

Accountability in the Educational Sector: Implications for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Accountability in the educational sector is a major concern to all educational stakeholders in Nigeria and so deserves a critical look on how funds can be appropriately utilized and accounts rendered for sustainable development of the educational sector. Emphasis should not just center on provision of education funds but also on how funds are been utilized for the improvement of the educational sector. Most scholars have argued that in order to achieve quality education for sustainable development, the issue of accountability must be taken seriously. This paper also examines the sustainable development in Nigeria in order to achieve quality education for sustainable development, emphasis should move beyond the input government, communities and individuals are to provide in terms of infrastructure, teachers and materials, to what goes on in the classroom as regards teaching and learning. The need for our educational managers to be held accountable for the poor quality of our educational system is overdue. However, the issue of accountability in the educational sector is a serious problem that many countries including Nigeria is facing. In the light of the above, this work examined accountability in the educational sector; implications for sustainable development in Nigeria and suggested definition of what people are accounted for, setting and castigating goals and providing updates on progress, as a way forward for proper accountability for sustainable development of our educational sector.

Keyword: Accountability, educational, sector, effectiveness, efficiency

Introduction

Despite strong progress in education, there are significant challenges to achieving the global education goals. Most children cannot read and write after several years of schooling in Nigeria. Faced with education challenges, the public wants to know who is responsible and policy makers look for urgent solutions. Increased accountability often tops the lists. When educational systems fail, people call for someone to be held responsible and for effective and efficient mechanisms to be put in place that ensures corrective action. Accountability is a process, aimed at helping actors meet responsibilities and reach goals. Individuals or institutions are obliged on the basis of a legal, political, social and moral justification to provide an account of how they met clearly defined responsibilities.

Accountability, therefore, does not easily rest with single actors, for instance, schools may be responsible for providing supportive learning environments, but to deliver on this, they rely on governments providing resources, teachers respecting professional norms and students behaving appropriately. According to Candoli (2013), accountability means having responsibility for or reporting to others on something usually fund, materials or personnel utilized in an organization. It involves accurate usage of money, personnel and materials for their intended purposes. Accountability in the educational sector is concerned with determining what records are to be kept, how such records will be maintained in terms of procedures, methodology and funds to be used. Recording, classification and summarization of activities of events, analyzing and interpreting the recorded data, preparing and issuing reports and statements which reflects conditions as of a given time (Adams, 2017).

Accountability in the educational sector, thus, implies that those engaged in operating the system should constantly evaluate and demonstrate that the resources such as human, material, financial and physical facilities devoted to education are being properly utilized to attain sustainable educational goals (Akube in Eze & Onwudingo, 2021). The Nigerian educational sector suffers from several challenges including poor funding, inadequate classrooms, and teaching aids, a “paucity of quality teachers and poor/polluted learning environment”. These shortcomings yield poor educational achievement and hampers sustainable development in Nigeria.

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. International organizations have considerable influence and responsibility regarding the development of global education, as they are responsible for reflecting all voices in formulating global educational goals. But there is an accountability vacuum concerning their role and responsibility in achieving these sustainable development goals. Therefore, accountability mechanisms to work, social, political, economic and cultural factors need to be in alignment. Adequate trust among parties is essential to achieve ambitious education goals and sustainable development that require collaboration, communication and a belief that others can be relied upon to deliver on commitment in an effort to achieving sustainable development.

Concept of Accountability

The term accountability can be defined as being answerable for ones actions or inactions; it also entails giving a report, providing a statement of explanation of one’s action or even furnishing a justification analysis. It could also mean offering an exposition of reasons, causes, grounds or motives, and even putting a statement of facts (Agabi in Eze & Onwudingo (2022). This means that accountability implies responsibility and answerability, which entails that any person given a job to do must be responsible or accountable for the successful execution of such jobs so as to yield the desired results expected. In reality, accountability concerns proper behaviour and responsibility of individuals and organization for the actions towards other people and agencies (Bovens, in Levit et al., 2008). In a similar vein Hunt in Eze & Onwudingo (2021), sees accountability as one’s readiness to give an explanation or justification to relevant stakeholders, for one’s acts, omissions, intentions and

judgments when called upon to do so. It thus, refers to the readiness to have one's actions judged by another and willingness also to accept responsibility for errors, misjudgment and negligence and recognition for competence, thoroughness, excellence and wisdom.

Politically, the term accountability suggests that any government entity should function as a part that depends on a larger political system. This means that accountability should be geared towards ensuring a democratic responsibility to the people at large and the scope of accountability should also cover finance, budgeting, fiscal audits and reporting to satisfy the existing demands of the public (Presthus, in Dangara, 2016). From the following definitions, accountability has elements of responsibility and is linked with answerability to others on actions or activities and even programmes in order to meet desired purposes. To be accountable, means to be responsible for all your actions, omissions, judgments and to be ready to accept corrections, punishment or rewards for the sustenance of development in any sector.

The Concept of Accountability in Education

Accountability in education is concerned with how educational resources are spent, how much learning is taking place, and how efficient and effective the educational system is. It is also a means by which educational policy makers at the Federal, State and Local Government, Parents and tax payers monitor the performance of students and school. (Alumode & Onuma, 2016; Odei-Tettey et al., 2019 in Eze & Onwudingo, 2021). Summarily, accountability in education is concerned with records, to assess or appraise schools' performance in relation to achieving the predetermined educational goals and objectives (Dangara, 2016). According to Agabi (2019), in the school system workers are accountable for a number of things depending on their responsibility and assignments. The class teacher is accountable for class documents like the class attendance register, class diary and every child marked present in class every day. The school administrator is equally accountable to all stakeholders concerned with the affairs of the school. Accountability in education tends to ascertain that the educational goals and objectives are achieved. It is a measure of how well the education resources are used to produce quality and quantity outputs, so as to meet desired educational goals and objectives for sustainable development.

Accountability and the Concept of Efficiency and Effectiveness

Discussions on accountability will not be complete without an indept explanation of the concepts of efficiency and effectiveness. From the economic point of view, education is seen as a production venture that uses inputs in the form of teachers, buildings and infrastructures to produce outputs, which are our school products. The processing aspect is concerned with the administration and management used in the process of production. The processing also determines the extent to which the educational goals will be achieved. Accountability as a goal related activity, is supposed to ascertain that educational goals and objectives are met for sustainable development of a nation.

Noun, (2019), defines efficiency in terms of optimal relationship between inputs and outputs, saying that an activity is performed efficiently if a given quantity of outputs is obtained with a minimum number of inputs or alternatively if a given number of inputs yields

maximum outputs. Similarly, Arinze (1996) in Eze & Onwudingo (2021) identifies two dimensions of efficiency in education namely:

- i. The flow of students through the system with a minimum of wastage; wastage in the flow of students manifest quantitatively in the form of drop outs and repeaters.
- ii. The quality of learning achieved in the system at given periods or levels; the quality of learning is determined by the outputs of the educational sectors, which is concerned with the extent to which the students learning outcomes agree with what the society or nation deems right.

An education system is therefore said to be efficient if it turns out graduates without wasting any students year, or without drop-outs and repeaters and also if the graduates turned out are what will meet the demands of the employees. Effectiveness is usually defined in terms of the achievement of stated objective or aims effectiveness measures performance. And activity is said to have been performed effectively if the objectives set out are achieved within the stipulated time frame (Noun, 2019).

From the analysis above, it is observed that discussions on accountability in the educational sector cannot be done without exploring the concept of efficiency and effectiveness, as the two concepts measures the levels of accountability of any given institution in a bid to ensure sustainable development. How best an institution achieves its predetermined goals and how prudent resources were utilized in the process of achieving the goals are very important elements in the discussions on accountability for the sustainable development of any nation.

The Concept of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is the idea that human societies must live and meet their needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The “official” definition of sustainable development was developed for the first time in the Brundtland Report in 1987. Specifically, sustainable development is a way of organizing society so that it can exist in the long term. This means considering both the imperatives present and those of the future, such as the preservation of the environment and natural resources or social and economic equity. Infact, to be sustainable means something that continues to exist over a period of time; sustainable development is seen as a systematic process of positive change in man which translates into the transformation of his immediate environment. In other words, development is man centered geared towards social transformation. That means any development that does not revolve around changing the man to be good himself and the general society is not development (Idari, in Onah, Eteng & Adie (2021).

Sustainable development is concerned with the organizing principle for meeting human development goals while simultaneously sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend. Achieving sustainable development implies a more accountability mechanism for the betterment of the educational system in Nigeria.

The Educational Sector

Acquiring education is extremely vital and necessary as one intends to achieve success. The educational sector is an important sector for shaping and directing human reasoning and actions that follow suit in every day society. Yakubu (2004) in Onah, Eteng and Adie (2021), sees education as the shaping or modification of behaviour of the individual with the view of developing desirable habits, skills and attitudes for the adequate adjustment in the society. The educational sector is accepted globally as a major instrument for social transformation, technological advancement, cultural integration, national unity and development (Dienye & Morrison in Onah, Eteng and Adie 2021).

The educational sector is any formal, informal, or non-formal system of activities people engage in the society in order to prepare them with the appropriate skills, attitudes, knowledge, information and competences that will enable them participate and function effectively. This implies that education in all its endeavours should positively impact on every aspect of human endeavour, the right attitude of honesty, integrity and transparency to ensure sustainable development in the country. As thus, the educational sector should be adequately financed, so as to sustain development seen in its input and outputs ratios for the sustainable development of our educational sector.

Types of Accountability

Internal and External factors like employee turnover and Economic policies can determine who should be held accountable for what. In the ease of problem-solving, collaborating with different departments or team mates makes it difficult to hold any one or pin point the exact moment when things started to go wrong. The following are some of the types of Accountability that exist:

1. **Professional Accountability:** Professional Accountability refers to that type of accountability when you are not only accountable for your actions but for others. This type of accountability is commonly observed in professional fields like Medicine, Teaching, Law, where a doctor, teacher or lawyer would be accountable for their practice, patients, client, and student's outcomes.
2. **Corporate Accountability:** Corporate Accountability exists in terms of your organizations social responsibility. In some Organizations, they are mandated to set aside a portion of their budget for corporate social Responsibility initiatives. These corporate responsibilities could involve sharing food at an Orphanage, organizing free plantation drives. Each organization is accountable for how their business impacts their immediate environment for sustainable development.
3. **Personal Accountability:** Personal Accountability occurs whenever you make a conscious choice to take accountability for your actions. In the school, this can mean being accountable for your decisions and how it affects your students and its outcomes. When you do something wrong, you could apologies instead of deflecting blames. Teaching Students at the right period of time you are allocated to teach a subject falls within the scope of personal accountability.
4. **Financial Accountability:** In the educational sector, financial accountability is concerned with crating a sound budget and ensuring minimal waste. Allocating resources

efficiently would ensure that there is no excess expenditure. This is very critical when you are in the planning stages of a new project, where there are higher chances of exceeding your budget. The educational sector has to consider economic policies, external stakeholders and their employees when establishing financial accountability

5. **Ethical Accountability:** These entails respecting your colleagues and students. Not blaming others for your mistakes and apologizing when you are in the wrong part. The school and their employees (teachers) have to be accountable for each other.
6. **Administrative Accountability:** Administrative Accountability means being accountable to the person who is in charge. For you to be a good Administrator in the school and be a valuable member of your team, being accountable is one way to establish your credibility and achieve organizational goals for sustainable development.

Factors Affecting Accountability for Sustainable Development in the Educational Sector in Nigeria

Considering the huge resources, human, time and financial resources injected into the educational sector for sustainable development, there seem to be slow development of the educational sector.

The following reasons are responsible;

1. **Poor Leadership:** One of the major factors affecting accountability for sustainable development in Nigeria is poor leadership at the various levels of government. Government lacks the capacity to perform, which is rooted in the lack of ability to innovate and harness available resources (Obasi and Asodike, 2014). Besides, the government has no regard whatsoever to the principles of good governance, openness, transparency, accountability and the rule of law. They join to form the crucial factors that foster sustainable development in a country. Hence, the lack of an open and accountable government has paved the way for corruption, bad government and bad governance where public resources are being misappropriated at the expense of the masses.
2. **Poor Resource Management:** Poor management of resources has also been a significant hindrance towards accountability for Sustainable development. This poor management led to the formulation of public policy of commercialization and privatization of government enterprise to relieve the government of financial burdens. With no solid accountability framework, poor management of resources now rife among public officials thereby affecting sustainable development to a great extent.
3. **Weak Government Institutions:** This challenge majorly revolves around those heading government institutions that ought to spearhead government policies and programme for sustainable development. However, incompetence has become the order of the day while many see themselves as bigger than the institutions they head thereby going above the law and not being held accountable for their actions.
4. **Politicization of appointments:** In the education sector, where non Professionals are appointed as head of education institution either due to party affiliation, ethnicity and regional or religious affiliation constitutes a very big obstacle to Accountability for sustainable development in Nigeria.

5. **Implementation of Quality Assurance Programmes:** Quality Assurance Programmes Implementation; According to Ayeni in Yobolo & Nwile (2021), quality assurance in education is the efficient management, monitoring, evaluation and reviews of the resources inputs and transformation process (teaching and learning) to produce a quality output (students) that meets the standards and expectation of the society. Quality assurance in education is the totality of the combination of some indispensable variables such as quality of teachers, quality of instructional materials and the quality of infrastructure. These infrastructures are; Classrooms, tables, desks, chalkboard etc. other also includes favorable teacher/pupils ratio and effective supervision of instructional material. Quality assurance also means putting in place the appropriate structures, legislation, supervision of personnel and materials in other to ensure that the minimum standards set are achieved, sustained and even seen to have meaningful impacts on the society.
6. **Inconsistencies in Educational Policies:** Education Policies have been observed to change with charges in the leadership of Nigeria. The inconsistencies in educational policies have not helped the development of our educational sector towards sustainable development.

Role of the School Manager in Ensuring Accountability for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

The role of educational managers is saddled with the responsibility of managing the human and material resources in the school. The principal is the head of school who is usually appointed considering qualification, experiences and seniority. The principal is the person on whose shoulders rest the entire administration, success or failure of the school. Peretomode in Obasi and Asodike (2014) opines that it is the duty of the school administrator to oversee the proper running of the school for sustainable development in terms of staff and students welfare, development and implementation of educational programmes, provision of proper instruction, school community relations, disciplines and proper keeping of school records. Peretomode further stressed that the function which the administrator has to perform to ensure quality delivery in our school include but not limited to the following;

1. **Curriculum Development:** The school administrator should play the role of the team leader in relation to curriculum development. However, he must ensure that all educational information are made available to teachers, observe his teachers in the classroom and offer professional advice for their improvement.
2. **Financial Function:** The school administrator is responsible for controlling the revenue accruing from the school and ensuring judicious utilization of all levies within the school. He should ensure that financial provisions are made available for the smooth running of his school in the budget. The administrator can raise funds to complement the efforts of the government by establishing relationship with the Parents Teachers Association (PTA), Board of Governors, Old Students Association and Non-Governmental Organizations for fund raising activities towards the growth of the school.

3. **Provision and maintenance of school facilities:** It is the duty of the Ministry or Board to provide furniture, equipment, books and expendable materials available to the school. The inadequacy of these facilities is a source of frustration and disillusionment among teachers. The administrator must be fully concerned with the physical environment and other facilities around the school. As a result, the school heads have the responsibility of ensuring that these facilities are in good shape with the available financial resources at their disposal.
4. **Development of Teaching Staff:** There are provisions in the National Policy on education and in the implementation guideline for the UBE Programme on the Professional development of teachers. The Policy framework made it compulsory for every teacher to undergo professional preparations before he can qualify to practice as a teacher. The school administrator should carry out the function of staff development by identifying and indicating the staff needs of the school. The school administrator can also conduct a programme of staff improvement through classroom observation and other forms of evaluation needed for the sustainable development of the educational sector.

Strategies to Improve Accountability for Sustainable Development in the Educational Sector

1. **Define what people are accountable for:** Employees need clearly defined expectations to achieve goals. Every institution have ever green responsibilities that support the organization's mission, goals and objectives. But in every case, educational managers need to demonstrate accountability and time spent on defining what their team is responsible for.
2. **Setting and Castigating Goals throughout the Educational System:** When once employees clearly understand what they're accountable for, educational managers, should help them set measurable, individualized goals that align with their individual role. Most if not all of the employees should have metrics defined that help them know if they're delivering on the goals of the organization for sustainable development or not.
3. **Providing Updates on Progress:** people need information on what they do, to ascertain their progress level. When these updates are provided it will show if there is actually development taking place or not. However, providing these updates on progress must be in tendon with expected educational goals.
4. **Recognize and Celebrate Progress:** Praising people for good work is the most motivating of all forms of feedback. Identify, celebrate and learn from successes. It motivates employees to stretch and creates responsibility role models for others to follow and will form a good basis for sustainable development in the educational sector.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the development of any nation is traceable to education, because education is a powerful instrument of change, good morals, skills, Knowledge and the right attitude. Therefore, the effective and efficient use of the financial resource will enhance the proper development of the sector. The factors affecting accountability for sustainable development in Nigeria such as poor leadership, poor resources management, weak government

institutions. The paper therefore summarizes that accountability in education is concerned with how educational resources are spend, how much learning is taking place and how efficient and effective the educational system is performing in order to sustain her development to achieving educational goals and sustainable development.

Suggestions

In order to enhance accountability in the educational sector for sustainable development of a nation, the following suggestions are advised;

1. There should be clear definition of who to be held accountable for the activities in the educational sector.
2. There should be checks and balances in the areas of finances in the educational sector.
3. There should be financial training on the need to keep financial records of the school properly.
4. School administrators should always be held accountable for all their actions and in-actions in the educational sector.

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