with the standards set by a higher authority in a managerial leadership fashion (Romme, 2019). Applying these principles to a school as an organisation, it must be emphasised that schools are by nature highly structured organisations with clear positions of hierarchy and accountability. Notwithstanding, Fidan and Balci (2017) believe that a school system is closely linked to the reality that they are complex organisations, in an ever changing and complexifying environment, peopled by complex individuals, often drawn from a range of cultures that are working towards the goal of achieving effective learning outcome. According to Seakamela (2011) and Bush (2008) over countries like Zambia and Tanzania suggest that the educational system is faced with a “wholesale systematic decay” to which parents pay very little attention to the educational success of their children while relaying heavily on the effort of the educators. In the case of South Africa, the dawn of democracy indicated a new culture and approach to learning and change in service delivery which no doubt warrants severe accountability actions to be taken. One of these changes was witnessed upon the institution of democracy in 1994 where the autonomy was shifted partially, if not completely to the schools through the creation of SGBs and SMTs (RSA, 1996b). Inherent in this new culture is the acknowledgement that education had to be re-engineered to meet the imperatives of an emerging developmental state which amongst others include the need for stakeholders to be accountable over public funds that has been entrusted on them (Godwin, Ntayi, & Munene, 2021). Unfortunately, Heystek (2011) posits that over three decades down the line, there is yet to be any clear evidence in the link between the sovereignty of schools and improved quality education.

An earlier postulation by Fleisch (2006) clarifies that over 20 theories have been developed to explain why pressure or accountability is an agent of change in schools with very poor performance. It seems therefore that pressure and threat of redeployment of stakeholders for poor performance and ultimately closure of schools might result in high stake accountability in schools. On the contrary, Steiner *et al.* (2018) refute that the persistent call for more accountability in the public sector in general has placed education systems, particularly those in developing countries like SA, under intense public scrutiny because effective schooling is an imperative for a democratic society. Thus, expectations for greater accountability from SGB chairpersons might lead to increased monitoring and evaluation of the schooling system through the development of indicator systems. Hence, attempts to address accountability related problems according to Steiner *et al.* (2018), have rather been characterised by the lack of accountability and blame shifting, while the system remains badly in need of professional management and support from all interested parties.

This is closely linked to a previous remark by Seakamela (2011) that governments in many countries responded to accountability pressures by taking the lead in setting goals, establishing priorities and building frameworks for accountability while at the same time shifting authority and responsibility for key functions to school level as defined by democratic principles.

The ability of schools to develop the curriculum and improve learning and teaching to achieve school objectives no doubt depends on the availability of resources (Mestry & Bisschoff, 2009). The main objective of SGBs and their chairpersons is therefore on their capacity to share the limited finances between human and physical resources at schools aimed at achieving effective educational goals which often necessitate the need for decentralisation. Thus, Hooge, Burns, and Wilkoszewski (2012) indicates that decentralisation does not only mean more local governmental control of schools but also more control of education by local non-governmental actors like state-dependent private schools and/or school governing boards. Mestry and Ndhlovu (2014) in fact stated with reference to Section 34 of the SASA that it is the responsibility of the SGBs to supplement state funding through school fees and other fundraising initiatives which they deem necessary. This is with the assumption that officials like the managers, leaders and other professionals who are closest to local operations know best what should be done and to take full initiatives and control to exercise discretionary power.

Theoretical Framework

According to Wellington (2015), a theory in educational research is only worthy of the name if it helps us to explain phenomena as well as aids our understanding of these phenomena. Therefore, a theory must be capable of bringing out certain hidden inferences in the educational environment to facilitate learning and teaching. Amongst other theories used in educational management and leadership research, the participative and or collegial leadership theory was selected as the most pertinent for this article. Though similar, various researchers have identified this theory differently as follows; while Naidu, Joubert, Mestry, Mosoge, and Ngcobo (2012) talks about collegial theory, Bush and Middlewood (2013) talk of participative theory. According to Naidu *et al* (2012) in their collegial theory, it requires determining policies and making decisions through a process of discussion leading to consensus. Whereas Bush and Middlewood (2013) say that participation simply means the opportunity of engaging staffs in the process of decision making. One underlying issue as gathered by these authors is on the fact that all the authors above talk about the importance of engaging stakeholders by taking into consideration their ideas and suggestions to arrive at a common value as defined by the mission and vision of the school.

Furthermore, both versions of the theory draw our attention to the view that the power of leadership should be distributed or shared amongst some, if not all stakeholders in the organisation who are believed to have a mutual understanding about the objectives of the institution. But not without an effective empowerment of school principals in the case of public schools towards decision-making in the middle of radical social, political, and economic changes in the country (Mestry, 2017). Practically, and in relation to this article of accountability, the relevance of the theory lies on the bonding amongst stakeholders in a collaborative fashion as emphasis by Shaked (2018) where it is believed that it would help to alleviate pressure from senior leaders like principals and the SGB chairperson. Because the introduction of a new democratic dispensation in South Africa as earlier observed brought about new educational laws that made way for school based management, it follows that managerial hierarchies as well as the execution of responsibilities between different stakeholders and the state are core components of accountability

that should be investigated. Notwithstanding, such democratic dispensation further warrants a kind of participative leadership which according to Rolková, and Farkašová, (2015) entails encouragement to participate, collaboration, encourage the flow of ideas in decision making, and guidance. Though seem controversial, this theory according to Bagarette (2014) can be very instrumental in organisations like the school where a high level of accountability is needed in the learning and teaching process as well as the school governance thereof.

Methodology

The article adopted a qualitative case study approach involving township secondary schools of the North West Province of South Africa. There is equally a trace of the ethnographic component following lengthy period of interaction with the participants. The authors found the approach to be relevant because it enabled us to collect rich qualitative data based on the SGB chairpersons understanding and implementation of school governance through accountability in their various schools. According to Creswell (2009), case studies are strategies of inquiry in which the researcher explores in-depth a programme, event, activity, process, of one or more individuals, as it is the case of this article involving three experienced SGB chairpersons from three purposively selected township secondary schools. These SGB chairpersons ranged from the most educated to the uneducated individuals. Our selection process was both deliberate and flexible as emphasised by Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey (2011) because it involved people of specific characteristics and experience of the topic, hence can provide detailed understanding on our research concern. Data collection was done through individual face to face interviews with all three participants who were encouraged to tell their stories regarding accountability issues in the running of schools. Beside interview, participant observation was equally performed. This was done by attending three crucial SGB monthly assessment meetings where the authors spend ample time with participants at the various sites, to understand assumptions, values, beliefs, and experience of the SGB chairpersons in school governance and accountability. Each interview that lasted for at most an hour and at least forty minutes was transcribed verbatim. The inductive data analysis approach which is thematic in nature was adopted based on the following steps: aggregation of data according to questions, identification of patterns in the data, categorisation and open coding of data in terms of common emerging themes. Also, because observation was used, the triangulation of data which entails enhancing the understanding of a phenomenon was used during the discussion phase to ensure a valid and reliable conclusion of results.

Findings and Discussion

The results were presented under the various themes with direct quotations from one participant to the other, accompanied by a discussion of the findings.

Theme 1: The connotation and nature of accountability in schools

The different SGB chairpersons were asked to describe the meaning of the concept accountability based on their various understanding. From the results obtained, 2 SGB chairpersons collectively describe the concept accountability to mean giving feedback over a task that has been entrusted on you to perform. Similarly, another opinion was shared by relating the response to the performance of given responsibilities in preparation for any future questioning. A direct quotation from the participants read as follows: *Accountability means performing expected*

duties as per your contract and also ensuring that you do all those activities that are being assigned to you diligently (CP1). Also, that accountability refers to individuals or people at the workplace having to perform certain responsibilities that carries along the mission and vision of the school (CP2). And lastly, that accountability is the act of making sure that your activities as a leader aligns with vision and mission of the school (CP3).

Arguably like the view of Young (2016), SGBs in England have substantial control and responsibilities regarding the education of learners. This by implication means that accountability involves three key aspect namely people, responsibilities, and reporting in what Spaul (2013) simply describe as a state of being answerable for something to someone. With such huge responsibilities delegated to them, SGB chairpersons are therefore expected not only to report back to the board members, but also owe a responsibility to report to the community through responsible authorities like the SGB chairpersons in a collective fashion by involving everyone in the decision-making process.

A further examination of the different views above in cognisance with observation during our visit to the study sites, reveals that as far as accountability is concern every SGB member has a task to perform, as well as knows what is expected of them. But reporting back when called to do so often makes them uncomfortable as they often see the leader under whom they are expected to report back to be bossy or rather too demanding. However, because the use of terminologies is largely guided by the idea the authors intend to disclose, participants were asked to identify other possible concepts which to them have similar meaning and which would make them more comfortable in place of accountability. Participant CP3 revealed saying “responsibility is a concept closely related to accountability because, once you are responsible over something, you must be able to account over any decision that you take. Thus, responsibility can be use in place of accountability”.

Similarly, Participant CP1 affirmed that the concept answerability is closely related to accountability as earlier suggested by Spaul (2013). This is because a school is a public entity entrusted upon a group of stakeholders, who are expected to report back or be answerable to the public when called upon to do so. It was therefore considered to be preferable as opposed to accountability which according to CP1, “it makes one seems as though you have committed a crime”. Whichever way the authors look at it, accountability is accountability and requires some form of a participative effort from the entire SGB board in what Bush and Middlewood (2013) says that opportunities must be given to other members of the board including principals to engage in the process of decision making. Despite the misconception however, it was deduced from the study that the essence of accountability in schools is to guide through an effective monitoring system of particularly the annual teaching plan and learner performance as opposed to implementing harsh punishment upon committing an offense.

Theme 2: The pattern of accountability in schools

The SGB chairpersons were asked to describe or demonstrate how the concept accountability is practiced in their various school environment. Based on the data obtained, it appears accountability in schools be it private or public is in the form of hierarchies. Participant CP2 says that “there is a financial committee in the school that consists of the financial secretary, the deputy principal, and the treasurer of the SGB”. An evaluation of participants’ views from the empirical study suggested that though SGB chairpersons have other responsibilities, their main interest is in finance. As explain by participant CP1, “at the beginning of the financial year, the SGB committee

looks at the needs of the school and place them in order of preference”. This is followed by the allocation of funds to the various sectors according to the need. At this level, the financial secretary is responsible for all financial records that must be directed to the SGB says participant CP1. This is in confirmation of Mestry and Bisschoff (2009) earlier confirmation that the SGBs have as part of their responsibility to share the limited finances obtained as indicated in section 34 of the SASA between human and physical resources at schools with the aim of achieving effective educational goals. Therefore, in monitoring or keeping SGB chairpersons accountable for a successful financial management, participant CP1 says: *They (SGBs) are expected to report as per the expenditure plan in their monthly and quarterly report which determines whether or not there is an over or under expenditure.*

Observation in some instances pointed to the degree of reporting that is expected in the domain of finance for proper accountability. Thus, a further demonstration that where there is responsibility, there must be accountability. According to Skedsmo and Huber (2019), in applying these core principles of accountability to an educational system, it must be remembered that schools are by nature highly structured institutions with clear positions of hierarchy within the members. One of the participants (CP2) during interview explained that: *It is critical for the SGB to adopt a school development plan that would determine what is expected of every stakeholder towards the development of the school. Therefore, whoever is assigned for the collection of fees for example, is highly accountable to the SGB board that oversees the finance.*

While affirming the above view, CP1 said “*if at the end of the year these financial duties are not well executed those placed in charge must be held to account*”. This is in line with Skedsmo and Huber (2019) view that concerns relating to performance, fairness, and efficiency brought about key reform elements such as standardised testing, monitoring, and accountability in the education system must be fully implemented. This explains why Heystek (2011) says that policy implementation for quality education in the case of quintile 1-3 schools is usually in the hands of the principals in an attempt to ensure maximum implementation, rather than leaving decision making in the hands of parents who are illiterate. However, to us, attaining these reforms must not be the point of departure alone. Rather, the point of departure should be on the need to make all SGB persons either educated or not to feel involved by means of participation in the policy making processes as well as creating awareness in respect to their responsibilities which entails training. In relation to inclusiveness of stakeholders Participant CP1 therefore reveals that “*as an SGB person, you have to account for all these tasks on or before due date as stipulated by policy. But not without the learners playing their part in the process by doing their assignments and studying for exams*”. An indication that accountability has no limit but rather comprises of the entire team that must be done in the form of hierarchy or managerial leadership fashion ranging from the top involving the department to the bottom involving the school management team.

Theme 3: The magnitude of accountability in schools

In a school as an organisation, specific tasks are often given to specific stakeholders either as a group or as individuals. The SGB chairpersons were asked to identify who they considered as key role players and the degree of accountability at the various schools they are involved. According to the interview with participant CP1: *Every stakeholder in the school including learners, are key players in the day to day functioning of the school with different areas of responsibilities.*

In fact, it emerged that every stakeholder has a role to play as far as learning and teaching is concerned and must be accountable to someone. However, failure to perform is tantamount to disciplinary actions, which unfortunately is often considered as the last option especially if it is not for the interest of the learners. Findings from a one-on-one interview with participant CP3 reveals that stakeholders are usually given the opportunity to make amends of their mistake rather than an immediate punishment. While acknowledging this view, Business Day (2012) explain that attempts to address such problems have rather been characterised by the lack of accountability and blame shifting, while the system remains badly in need of professional management and support from all interested stakeholders.

Furthermore, the SGB chairpersons equally acknowledged that they are aware of their responsibilities as well as the repercussions for failing to comply which is the same for all the stakeholders. Regarding the issue of learner security in and out of the school premises, it is well defined by RSA (1996b) and understood by the stakeholders that it is the responsibility of the educators based on the stipulations of *loco parentis* to look after learners that have been entrusted under their care by parents. Findings reveal that there have been cases or situations in which principals and educators are taken to court by parents for failing to provide adequate security over a particular learner while in order instances it was resolved amicably. Regarding this, participant CP2 says: *We had a case some three years ago where a court case was opened against one of our educators. Fortunately, because of my influence in the community as the SGB chairperson, I invited the parent over in the presents of the educator and the matter was resolved.*

An important role demonstrated by the SGB chairperson in this instance is the right to be heard which was offered to both parties. In other instances, as deduced from the data it could become more problematic if the learner suffers physical injuries that can cause disability or even death. To these SGB chairpersons therefore, every effort is made to ensure that all problems are resolve at the level of the School Governing Board before they escalate. In line with the above analysis, the authors believe that Smith and Holloway (2020) were to a greater extent correct in their disclosure that the process of evaluating school performance based on learner performance measures narrowly defines educator quality. Thus, educators play a multifunctional role which range from ensuring that the school climate is good enough for learning as well as classroom management. Consequently, besides the role of the collegial theory in ensuring learner's safety through participation, the above explanation further display the role of an effective and efficient leadership role.

Theme 4: Other leadership responsibilities (Educator recruitment)

Following the decentration of the South African Education System, in which the powers over decision making was entrusted on the school (Hooge et al., 2012; Mestry & Ndhlovu, 2014), it follows that the SGB has as part of their responsibilities to recruit educators. Like in the other areas of responsibility, it was unanimously revealed that the SGB is responsible to see that the process of recruitment is done accordingly, whether assigned by the Department of Education or for their own personal need as an independent organisation. Affirming this view participant CP1 says that: *Because of my level of exposure, connection, and level of accountability to parents as a former principal, I am sometimes entrusted with the authority to hire an educator payable by the SGB in collaboration with the principal.*

Under such circumstances one would assume that the SGB in collaboration with the principal is at the centre of educator's employment and of making sure that every classroom has an educator

through self-generated funds. However, it remains the responsibility of the Department of Education to advertise the position(s) either through government gazette, newspapers and various online platforms, while as part of the SMT, the SGB does the screening and shortlisting which are then referred back to the Department for appointment (CP2). This is like Seakamela (2011) earlier explanation that the governments in many countries respond to accountability pressures by taking the lead in setting goals, establishing priorities, and building frameworks for accountability while at the same time shifting authority and responsibility for key functions to school level. This is important for a managerial leadership system which is characterise by hierarchy as it would clearly define the different levels of accountability for every stakeholder.

Another notable remark is on the criteria involved in the recruitment process of educators. Participant CP3 on a very serious note emphasised saying “as far as accountability is concern, people can sometimes abuse their powers or bypass authorities to attain the said objectives or goals of the school”. For example, participant CP1 says: *At some point of the recruitment process at our school, only male educators are hired with no major challenge from the Department or community because it is a constructive discrimination.*

This by implication means that if the objective of learning and teaching is to achieve a successful outcome, then the department must worry not about how it is attained. Unfortunately, the authors hold that though some form of collaboration or partnership is displayed through mutual agreement, this is an act of unfairness through gender bias which must be condemn because the school as an organisation is guided by principles like fairness as indicated in the South African School Act 84 of 1996 (RSA,1996b). This however affirms the postulation by Heystek (2011) that the issue of decentralisation or participative leadership in schools would work better for schools with more educated members of staff. However, the department has an obligation to ensure that even in township areas such as those in this case study with high illiteracy rate, the parents get the help they deserve.

As deduced from the data the SGB is responsible for the payment of educators hired by them through fun raising which is often very challenging for quantile 1-3 schools. This was confirmed from two separate interviews where on the one hand participant CP3 revealed that “the budget allocated by the DoE does not allow for extra employees that are brought on board for temporal teaching”. While participant CP1 from a quintile 5 school says “*We are self-sufficient in our school. Beside the allocation received from the government, we also raise funds through the SGB in various forms because we have a lot of educators paid by us*”. Therefore, in both instances, the SGB would be compelled to raise funds in different forms as stated in Section 34 of the SASA 84 of 1996 (Mestry & Ndhlovu, 2014). In trying to demonstrate the severe nature of the problem particularly for quintile 1-3 schools, CP3 says: *Hired educators usually go unpaid for some time while the SGB negotiate with the national treasury for their payments to be made.*

Unfortunately, this usually does not end well as employees through their different unions embark on strikes actions even before negotiations are made for their payments which often result in very tense situations among stakeholders. Incorporating this idea with the collegial theory would mean bringing other community members including part time educators on board by means of participation in the decision making and implementation process, thereby easing the pressure on the SGB chairpersons.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study on the accountability of SGB chairpersons was conducted in selected township secondary schools in the North West province of South Africa. For almost three decades into democracy, the governance of South African schools has undoubtedly been characterised by decentralisation, with maximum authority delegated to the parents through the SGB. The degree of influence or relationship to which parents have on the educational outcomes of schools though according to Heystek (2011) is almost invisible, has proven to vary from one school type (quintile system) as well as environment to the other. Thus, warrants a high level of accountability to higher authorities. This is because no single sector or unit of a school as an organisation can work in isolation. It logically follows that every stakeholder including the learners and non-teaching staffs should be held accountable for their deeds and misdeeds. In a school as an organisation, the principal is often considered to be the accounting officer base on their leadership role. However, the process of accountability would be more productive in a school environment where there is a high level of participation by the governing bodies (parent component inclusive) who have been granted full autonomy as indicated in the SASA 84 of 1996 to hold other members of the SMT to account. Unfortunately, most of the township schools in the area under study falls between quintile 2 and 3 where the parents are mostly illiterate and unavailable to take responsibilities. Hence, resulting to instances where the parents either out of trust, or lack of the zeal to take responsibility, delegate their authority to the school principal or SGB chairperson over pertinent decision making.

Moreover, in analysing the data from both literature and the empirical findings, it could be deduced that accountability would mean taking responsibility over resources that have been given to the school authorities who in return would give an account to a higher authority about how these resources were used. Thus, the assumption that responsibilities must be given to an individual before they could be held to account. Most often than not, educators are held accountable in respect to the implementation of the curriculum as well as learner performance thereof. However, traces of accountability on the side of other officials like the SGB chairpersons can equally be found, considering that it is their responsibility for instance to provide funds for privately hired educators. Subsequently, other stakeholders like the department through monitoring must ensure that all due processes of educator employment are followed in order to ensure fairness. It is then in their best interest to ensure that for any drastic measure like suspension and dismissal to be taken against educators who failed to perform their responsibilities, the interest of the learners must first be taken into consideration.

As a recommendations, it goes without saying that even in the presence of a high level of poor performance that warrant some degree of accountability, reflective rather than retributive actions could be taken in the form of motivation of stakeholders. Also, there is clearly a huge need to educate employees on the purpose of accountability, thereby avoiding a possible miscontextualisation and resistance. Whether responsibility or answerability which are all synonyms of accountability, the purpose remains the same for as long as it is for the best interest of teaching and learning. Lastly, because the realisation of accountability in education depends heavily on all stakeholders, especially the SGBs and SMTs, it is also recommended that they relentlessly develop and up skill each other where necessary through a more participative effort characterised by tolerance.

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