

Accountability in Education in Kenya: Challenges and Strategies

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Abstract

School accountability—the process of evaluating school performance on the basis of student performance measures—is increasingly prevalent around the world. Kenya has not been left behind. Therefore, the paper will explore the challenges and strategies of accountability in education in Kenya. Accountability in education is a broad concept that could be addressed in many ways, such as using political processes to assure democratic accountability, introducing market-based reforms to increase accountability to parents and children, or developing peer-based accountability systems to increase the professional accountability of teachers. The most commonly considered definition of accountability involves using administrative data-based mechanisms aimed at increasing student achievement. The study found out that the Government of Kenya is struggling with many

challenges related to accountability in education. The challenges include: enrolment policy, education for individuals with disabilities, staff and performance, quality assurance and standards, management and governance among others. As far strategies to enhance accountability include devising performance indicators through The National Education Sector Plan (NESP) 2013-2018.

Key Terms: Accountability, Indicators of accountability, challenges

Introduction

As the economies of nations compete for strong positions within a competitive global market place, many governments have become increasingly interested in the performance of all aspects of their education systems. This trend, coupled

with the enormous expenditures that are devoted to education, has also precipitated widespread public requests for higher levels of scrutiny concerning the quality of education. These demands for information about school system performance can only be addressed through the implementation of systematic accountability systems.

Historically, the education profession has conformed to the requirements of regulatory or compliance accountability systems (usually based on government statutes), and has also subscribed to professional norms established by associations of educators. However, at the beginning of the 21st Century, accountability systems have also been required to respond to demands that professional performance be judged by the results that have been achieved (UNESCO,2005).

Accountability has been an educational issue for as long as people have had to pay for and govern schools. The term covers a diverse array of means by which some broad entity requires some providers of education to give an account of their work and holds them responsible for their performance.

Anderson (2005) asserts that Educational accountability targets either the processes or results of education. A desired goal is identified (e.g., compliance with the legal mandates of providing special education, highly qualified teachers, improved student performance), and measures are identified for determining whether the goal is met (e.g., a checklist of indicators that the legal mandates have been met, a target of 90% correct for teachers taking a test of current knowledge and skills, a target of 60% of students performing at grade level by the end of each school year). Criteria for determining whether the goal has been met can involve specific determinations of ways that the goal may and may not be met (e.g., deciding how many indicators in the checklist must be marked to be considered meeting the legal mandates, determining the specific content that does or does not count for specific types of teachers, determining how to calculate the percentage of students performing at a proficient level, and how to define grade level performance).

Models of Accountability in Education

A number of models of accountability in education have been developed, chiefly by Kogan (1986), Ranson (1986), Elliot et al.

(1981) and Day and Klein (1987). These models illustrate different codes which specify, for example, alternative methods of presenting and evaluating the account. Whilst there are some differences of classification and nomenclature, four main models of educational accountability emerge from the literature: professional, hierarchical, market and public. Although it is unlikely that any of the ideal models will exist in its pure form.

(a) Professional Accountability

The emphasis on accountability for process is characteristic of professional accountability. Sockett (1980, p. 11) illustrates this, arguing that ‘the question (professionals) debate is not whether certain results have been achieved, but whether professional standards of integrity and practice have been adhered to’. In this form of accountability, teachers, and hence schools, are accountable to professionals. Ranson (1986) states that the educational process is so complex that only professionals can hold other professionals to account.

(b) Hierarchical Accountability

In contrast to professional accountability where accountability is ‘sideways’, the hierarchical model involves accountability ‘upwards’. This is exercised through the

managerial hierarchy and stresses the contractual relationship with the state. Becher et al. (1981) describe it as an obligation to render an account to an employer.

(c) Market Accountability

In the market model, accountability is to the consumer (normally the parent). The emphasis is on accountability for outputs, mainly measured by examination results. In this system, schools are accountable to the consumer who chooses their product or an alternative in the marketplace. In order for the market to operate effectively, information (for example, examination results) needs to be available so consumers know the full specifications of the product they are ‘buying.’

(d) Public Accountability

Both market and public accountability involve an active role for parents. In the public model, this active role is required of the community more widely. The method of accounting stresses parental and community participation in determining the purpose and process of education (Ranson 1986). This operates collectively through the democratic process as well as individually, and therefore involves all individuals within an electoral ward. It

stresses mutual accountability and partnership between politicians, professionals, parents and the community.

Forms of Accountability in Education

Accountability occurs in many ways in educational systems:

a) System Accountability

Educational accountability in which the system is held responsible for the results of its students gained popularity in the early 1990s. Schools, local education agencies, and states are held accountable for the performance of all students in the public education system.

b) Accountability for the Process of Education

This is a common form of educational accountability. Schools are required to meet accreditation criteria. Special education programs must demonstrate that they have provided services and maintained Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in a manner consistent with the law. The desired goal of educational accountability focused on process is to improve the process that is targeted. Special education IEPs are an example of a process targeted for

accountability. Meeting the process requirements means demonstrating compliance with a number of requirements in the law and in regulations for IEPs. Measurement occurs through the completion of a checklist, for example, that identifies the requirements (such as providing notice within a certain period of time, having specific signatures on the IEP document, and so on). The criteria for determining when the measures show that the goal has or has not been met are defined in terms of numbers of elements that must be checked. The consequences for not meeting the goal generally include a letter identifying the problems in the process. In some cases, repeated failure to meet the criteria results in penalties, such as reduction of funding, to the educational system.

c) Individual Accountability

Student accountability implemented via promotion or exit exams is a common type of individual accountability in schools. Students are required to pass a test to demonstrate that they are ready to move either from one grade to the next (promotion) or leave the educational system with a credential certifying successful completion (exit). The tests that are administered to students generally

cover those topics that the school system or its public have deemed important for individual students to demonstrate at a certain point in time. The criteria for determining when the measures show that the goal has been met (for instance, that the student is ready to move from one grade to the next) are defined in terms of passing scores on the test. In some cases alternative criteria are available to certain students who either are not able to pass the tests or who need to demonstrate that they have met criteria through other means.

Individual accountability for the adults in the education system include such variations as teachers being held responsible for passing tests to obtain or keep jobs, or principals and educators receiving salary bonuses on the basis of student achievement. This type of accountability includes the same components as other educational accountability systems, with goals, measures, and other criteria for determining when the goal has been met, and rewards and sanctions for meeting or not meeting the criteria.

Challenges to Accountability in Education

Enrolment Policy

The Education Sector has been making improvements in terms of access to institutions of basic education and provision of services. However, the challenge of attributing learning outcomes to the investment in the sector still remains. The resource investment over the years, both for development and recurrent expenditures would have by now translated into exemplary results at the ECDE, primary and secondary school levels; however this is not the case.

At the ECDE level for instance, though the enrolment increased from 1.914 million children (967,544 boys and 946,678 girls) in 2009 to 2.37 million (1,175,530 boys and 1,194,518 girls) in 2011, the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) was still at 65.5 per cent and at 41.8 percent in 2011. Clearly, this is an indication that many children of nursery school going age were still not enrolled in the ECDE centers, a clear violation of the children's right to basic education.

At the primary school level enrollments increased from 8.8 million (4.5 million boys and 4.3 million girls) in 2010 to 9.86 million (4.98 boys and 4.86 girls) in 2011; the gross Enrolment Rate was at 115.0% while the Net Enrolment Rate was at

95.7% in 2011. While this demonstrate good progress in terms of access from a national point of view, the situation is not the same especially in ASAL areas where many children of school going age can still be seen staying at home during school days. The Completion rate stood at 74.6 per cent in 2011 clearly showing that children are dropping out of school. The question is, why do they drop where do those who drop go to?

In terms of transition from primary to secondary schools, the rate was at 73.3 per cent (68.9 per cent for male and 75.3 per cent for female) in 2011; again it is clear that some learners do not access secondary education; where do they go to? What alternatives do they have? Does the government know where they are?

At the Secondary School level the enrolment grew from 1.18 million students in 2007 (639,393 boys and 540,874 girls) to 1.5 million (804,119 boys and 695,896 girls) students in 2009 to 1.7 million (916,302 boys and 792,818 girls) students in 2010 and further 1.8 million (948,706 boys and 819,014 girls) in 2011. The GER for secondary level was at 48.8 per cent (51.0 per cent for boys and 46.8 per cent for girls) and the NER was at 32.7 per cent

(32.6 per cent for boys and 33.1 per cent for girls) in 2011; a clear indication that many children of secondary school going age are not in schools.

Education for Individuals with Disabilities

While Kenya government recognizes the need to educate all children, including those with exceptional needs, there lacks a mechanism to ensure and oversee that all students have equal access to education. The crucial question regarding persons with disabilities, especially those with intellectual disabilities is: how will the rights of persons with exceptionalities be protected from economic, social, and political neglect? An estimated 80% of all individuals with disabilities reside in isolated areas in developing countries (Oriado, 2003) with 150 million of them being children (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002). Disability-related issues affect approximately 50% of the population in these countries (Oriado, 2003, Mukuria, Korir & Andea, 2007). In most cases, disability problems are compounded by the fact that most of the people with disabilities are extremely poor and live in areas where medical and educational services are not available (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002; Meja-Pearce, 1998; Oriado,

2003; Mukuria & Korir 2006). According to the 2009 census, this group makes up approximately 20% of the Kenya's population (Kenya Bureau of Statistics, 2009); unfortunately, only 2% of individuals with disabilities receive any form of special education (Eleweke & Rodda, 2003; Mukuria & Korir, 2007).

Staffing & Teacher Performance:

Though the outcry on teacher shortage continues to be heard, additional concerns also revolve around teacher distribution with allegations of some schools having more teachers than they require while in other schools, at every given time, some classes remain untaught because of teacher shortage. Teachers' absenteeism also remains an issue that cuts across many schools in the country with concerns that some teachers chose to be away based on a mutual agreement with the head teacher as opposed to an official documentation of leave of absence.

Quality Assurance & Standards support:

Teacher performance records are lacking in many schools: While at the Classroom level, it is not easy to determine the extent to which the teachers are delivering the

right content; but instead the performance of the teacher is left to be reflected in the performance of the learners (often during external examinations)

Another critical gap is that the school terms often begin with the teachers not aware of the specific dates that the QASOs would be visiting their schools. The criterion that determines which schools to be visited during a particular term is also not readily available. Some schools also indicate that one calendar year ends without any QASO visiting their schools and as such no quality assurance support is received from MoE throughout the year. Most of the QA&SO are not clear on the kind of support teachers require and they also have capacity gaps.

Even though feedback is given to the schools after visits have been conducted by MoE officials, the feedback never trickles down to the learners and their parents / guardians. Most of the time the feedback is discussed at the teachers level while other actors in education service provision are left out. The feedback at times reaches the headquarters of MoE but there are no clear mechanisms of responding to such feedback until a crisis emerge.

Management and Governance:

While some schools have School Management Committees and Board of Management in place, that have undergone trainings conducted by Ministry of Education officials, the functioning of these committees is not reflected in the manner in which school programmes and activities are implemented. In some instances, the head teachers continue to make decisions by themselves (as individuals) and the SMC & BoM members hardly question such decisions. There is also lack of School development Plans in most schools and this creates an opportunity for poor plans.

The information on the funds received that is displayed on the school notice boards has been limited to the FPE funds with many head teachers not displaying any other funds the school receive, especially those collected from parents towards other programmes, for example the school feeding programmes. In terms of purchases of school items, there have been outcry among parents that some head teachers collude with suppliers to increase the prices of goods (often way ahead of the market prices) with the aim of receiving “kickbacks.”

Very few schools do generate annual financial reports for discussion with parents; majority of schools choose to discuss the financial reports with the MoE officials and ignore the parents, guardians and children. In addition, auditing of the funds that the schools receive every year is irregular and such audit reports are never shared with the parents, guardians and children.

Access to Information:

Information flow between the school administration and the teachers is another gap that exists in many primary and secondary schools. For instance, some teachers are only aware of the data in regards to the learners in the school and their performance but have no idea on the resource requirements of their schools and the management of resources that the schools receive. The level of awareness of some teachers in regards to various policies and guidelines in education service provision is also minimal; this is however attributed to lack of access to such documents at the school level; there are cases where the school head teachers limit such information to themselves and do not share with the other teachers in the school.

While the children are aware that the government has been financing the Free Primary Education, many of them are not aware of how much they have been entitled to over the years. Worse is the fact that some of the parents and guardians too are not aware of what their children are entitled to under the FPE programme. This is attributed to lack of clear communication modes between the school administration and the children, and their parents and guardians.

Holistic Focus on Learners:

On an annual basis, the schools over concentrate on discussing the performance of the children in regard to KCPE and KCSE results; and very minimal is discussed in reference to performance of the children at other levels (class 1 – 7 & Form 1-3). While many of the school teachers are aware that some of the learners do not transit to secondary schools, it appears that majority of the teachers have no role in following up where such learners go to. For instance, there are cases where some teachers interact with their former pupils in the neighborhood such as in the market centers; while they are very much aware that such children have not enrolled in

secondary schools; they do not bother to find out whether such children require support.

Some parents have also have left their children in the hands of teachers and do not care to follow up on what their children do in school; some do not even attend school meetings throughout the year and do not event care to find out what deliberations and decisions are made in such meetings.

Finances:

Though the government supports the Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE) programme, there is a general feeling among the public that secondary education in Kenya is largely expensive. The fact that various categories of schools charge different amounts of fees is something that continues to amaze the public. There are cases of schools that get to acquire the National level status then increases the fees payable by about 50%; goes ahead to demand the same from parents and the government does nothing.

Various secondary school heads continue to incur exorbitant expenditures with completely no oversight. For instance who pays for the cost of Kenya Secondary

Schools Heads Association Annual meeting? Is it the Government of Kenya? Is it from the Head teachers personal incomes? or from the poor parents and guardians (from the fees paid to schools)? This is something that the public is seeking for accountability on the part of the government. Secondary schools in Kenya continue to manage millions of shillings annually; but majority of the schools do not report to the students, parents and guardians on their incomes and expenditure on annual basis. Reports that are shared publicly are largely in regards to performance and very minimal information on finances. A part from the details of the fees to be paid in the subsequent year, the secondary schools heads often give very minimal information on the expenditure of the previous years.

Public Participation:

Even though various districts have a culture of annual education stakeholders meetings, the participants in such meetings are often limited to head teachers, teacher unions, FBOs and NGOs. Public participation in such meetings, for example through the Chairpersons of schools and other representatives of

parents and children continue to remain very minimal.

Strategies towards Accountability in Education

The National Education Sector Plan (NESP) 2013-2018 is an all-inclusive, sector-wide

programme whose prime goal is: **Quality Basic Education for Kenya's Sustainable**

Development. The sector plan builds on the successes and challenges of the Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (KESSP), 2005-2010. Sector governance, management and accountability in a decentralized setting with devolved responsibilities and diverse partnerships have been emphasized. Clear guidelines for coordination, transparency, and reporting at the national, county, sub-county and institutional levels are paramount. The focus on improvement of education quality specifically targets: improvement of schooling outcomes and impact of the sector investment; development of relevant skills; improved learning outcomes; and improved efficiency and effectiveness in use of available resources.

Four major sets of performance indicators for NESP are identified as;

1. Social development and economic growth for the 21st century are dependent on a broad base of capable, literate, numerate, confident and motivated citizens. These citizens will actively contribute to a knowledge-based society. The National Education Sector Plan (NESP) sets out to shape the education system to complement and support the national aspirations of Kenya.
2. The sector plan as set out in NESP emphasizes a holistic and balanced development of the entire education sector, and is embodied in recent legislation, including the Basic Education Act 2013. The NESP Implementation Plan focuses on the urgent need to enroll all students in basic education, raise literacy and numeracy levels, reduce existing disparities, and improve the quality of education with a focus on teacher quality, school level leadership, more effective applications of teacher training in the classroom, increasing resources to the education sector, and targeting improvements and monitoring key results.
3. NESP sets out to expand on the national aspirations set out in Vision 2030 through

a statement of comprehensive goals and objectives. It further aligns a commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the education related goals of the Millennium Development Goals with a vision for the wider educational aspirations of Kenya.

4. The foundation priorities of the education system provide the strategic implementation processes set out in NESP. Through the extensive consultation processes undertaken for developing NESP, stakeholders elaborated that the vision and goals embody and cluster around four principles:

Inclusiveness

This principle is about the fullness of the range of learning opportunities provided for all children, young people and communities. The NESP describes the social circumstances and barriers to learning that present challenges to implementation planning.

Integrated and Unified System

This principle is about the characteristics of an efficient education system that effectively and coherently integrates all learning institutions, central authorities and administrative agencies, through their

mandates, processes and procedures. NESP describes governance, management and administrative expectations (institutional arrangements) that will ensure all students are exposed to opportunities of shared knowledge and culture.

Equitable School Environment

This principle is about the provision of safe, stimulating and innovative learning places of modern pedagogy for all children and young people. NESP sets out goals and objectives for the fair provision of infrastructural, teaching and learning resources and support systems to benefit all learners.

Quality of Learning

This principle is about the setting of rigorous quality benchmarks in the curriculum and its delivery and assessment so as to ensure that the learning opportunities for all children and young people are maximized. NESP describes expectations for minimum standards of the physical learning environment, curriculum development, teacher performance, and prescribes the work of agencies to monitor and assure ongoing quality.

5. NESP also implies four central and interdependent policy pillars to underpin the development of each of the described implementation strategies:

Pedagogy Enhanced by Technology

NESP makes a very strong representation of the role of technology in a modern, vibrant and successful society. NESP envisages a solid technology base through information and communication technology (ICT) to be reflected within the curriculum at all levels, its delivery and the system support mechanisms. The principles described above clearly focus on the fundamental place of pedagogy in lifting and maintaining quality of learning. This policy pillar establishes the place of technology as a powerful support to pedagogy but not the determinant of pedagogy.

Systemic Solutions

The NESP principle of an integrated and unified system demands that meeting the challenges requires the design, development and implementation of agencies, approaches and processes that support the interdependencies of all elements within the system. The setting of priorities and sequencing of

implementation strategies will take account of the expected growth and impact of the education system. The NESP elaborates the mechanism (the National Education Board, NEB) whereby growth and impact is considered across the social and wider sectors.

Collaboration

The achievement of the sector plan requires a high commitment by all key stakeholders in the education system to working together as a team. Collaboration as an approach, however, goes beyond individuals working together for the common goal with a focus on the learner. It includes the establishment of conditions and relationships between the central administration, agencies and learning institutions to facilitate collaborative processes and approaches. The design of new and strengthened strategies is expected to stimulate and maintain a focus on group, rather than individual, effort through to the very top of the system.

Capacity Development

Achieving the NESP goals in a decentralized system requires significant capacity building at all levels of the education system. The strengthening and establishment of new ways of working through clearly defined roles, expectations,

responsibilities, accountabilities and mandates are best achieved by capacity building of both human and resources. This policy pillar will strive to incorporate capacity building as a prime driver for reform.

Conclusion

The Government of Kenya is encountering many challenges as it deals with accountability in education owing to the fact that the idea of accountability has not yet been embraced fully neither by the assessors nor those being assessed. Mechanisms have been formulated to enhance accountability but have not yet been implemented fully.

Recommendation

There are should be concerted efforts among all the education stakeholders to ensure there accountability in education. There also needs sensitization about accountability in education as many stakeholders are not aware of their role as far as accountability is concerned. Follow up measures on accountability should be to put in place.

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