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Accountability in education: Meeting our commitments

Accountability: Education in Honduras

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1. Defining Accountability

The literal translation of the term ‘accountability’ in Spanish (rendición de cuentas) combines two words: rendir, to render or to give and cuentas, accounts. Thus, the Spanish term could be translated word-for-word as ‘to give account.’ However, the more commonly used terms to refer to accountability both for individual citizens, largely parents, and public administration are responsabilidad or responsibility and participación or participation.

The term ‘rendición de cuentas’ is only found in the Ley Fundamental de Educación or the Fundamental Law of Education (2011) once, whereas the the term ‘responsabilidad’ is found 17 times and the term ‘participación’ six times. As in other country contexts, the terms ‘responsabilidad’ and ‘participación’ are associated with a right whereas the term ‘accountability’ is used to hold someone liable for neglecting their responsibilities.

In terms of accountability in education in Honduras, it is the education providers who are held responsible, especially teachers. The Fundamental Law of Education defines the concepts of responsabilidad and participation. The following excerpts emerge.

La formación permanente es un derecho y una obligación de los docentes, y a la vez, una responsabilidad de los órganos de dirección del Sistema Nacional de Educación. (pagina 13)

Lifelong learning is the right and obligation of teachers, and at the same time the responsibility of the governing bodies of the National Education System.

Participación. Es asumir compromisos en la solución de problemas relaciones relacionados con la de gestión educativa. (pagina 4)

Participation. It is to assume commitments in the solution of related problems in relations with the educational management.

Los Centros Educativos constituyen la base del Sistema Nacional de Educación, con la participación del personal directivo, docente, educandos, padres de familia y la comunidad en su área de influencia. (pagina 10)

The Education Centers form the basis of the National Education System, with the participation of management, teaching staff, students, parents and the community in their area of influence.

La participación de los padres de familia o tutores en las instituciones educativas, es esencial en la formación de valores y conductas que constituyen la base de la personalidad del educando. (pagina 14)

The participation of parents or guardians in educational institutions is essential in the formation of values and behaviors that form the basis of the personality of the learner.

La educación es una inversión social pública, por lo tanto, los responsables de su administración y manejo están obligados a rendir cuentas a la Nación.

Education is a public social investment, for this reason, those responsible for the administration and management must be held accountable to the nation.

2. Introduction and Country Profile

In June 2009 there was a Coup d'état of the President Manuel Zelaya of the Libre party, at the order of the Supreme Court. As a result, Honduras temporarily lost its membership in the Organization of American States (OAS). In November of 2009, Porfirio Lobo of the National party won the election and Honduras' membership in the OAS was restored.

The complexity of political parties and loyalties is thick and intertwined in Honduras. For example, the current Minister of Education, Marlon Escoto, was appointed under the National Party, even though he is from the Libre Party (that party of Zelaya). He became Minister in 2011 and remains the Minister despite the ongoing changes in the presidency.

Despite being aligned more closely with the Libre Party, the Minister's reforms reflect reforms associated with "neoliberal policies" and accountability reforms such as those found in Making Schools Work (Bruns et al, 2011). These reforms include the use of participation and accountability mechanisms such as the Committees for Education Development (COMDEs) and the Community Participation Law (2011).

The accountability reforms also include the use of standards and assessment, and posting teachers names on walls outside of school for accountability, known as "Murales de Transparencia." Transparency murals remain in effect today as described on the Secretaria de Educacion Portal de Transparencia. They originated in 2010 in select departments by a local NGO, Transformemos Honduras, and have now been scaled by the Ministry nationwide.

In addition, the Minister's relationship with the unions is complex, and the unions themselves and their relationships to political parties are equally as complicated. Teachers' unions play an integral role in national politics, they were active in the Coup d'état and historically they gained their strength via presidential decrees. Teachers unions were in favor of Zelaya and the Libre party and went on strike during the Coup d'etat, closing school and causing children to miss class. At the same time there are various divisions within the unions themselves (2009).

Other institutions which play a role in the education landscape include donors and lending agencies (World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, and the U.S. Agency for International Development). Local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), have also served very powerful roles in Honduras (Jackson 2005). NGOs include CARE, Child Fund and Save the Children which work in tandem with the state to provide education services in marginalized areas.

The World Bank Country Assistance Strategy (2011) asserts that Honduras lacks "transparency around decision-making", and it makes note of the weakness of government institutions and organizational capacity of groups including the Secretariat of Education. It also highlights the public sector wage bill and its increased growth over the years in response to teacher union demands. Given international pressures 2013 the wage bill was frozen. This created discontent, particularly among teachers who threatened and implemented strikes. Seventy-five percent of the total tax revenue for special pay regimes goes to civil servants, most of them being teachers and nurses.

The Education System. The formal education system in Honduras is comprised of four levels; pre-basic, basic, middle and higher education. Within basic education there are three cycles, the first corresponds to grades one through three, the second corresponds to grades four through six and the third corresponds to grades seven through nine (See Table 1).

Table 1 Honduras education cycles

Level	Cycle	Grade	Age	Mandatory
Pre-basic education			4-6 years	Yes
Basic education	1	1 st -3 rd	6-8 years	Yes
	2	4 th -6 th	9-11 years	
	3	7 th -9 th	12-14 years	
Middle education	Academic	10 th -11 th	15-17 years	Yes
	Professional	10 th -12 th	15-18 years	
Higher education			17+ years	No

Source: UNESCO, 2016

Enrollment in primary is near universal whereas enrollment in pre primary, lower and upper secondary remain low. Adjusted net enrollment rates in 2014 for primary were: 95 percent, for lower secondary were 73 percent and for upper secondary were 53 percent. Completion rates in 2014 for primary were 79 percent, for lower secondary were 43 percent and for upper secondary were 31 percent. (UNESCO, 2016).

Accountability Emerged. The Fundamental Law of Education (2011), title 6, chapter 1, article 59 states, “the participation of parents of the family, tutors and those in charge of younger children are essential in the formation of values and conduct that construct the base of the formation of the personality of the individual.” This excerpt emphasizes the role of parental participation as an essential part of the foundation for the education of children. The law goes on, ... “their basic function is to support, collaborate and monitor the education provided to their children.” This excerpt emphasizes the role of parents to not only support but also monitor their children’s education. Monitoring is required for oversight and holding teachers accountable.

The Community Participation in Education Law (2011) in its most basic form is a law which decentralizes decision-making to the municipal and the school level. There are tiers from the local level to the center national level. The first tier focuses on the COMDEs. The COMDEs are comprised of the district director (or technical assistant depending on the characteristics of the municipality), the mayor, a representative of the teachers, a representative of the parents and representatives of church, NGOs, or other community groups. The district director and mayor are automatically appointed; the other members are elected. They design education plans to be executed through a participatory approach.

Challenges. Challenges persist in terms of access and quality. As indicated low enrollment rates persist at the pre primary, lower and upper secondary levels. In addition, in general terms there are low completion rates in Honduras and students continue to struggle to be proficient in reading and mathematics.

Table 2 Select Indicators

Indicator
Percent proficient early primary reading, 2014
Percent proficient early primary mathematics, 2014
Percent proficient primary reading, 2014
Percent proficient primary mathematics, 2014
UNESCO, 2016

A national sample of Honduran students took standardized achievement tests in first through sixth grade in 2014. In early primary education grades 2 or 3, 54 percent of students achieved at least a minimum proficiency level in

reading. Fewer students in early primary education grades 2 of 3 achieved at least a minimum proficiency level in mathematics (44 percent). At the end of primary education, more students achieved at least a minimum proficiency level in reading (75 percent).

In addition, at the end of primary education, fewer students achieved at least a minimum proficiency level in mathematics (38 percent). In other words, in the later years of schooling performance in reading tends to improve whereas performance in mathematics does not. These data are from 2014 as reported in UNESCO, 2016. The reason for this is because few teachers have been trained in mathematics. Those with advanced degrees in mathematics do not pursue teaching but rather occupations that will provide better compensation.

Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA) from 2009 indicate that 29 percent of rural school third-grade students in Honduras cannot read a single word (Gove & Cvelich, 2011). Laguna and Castro (2009) also examine PROHECO schools using EGRA, they find not only that each additional year of schooling is associated with better performance on EGRA tasks but also that girls outperform boys in all measures, with the exception of one, comprehension.

3. Actors and Accountability

This section reviews the key actors in education across multiple education policies and initiatives. As mentioned the key legislation related to accountability in education include the Fundamental Law of Education (2011) and the Community Participation Law (2011). In addition, there are different initiatives such as the transparency murals and the School Based Management (SBM) reform, PROHECO. The actors involved in these reforms include the government, international community, schools, teachers, parents and students. The government includes the Minister of Education in the Secretariat of Education. It also includes department or state level heads and district level heads. The international community includes donors, lending agencies and Non-governmental organizations. Specifically, these actors include the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development, UNICEF and Save the Children. Schools implies principals and teachers. Parents include mothers, fathers, and also people who perform caretaking and caregiving roles such as aunts, uncles and grandparents.

Across all reforms it appears that the actor to be held accountable in the reforms largely focuses on the teacher. The transparency murals are intended for parent use in order to hold teachers accountable. The information provide includes the assignment of students to classes, meals and other resources to teachers. With this information parents can visually observe if the teachers are teaching the correct students with the right resources. The assumption in making this mechanism for accountability is that parents are literate. It is important to be aware of the fact that there is a rural/urban divide with regard to literacy. In turn parents in rural are not able to read and hold teachers accountable compared to the parents in urban areas who can read and hold teachers accountable. This is a crucial consideration with regards to equity. Literacy data covers youth and adults age 15 and over for the 2005–2014 period. The adult literacy is 87 percent (UNESCO, 2016).

School Based Management (SBM) is a form of educational decentralization in which political and administrative responsibilities are devolved to the school level. Depending on the case SBM usually entails devolving powers to local school committees made up of parents, teachers, administrators and other stakeholders who make decisions about education inputs, such as curriculum, pedagogy, budgets, materials, etc. According to Barrera-Osorio et al, 2009, “Because these community members usually are parents of children enrolled in the school, they have an incentive to improve their children’s education. As a result, in theory, SBM can be expected to improve student achievement and other outcomes because these local people demand closer monitoring of

school personnel, better student evaluations, a closer match between the school's needs and its policies and a more efficient use of resources." (p. 17).

SBM changes the role of citizens from voting for elected officials who make education policy decisions to the citizens themselves making education policy decisions. SBM can vary in degree of decision-making from committees as weak (advisory) to strong (full control), in terms of what powers and responsibilities are devolved, and in terms of who participates. "Community Managed Schools (CMS) are just one item on the menu of SBM reforms designed to promote parental participation and more utilization of local knowledge and capacity." (Patrinos, 2006, in Di Gropello & Marshall 2011, p.1).

CMS induce oversight of teachers by parents, whereas traditional schools hold teachers accountable to the ministry of education. Through parent councils decisions are made about school administration, hiring and firing teachers, salaries, etc. SBM reforms aim to make teachers and school administrators accountable to parents and communities, although stated goals may range from improved quality outputs such as improved student achievement to increased access. For example, in the case of Honduras the SBM program targets rural communities in order to expand access to primary school.

4. Case Study

In the Programa Hondureno de Educacion Comunitaria Honduran Community Education Project (PROHECO) parents on school councils make decisions about salaries, hiring/firing teachers and supervising/ evaluating teachers. PROHECO parents also make decisions related to purchasing school materials.

The PROHECO reform began in March 1999, funded entirely by the World Bank. In order to participate schools had to be rural, have at least 25 pre-school or primary school aged children, be at least 3 kilometers away from the nearest school, and have been affected by Hurricane Mitch (SE, 2003 in Di Gropello, 2006).

The project's initial concern was to address primary enrollment in rural areas by increasing parent control via school-based management. This entailed introducing local councils to oversee school operations. Studies conducted by the Ministry of Education in 1997 indicate that 14 percent of school-aged children were not enrolled in school, 85 percent of these children were in rural areas (Di Gropello, 2006). By the end of 1999 PROHECO schools were in more than 500 communities. In 2010, PROHECO school enrollments accounted for 11 percent of the total national enrollment and 21 percent of enrollment in rural areas for a total of 130,000 students (PREAL, 2009).

Responsibilities for the implementation of PROHECO are distributed across the coordinating unit, departmental offices, district offices, social promoters and school councils, known as Community Education Associations (AECOs). The coordinating unit establishes overall operational policies and strategies, including curriculum design and coordination of technical and financial activities. The departmental offices raise awareness about PROHECO and oversee the organization and development of the AECOs. The district offices support schools to implement the national curriculum, collect data, and select communities for PROHECO. The social promoters identify communities and provide AECOs training on participation and budgets. The AECOs are the legal entity of community members, who select and pay teachers, monitor teacher and student attendance and performance and manage funds (DiGropello, 2006).

Table 3. Actors and Accountability Roles

Organizational/ Implementation Responsibility	
Contracting & Supervision of school council trainers	PROHECO coordinating unit
Training of teachers	PROHECO coordinating unit & Ministry of Education (MINED) district offices
Identification of participating communities	Promoters w/ municipalities & MINED district/ department levels
Organization of school councils	Promoters
Training for school councils	Promoters
Monitoring of school councils	Promoters
Characteristics of School Councils	
Size of Council	Six members
Council Membership	All are members of the community
Key decision maker	Community members
Functions Decentralized to School Councils	
Personnel Management	Paying staff salaries, hiring/ firing teachers, supervising/ evaluating teachers
Maintenance and infrastructure	Building/ maintaining school, buying school material
Budget	Budget oversight
Source: DiGropello, 2006.	

PROHECO is designed to hold teachers accountable through parent-community councils. The accountability mechanisms for parental accountability in PROHECO schools make parents responsible for management via their participation. Parents are responsible for hiring and firing teachers. Each year the Community Education Association (AECO by its acronym in Spanish) decides whether or not to employ the current teacher(s) or to employ new teacher(s). The AECO manages this process by annual labour contracts. The decision is based on teacher performance as measured by attendance. The consequence for poor performance or absenteeism is not renewing the annual contract. In addition, the AECO allocates resources for school materials in the classroom.

As indicated in the introduction, while PROHECO is designed to hold teachers accountable, there are other legislative mechanisms which promote parental accountability. Parents cannot get fired the same way teachers can but there are legislative and social pressures for parents to be actively involved as part of their responsibilities.

Using 2003 data from the Unidad de Medicion de la Calidad de la Educacion (UMCE), Di Gropello and Marshall (2005) find that PROHECO teachers report fewer work hours per week, but spend more time on teaching activities. Their absences correspond with teacher training whereas traditional school teachers' absences correspond with union participation; for this reason, PROHECO schools have remained open when traditional schools have closed over the last two years due to strikes (Di Gropello, 2006).

Di Gropello and Marshall (2005) demonstrate that PROHECO schools have lower dropout rates and grade failure than traditional schools. Di Gropello and Marshall (2011) use the UMCE 2003 data to show that PROHECO schools score significantly higher in mathematics and science than traditional schools. They argue that PROHECO has efficiency gains in specific areas of schooling that are offset by lower capacity, primarily that of teachers and parents in PROHECO schools. They associate the efficiency gains with a range of indicators, most of which are concerned with teacher behavior, they include that PROHECO teachers spending more time on teaching and on

homework grading activities and they de-emphasize group work. Gavin, 2016 confirmed this finding that PROHECO teachers spend more time on task. This was measured by calculating the amount of time over a 45-minute period that was spent by students and teachers on teaching-learning activities. Ten snapshots were taken over a 45-minute period, the method is known as the “Stalling’s method” and is used in research related to Opportunity to Learn (OTL) (Moore et al, 2008).

According to the World Bank (2007), “in the last three years the number of school days in regular schools has been about 72 compared to 200 mandatory school days per year.” (p. 4). The document goes on to say, “by comparison the number of teaching days in PROHECO schools in the year 2006 exceeded 175.” (p. 4).

PROHECO follows similar reforms in Central America, namely the Community Education Program (EDUCO) in El Salvador and the Programa Nacional de Educacion (PRONADE). However, unlike the similar reforms in Central America, PROHECO in Honduras is the only one which remains active.

Inherently the origin of the reform was to have schools where there were no other schools; i.e. an expansion of provision of educational services to marginalized rural areas. Now, the nature of the reform has changed, this may be attributed to factors, including pressures from outside and within the SE, lending agencies etc. Without a control design across studies the SBM model does not have a lot of empirical support.

Some argue that school based management programs have not improved learning outcomes in most contexts (3ie, 2016). In addition, there may not be high quality studies on interventions such as school based management. PROHECO was not implemented in a way that allows for a control treatment design. Student assessments in PROHECO schools must control for other factors, especially the rural/ urban divide and poverty. However, the fact that PROHECO schools provide more time teaching than non PROHECO schools may be a first step towards improving learning outcomes.

5. Policy Recommendations

The following policy recommendations emerge in order to make accountability and PROHECO more effective in Honduras.

- Without World Bank funding PROHECO requires financial support, combine federal level government support with valuable parent and community in kind and volunteer labor contributions.
- Reinforce training to parents at the local level, especially with parents who may not know how to read and write, do not expect teachers to train parents on how to oversee teachers
- Once parents have literacy skills their participation should move beyond management and include activities which directly support learning in the home as well as the school

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