

Teacher accountability for quality education in mauritius



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There are various papers and reports on teacher accountability worldwide. Our paper focuses on teacher accountability in the Mauritian context. In this study, we argue that even though these studies are stepping stones to conduct pedagogical survey, however they are not sufficient for qualitative research since a recent review from National Institute of Child Health and Human Development claims, “ rigorous experimental and qualitative research that defines and characterizes effective teaching methodologies that demonstrate improved student performance is limited.” This model has been developed from teachers’ perspective and analyzes their role in the success and failure of students. The conditions identified are based on a literature review on school and teacher accountability. Questionnaire data were collected from a representative teacher sample (N = 206) in 6 State Secondary Schools in in the four educational zones of Mauritius.

Keywords: accountability, Qualitative

INTRODUCTION

The need for teacher accountability is to evaluate a teacher, like evaluating any other professional, one needs to determine what that professional needs to know and be able to do , and then how that professional demonstrates this knowledge through performance (John Schacter).

Reports from education policy specialists help us see how we come to have failing schools, low-performing students, and little accountability (Unicef report, 2000) and how we can devise the affordable, reasonable, and workable accountability systems and incentives we need to raise student learning. Therefore, following Earl & LeMahieu (cited in Earl, 2005: 7) we

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understand that, “ Accounting is gathering, organising and reporting information that describes performance. Accountability is the conversation about what the information means and how it fits with everything else that we know, and about how to use it to make positive changes.”

In fact various literatures stress upon how accountability has become a cornerstone of schools reforms. Gurr (2006: 2) notes that, ‘ in recent time there has been intense interest in most parts of the world to create systems for monitoring school performance’. De Grauwe and Naidoo (2004: 20) refer to ‘ the worldwide trend towards school evaluation’.

The Mauritian School is presently experiencing a need to assure academic success and development for all students and the focus is on providing opportunities for students’ achievement and removes barriers to students’ access (Strategy Plan 2008- 2020). In this light the focus is on finding ways to reach more students and on the implementation of strategies for successful teaching and learning. At a time of rapid technological advances, there is a need to increase standards-based education through a foundation of accountability to account for academic achievement (Strategy Plan 2008-2020).

Global Perspective

Recent reform initiatives have laid increasing emphasis on teacher accountability. The aim of President Clinton’s Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994 was to shift the focus from inputs to results and this reform initiative led to a national development of standard-based educational reform (Herrera & Murray, 2006). According to McLaughlin and Shepard

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(1995), standards-based education can be defined as “ setting standards of performance in academic subject areas as a means of improving the substance of school curricula and increasing the motivation and effort of students, teachers, and school systems and thereby improving student achievement. In addition to setting high standards, the reform aimed at making educators feel accountable “ for what students learned and their performance on standardised tests” (McLaughlin & Shepard, 1995).

The ‘ No Child Left Behind’ (NCLB) law (2002) mandates that USA states adopt comprehensive accountability systems for identifying and improving underperforming schools. The major focus of NCLB is to provide all children with a fair, equal and significant opportunity to obtain high quality education.

The moves towards a more balanced and sustainable approach to school accountability

processes in England followed the release of the Government’s Green Paper in 2003 called Every Child Matters. Under the accountability and integration proposal outlined in this paper, the creation of an inspection framework for children’s services was to be

actioned with the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) taking the lead in bringing

together joint inspection teams.

School and teacher accountability relates to an ongoing pursuit of quality improvement and at the same time providing public assurance. De Grauwe

and Naidoo (2004: 39) conclude that ‘ the challenge is not to choose
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between accountability and quality improvement, but to find the right balance between these aims, between internal and external evaluation, between the criteria set by central authorities and those set by the school staff itself, between the demands of the ‘ public’ and the needs of the professional community.’

Opinion is divided on the impact of school evaluation and accountability processes on the performance of schools. Many authors question the inherent value of the components of some systems. Elmore (cited in Gurr, 2006: 3) ‘ disputes the long-term worth of external accountability environments and suggests that for real and sustained school improvement, teachers and principals need to take more responsibility for the outcomes they influence.’

Hattie (2005: 12-13) argues that ‘ we must develop an accountability system that is located from the student level upwards, directly involving and influencing the teacher and principal level, as such a system is more likely to have major effects on the quality of teaching and learning.’

Leithwood (2005) proposes the adoption of a reciprocal, professional approach. Together with the assessment of student progress, he emphasizes upon the importance of developing and appraising teacher’s performance against professional standards.

The Reports on School Accountability Framework Review, National and International Perspectives and Approaches help to have an insight in the accountability processes in other countries:

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In Scotland a system of proportional response has been established linked to the findings of school inspections.

In some USA and Australian states various regional and district based services are called upon to support schools in response to reviews and the analysis of test results.

Finland, South Korea and Singapore have a strong focus on teacher training and continued professional development for serving teachers and principals. In Finland the initial selection process for students applying for the teacher education program is very rigorous. All teachers graduate with a Masters degree (5 years).

South Korea has recently introduced an evaluation system for teachers and principals, while in Singapore teachers and principals are appraised using the Enhanced Performance Management System. Every school is to have a School Staff Developer to ensure that training and professional development programs encompass teacher needs while maintaining a focus on school goals.

Experienced teachers in Ontario, Canada are formally evaluated every three years. Inexperienced teachers are mentored, closely monitored and evaluated. An unsatisfactory rating for any teacher can result in a recommendation for termination.

In contrast with general trends De Grauwe (2004: 78) notes that in Finland, a country that consistently performs at the highest level in international tests, ' the national inspection system was discontinued in 1991. Decision-makers

felt that the benefits from external inspection and advice services were minimal and that, in view of the high level of training and professionalism of teachers and the strong parental interest in the schooling of their children, quality control could be entirely trusted to them.'

Accountability as an Auditing Tool

An accountable educational system can be set up and managed through strategic planning processes, which shape and guide the system, where it is going and how it is going to get there (Kaufman et al, 2002).

In the work world, management and employees are held accountable. Those that do well gain merits and are promoted. The marketplace creates incentives for their efficient performance, holds them closely accountable, and rewards success. Likewise, the accountability principle extends to most sectors of Mauritian life more significantly the private sector. Unfortunately, the Mauritian school system lacks the marketplace accountability, which is seen only at the level of large-scale examination systems associated with higher achievement, Cambridge School Certificate and Higher School Certificate.

Educators' resistance to testing and accountability is not surprising and is rather to be expected. Neither doctors nor bricklayers would choose to be accountable for their effort, it would be much easier for them to say that all's well as they request higher compensation (Evers et al.) Government-generated movement for accountability is generally welcomed by the public, vigilantly accepted by the school personnel responsible for implementing them and skeptically viewed by the teachers who are to be appraised

(Odhiambo, 2003). Accountability is a contentious and divisive issue regardless of the context within which it operates. It is not unusual for teachers to openly, or covertly, resist involvement in appraisal schemes for numerous reasons, ranging from a fear of negative information becoming public to a complete lack of trust in the appraiser (Dimmock & Walker, 2005).

According to the report prepared by Michael Heim for Hawaii's School Leadership Academy on Accountability in Education: A Primer for School Leaders, the author based on different literature review comes up with the Conceptual model for accountability.

Heim writes that, ' The evaluative nature of accountability, i. e., using authority justifiably and credibly, is an essential characteristic. The evaluative dimension is what distinguishes accountability from reporting.' Furthermore he asks a simple question,

“ Who is responsible for what to whom?”

The “ Who is Responsible?” and “ To Whom?” components contain numerous accountability providers and recipients: policymakers, the government, education officials, school staff, parents, students, the general public, and special interest groups.

It can be noticed that there is an internal-external dimension to accountability. That is, accountability relationships arise internally within the same organization, and also externally that is with recipients outside the organization

The following diagram tries to integrate various accountability frameworks found in the literature with the definition of accountability used herein. The diagram contains the necessary components required of a conceptual model for accountability.

Conceptual Accountability Model

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Source: M. Heim, Hawaii's School Leadership Academy on Accountability in Education: A Primer for School Leaders

Teachers are responsible for accomplishing tasks such as aligning curriculum, classroom instruction, and student assessment practices. Teachers are also responsible for truly involving others so that the “ co-production” of learning can be successful. Attention must be given throughout these efforts to thoughtfully cultivate a relationship with students. Accountability between students and teachers, teachers and parents, and students and parents, can only exist on a mutually agreed relationships and responsibilities among them.

Student learning is not a one way traffic or unidirectional, it encloses many factors, some of which are within the authority of school and its staff to control, and others which are not. Whatever the educational circumstances and limiting factors contributing to educational goals, teachers must make a difference in the lives of children and youth. Teacher's accountability for student outcomes, then, must highlight the ways and extent to which they have contributed to making a difference. Testing students' performance is <https://assignbuster.com/teacher-accountability-for-quality-education-in-mauritius/>

useful, but information that shows growth or improvement over time is essential (Heim,).

1.3 Reform Initiatives on Accountability and Quality in the Mauritian Educational System

International commitments such as Education for All, Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategies, and the Millennium Development Goals increasingly influence strategy decisions and planning in the Mauritius education sector. Over the past decades, through the different policy papers and reports, the Government has aimed at creating an education system responsive to the emerging needs of society. Besides, the new Programme-Based Budgeting (PBB) system demands achievement in return for investment, and it requires a system of performance measurements at all levels of the education system.

According to the Strategy Plan 2008-2020, the vision of the Government is to ensure Quality Education for all. Teacher performance, student assessment and the structure of the system are specifically designed to improve the quality of education and ensuring excellence for all. Quality in the education system requires accountability on the part of teachers for both the learning environments they provide and the learning outcomes they enable their students to achieve (Strategy Plan, 2008).

In 1991, the Master Plan pointed out that there were insufficient accountability and poor communication within the educational system as duties and responsibilities were not clearly defined. There was no School Management Division. The Master plan therefore proposed an improved and

more effective system of management by re-establishing policy and operational management of responsibilities at all levels to achieve accountability (Parsuramen, 1991). One of the recommendations of the White Paper (1997) was that Heads of Schools should manage their schools within clear policy guidelines and accountability parameters (Pillay, 1997). Moreover, the Action Plan (1998) insisted on accountability and transparency at each level and the setting up of a Quality Assurance Division in order to achieve increased quality and cost effectiveness in the education system.

At the turn of the new millennium, Obeegadoo in his reform plan Ending the Rat Race (2000) highlighted that for colleges to be centres of excellence, it is necessary to have a close monitoring of standards with clear lines of accountability. The Strategy Plan 2008-2020 also indicated that performance indicators should be set up so as to increase the accountability of school personnel to produce results.

Existing Framework

The Mauritian System has developed accountability frameworks which consist the components of school planning, school self-assessment, school reporting and school review (internal or external). Self-assessment and reporting are usually annually based, planning is often both longer term (3-5 years, strategic) and annual (operational) with review cycles.

With the purpose of ensuring the accountability of teachers within the educational system, the following indicators are in place:

Guidelines such as, the National Curriculum Framework, define the task and responsibilities of teachers.

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The Personnel Management Manual of the Ministry ensures uniformity and stability of employee action through specified rules and regulations.

Quality Assurance Teams assess teaching and learning.

Heads of Schools monitor the work of teachers through regular class visits.

A Performance Management System (PMS) is in place. After being on a pilot basis in 2009, the system will be fully operational in 2011.

Establishment of clear reporting guidelines and schedules.

Performance Analysis Report provide statistical data on student achievement results and progression

Percentage pass rate at SC and HSC level.

1. 5 Barriers/ Limitations that exist

2 levels: one general, second specific (related to our topic)

According to David Blake (Quality Assurance in Teacher Leadership Education, A case study) the emerging framework for quality assessment in teacher evaluation is clearly problematic because many problems such as definition, workload, funding, bureaucracy and values are involved.

Furthermore, sanctions and rewards are elements of the accountability processes and as mentioned above, teachers as the appraisee are scared of the appraiser. Furthermore to hold the appraisee accountable there needs to be valid and reliable assessment mechanisms.

Teacher accountability, as per various studies, is very broad

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to find out whether state secondary school teachers feel accountable for their student's performance. This study examines the roles and responsibilities of state secondary teachers and it aims at transforming teachers into accountable, responsible & competent collaborators, demonstrating best practices.

This article reviews the research on teachers accountability for quality education and proposes that by implementing firm teacher performance based accountability systems (The Milken Family Foundation, 2000), can improve teaching practices and ultimately students' success.

METHODOLOGY

Survey Method

The survey method is a research method to gather data about people, their opinion and behaviours (Wikipedia, 2010). The survey method was selected as it is an efficient way of collecting information from a large number of respondents. Survey is flexible as it produces a wider range of information compared to other methods, like direct observation, experimentation (Wikipedia, 2010). Several questions can be asked about the given topic, thus conferring considerable flexibility to the analysis, and standardised questions make measurement more accurate. Statistical tests can be used to determine validity, reliability and statistical significance (Wikipedia, 2010).

There are two types of surveys, namely questionnaires and interviews.

Questionnaires are usually paper-and-pen instruments which the respondent

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completes whilst interviews are completed by the interviewer based on the say of the respondent (Trochim, 2006).

For the purpose of our study, we found that the Questionnaire method would be best for our situation.

Questionnaire Design

Data was collected through the use of questionnaires. Our survey used the quantitative measure, i. e. forced-choice questions were used. Cross-sectional survey was used, as information was gathered on a population of State Secondary College teachers, as of October 2010.

Once we had selected Questionnaire as our survey method, we had to construct the survey itself by tackling a few issues, including the different types of questions, decisions about question content and purpose, decisions about question wording, decisions about response format, and, question placement and sequence in our questionnaire.

Our survey consisted of close-ended questions, where the response options were exhaustive and mutually exclusive. Two types of response scales were used, namely, dichotomous, and four-point Likert.

Five main sections have been duly taken into consideration while designing the questionnaire namely Respondent Profile, Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, Professional Responsibilities and Support and Demand. These are essential components regarding collection of data in connection with teacher accountability for quality education.

Participants

A representative sample of State Secondary School teachers was selected from a population of 3439 teachers so as to collect questionnaire data. The study was explained to the teachers and they were asked to fill in a questionnaire. The questionnaire data was collected from a sample of 206 teachers from 6 State Secondary Schools from the four Educational Zones in Mauritius. 3 of the schools are termed as State Colleges and are high-performing schools with an average pass rate of 80%, whilst the other 3 schools are low-performing schools with an average pass rate of 75%.

The sample was 59% female and 41% male; the age ranged between 23 and 60 years with an average age of 30-40 years. The participants belonged to 14 different departments.

Limitation of the study

Though there are advantages to the questionnaire method, we would, however, like to point out that there are a number of weaknesses to the method. For instance, the quality of responses cannot be judged and respondents' honesty cannot be proven. Human biases for e. g. ego of the respondents are there.

High response rates were not achieved; out of the 300 questionnaires distributed, only 206 were retrieved. The period during which the survey was carried out was not appropriate due to the fact that many teachers were involved in Cambridge examinations at that given time. Moreover, some respondents did not attempt a few questions whilst others, although having

the best of intentions, could not find the time to respond to the questionnaire. Others misplaced the instrument or forgot to return it.

It was also noted that though secrecy was assured, some respondents were unwilling to provide certain information as they felt this would somehow intrude on their confidentiality, for e. g. some omitted to specify whether they were the Head of Department or not.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Purpose of study

The purpose of the study is to find out whether state secondary school teachers feel accountable for their student's performance. This study examines the roles and responsibilities of state secondary teachers and it aims at transforming teachers into accountable, responsible & competent collaborators, demonstrating best practices.

Respondent Profile

Male (%)

Female (%)

Age group

<30

30-40

41-50

> 50

10. 6

58. 8

12. 9

17. 6

30. 0

55. 0

10. 0

5. 0

Teaching experience

<5 yrs

5-15 yrs

16-25 yrs

> 25 yrs

13. 4

54. 9

13. 4

18. 3

25. 2

59. 7

9. 2

5. 9

Educational zone

1

2

3

4

12. 9

58. 8

15. 3

12. 9

22. 3

41. 3

9. 9

26. 4

Posting

Gaetan Raynal SC

Shrimati Indira Gandhi SSS

Quartier Militaire SSS

Sookdeo Bissoondoyal SC

Sir Leckraz Teeluck SSS

Sharma Jugdambi SSS

13. 1

21. 4

3. 6

14. 3

34. 5

13. 1

26. 4

11. 6

15. 7

9. 9

14. 0

22. 3

Type of posting

Permanent

Supply

Medco

88. 2

7. 1

4. 7

89. 2

6. 7

4. 2

Department

English

French

Mathematics

Science

Social Studies

Computer

Economics

Accounts

Home Economics

Art and Design

Design and Technology

Physical Education

Oriental Languages/ Hinduism

Music and Dance

5. 1

8. 9

20. 3

17. 7

3. 8

1. 3

7. 6

10. 1

0

2.5

6.3

5.1

8.9

2.5

16.5

13.0

7.8

9.6

1.7

1.7

5.2

3.5

4.3

5.2

0

1. 7

25. 2

4. 3

Head of Department

Yes

No

23. 5

76. 5

19. 2

80. 8

Working periods

<15

16-20

21-25

> 25

2. 4

3. 6

22. 6

71. 4

4. 1

5. 8

25. 6

64. 5

Qualifications

Diploma

Degree

Masters

4. 8

69. 0

26. 2

5. 0

65. 3

29. 8

Professional training

Yes

No

64. 6

35. 4

49. 6

50. 4

Teacher Accountability/Effectiveness & Performance Management System

One of the government's principal stated reasons for introducing performance management into schools was that it claimed doing so would help improve the professional development of teachers (DfEE, 2000, p. 3). The PMS (Performance Management System) in Mauritius allows the educator to be assessed based on a variety of competencies, of which he/she has to choose at least ten. This new tool of performance appraisal of teachers is still at its initial stage in Mauritian schools. The results obtained are provided below.

Table 1: Educators' self-rating based on competencies enlisted in PMS

Frequency

Percent

Valid Percent

Cumulative Percent

Valid

Always

83

40.3

41.3

41.3

Often

82

39.8

40.8

82.1

Rarely

25

12.1

12.4

94.5

Never

11

5. 3

5. 5

100. 0

Total

201

97. 6

100. 0

Missing

System

5

2. 4

Total

206

100. 0

The study carried out by Brown, A (2005) showed that performance management can, under certain circumstances, help to improve the quality of primary education in England. with new challenges in the field of education, teachers also basically need to be assessed by such appraisal

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systems so as to maintain accountability. However, the study by Monyatsi, P. et al (2006) in the context of teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of teacher appraisal in Botswana concluded that though some teachers consider teacher appraisal as ‘ an axe ready to chop teachers’ which is contrary for the appraisal process to serve the purposes of accountability, yet, through the appraisal process as practiced in Botswana secondary schools, teachers can gain increased knowledge and skills, which ultimately enhance their performance in their daily duties in the schools Our study supports this fact as out of 205 respondents in this section, 146 educators organise and manage their classrooms effectively whereas on 2 of hem rarely do so.

To bring about a rise in performance through efficiency and effectiveness, there are two major aspects which need to be taken into account. One, professional development of the teacher and second, accountability. The Strategy Plan 2008-2020 caters for this aspect by focusing on lifelong learning of the educator. With the growing challenges in education, teachers’ roles are changing rapidly. Globalisation and meeting international educational standards demand the teacher to be more professional in his/her teaching tasks. Teachers are expected to be equipped with updated trainings in pedagogy, teaching skills and professional development. Many countries are coming with teacher appraisal management systems so as to make the teacher of today become accountable at various levels.

(ON DEMAND & SUPPORT – ?)

The study conducted on teacher accountability demonstrated that the expectations of educators as far as support in the form of trainings, opportunities to work with experienced teachers or even participation in decision making are much below and somewhere, there is a co-relation between support and the accountability of educators towards their multiple tasks they perform. Though, many educators (107 often give remedial work, 94 often encourage group learning and 94 collect feedback on students' performance whereas on 1 educator never does so in all the cases) are accountable towards their modes of instruction and are satisfied with their teaching practices, yet, some seem to be less accountable as far as performance of students on an overall basis is considered (18. 9%). Many have held the rector responsible for the overall rate of failures or passes while detaching themselves from the school's performance. Normore (2004) mentions that being accountable means, among other things, being obligated or subject to giving an account. In saying that someone is accountable " we could imply that he/she is obligated to give a report, description, explanation, justifying analysis, or some form of exposition of reasons, causes, grounds, or motives for what we have observed"

Table 2: Educators feel rector is accountable for academic success/failure of students

Frequency

Percent

Valid Percent

Cumulative Percent

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Valid

Always

49

23. 8

24. 7

24. 7

Often

51

24. 8

25. 8

50. 5

Rarely

64

31. 1

32. 3

82. 8

Never

34

16. 5

17. 2

100. 0

Total

198

96. 1

100. 0

Missing

System

8

3. 9

Total

206

100. 0

It implies that, based on our survey, educators in Mauritius are normally very much satisfied with performance at their departmental level rather than at

the institutional level. Many (144 educators) assert that they are satisfied with their classroom teaching only.

As for the Planning and Preparation aspect, most educators do prepare their Lesson Plans and their Scheme of Work on a regular basis (135 out of 206 always do so). Out of 203, only 1 educator never prepares the Scheme of Work. Out of 203, 13 rarely align their objectives with the National Curriculum Framework. Hanley, C. (2009) documents a number of the ways in which accountability pressure has changed school instructional policies and practices in Florida's low-performing schools, and relate these instructional policy and practice changes to increased student performance.

Many educators also felt that demonstrating a general feeling of warmth, care and respect towards their students make them accountable and thus, contribute to their professional development (140 always do so whereas only 3 never do so). Feeling responsible towards the classroom setting and organising and managing classrooms effectively has an impact on the performance of students and therefore bring quality teaching, they believed. This is why, a considerable number of educators take care of these aspects with existing infrastructure at their particular schools. However, some educators (40 rarely and 4 never do so) do not feel responsible/accountable for preparing their students for competition and collaboration in a global economy. This confirms that the vision of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, as stated in the Strategy Plan 2008-2010, has not totally reached the understanding of educators. Another reason might be that though the vision is noble yet appropriate infrastructure and training are hardly to be provided to schools for implementation.

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3. 4 Teacher Experience a