
AICEI PROCEEDINGS

“ACCOUNTABILITY IN EDUCATION: HAVE THE RECENT REFORMS IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM PRODUCED CONCRETE RESULTS?”

Emil Gjorgov and Gordiana Gjorgova ¹

¹University American College Skopje

Abstract

Ever since the Macedonia's move towards independence and market economy, the educational process has undergone various phases in development either internally or externally. Many of the initial processes for modernization and improvement that have been introduced are now either non-existent or have been appended with new projects.

In the never-ending race for implementation of the so-called quasi-market reforms and educational project reforms, the real accountability of the public educational system has been side-railed and denounced for weekend seminars. Research data has shown that the quality of the public educational system in western European countries and the US has declined considerably. Does the national educational system of the Republic of Macedonia have a future at all, or is destined to fall into the hands of private companies that will provide private education with or without accountability.

This paper will address issues such as accountability in the secondary education and problems associated with students faltering in the higher education. Is it the system, that is currently used at fault, or are there many other factors that contribute to the low success rate in the undergraduate level.

In any case, establishment of a system of accountability as well as proper compensation management of academic staff at every level of education is prudent if Macedonia is to increase the number of high school graduates, undergraduate, and graduate students. There is no doubt about it, globalization is the buzz word of the last two decades. Yet the term is used in so many different contexts, by so many different people, for so many different processes, that it is difficult to ascertain what is at stake in the globalization transition and process. What functions does the term serve, and what effects does it have on the contemporary theory, politics and critical pedagogy?

Keywords: *education, Macedonia, development, accountability, Europe*

Introduction

The complexity of the 21st century and the unpredictability of the forces acting upon it require citizens to become more engaged in democratic institutions, as the countervailing tendencies toward individualism and alienation. Efforts have been made to promote greater recognition of the value of capacity building at all stages and levels of the accountability system, but time will reveal the true nature of the educational reforms and the outcome to industry and the economy.

Increasingly, business and community leaders recognize the role of capacity building in a knowledge economy. The accountability process itself could engage all educational partners in learning and building their capacity to support the educational goals.

The greater portion of the general public is unaware that examinations and tests in schools, although of high technical quality, have limited validity in terms of measuring achievement of the goal of education. They do not know that the tested parts of the core courses of mathematics, science, social studies and language arts are a fraction of the skill and knowledge students need to learn and of the values and predispositions they need to develop to be happy and productive members of society.

The teaching profession is one of the most important factors for developing the educational system of Macedonia. In the perpetual expansion of private and public schools for secondary and higher education, there has to be a mechanism for accountability and assessment of achievement.

For the most part, in the secondary level of education, students are awarded excellent grades not for merit but for satisfying the entrance requirements for the university level. The current system for fractional assessing and evaluation of freshmen students is based upon their previous achievements without accountability.

1. Accountability in Education

Accountability in education in the past has been viewed as a one-way responsibility to show the ministry or board of education that results have been achieved or that policies have been implemented. In western democratic societies over the past 20 years or so, governments have tended to apply a particular notion of accountability to respond to the public's concerns about the effective use of the tax revenues.

In this context, accountability has come to mean the requirement of a public body to answer for the public funds, the performance of public duties and the achievement of anticipated results.

The emerging liberal governments of West and East Europe and the Balkans in the late 1990s with its neo liberal economic policies which has drawn upon a free market, business modeling for reforming education and educational accountability.

There are two major interpretations which identify types of accountability according to the way it is approached.

The first set of classification identifies three forms of accountability:

- Answering to one's client – moral accountability;
- Responsible to oneself and one's colleagues – professional accountability;
- Accountability in strict sense to one's employer – contractual accountability;

The second set identifies four forms of accountability:

- Oneself and one's own values – moral accountability;
- Other professionals or colleagues within an occupation or institution- professional accountability;
- Client or stakeholders of the institution – client accountability
- Founder, governors or government (ministry) contractual accountability

The concept of accountability is one which has become very popular over the last couple of decades in popular debates about education in many developing and emerging countries.

Central to such debates is the way in which accountability is defined. It is most often related to schools' and teachers' responsibilities, but there are two fundamental interpretations of this concept which represents substantially different approaches.

One represents accountability as giving an account of one's practices voluntary, the other as being called to account by another party; the former is an internal form of accountability emphasizing trust and support, the latter in an external form of accountability emphasizing pressure and inspection.

The issue so far has primary been dominated by those who claim the latter to be the more efficient approach for improving the educational system.

Indeed, there is significant evidence in inefficient assessment in primary and secondary level of education and that accountability is a factor that has to be addressed to all relevant institutions.

2. Quality standards implemented

Standards based reform are intended to focus on all levels of the educational system on clearly articulated outcomes, theoretically permitting educators and policy makers to alternate ways of achieving the desired levels of learning and educational goals.

The current programs being employed have not provided efficient methods to define not only what outcomes are to be achieved but also how they will be achieved.

The curriculum based programs, methods of instruction, and school programs for public and private schools are standardized by the ministry of education. To avoid stereotyping and inefficiency, care must be taken to ensure that the capacity of educators has to be responsive to the diverse needs of the local schools, students and community.

Projects in the secondary level of education, such as promoting greater employment and productivity in vocational programs have yet to be evaluated and calculated for their effectiveness.

The reformed curriculum in the secondary level, as well as the introduction of the ECTS at the higher level of education in the Republic of Macedonia have promoted many short term projects to flourish without accountability. Benefits of such experimental projects have yet to be analyzed for their efficiency and possibly harvest the positive results.

Traditional educational models in the past promoted and implemented stable strategic planning that allowed coordination between business, industry, and education for proper growth.

One such anecdote to accountability in education is when the Vietnamese people's state in the early 70' promoted open style education and demanded results from the initial graduation of students. The students were not prepared to enter the workforce, nor were they prepared to enter the university level of education. The government demanded accountability from the instructors, why were the students so ill prepared.

During this time, many years of consecutive drought have cut the production of rice and wheat by 60% and the government needed answers.

The official policy at the time from the government was "if you teachers are so smart, then make the rice grow, else you will be put to the fields along with the students to make the rice grow faster". One brave teacher that had voiced his opinion said that "the educational process is not just to teach students how to read and count numbers", instead it is a process of long team planning, where the official government must have a clear policy for development and strategic planning through education.

3. Private vs. Public schools

Where is the accountability for the educational process in the Republic of Macedonia, is it somewhere in the vaults of the ministry of education or is it lost in the process of democracy. In any case, youth employment and programs for economical development are directly dependant on clear cut policies in education.

Recently the government of the Republic of Macedonia amended the law for secondary and higher education, which enabled the formation of private educational institutions. This initiative for liberalizing the secondary and higher education deserves an appraisal.

Now the quality of education will shift from the public schools, with limited accountability to private schools where parents demand satisfaction for their investment. This may sound like a market commodity or an asset, but in reality the educational process is invaluable, because it provides growth, employment and development for the whole society.

The issue of accountability for private educational institutions raises serious problems.

It appears that parents are looking for an educational system that will focus on social engineering and ultimately produce an ideal student and citizen. This social engineering will be accomplished under the guise of accountability and administered through rewards and punishment. Again are we faced with an experimental model of education. The question is whether it has already been tested in countries where education has been faltering.

Independent evaluation of students at different universities around the country yielded unexpected results when surveyed for various teaching models.

Student's response to a comparison between frontal and interactive teaching styles are most often in favor to the latter, despite their initial resistance towards having to do considerably more work throughout the academic year.

Many believe that every student is unique and has a preferred style of learning that does not match the approaches of standardized testing in public universities. This sort of knowledge acquisition and testing are designed to ignore or override external factors affecting individuals such as; age, ethnic background, mental preparation, physical and emotional health.

When students focus on achieving high scores, they are less likely to learn to their capacity so they just compile bundles of information without content. When this type of learning acquisition occurs, their level of critical thinking is below average; they accept mistakes as if they were normal part of learning and also develop unique learning styles. This type of stress related learning is ranked below average in many performance indicators.

4. Way to overcome forceful learning

It is always stated that we live in a knowledge society. This should not be taken to mean that the acquisition and retention of factual information is of prime importance. The expansion of the internet and the endless availability of files, documents and information, in recent years has made it is impossible for individuals to achieve mastery of knowledge in many areas.

At the present rate of development and change in many societies, learning to learn becomes a more valuable skill than just learning knowledge and concepts.

A quote by Peterson (2003) “ what matters is not absorption and regurgitation either of facts or of predigested interpretations of facts, but the development of powers of the mind or ways of thinking which can be applied to new situations and new presentations of facts as they arise.

Besides the more fundamental skills such as: knowledge, understanding and appreciation, students will have to explore ways to develop higher order learning skills.

This method of active learning promotes a mnemonic process of understanding as well as critical thinking.

Yet, many students appreciate the fact that through discussions and continuous evaluation they can probe their knowledge safely while learning and discovering new aspects of courses

they take for professional development, as well as life training in general. The emphasis is placed on the fact that students learn for life and their future profession instead of learning for grades and school achievement.

During the many years of educational provision, many students that had enrolled in the public higher educational system at some point in their studies dropped out because of objective reasons; work, family or other, but still a significant number of students dropped out because of inability to comprehend the style of teaching and inability to memorize facts and data published in textbooks. Who knows, maybe if they were approached with a different method of teaching they would have completed their education.

5. Traditional vs. Interactive ways of learning

In the traditional method of learning and teaching at the higher level, students are not accustomed to voice their opinion or discontent; instead their opinions would be a carbon copy of the professor's idea or understanding to the matter. By reproducing such original work, students are recommended and appraised by professors as great students and awarded with passing grades.

How amazing, that in the midst of all egotism and hedonism of the new world civilization there would be students that cease to parade their points of view on anybody and everything. When comparing with western schools and colleges where students voice and overemphasize their personal opinion, the model of education where students are not able to speak and express their opinion has to be appended with an input of fresh ideas and developmental processes.

The same analogy can be applied to the secondary level of education, pupils have to begin to actually develop critical thinking skills, clear and concise idea development and learning for life not for grades. Apparently most of the secondary level educators have completed basic training in short weekend seminars either through professional trainers or peer trainers, and still methods such as interactive learning have not been successfully implemented at the higher level of education.

To make the matter ill fated, most primary and secondary schools favor lenient policies towards unmotivated and inactive students.

Taking into account that most educational institutions in order to economize their teaching space, bunch together students as if they were commodities or assets of a company, the quality of the educational process is degraded.

The issue of accountability in public schools stems from poor academic leadership, compensation management, years of neglect towards educational facilities, and inappropriate coordination between various international projects aimed at improving the education system in the Republic of Macedonia.

Reforms and donations of high level technology in secondary public schools are always welcome, but what is technology without accountability. Most projects endure the warranty period of one year and then are destined to spend harsh times on dusty shelves where they will linger until the next donation of technology.

Projects for modernization of infrastructure and curriculum are also under scrutiny of accountability. For a project to be successful, sustainability has to be the number one factor that determines quality and productivity.

The same analogy can be stigmatized towards the higher education, where certain classes are overcrowded and lectures are for the most part in-comprehensible. The clear cut division between the sender and recipient of information ensures a permanent level of hierarchical authority between professors and students.

It seems therefore that students are listening to their professors; they appreciate their comments and are eager to work with them on common learning experiences. The question that seems to be much more at stake is whether professors are listening to their students.

To what extent are professors aware of the students' former educational experience in the secondary and higher level, and what is their consequential impact on their class performance?

This is real accountability on the part of the primary and secondary education. Are secondary schools and their administration aware of the fact that many of their ill prepared students never complete their higher education?

This is a common error in the educational model in the Republic of Macedonia, students in the primary and secondary educational levels get their outstanding grades just for enrolment into the university. The quality of assessment and evaluation of the academic achievement is degraded to the lowest point.

6. Conclusion

The process of learning acquisition through theoretical means is denounced and meaningless without the practical experience and implementation. This is where private universities such as American College Skopje take a bold initiative to promote employment for all that are willing and able. The model of student apprentice is appraised by the student body and hopefully will be embraced by the business community as well. This is what accountability is all about; providing education, know-how and employment through practical work and experience.

The academic program along with the curriculum for each college at American College, has introduced ways to promote learning and understanding through an increased workload, which for many students means that they have to complete regular assignments, actively participate in class discussion, regular attendance and active learning.

Learning is accompanied by a method of assessment which must pay appropriate attention to the higher order learning cognitive skills such as: synthesis, reflection, evaluation, and finally critical thinking. Ways of assessing students through multiple choice questions, short response questions, extended essay questions, projects, research and portfolio are all examples of assignment based assessment tasks.

Yet with introduction of American and European educational models, which have been implemented by American College Skopje, students take part actively in the learning process through class discussions, group work and presentations without any limitations. Even though students may seem to be identical in intellect and perseverance, there are clear cut ways of distinguishing their effects on the learning process.

One of the things that employers often identify as being an important quality when hiring college graduates are their problem-solving skills. Students need to develop the ability to apply problem-solving skills when faced with issues or problems that are new to them.

The development and use of problem-solving skills also improves learning. Rossman (1993) suggests that when students use problem-solving skills, "The role of the student changes from a passive recipient of information to a participant in the creation of understanding. The problem should captivate students' attention, be meaningful, and allow a wide range of individual responses."

After all, we learn for life, not for school. These are certainly new challenges to the modern private education, challenges that echo the increasing degree of disconnectedness between people and their surroundings. In this way we can ensure that higher education reaches its ultimate goal; raising awareness of contemporary social issues and making all participants in the learning process good citizens of the world.

7. References

Ball, S.J., Vincent C. and Radnor H. Into confusion: LEAs Accountability and democratization, Journal of educational policy, (1997)

Becher T., Eraut M. and Stuart Wells, The transformation of the education and society (1997)

Elliott J., Teachers' perspective on school accountability, School accountability the SSRC Cambridge Accountability project. (1981)

Kogan, M., Educational accountability: an analytical Overview. London(1996)

Poulson, L., Accountability: a key word in the discourse of educational reform, Journal of educational policy. (1996)

Sallis, J., School, parents and Governrments.: a new approach to accountability, London,(1988)

Pauline Rea Dickens & Kevin Gernaine, Evaluation: a scheme for teacher education, Oxford University Press.

Journal of research in international education, Volume 4 number 3, December 2005, Sage publication

Константин Петковски, Мирјана Алексова, (2004) Водење на динамично училиште.