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Political Accountability in Education Service Delivery: Post-apartheid South African Government's Responsiveness

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ABSTRACT This paper hopes to contribute to insights into political accountability within the education sector. Drawing on an extensive documentary review of education policies, as well as on interviews with 100 high school purposively selected educators (25 from independent schools, 48 from former Model C schools and 27 from township schools) and six school Principals, all from uMgungundlovu District in KwaZulu-Natal, this paper examines how the post-apartheid government of South Africa has exercised, and continues to exercise its political accountability for the delivery of basic education. Although the African National Congress government has prioritised education in its election manifestos and national budgets, an analysis of the respondents' perceptions of the government's responsiveness to the educational needs of South Africans shows that there is general dissatisfaction among the educators who are at the coalface of delivery. This is due to perceived failure of the government to implement effectively educational policies formulated in the post-colonial South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

In democracies, citizens elect officials to deliver on promises made in their election manifestos. Invariably they promise to deliver effective and efficient services such as education, health, and security. The activities of governing parties and governments are (or should be) a reflection of citizens' needs. Citizens, political parties, parliaments and other democratic institutions may reward or sanction those responsible for making and enacting public policy (Jelmin 2012; Tusalem 2016). Increasingly, scholarly literature has demonstrated that citizens have the capacity to punish elected officials if they are not delivering services to the level of citizens' expectations (Jelmin 2012). To avoid reprisals from the citizens, elected governing parties try to be seen to be proactive in addressing the needs of the citizens. However, within the literature, there is evidence that shows that such punitive measures are not effective in developing countries and authoritarian governments (Brinkerhoff 2004; Jelmin 2012).

Extensive work on the effectiveness of political or democratic accountability in developing countries has been conducted (Brinkerhoff 2003, 2004; Jelmin 2012; Busuioc 2016). Drawing on a range of case studies, Jelmin (2012) analysed the political accountability in different areas of service delivery in South Africa, Kenya, the Philippines, Brazil, Indonesia, Uganda and Zambia and concluded that accountability is dysfunctional due to lack of credible opposition parties, clientelism and capacity constraints of parliamentarians. In the South African case study, a community-based organisation in Durban could stop authorities from disconnecting water and electricity in communities. The Kenyan case study reveals how the Centre for Multiparty Democracy-Kenya (CMD-K) seeks to enhance political accountability by helping political parties to play an effective role in mediating between citizens and the State (Speijcken 2012).

In some cases, service delivery protests have been misconstrued as evidence of dissatisfaction with governing parties themselves. Booysen (2007) points out that while there were many service delivery protests in South Africa in 2006, which observers speculated were a revolt against the ruling party, these protests were, in fact, a strategy just to put pressure on the ruling party to attain improved service delivery. Political accountability discourses have focused on how citizens and other democratic institutions exercise or fail to exercise their powers to sanction or reward the elected officials on the basis of their performance in service delivery (Brinkerhoff 2004; Jelmin 2012; Busuioc and Lodge 2016). There is a paucity of scholarly literature on how elected governments in developing countries exercise political accountability by condemning

electoral fraud and voter intimidation. Such lack of accountability may be due to an attempt to avoid reprisal and to perpetuate their stay in power. Although important in illuminating the dynamics of political accountability in developing countries, these studies provide a partial view of the democratic landscape and service delivery in developing countries. Most of these studies tend to conflate all public services and to then draw conclusions, which are then generalised to all the services. In addition, there is a dearth of empirical studies that have explored the link between political accountability and the quality of service delivery. The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it uses an education service delivery case study to illustrate how the government of South Africa is exercising political accountability by demonstrating how it is being responsive to the educational needs of South Africans as provided for in its Constitution. Secondly, it examines the perception of educators in uMgungundlovu District of the level of government's responsiveness to the basic educational needs of South Africa. Perceptions of street-level bureaucrats, who implement the educational policies at district, school, and classroom level, of the responsiveness of their political masters have important implications for professional practice. This is particularly so because such street-level bureaucrats enjoy a significant degree of autonomy and exercise considerable discretion in their practice (Lipsky 2010).

Objectives

This paper will hopefully contribute some useful insights to the political accountability discourses in our emerging economy. The paper reveals that the South African government exercises political accountability in various ways. Obliged by the 1996 Constitution, and responding to the needs of the people, the government formulated policies and invested significant resources in the provision of basic education. However, the perceptions of street-level bureaucrats in the implementation of educational policy in the uMgungundlovu district concerning the responsiveness of government to the educational needs of South Africa are not homogenous. The perceptions tend to differ according to the race of the individual and the type of school at which the respondents taught.

Following this introduction, the next section attempts to conceptualise political accountability as a mechanism for ensuring effective and efficient public service delivery. The section illustrates some of the issues of definition associated with political and democratic accountability. This will be followed by a brief section which will explore the context of political accountability in education service delivery in post-apartheid South Africa. After a brief discussion of the research approach, the paper will reveal some ways in which the government is being responsive to the educational needs of a democratic South Africa. Before concluding, the paper explores the perceptions of educators of the government's responsiveness.

Conceptualising Political Accountability

Political accountability "relates to building trust among citizens that government acts in accordance with agreed-upon standards of probity, ethics, integrity, and professional responsibility" (Brinkerhoff 2003: 8). Political accountability is an external mechanism. Many scholars believe that political accountability is an important type of accountability for service delivery and management of street-level bureaucrats (Busuioc and Lodge 2016; Rached 2016; Tusalem 2016). Also referred to as democratic accountability (Brinkerhoff 2001: 8), "political accountability relationships afford managers the discretion or choice to be responsive to the concerns of key interest groups, such as elected officials, clientele groups, and the general public" (Huisman and Currie 2004: 531). These stakeholders may come from formal institutions (such as chief executives or legislative bodies) or constituent groups (Jelmin 2012). These relationships derive from external sources but involve low degrees of direct control. They are characterised by a high degree of discretion for the individual organisation or individual to choose whether to respond to the expectations of a key external stakeholder and to face the consequences of making such a decision (Radin and Romzek 1996). This is because the relationship is based on an expectation of responsiveness to these stakeholders. Hupe and Hill assert that political accountability implies an orientation towards the top of a social structure, demanding that functionaries are accountable to it (Hupe and Hill 2007: 286). However, the political model of ac-

countability can lead to intrusive regulations and it requires consensus or at least majority consent (Burke 2005: 10).

Political accountability usually causes conflicts between politicians and professionals due to their different perspectives. Public managers, especially "those with a professional or legal background, often find political accountability difficult to handle, if not threatening, because of the fluid, contingent, and ambiguous character of political agendas and political norms" (Bovens 2005: 7). This is because the criteria for political judgment are often contestable and contested and may depend on media coverage, blaming, coalition building, and political opportunity to get into or to stay in power.

Political Accountability: The Delivery of Education

The faith and hope that families, communities and society have the beneficial impact of education make education one the *'most public'* of all the public policies. Managing the implementation of education becomes one of the most controversial tasks for public managers. Examples of such controversial policies include the 'No Child left Behind' in the United States and the Curriculum 2005 (C2005) in South Africa. Using an hierarchical approach, each level at the top of the political hierarchy places pressure on the levels beneath it to perform and produce outcomes. Political accountability represents the relationship between elected officials and the voters. This relationship can exist at least on two levels, namely school and national levels. At the school level, it is manifested in school governing bodies (SGBs) that are elected to oversee the running of the school. At the national level, it is revealed in national politics where elected officials are expected to formulate sound educational policies and enact them in the most prudent ways. Although these two dimensions of political accountability do not pose any meaningful direct contact with street-level bureaucrats in classes, their position in the management of educational policy merits a brief analysis.

In South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC), the governing party, aims to strengthen its position and to exercise political accountability in the improvement of education through strengthening the culture of performance management within the education system; simplifying and aligning the evaluation instruments that measure performance standards for educators; strengthening monitoring the support for educators; and strengthening reporting at all levels (ANC 2012: 13). Education has featured prominently in the successive ANC election manifestos.

What has been made clear in this is that governing parties exercise political accountability in education to maintain trust and significance in the perception of voters while opposition parties present alternatives as they attempt to win voters to their sides. While it has been shown that, in the western world, political accountability is an effective means of keeping governments accountable, evidence reveals that this is not so in Africa and other developing countries (Brinkerhoff 2001). Although political accountability may not have a direct link to what takes place in classrooms, it foregrounds the different mechanisms that are employed to make teachers accountable.

METHODOLOGY

This paper forms part of a larger project, which sought to analyse the different accountability mechanisms employed to ensure effective implementation of educational policy in South Africa. The research focused on secondary schools in uMgungundlovu District in KwaZulu-Natal. This is a District with poor and rich schools. It also has a mix of public and private schools. Above all, the District includes schools which have enjoyed successive outstanding Matriculation pass rates (Grade 12) as well as those that continue to be far less successful. The broader study adopted a mixed methodology approach which focused on qualitative as well as quantitative methods.

Qualitative research methodology is relevant for this study for three major reasons. First, qualitative research is deemed to be much more fluid and flexible than quantitative research in that it emphasizes discovering novel or unanticipated findings and the possibility of altering research plans in response to such serendipitous occurrences. Quantitative techniques were used in coding interview data with a view to constructing a dataset which could be analysed using an SPSS (Burton 2000: 217). To this end, questions in the interview schedule were designed in a way that made responses easier to code. Quan-

titative data were linked to qualitative data to: (a) enable confirmation and corroboration of each other via triangulation; (b) to elaborate and develop analysis, providing richer detail; and (c) to initiate new lines of thinking through attention to surprises or paradoxes (Miles and Huberman 1994: 41).

Sample

For this study, non-probability sampling was used, in both the convenient and purposive forms. Based on the researcher's previous findings (Mutereko 2009), the sample comprised six school Principals and 100 teachers. The sample size for this study was determined by three different factors. First, the size was determined by the techniques of analysis to be used which are mainly qualitative. Secondly, the number of units of analysis from which usable data were collected was anticipated to be smaller than the number originally drawn as some people might have refused to participate in the research (Welman et al. 2007: 72). Thirdly, the size was also influenced by the resources that were available for undertaking this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with the six Principals of the schools where the teachers who participated in the questionnaire were located. The interviews lasted forty-five minutes to one hour. The interviews served two main purposes: Firstly, the interviews sought to understand the mechanisms of accountability associated with the implementation of the National Curriculum Statements (NCS); and secondly, the interviews also elicited the views of school Principals on the government's responsiveness to the basic educational needs of South Africa. The researcher took notes and recorded the interviews when permission was granted.

Apart from the data collected through interviews, extensive use was made of reviewing official documents, from government and other educational organisations. This covered the laws and policies that have been promulgated to guide the management of schools. These documents allowed the researcher to track what happened, when it happened, and who was involved (Bickman and Rog 1998: 19). These documents were also important in corroborating and augmenting evidence from other sources (Bickman and Rog 1998: 19). The review of documents before fieldwork also provided the basis for interviews.

The main form of data analysis was content analysis. Data recorded and coded from interviews were transcribed before analysis. Thematic content analysis was then used to analyse responses to the open-ended comments in the interview schedule. The analyses of the transcribed data were based on pattern matching logic, which "compares an empirically-based pattern with a predicted one" (Yin 2003: 116). The 'predicted pattern' comprised findings from the previous studies, together with the theoretical framework (Bergen and While 2005: 4). Put another way, findings from other studies at times were used to compare results.

The responses from the closed questions in the interview schedule for the educators were analysed quantitatively, using SPSS Statistics 21. Frequency tables, contingency tables, and bar graphs were developed to present summary statistics. The Chi-Square tests were deployed to test the effect of accountability mechanisms and the level of accountability. Cross-tabulation was used to explore relationships in the data.

RESULTS

In as far as political accountability is concerned, the South African government, as Brinkerhoff (2003: 7) says, established institutions, procedures, and mechanisms that seek to ensure that government delivers on electoral promises, fulfils public trust, aggregates and represents citizens' interests, and responds to ongoing and emerging societal needs and concerns. Political accountability is a cornerstone of democracy whereby those elected are accountable to the citizens. However, in political accountability, the performance and outcomes expected of the elected officials are variable and hard to specify. In the case of education, this might entail policies relating to the resources that are devoted to education, the curriculum that is taught, provision of infrastructure and how special constituent children are treated. This subsection considers the responsiveness of the ANC in those areas. The latest contested issue is the language of instruction and the constitutional rights of learners to be instructed in the language of their choice.

Financing and Access

Most education policies enacted after the demise of apartheid in South Africa were aimed at fulfilling the promises made and gaining the trust of citizens. In the context of high unemployment, coupled with a widely recognised shortfall in skills, reducing poverty is a matter of giving South Africans a better educational start in life. For that reason, basic education featured strongly in the 2008 and 2014 election manifestos of the ruling party (African National Congress), and it is why access to quality education has been a priority amongst democratic South Africans for decades, as reflected in, for instance, the 1955 Freedom Charter (DBE 2010: 6). Considering this, the government's contribution at the national level to public education remains its single largest investment, as that is seen as key to reducing poverty and accelerating long-term economic growth. As enshrined in the South African Constitution, the government strives to make sure that everyone has access to their right to a basic education, including adult basic education and further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must progressively make available and accessible.

The Department of Basic Education, in terms of the South African Schools Act of 1996, made attendance in school compulsory for all children aged seven to 15 (or the completion of Grade 9) (South African Schools Act of 1996, Section 3.1). To achieve this without disadvantaging learners from poor communities, the same Act allows for learners from poor families to be exempted from paying school fees. Furthermore, the government introduced the No Fee Schools policy which abolished school fees in the poorest 40 percent of schools nationally for learners from Grade R to Grade 9 and in 2009 this was extended to 60 percent of learners nationally (South African Government Information 2011: Available Online). Consequently, spending on education is the largest allocation in the national budget, totalling R165 billion (19%) in 2010/11. The percentage of the national budget allocated to education has not been static. Over the years it has fluctuated depending on other variables. In 1996 education was allocated over 21 percent of the national budget (which coincided with the introduction of C2005) with 2002 showing the highest percentage (over 22%) ever allocated. In 1995 and between 1997 and 1999, education was allocated below 16 percent of the budget.

The respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of government in financing education. 'Financing education' is a broad term. It includes financing all aspects of education. Some respondents expressed satisfaction in terms of the money allocated for education but bemoaned how it has been used. The following are some of the respondents' views on the effectiveness of the government in financing education:

*We hear there is a lot of money for education but it's not coming. Not in terms of finance, there is a great need to increase financial support (*Tr43).

No. There is a little money coming. In my school, we don't have computer rooms. Our learners pass matric without the knowledge of using a computer. I wonder how they cope in tertiary institutions (Tr31).

Some schools still do not have the necessary infrastructure like toilets and classrooms. Only No Fee schools get the government attention; they focus mostly on what they term 'under-performing' schools. There is no help for parents who can't afford school fees. In No Fee-paying schools text books always arrive late so quality learning is delayed (Tr71).

It is apparent that some respondents acknowledge that the government is allocating large sums of money to education, but they are not receiving it. For instance, Tr43 points out that substantial money is given to education each year but there is very little to show for this in the schools. Tr31 and Tr71 do not believe that the government is doing enough in terms of supplying the schools with necessary facilities and equipment needed for teaching and learning.

Educators in all types of schools, former Model C schools, public schools in townships, urban and rural schools, complained about the resources they receive to run their schools. Thus, most respondents said that the government was not effective in financing education. Table 1 shows the perceptions of educators on the effectiveness of government to finance education.

Table 1 shows that 15 percent of respondents in uMgungundlovu District think that the government is effective in financing education. Only 5 percent of the respondents said the government was very effective in financing this. On the other hand, 25 percent of the respondents indi-

Table 1: Perceptions of teachers regarding government's effectiveness in different policy areas

Effectiveness in	*Not effective at all (in percent)*	*Not effective (in percent)*	*Somewhat effective (in percent)*	*Effective (in percent)*	*Very effective (in percent)*	*No opinion (in percent)*
Formulating educational policies	14	28	35	19	2	2
Supporting less privilege schools	24	32	28	12	3	1
Financing education	25	26	26	16	6	2
Formulating policies	14	28	25	19	2	2
Implementing policies	15	26	27	23	7	2

cated that the government was 'not effective at all' while 27 percent said that it was 'not effective'. Further analysis indicates that the perceptions of respondents may be based on the type of school at which they taught, which is shown in Table 1.

Political Accountability: Supporting Less Privileged Schools

The government has introduced a range of policies that are meant to support the less-privileged schools. Table 1 shows that 32 percent of the respondents believed that the government had not been effective in supporting the less privileged schools, whereas 24 percent indicated that it had been 'not effective at all'. About of the respondents said that the government was 'effective' while a tiny fraction (3%) said the government was 'very effective'. Some 28 percent could not say whether the government had been effective or not.

Further analysis of the perceptions of respondents of government's support for less privileged schools revealed that their responses differ according to the type of school. Table 1 shows the respondents' perceptions according to the type of school in which they taught.

Political Accountability: Supporting Less Privileged Learners

The respondents were asked to rate the government in terms of supporting less privileged learners. This question was more complex than the previous one about 'less privileged schools', because, in some cases, less privileged learners in the fee-paying schools may find it difficult to pay the fees, to have decent meals or to have transport to and from school. The teachers' perceptions of this are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that 21 percent of all the respondents believed that the government is 'not effective at all' in supporting less privileged learners, while 35 percent said that the government was 'not effective'. A total of 16 percent [13% and 3%] was satisfied with the support given to less privileged learners. Further analy-

Table 2: Respondents' perceptions of government's effectiveness in supporting the less privileged learners, according to type of school

Type of school	*Supporting less privileged learners*						*Total*
	Not effective at all	*Not effective*	*Neutral*	*Effective*	*Very effective*	*No opinion*	
Independent	3	6	7	9	0	0	25
	12.0%	24.0%	28.0%	36.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	14.3%	17.1%	26.9%	69.2%	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%
Public: Former Model C	14	16	10	3	3	2	48
	29.2%	33.3%	20.8%	6.3%	6.3%	4.2%	100.0%
	66.7%	45.7%	38.5%	23.1%	100.0%	100.0%	48.0%
Public: Township	4	13	9	1	0	0	27
	14.8%	48.1%	33.3%	3.7%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	19.0%	37.1%	34.6%	7.7%	0.0%	0.0%	27.0%
Total	21	35	26	13	3	2	100
	21.0%	35.0%	26.0%	13.0%	3.0%	2.0%	100.0%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

sis shows that 29.2 percent of all former Model C school respondents said that the government was 'not effective at all' in supporting less privileged learners. At the same time, the respondents from former Model C schools constituted 66.7 percent of all those who said the government was 'not effective at all' in supporting the less privileged learners.

About 41.8 percent of respondents in the ordinary public schools in townships thought that the government was 'not effective' in supporting less privileged learners. They also constituted 37.1 percent of those who believed that the government was 'not effective' and 19 percent of those who said the government was 'not effective at all' in supporting less privileged learners.

About 36 percent of respondents from independent schools indicated that the government was 'effective' in supporting the less privileged learners. Furthermore, the majority (69.2%) of all the respondents who noted that the government was 'effective' in supporting the less privileged learners were from independent schools.

The information given in Table 1 is supported by data collected from the interviews. Some teachers expressed their displeasure with the way the government is supporting the less-privileged as shown in these comments.

No. The government is not effective. Poverty-stricken learners are still suffering! (Tr32).

The government is not doing enough for the less privileged. The poor will remain poor (Tr28).

There is no help for parents who can't afford school fees. In No Fee-paying schools' textbooks always arrive late so quality learning is delayed (Tr71).

I don't think they are supporting the less-privileged learners. The government is giving more money to basic education - where is that money going? I don't know. They are cutting down on subsidies; they are cutting down all over (Prl1).

On paper, it's happening. In practice, it is not happening, because there are a lot of poor people who are denied access to schools because they can't pay the fees. It's a good theoretical thing but there are a lot of people who are unable to pay fees. Even in No Fee-paying schools very often the quality of education is very poor. Although these schools do not charge fees, they start charging for other things (Prl1).

There are some schools which are fee-paying schools but because of the structures of the government people can join the school and then basically ask for a full reduction of the fees and they qualify for it. I feel that nobody should qualify for it. If they choose to come to this school, which is a fee-paying school, they should pay something but the government doesn't have that philosophy. The government does not subsidise non-fee paying learners. This leaves the school in financial problems (Prl3).

The differences in perception in terms of all type of schools is statistically significant as confirmed by a chi-square test ($p = 0.005$). This shows that the variation cannot be attributed to a chance occurrence. Table 1 shows that the relationship between the type of school where a respondent taught and the perception of government's political accountability in supporting the less-privileged learners is statistically significant.

It is apparent that the government is helping the less - privileged learners and schools. A substantial number of schools have been classified as 'No Fee'. However, the quality of education in these schools may not be good, as Principal 1 said. Furthermore, as Principal 1 pointed out, even though the No Fee schools do not levy fees, they charge learners for other things. Thus, the less privileged learner may remain deprived.

In terms of supporting the less privileged learners, the government introduced a nutrition programme, as was reported earlier. Table 3, which is based on data from EMIS 2010, shows that the majority (60.1%) of the high schools in uMgungundlovu District are served by the nutrition programme.

Schools that are classified as 'rural' are the major beneficiaries of the nutrition programme. They constitute 77.6 percent of all the schools in the nutrition programme. The majority (93.3%) of rural schools have a nutrition programme. Schools that are classified as 'urban' constitute a mere 22.4 percent of all the schools benefiting from the nutrition programme. Furthermore, 91.5 percent of the schools that have not received the nutrition programme is classified as urban. It can be argued that, by serving 61.1 percent of secondary schools in the uMgungundlovu District, the government has tried to accommodate the less-privileged learners.

Another area in which the government is assisting the less privileged learners is trans-

Table 3: Nutrition programme in uMgungundlovu District high schools

		Rural / Urban		
		Rural	*Urban*	*Total*
No nutrition programme	Schools	6	65	71
	% without	8.5	91.5	100.0
	% in the area	6.7	73.0	39.9
A nutrition programme	Schools	83	24	107
	% with	77.6	22.4	100.0
	% in the area	93.3	27.0	60.1
Total		89	89	178

Source: Based on EMIS 2010

portation. Due to the geographical distribution of high schools in uMgungundlovu District, not all learners have a high school close to their residences. In that regard, there are plans to assist such learners. In its performance plans 2011/2012, the KZN DoE "has been providing learner transport to certain areas where children experience difficulties in getting to nearby schools" in the province which include uMgungundlovu District (KZN DoE 2011: 34). However, the actual number of learners benefiting from the learner transport programme for uMgungundlovu could not be ascertained.

The government has exercised political accountability by supporting less privileged learners and schools, as well as by introducing a nutrition programme for those in need as well as by planning to introduce transport. Such measures are evident in uMgungundlovu District, but the overall sense from teachers and Principals is that such efforts to date have not been adequate. The next section investigates the perception of respondents in uMgungundlovu District regarding the government's effectiveness in formulating educational policy.

Political Accountability: Policy Formulation

In order to gain and maintain the trust of citizens, governments formulate policies that are aimed at delivering services such as education. Respondents were asked to give their views on the effectiveness of the government in formulating relevant educational policies for South Africa. The results are presented in Table 1. About 28 percent of respondents said that the government was 'not effective' and another percentage (14%) indicated that the government was 'not effective at all' in formulating educational policies. About 34.7 percent were neutral. A portion (19%) of the respondents noted that the government was 'effective' while 2 percent believed that the government was very effective in formulating educational policies. As indicated earlier, some respondents pointed out that such policies were 'good on paper' which may also be taken to mean that the policies are well formulated. Interview data revealed mixed perceptions regarding policy formulation in South Africa with some pointing out the frequency of policy change as too fast.

I think the government is trying. They are definitely spending a lot of money on education but the education system they are using is not right for our context (Prl5).

No. The policies are not good. With the advent of OBE and its rigidity as a system ... teachers felt disempowered and often lost confidence in themselves. The administration was onerous and time consuming leaving less time for more important activities like lesson preparation. (Tr36)

No, some policies are not working in SA. (Tr22).

The government is forever changing goal posts, we are never consulted (Tr24).

It is not enough. The government must stop changing the curriculum now and then (Tr17).

I think the department needs to make up their minds and stick to it. Changes cause stress and confusion to teachers (Tr16).

Yes, the government is doing well but they must stop giving new policies every day. They should make sure that all schools have learning materials and facilities (Tr54).

The issues raised by respondents included policy stability, policy effectiveness and policy relevance. Most of these respondents were dis-

satisfied with the educational policies themselves, especially the pace of change.

Political Accountability: Implementing Educational Policies

How effective has government been in implementing policies on education, as opposed to formulating them? The results appear in Table 1. The results indicate that the government has not been very effective in implementing educational policies. Only 15 percent of the respondents asserted that the government has 'not [been] effective at all' in implementing educational policies. Other respondents (26%) said the government is just 'not effective', while 27 percent said the government has been neutral in the area of educational policy. Only seven percent of respondents thought that the government was very effective in implementing the policy, but 23 percent indicated that it had been effective. As shown in the interview data below, most respondents were not satisfied with the way government implements educational policy.

…on paper it works but lacks implementation at the cluster and school level (Tr18).

The government is trying, however, more needs to be done in terms of implementing education policies (Tr54).

The government is not effective at all because there [are] many things which are insufficient in our school but the government does nothing (Tr38).

No. Too much under SADTU [South African Democratic Teachers' Union] and implementation is hampered by cadre deployment (Tr34).

Policies are all in place but there is a no implementation thereof. There is not enough accountability in some schools and in the Department of Education. Some schools do not have telephones and it is difficult to communicate. There is a shortage of qualified teachers in many schools (Tr71).

A largely negative response arose from the interviews on matters of policy implementation. Yet the findings from the questionnaire were mixed, with 4 percent overall expressing some dissatisfaction, while 27 percent had a neutral view, and 30 percent thought that government had been effective to some degree.

DISCUSSION

As presented in the theoretical framework, political accountability entails building trust among citizens and the elected officials in government. Its main avenues are regular elections which are decisive in determining the continuation of a government in power (Brinkerhoff 2001; Busuioc and Lodge 2016). The elected officials are expected to deliver on their promises, otherwise, they could be voted out of power. Political accountability gives managers the discretion to respond to key issues raised by their clients, as well as by elected officials and the public (Huisman and Currie 2004; Rached 2016: Tusalem 2016).

The performance and outcomes of elected officials are not easy to specify in education. The outcomes of elected officials may consist of educational policies, levels of spending on education, and special treatment for a category of children. The perception of street–level bureaucrats concerning this variable may influence their response to different accountability mechanisms. To that end, the study undertook an extensive review of government documents to elicit what the government has been doing in exercising political accountability. This was followed by an exploration of respondents' perceptions of the level of government's political accountability regarding issues such as financing education; supporting less privileged schools; supporting less privileged learners; policy formulation; and implementing educational policies. These issues were critical for street–level bureaucrats' accountability in the sense that when they are satisfied they are more likely to be motivated in their work.

Documentary evidence suggests that the South African government has made education its top priority. In the Delivery Agreement, which could be read in conjunction with the *Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025,* the desire to achieve improved quality education is ranked first out of twelve other priorities of government. In addition to this, the government has policies to help less - privileged learners in the form of nutrition programmes, a No Fee policy for certain schools, as well as transport programmes to make sure that all learners have access to basic education.

What does this mean in terms of the political accountability framework? In exercising political accountability, the South African government has "established the institutions, procedures,

and mechanisms that seek to ensure that government delivers on electoral promises, fulfils the public trust, aggregates and represents citizens' interests, and responds to ongoing and emerging societal needs and concerns" (Brinkerhoff 2003: 28). But how do the respondents perceive such actions in terms of effectiveness and adequacy?

The government exercises political accountability in education in various ways. As mentioned earlier, government's political accountability is often measured in terms of financing education, supporting less privileged schools, supporting less privileged learners, policy formulation, and implementation, but Bovens (2005) points out that this might be contestable since it is often based on media coverage, blaming, coalition building, and political opportunity to get into power or to stay in power.

Most respondents were largely negative about the effectiveness of government. 25 percent and 27 percent suggested that it was 'not effective all' and 'not effective' respectively. This meant that 52 percent of the respondents were not satisfied with the funding given to education. This may be difficult to understand since documentary evidence suggested that the government was giving the largest portion of its budget to education and had placed it at the top of its priority list. The answer to this paradox may lie in the distribution of such funding in the DBE's different sectors. These include administration; public special education; further education and training; early childhood education; independent schools; and spending on public ordinary schools which is further divided into public primary schools; public secondary schools; professional services; human resources development; school sports and culture; a nutrition programme; and HIV/AIDS. Considering such distribution, it might be difficult to assume that each sector was getting adequate funding. Respondents from some schools pointed out that the government was cutting funding.

However, after analysing the responses according to the type of school in which respondents were located, it was determined that a majority (40%) of respondents from independent schools were in the majority (66%) of those who felt that the government was effective in financing education. Perhaps this could be because these schools charge fees and are less dependent on government support.

In accordance with the South African Constitution, the government is expected to exercise political accountability by making sure that every learner has access to basic education. To that end, it has a responsibility to support less privileged learners. Documentary evidence suggested that the government has several strategies to help such learners. For instance, learners who lived far away from schools were provided with transport. Learners whose parents could prove that they were unable to pay fees were also exempted from paying school fees. As was explained, learners who attended poor schools were given nutritional snacks every school day. However, most respondents were generally negative about government support for the less privileged learners. Some respondents pointed out that although some learners were not charged school fees, they are also charged for other things such as sports and excursions which they cannot afford.

According to the research carried out, schools in public townships had the largest proportion of respondents who were negative about government's support for such learners. Because of apartheid, these areas tend to have more learners who are less privileged than any other type of school. Since these respondents are exposed to such learners more than any other respondents, they may have a better understanding of the needs of such learners. Again, by contrast, independent schools had the less privileged.

The study has shown that schools in uMgungundlovu District are not at the same level in terms of resources. Some schools are more privileged than others. For instance, there are some schools with more than three laboratories while others do not have even one. To that end, a largely negative response came from all the respondents about government support for the less privileged schools. Lack of support for such schools raises serious questions about the government's political accountability to education since it can lead to what is commonly called the 'silent exclusion' of learners in such schools. This is a situation whereby learners attend schools which are not properly equipped to teach effectively.

Another way of measuring government political accountability is through policy formulation. A significant proportion of respondents were largely negative about the government's effectiveness in this area. Other respondents,

14 percent suggested that it was 'not effective at all' and 28 percent that it was 'not effective'. A positive or negative perception of street–level bureaucrats about policy formulation is critical for policy implementation. A negative perception might engender a negative attitude in teachers who are implementing the policy.

With regards to government's effectiveness in implementing education policy, a large proportion of respondents were negative. Although most respondents said the educational policies were good on paper, they pointed out that government was ineffective in implementing them. When the data were analysed according to the level of education of respondents, it was seen that those with higher qualifications were in the majority of those who expressed dissatisfaction in policy implementation. Some respondents blamed cadre deployment as one hindrance in policy implementation while others blamed strong teacher unions for blocking implementation and yet others blamed the dearth of qualified educators. Whatever the reasons, the documentary evidence seemed to corroborate these perceptions of respondents since it has become apparent that educational policy implementation has been the main challenge facing education in South Africa, as suggested by the number of review committees established by successive ministers of education. However, 30 percent of respondents was positive about the implementation of education policy; most of these respondents were among the least qualified.

In exercising political accountability, the South African government introduced transport and nutrition programmes for less privileged learners. This is consistent with what Jaafar and Anderson (2007:220) say about political accountability, that it "allows the government to demonstrate, at least symbolically, that it is being attentive and responsive to all constituent interests in education." This is further corroborated by Radin and Romzek's assertion that "political accountability manifests itself in educational institutions' responsiveness to expectations that emerge from external stakeholders such as legislative bodies and parents and the society at large" (1998). In line with this, Fenstermacher (1979: 333) says that political accountability guarantees "that all students, without respect to race, income, or social class, will acquire the minimum school skills necessary to take full advantage of the choices that accrue upon successful completion of public schooling."

The current study has revealed that in order to gain the trust of the citizens, the South African government is exercising political accountability in financing education, supportingless - privileged schools, supporting less privileged learners, in policy formulation and in implementing educational policies. With a few exceptions, most respondents are not satisfied with government's effectiveness in all these areas. When governments fail to exercise their political accountability, Smithson argues, political accountability allows "citizens in a democracy to hold those responsible for making curriculum policy decisions, democratically accountable for their policies - to the extent that should citizens disapprove of policies and policy-makers, they could rid themselves of both, and the electoral system is the traditional means of accomplishing this" (1987: 7). Rached (2016) explains that the political accountability in this sense gives citizens 'a power-constraining toolbox'. Although the mechanisms of checking political accountability are political processes and regular elections, the current study has not shown why these have not been effective. Many respondents indicated that political accountability does not work in South Africa because the government is not evaluated on the basis of service delivery but on the basis of bringing apartheid to an end. Some of them said that freedom was more important than services. This implied that removing the government is equivalent to bringing apartheid back. This is hardly distinguishable from Brinkerhoff's (2001: 9) view that political accountability does not work well in "developing and transitioning countries." In line with this argument, Landa and Duell's (2015) work illustrates that where voters and political representatives share a common social identity, the power of electoral processes in punishing low performers is less effective. As stated earlier, the way street–level bureaucrats perceive the commitment of leaders of their organisations and political leaders at large to the goals of education may affect the way they perform their duties.

CONCLUSION

Insight has been gained about political accountability in the delivery of education in South Africa. Documentary evidence seems to suggest that the South African government's responsiveness to educational needs is within

optimum levels, depending on how one views it. Such a perception is not corroborated by the perceptions of educators who are at the coalface of education delivery. Although there was a general sense of dissatisfaction among respondents, perceptions seemed to differ according to the type of schools at which they taught and also along racial lines. It was recognised that after the demise of apartheid, the South African government formulated progressive policies, which had no racial bias, but the implementation was not effective. This view was also supported by the evidence of numerous commissions established by successive ministers of education to investigate the implementation of educational policy. Although the commissions may indicate the weaknesses of implementation, they also signal government's responsiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Several noteworthy implications for our understanding of political accountability in education service delivery flow from this research. First, the South African government has invested significant resources into the basic needs of South Africans. The extent to which such resources influence election outcomes is uncertain although the prominence of education service delivery in the ruling party's election manifestos seems to suggest that it is an important factor. It might be important for scholarly attention on political accountability in Africa to widen the scope to include the positive aspects that the African governments do to gain the trust of citizens. This study was limited in terms of the nature and size of the sample. Future studies can focus on different services and include the clients of such service. This current study provides an initial step towards such studies.

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