

**STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION DEPARTMENT'S
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY SESSIONS IN MOTHEO
DISTRICT, FREE STATE PROVINCE**

by

SEKHUTHE JIM MOHOKARE

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN EDUCATION

In the subject

EDUCATION MANAGEMENT

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF N. NDOU

JULY 2025

DECLARATION

Name : SEKHUTHE JIM MOHOKARE
Student number : 56956169
Degree : Doctor of Philosophy in Education Management

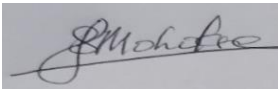
The exact wording of the title of the thesis as appearing on the electronic copy submitted for examination:

STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION DEPARTMENT'S ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY SESSIONS IN MOTHEO DISTRICT, FREE STATE PROVINCE

I declare that the above thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged using complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis to originality-checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



15 July 2025

Signature

Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my family (Thato, Caledon, Mankoe, and Liphapang Mohokare) and the Free State Department of Education. It is my hope that the study's findings will enhance academic accountability in the province, ultimately improving educational performance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my appreciation and gratitude to God, who gave me the strength to complete my studies, and to the following organisations and individuals for their assistance and valuable support:

- The Free State Department of Education for providing me with financial support for my previous and current studies.
- The University of South Africa for granting me the opportunity to enrol in the postgraduate programme and for providing financial aid.
- Professor Nndwamato Ndou for unwavering belief in me and for making this study possible.
- The Motheo District Director for allowing me to conduct research in the district.
- Mr MA Ntho, the Circuit Manager, for regularly checking on my progress with the research.
- Circuit managers, principals, departmental heads, and teacher union members who voluntarily participated in the study.
- My brother, Reverend Dr SM Mohokare, for his continued encouragement to complete this study.

Table of Contents

DECLARATION	i
DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF ACRONYMS.....	x
LIST OF TABLES.....	xii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xii
ABSTRACT.....	xiii
CHAPTER 1	1
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND.....	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY	1
1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY	5
1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	6
1.4.1 Main research question	8
1.4.2 Sub-research questions	8
1.4.3 Aim of the study.....	8
1.4.4 Objectives of the study	8
1.5 LITERATURE/SCHOLARSHIP REVIEW.....	9
1.5.1 Theoretical framework	9
1.5.2 Literature review	11
1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN.....	17
1.6.1 Research approach	18
1.6.2 Research paradigm	18
1.6.3 Research design	18
1.7 POPULATION AND SAMPLING	19
1.7.1 Population.....	19
1.7.2 Sampling of participants	19
1.8 INSTRUMENTATION AND DATA GENERATION TECHNIQUES	20
1.8.1 In-depth interviews.....	20
1.8.2 Observations.....	20
1.8.3 Document analysis review	20
1.9 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	21
1.9.1 Analysis of data	21
1.9.2 Interpretation of data	21

1.10 CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS	21
1.10.1 Confirmability	22
1.10.2 Credibility.....	22
1.10.3 Dependability.....	23
1.10.4 Transferability.....	23
1.10.5 Triangulation.....	23
1.10.6 Trustworthiness	24
1.11 RESEARCH ETHICS	24
1.11.1 Ethical clearance	24
1.11.2 Informed consent	25
1.11.3 Privacy and confidentiality	25
1.11.4 Participants' well-being	25
1.12 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	26
1.12.1 Limitations of the study	26
1.12.2 Delimitations of the study	26
1.13 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS.....	27
1.13.1 Accountability	27
1.13.2 Quality.....	27
1.13.3 Stakeholders' perceptions	27
1.13.4 Academic performance.....	28
1.13.5 Teacher unions	28
1.14 THESIS CHAPTER OUTLINE	28
1.15 CHAPTER SUMMARY	30
CHAPTER 2	31
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	31
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	31
2.2 THEORIES UNDERPINNING THE STUDY	31
2.2.1 Existential theory	32
2.2.2 Systems theory	37
2.2.3 Accountability: The common factor in the theories underpinning the study.....	45
2.2.4 Theoretical framework on the review of literature	48
2.2.5 Theoretical framework on research design and methodology employed in the study	49
2.2.6 Theoretical framework on arrangement, analysis and discussion of data	49
2.2.7 Theory on the development of a model for accountability sessions	50
2.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY	50
CHAPTER 3	51

LITERATURE REVIEW	51
3.1 INTRODUCTION	51
3.2 THEORISING THE PRINCIPLE OF ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR	51
3.2.1 Education policies and educational accountability	52
3.2.2 Forms of accountability in education	53
3.2.3 Areas of accountability in education	57
3.2.4 Characteristics of accountability	59
3.2.5 Social accountability versus educational accountability	66
3.2.6 Accountability and support	66
3.2.7 Management of school-based academic performance	67
3.2.8 The relationship between accountability and equity	67
3.2.9 Accountability and the school curriculum	68
3.2.10 Effects of early accountability	69
3.2.11 The value of the element of trust in educational accountability	69
3.2.12 The procedure of conducting academic accountability	70
3.2.13 The impact of academic accountability on teachers	71
3.2.14 The importance of academic performance accountability	71
3.2.15 Test-based accountability	72
3.2.16 Data-based accountability	72
3.2.17 The role of education stakeholders in academic performance	73
3.2.18 The value of School-Based Management (SBM)	78
3.2.19 Advantages of accountability	79
3.2.20 Disadvantages of accountability in education	80
3.2.21 Strategies to improve educational accountability	81
3.2.22 The importance of monitoring accountability	86
3.2.23 The importance of evaluating accountability	86
3.3 GLOBAL VIEWS OF THE CONCEPT OF ACCOUNTABILITY	87
3.3.1 United Nations (UN)	88
3.3.2 Africa	89
3.3.3 Europe	90
3.3.4 America	91
3.3.5 Asia	93
3.3.6 Australia	94
3.3.7 Republic of South Africa (RSA)	94
3.4 PRACTICAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN BASIC EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA	99
3.4.1 Educational laws	99

3.4.2 The flow of the accountability chain from parliament to local individuals	102
3.4.3 Accountability and School Self-Evaluation (SSE)	103
3.4.4 Strategies to improve results at the school level	104
3.4.5 Improved performance	105
3.4.6 Teacher unionism	107
3.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY	111
CHAPTER 4	112
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN	112
4.1 INTRODUCTION	112
4.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN THE STUDY	112
4.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY EMPLOYED IN THE STUDY	113
4.3.1 Research paradigm	113
4.3.2 Research approach	115
4.3.3 Research design	116
4.4 POPULATION AND SAMPLING	117
4.4.1 Population	117
4.4.2 Sampling of participants	117
4.5 INSTRUMENTATION AND DATA GENERATION TECHNIQUES	121
4.5.1 Focus group interviews	122
4.5.2 In-depth one-on-one interviews	123
4.5.3 Observations	124
4.5.4 Document analysis	126
4.6 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	127
4.6.1 Analysis of data	127
4.6.2 Interpretation of data	131
4.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY	133
4.7.1 Confirmability	133
4.7.2 Credibility	134
4.7.3 Dependability	136
4.7.4 Transferability	136
4.7.5 Triangulation	137
4.8 RESEARCH ETHICS	137
4.8.1 Ethical clearance	138
4.8.2 Informed consent	138
4.8.3 Privacy and confidentiality	138
4.8.4 Participants' well-being	139

4.9 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	139
4.9.1 Limitations of the study	139
4.9.2 Delimitations of the study	140
4.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY	140
CHAPTER 5	141
DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION	141
5.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	141
5.2 PROFILING OF PARTICIPANTS	142
5.3 THEMES EMANATING FROM INTERVIEWS	147
5.3.1 Theme 1: Views of stakeholders on academic accountability	149
5.3.2 Theme 2: The importance of academic accountability	167
5.3.3 Theme 3: Challenges resulting from academic accountability sessions	176
5.3.4 Theme 4: Mitigation of challenges relating to academic accountability sessions	198
5.3.5 Theme 5: The roles of stakeholders in academic accountability sessions	213
5.3.6 Theme 6: Stakeholders' image of academic accountability can enhance learner performance	218
5.4 PRESENTATION OF DATA EMANATING FROM DOCUMENTS ANALYSIS	225
5.4.1 Letter inviting stakeholders to the accountability session	225
5.4.2 Accountability presentation slides	226
5.4.3 Performance reports 2023 and 2024	227
5.4.4 Teacher Union 1 reports and awards	227
5.5 PRESENTATION OF DATA EMANATING FROM OBSERVATIONS	228
5.5.1 Accountability sessions of 2024	228
5.6 PROPOSED MODEL OF ACADEMIC ACCOUNTABILITY FOR DISTRICTS OF EDUCATION: NOOGENIC-SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO ACCOUNTABILITY	230
5.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY	235
CHAPTER 6	236
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	236
6.1 INTRODUCTION	236
6.2 AIM OF THE STUDY	236
6.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY	236
6.4 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS	237
6.4.1 Chapter 1: Introduction and Background	237
6.4.2 Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework	237
6.4.3 Chapter 3: Literature Review	238
6.4.4 Chapter 4: Research Methodology and Design	238

6.4.5 Chapter 5: Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation of Data	239
6.4.6 Chapter 6: Summary of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations	239
6.5 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	240
6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS	246
6.6.1 Recommendations for higher education institutions.....	246
6.6.2 Recommendations for provincial and district education	246
6.6.3 Recommendations for circuit managers (CMs)	249
6.6.4 Recommendations for school principals	249
6.6.5 Recommendations for School Management Teams (SMTs)	249
6.6.6 Recommendations to teacher unions	250
6.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY	250
6.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	251
6.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY	252
6.10 CONCLUSION.....	252
LIST OF REFERENCES	253
APPENDICES	287
APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE	287
APPENDIX B: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH.....	289
APPENDIX C: APPROVAL LETTER.....	290
APPENDIX D: LETTER TO CIRCUIT MANAGER	292
APPENDIX E: LETTER TO PRINCIPALS	293
APPENDIX F: LETTER TO DEPARTMENTAL HEADS	294
APPENDIX G: LETTER TO UNIONS	295
APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR CIRCUIT MANAGERS.....	296
APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPALS	297
APPENDIX J: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR DEPARTMENTAL HEADS	298
APPENDIX K: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR UNION MEMBERS.....	299
APPENDIX L: OBSERVATION GRID.....	300
APPENDIX M: PROOF OF LANGUAGE EDITING	303
APPENDIX N: TURNITIN REPORT.....	305

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
CD	Chief Director
CM	Circuit Manager
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DCES	District Curriculum Education Specialist
DD	District Director
DH	Departmental Head
EEA	Employment of Educators Act No. 76 of 1998
EELC	Equal Education Law Centre
ELRA	Education Labour Relations Act
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
EU	European Union
FET	Further Education and Training
FSDoE	Free State Department of Education
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
GWMES	Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation System
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HoD	Head of Department
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
MP	Member of Parliament
NAPTOSA	National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa
NASBM	National Association of School Business Management
NATU	National Teachers' Union
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act
NEEDU	National Education Evaluation and Development Unit
NEPA	National Education Policy Act No. 27 of 1996
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSC	National Senior Certificate
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme

OAU	Organisation of African Unity
PAM	Personnel Administrative Measures
PGDS	Provincial Growth and Development Strategy
PED	Provincial Education Department
PEU	Professional Educators Union
QLTC	Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign
RCL	Representative Council of Learners
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SACE	South African Council of Educators
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers Union
SAOU	Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysers Unie
SASA	South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996
SA-SAMS	South African Schools Administration and Management System
SBM	School-Based Management
SBST	School-Based Support Team
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
SSE	School Self-Evaluation
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organisation
WSE	Whole School Evaluation
WTR	Work-To-Rule

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Free State academic performance	105
Table 3.2: National academic performance	106
Table 5.3: Circuits.....	143
Table 5.4: Schools.....	144
Table 5.5: School principals and departmental heads	145
Table 5.6: Teacher unions	145
Table 5.7: Comprehensive summary of participants	146
Table 5.8: Themes and sub-themes	148
Table 5.9: Support by teacher unions and principals	166
Table 3.10: Table 5.3.2.2 Importance of academic accountability	173
Table 5.11: Challenges experienced by teachers	182
Table 5.12: Synoptic look at challenges	187
Table 5.13: Stakeholders' challenges	194
Table 5.14: List of stakeholders	207
Table 5.15: List of documents analysed	225
Table 5.16: Events observed	228

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 5.1: Current academic accountability	160
Figure 5.2: Challenges from the circuit managers' perspective	188
Figure 5.3: Proposed model of accountability: Noogenic-systemic approach to academic accountability	231

ABSTRACT

In recent years, the emphasis on accountability in education has grown, with schools, colleges, universities, and education districts being held to increasingly high standards of academic performance. The study explored the perspectives of education stakeholders on academic accountability sessions held in the Motheo District, Free State Province. The primary purpose of the study was to bridge the gap in understanding among teacher unions, CMs, principals, and Departmental Heads regarding academic accountability and to clarify the department's perspective on the notion that teacher unions hinder academic accountability. The study was guided by two theories: Viktor Frankl's existential theory and Maturana's systems theory. Furthermore, the study adhered to the global principle of academic accountability from the perspectives of both local and international countries. The study employed an interpretivist paradigm to acquire data from participants in a qualitative approach. The research design for the study employed a multiple case study approach, allowing for the comparison of data generated through one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, observations of events in their natural setting, and an analysis of relevant documents. The employment of various data generation methods was intended to allow triangulation of data, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the study.

The study involved three teacher unions, four CMs, four principals, and four Departmental Heads. Thus, 19 participants voluntarily participated in the study. Data analysis was conducted using a thematic data analysis strategy to identify the themes. The study established the positive and supportive stance of teacher unions, CMs, principals, and Departmental Heads regarding academic accountability and academic accountability sessions. Teacher unions support academic accountability and would like to participate in the processes leading to it. Involved teacher unions can discuss common understandings of academic accountability and hold sessions on the topic. A working model of accountability was developed within the parameters of the theories employed, leading to the development of the noogenic-systemic approach to academic accountability. Thus, every stakeholder is accountable for academic accountability. The researcher made recommendations to teacher unions, CMs, principals, and Departmental Heads. Teacher unions and the Department of Education should collaborate to develop a policy on academic accountability. The education

department should ensure that academic accountability is officially documented. School Management Teams should practice accountability within their schools, while principals are expected to hold themselves accountable for the academic performance of their schools.

Keywords: academic accountability, educational accountability, school performance, learner academic performance, professional development, educational management, curriculum management, school effectiveness

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Democracy is understood as the government chosen by means of a ballot paper where all eligible citizens line up to elect the party of their choice (Harrison & Boyd, 2018:59; Merten, 2023). The endowment of democracy in South Africa and around the world has presented various dynamic factors that should facilitate its implementation. Munck (2014:8) attests to the view that actual participation in implementation, the rendering of quality services, and accountability are factors that oversee democratic freedom for everyone and in every sphere of government. In relation to the phenomenon under study, one can consider the basic human rights (South Africa 1996, ss 2(7)) and mandatory accountability (Deming & Figlio, 2017; Merten, 2023) of service providers as factors that determine the success of the democratic regime. Interestingly, concerning accountability, all services should be provided with the highest quality, which should also be maintained (Munck, 2014). Thus, one can safely say that accountability protects quality. Based on this argument, these factors have a significant impact on the education department and education for all South Africans. The Department of Education (DoE), like all other governmental departments, had to adapt to meet the demands of democracy for all (Nnadozie, 2017).

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In the Republic of South Africa (RSA), the DoE classifies schools based on their economic viability (USAID, 2008:5; Ardington, Kotze & Wills, 2021:3; Olivier, 2021:2; Van Dyk & White, 2019). This is determined by the location of the school or the socioeconomic status of the community it serves (USAID, 2018:26; Van Dyk & White, 2019). As a result, quarterly monetary grants are paid to various schools according to their quintiles (South Africa, 1996; USAID, 2018). This has led to multiple schools applying for Section 21 status, and consequently, the School Governing Body (SGB) of a particular school will take complete control of its finances (USAID, 2008:2; Mestry, 2006:27). This then calls for an accountability obligation between the department and the school. Schools are required to account for the expenditures and all transactions

made in the name of the SGB (Dwangu & Mahlangu, 2021; Mestry, 2006:27, 28). Financial books must be audited, and the resulting reports are then presented to both the school and the district office.

Much has been written about the necessity of accountability in various spheres of the government and the country in recent years. In the education sector, schools must account for academic performance, among other factors (Nnadozie, 2017; Smit, 2021). In the case of finances, as explained above, schools explain how they used the allocated grants (Dwangu & Mahlangu, 2021; Mestry, 2006:28); however, the situation is undoubtedly different when it comes to academic performance. On the contrary, the researcher ardently concurs with the theory of learning, which holds that learners whose academic performance we should account for (Nnadozie, 2017) respond differently to education (Wilson & Peterson, 2006). Factors affecting learners could be political, economic, and psychosocial. The researcher believes that these factors make accountability for academic results a challenging and complex issue.

Based on personal experience, the researcher concurs with the findings of Hofflinger and Von Hippel's Chile-based study (Hofflinger & Von Hippel, 2020), whose findings can be partly generalised to the researcher's area of study. To evade accountability requirements and keep their names off the list of underperforming schools, some institutions have implemented rigorous yet unlawful plans to manipulate academic results (Hofflinger & Von Hippel, 2020). To this end, the researcher has noticed that some schools limit enrolment in a Grade 12 class. In addition, learners are sifted (Mail & Guardian, 2020) and denied borderline adjustments. Moreover, in some schools, learners are forced to deregister particular subjects for the sake of simplicity. Some learners also suffer from being registered as private candidates in the mainstream system. This is done as a plan to ensure that schools or principals are not held accountable for the poor results.

Notwithstanding all this, the Free State Department of Education (FSDoE) has received positive reports about the academic improvements brought about by educational accountability (FSDoE, 2021:10; Moloi, 2022). This explains the provincial department's consistent academic performance that can be traced back to 2019. For five consecutive years, Free State has been ranked as the top performing province

with Motheo District rising to the heights in the 2022 academic performance (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2022:49). On the other hand, teacher unions are blamed for rejecting “measures that would ensure accountability by teachers” (Caluza, 2022:29) whilst they are also lauded for making education reform possible in South Africa (Mafisa, 2017a:71; Shrestha, Williams, Al-Samarrai, Van Geldermalsen & Zaidi, 2019:110). In support of Caluza (2022), Symeonidis and Stromquist (2020:26) argue that teacher unions are often blamed for hindering academic accountability. Symeonidis and Stromquist (2020:6) further argue that teacher unions primarily focus on teacher wellness and ultimately protect ineffective teachers. However, the researcher identified a gap in the literature. The voice of teacher unions on the aspect of academic accountability is lacking in the literature. Notwithstanding the controversy, the researcher is of the view that the element of accountability for performance should become a norm for all stakeholders, namely, CMs, principals, and Departmental Heads (DHs). Although their view regarding academic accountability is also lacking, the researcher believes that, in addition to principals being lawfully held accountable in accordance with their job description (South Africa, 2022:32), school governing bodies (FSDoE, 2021:19) and subject teachers are also held accountable for learners’ academic performance (Nuku, 2021:4,12; Caluza, 2022:29).

In their turnaround strategy to improve results, the Eastern Cape Department of Education makes academic accountability the responsibility of the board of education directors (Nuku, 2021:12). According to the researcher’s assessment, this is likely to spark more resistance from teacher unions as the one recorded by both Ehren, Paterson and Baxter (2020:4) and the Free State South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) leadership (Mohlomi, 2018). Recently, principals in the Motheo District, Free State Province, took their grievances about harassment they generatively felt during accountability sessions to the union (Mohlomi, 2018). According to Mohlomi (2018), school-based teachers thought they were being harassed through mandatory accountability sessions by district officials who could be labelled as “fellow comrades” (Mohlomi, 2018). They were members of the same union as the victims. Put differently, one could deduce that school-based teachers felt victimised by office-based members who conducted the accountability sessions. Reportedly, the unions intervened and subsequently, the accountability sessions took

a new shape. However, principals and School Management Teams (SMTs) were reportedly still faced with harsh reactions for failing to produce the required results (Mohlomi, 2018). Sadly, the problem reached new heights in 2024 with the implementation of the Work-to-Rule (WTR) campaign, which, among other things, called for education officials to reform academic accountability (Mohapi, 2024; Maluleke, 2024).

One can infer that 'harshness' is evident in the fact that measures taken by districts to improve results include moving principals to other schools without following the normal route of application, including sifting, interviews, and appointment (Equal Education Law Centre [EELC], 2022; Maluleke, 2024). In addition, SGBs can be dissolved and principals and SMTs issued with written warning letters (EELC, 2022:23). Meanwhile, the Motheo District Director (DD) had indicated in a Grade 12 teachers' support meeting that his department requires academic performance from Grade 12 educators to warrant promotion (Moloi, 2022). It is this argument regarding the usefulness of accountability (FSDoE, 2021; Moloi, 2022) and the alleged rejection of accountability measures by unions (Mohlomi, 2018; Caluza, 2022:19; Mbele, 2021:29; Ehren *et al.*, 2020) that necessitated the study on stakeholders' perceptions of academic accountability sessions.

The study will attempt to understand the challenges that CMs, principals, and DHs face regarding obligatory academic accountability. Furthermore, the support they receive from the district will be evaluated. The study will determine the various aspects that teacher unions, CMs, principals, and DHs set as expectations from the Provincial Education Department (PED) regarding academic accountability. Academic accountability sessions, as productive they appear, call for direct engagement of low-level members of the SMT with the District Director (DD) (Nuku, 2021:12). It is worth noting that SMTs in the Free State Province are sometimes required to account in the provincial Head of Departments' (HoD) roadshow before the delegates which include the Chief Director (CD) and other members of the directorate. Simultaneously, the gap in the literature will be filled by developing the voices of teacher unions, CMs, principals, and DHs regarding academic accountability.

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Schools do not exist in isolation. Various stakeholders are involved in the well-being of the school. Learners, parents, principals, DHs, CMs, and the district office are affected by the performance of the particular school (Sibiya, 2017:7, 8). If schools are equally or at least equitably resourced, but one performs significantly below expectations, the cause of the problem inevitably calls for a focused investigation through engagement in formal accountability sessions, among others. However, the need for accountability is mostly driven by performance in Grade 12 examinations. Aren't all the grades equally important? Aren't the lower grades paving the way for performance in Grade 12?

Given the above, one may consequently conclude that such practices make accountability one-sided. As Motshekga (2021:5) alluded to, teacher unions, CMs, and SMTs should be held accountable for learners' performance. However, such a culture indirectly calls for schools to perform better in Grade 12, while lower grades are somehow neglected. As already alluded to in Section 1, for schools to improve their Grade 12 results, the gate to Grade 12 is narrowed (Mail & Guardian, 2020). Borderline adjustment is manipulated to ensure that only capable learners are promoted.

Additionally, the implementation of Multiple Examination Opportunities (MEOs), introduced to assist advanced learners, was abused by schools. Quoted verbatim by Mail and Guardian (2020), the former Minister of Education, Angie Motshekga (Member of Parliament [MP]) had this to say, "We had to acknowledge ... that while well intentioned, the Multiple Examination Opportunity is being used by some schools as a gate-keeping mechanism and not for its original intentions." This leaves the researcher with the impression that the better the results, the less severe the accountability engagement. Although schools may improve academic performance, which would exempt them from provincial and district pressure, a significant number of innocent learners are likely to be affected or even drop out of the system. In the researcher's view, if accountability can be evaded in this manner, it only opens another door to the need to account for the learners' drop-out rate. However, no matter how riddance thereof is achieved, the fact remains that schools can be exempted from accountability sessions if their performance significantly improves.

According to the EELC (2022:23), threats and sanctions are imposed on underperforming schools and on principals who are expected to be held accountable for their performance. The researcher believes that this practice can compromise accountability. In a meeting held by the DD of Motheo District in the Free State, some SMTs were frankly and publicly declared “unmarketable” and that moving them to other schools could negatively affect the performance of the teachers in receiving secondary schools (Moloi, 2020). One would think of various ways teachers can move to other schools. These include promotion and cross-transfer. Thus, it is inferred from the DD’s statement that no performance, no promotion, or cross-transfer is ever possible.

Schools that consecutively fail to produce positive results are deemed to be trapped in an underperforming state; consequently, principals of such schools may be reassigned to primary schools. One is left with the question: Are primary schools less important than secondary schools? However, in other areas of the globe, too, some underperforming schools are officially closed for failure to meet a certain educational standard (Han, Raymond, Woodworth, Negassi, Richardson & Snow, 2017:7). On the other hand, teachers who fail to meet required standards are also removed from schools (Huber & Skedsmo, 2016) or even demoted (Matete, 2021).

The literature lacks accounts of academic accountability from teacher unions, CMs, principals, DHs, parents, and learners themselves. Among these stakeholders, the study aims to establish the perspectives of teacher unions, CMs, principals, and DHs on mandatory accountability. The primary objective of the study is to establish a common understanding of the concept of accountability as it relates to academic performance and to propose a framework for academic accountability specific to South African schools.

1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The FSDoE holds quarterly sessions where SMT members are expected to account for their individual school's academic performance (FSDoE, 2021:9). This is prompted by the realisation that accountability mechanisms “exist in theory, but they are not working well in practice” (EELC, 2022:7). Moreover, secondary schools are expected to perform at 90/40 (Moloi, 2020, 2022). Schools that obtain 90% or above in Grade

12 academic results for several consecutive years are designated as performing schools. These schools are expected to achieve a 90% general pass rate and a 40% bachelor's pass rate in their Grade 12 results. SMTs are expected to ensure that their schools perform as expected, as they are directly responsible for the curriculum (EELC, 2022; Moloi, 2022). According to the researcher's assessment, the line of management has been compromised in matters concerning academic accountability. SMT members in their respective positions (at post levels 2, 3 and 4) and teachers should account for their performance before the DD, CD, and HoD. One would recall that the office of the CM still liaises with schools and the district. Yet, academic accountability is conducted by and reported to the office higher than this. Based on the researcher's experience, this is an area in which teacher unions are queried.

As previously stated, schools are required to achieve an individual Grade 12 pass rate of 90% (The Free Stater, 2021). On the other hand, 40% of learners who pass should obtain the necessary results for admission to bachelor's programmes at universities (Moloi, 2022). The question arises whether the required performance is preceded by support or not as averred to by Mbele (2021:68) and detailed further by EELC (2022:19). Since problems affecting teachers are typically presented to teacher unions as agents who bargain for teacher protection and healthy working conditions (Cowen & Strunk, 2014:5; Symeonidis & Stromquist, 2020:26), the researcher found the need to locate the position of the teacher unions with regard to academic accountability in the Free State. A search of the literature led to the realisation that it is adorned with considerable research that confirms the need for accountability in various spheres of education. The need for quality education, which leads to academic accountability (Thiel, Schweizer & Bellmann, 2017:4), at various levels is well-articulated in the literature. However, the researcher was unable to find the voices of teacher unions, CMs, principals, and DHs regarding the need for formal academic accountability. The study, therefore, aimed to complement the existing literature by seeking the voice and contribution of the stakeholders mentioned above regarding academic accountability in education. The researcher formulated the following main and sub-research questions based on the problem statement.

1.4.1 Main research question

The study aims to address the following research questions:

- What are the stakeholders' perceptions of the Department of Education's academic performance accountability sessions in the Motheo District, Free State Province?

1.4.2 Sub-research questions

- What is the importance of the Department of Education's academic accountability sessions?
- What is the role of stakeholders in academic accountability sessions of the Department of Education?
- How can stakeholders' perceptions of accountability sessions affect learners' academic and school performance?
- What are the challenges faced by stakeholders in the Department of Education's accountability sessions?
- How can the Department of Education mitigate challenges faced by stakeholders in academic performance accountability sessions?

1.4.3 Aim of the study

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To explore stakeholders' perceptions of the Department of Education's academic performance accountability sessions in the Motheo District, Free State Province.

1.4.4 Objectives of the study

- To determine the importance of conducting the Department of Education's academic accountability sessions.
- To identify the roles of education stakeholders in the academic accountability sessions of the Department of Education.
- To determine how stakeholders' perceptions of academic accountability sessions may affect learners' and schools' academic performance.

- To explore the challenges facing stakeholders in the Department of Education's academic accountability sessions.
- To determine how the Department of Education can address the challenges faced by stakeholders during accountability sessions.

1.5 LITERATURE/SCHOLARSHIP REVIEW

A literature review involves the processes of searching for relevant literature, summarising, and synthesising it (Snyder, 2019; Ramdhani, Ramdhani & Amin, 2014:47) to discover what is already known about the phenomenon under study. Its importance lies in the fact that limitations of literature are laid bare and a gap in scholarly information is exposed (Mudavanhu, 2017:190). Furthermore, the researcher conducts a review of the literature to provide evidence that all relevant sources have been consulted, thereby shedding light on the research questions presented (Snyder, 2019:334). With all these considerations in mind, this section is divided into two parts: theoretical framework and literature review. The theoretical framework explores the theoretical foundations of the study, while the literature review examines the relevant literature.

1.5.1 Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework is a set of existing theories within which the study is conducted (Kivunja, 2018:46). It is essential for realising the research questions and for guiding the research processes (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:86). As evident from the literature review, accountability in education involves individual people and microcosms as one system in the department. As a result, this study is underpinned by two theories, namely, the existential theory and the systems theory. Existential theory encompasses individuals or institutions as components of systems, as proposed by systems theory. According to Botha (2013:11) and Woofolk (2014), a theory is developed by empirical research. Consequently, a product is established that comprises various beliefs, a set of principles, and ideas about a specific area of study (Woofolk, 2014:18). This study directly examines the roles of human beings in the education system. This explains the careful choice of the following theories, which underpin the study.

1.5.1.1 Viktor Frankl's existential theory of 1946

The study is based on the fundamental principles of Viktor Frankl's theory. This is the theory that attaches value to individuals in their existence among other people (Madeson, 2020). The theory also seeks to establish the remarkable contribution of an individual in their own situation by simply adhering to their inherent will to meaning (Madeson, 2020; Moore & Viljoen Meyer, 2017). Furthermore, people and institutions exist as entities within larger systems, and the theory seeks to encourage the realisation of self within the system.

According to the theory, individuals' lives are characterised by the value of freedom of will (Moore *et al.*, 2017). The theory holds that whatever happens to or through a human being happens by choice, not by instinct. Frankl links freedom with responsibility (Moore *et al.*, 2017:433). One ends up being accountable for the choices harboured (Moore *et al.*, 2017:437). The researcher deems this the direct link between the theory and the phenomenon under study. In addition, the theory explains meaning as the person's choice of the right move both in odd and favourable situations (Moore *et al.*, 2017:433). This means that it is the search for and acquisition of meaning that satisfies individual lives. This idea links the theory to the phenomenon of accountability, as people "through their work they respond to the demands of responsibility" (Moore *et al.*, 2017:449).

Moreover, people naturally "want to be faced with a task, to be challenged and to feel that they have a calling" (Moore *et al.*, 2017:448). This leaves the researcher with the impression that life in every area is demanding the completion of tasks, and new ones are constantly being set. Thus, one would understand that tasks are there for everyone; one should be held accountable for the choices made and actions taken, and individuals should find meaning in every situation. The researcher's view is that, in essence, Frankl's theory of existentialism, as discussed here, supports accountability in all aspects of work, personal life, and overall life. Thus, people are accountable for tasks entrusted to them.

1.5.1.2 Maturana's systems theory of 1972

According to the theory, organisations are distinct structures that are enhanced by systems (Moore *et al.*, 2017:481). The organisation functions well when its underlying systems are functional. In the case of education, schools are considered organisations within societies (Vishnoi, 2021) that require fully functional systems. According to systems theory (Moore *et al.*, 2017:482), systems can be perturbed by external systems, and local systems determine the extent of influence to accept from these systems. The extent of influence allowed will subsequently determine the local systems' reaction. Based on this, the researcher can infer that the latitude on systems to freely decide on positive or negative reactions links systems theory with the existential theory of Viktor Frankl. This, in turn, makes one accountable for one's own decisions.

Although the school can be regarded as a distinct system in its own state, serving as a microcosm of the educational district (Vishnoi, 2021), one can think of the education department itself as a compound system in its own right. As a result, the researcher opines that the need for accountability from lower or contributing systems is inevitable. This idea is further accentuated by the fact that Maturana's systems theory emphasises the importance of feedback that one system owes to the other in a compound system (Moore *et al.*, 2017:483). A closer examination of the aspect of 'feedback' as part of the system led the researcher to conclude that feedback is closely tied to accountability. Systems refer to stakeholders in education, including parents, teachers, teacher unions, and other relevant parties.

1.5.2 Literature review

Schools consist of teachers, parents, and learners. Smart (2020) views these stakeholders as clients of the education system, and adds the community at large, SGBs, and teaching staff to the list. The researcher is of the view that CMs can also be added to the list, given the tenets of the systems theory, which guided the study. While parents are deemed the principal clients whose services are needed by the school (National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa [NASBM], 2016:1, 4), the researcher opines that all stakeholders are indebted to one another in the matter of quality service delivery. This makes accountability a necessity in

education to ensure the rendering of quality services. Schools are also expected to account for the tasks associated with education (Spurrier, Aldeman, Schiess & Rotheram, 2020). In their words, schools are “accountable for the impact they have on students” (Spurrier *et al.*, 2020:1).

1.5.2.1 Whole School Evaluation (WSE)

The Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) (2020) circulated information to its schools that clarifies the link between accountability and whole-school development. By critically reviewing the document, one quickly realises that, amongst other things, schools need to take responsibility for the monetary grants given, the activities of teaching and governance, and everything that relates to the running of the institution. The idea is also strongly propounded by the European Union (EU) (2020). Moreover, as Klein (2020) opines, the notion of professional accountability cannot be completely detached from schools’ responsibilities as institutions of teaching and learning. Again, schools need to evaluate their strengths in terms of the basic functionality of the whole school, school management, learners’ achievement, school’s infrastructure, and parental involvement (Metu, 2017).

1.5.2.2 The procedure of conducting academic accountability

Although the idea of accountability is important, Moloi (2020) suggests that the procedure used to require accountability from stakeholders can detract from its effectiveness. However, according to the DD of Motheo District, the directorate is strict with teachers to ensure maximum academic performance (Moloi, 2022). Notwithstanding this, the researcher concurs with Schleckser (2018) that a clear tool should be used to control accountability, especially where schools have to account for academic performance, given the socioeconomic status of learners who converge at school. As early as 2004, Biesta had already recognised the need for a formal relationship to be established between the service provider and the one to whom it is accountable. The notion of formal accountability necessity is today advanced by governmental development of national policies and formulation of local frameworks (EU, 2020). This leaves the researcher with the impression that schools are bound to formally account for their actions.

1.5.2.3 The impact of academic accountability

According to the DD for Motheo District (Moloi, 2022), the Free State Education HoD believes that, with accountability, teachers can perform to the best of their abilities. This notion is affirmed by Smith and Benavot (2019:3-5), who mention academic performance, competency, and interaction with employees as distinct benefits of academic accountability. Hess (2021), on the other hand, raises a critical point: learners do not end up requesting admission to a particular school, but rather, schools are chosen carefully, taking into account various factors, including academic performance. Consequently, one may conclude that for these schools to ensure quality teaching and learning, as well as client satisfaction, a formal accountability relationship should be embraced.

1.5.2.4 Unionism and academic outcomes

The importance of unions in education remains to be established. Most of the benefits of unionism are felt by teachers (Msila, 2021), while the district may feel pressure to yield to the demands of teacher unions (Mbele, 2021). This becomes clearer in the study by Cowen and Struck (2014), who found no significant relationship between teacher unions and learners' academic outcomes. On the contrary, Msila (2021) found that when engaged in collaboration, teacher unions can contribute to school improvement. Taking these conflicting views into cognisance, the researcher can conclude that there is a minimal causal relationship between unionism and learners' academic performance. However, the studies were conducted in two countries, and the implication is that the findings may not be generalised to the RSA.

1.5.2.5 Educational accountability and ethical leadership

Queensland University of Technology (2015) established the need for relational leadership between the accounting parties and those to whom accountability is owed. This is achievable through general testing, where learners are subjected to the same tests, after which administrators are required to account for their performance. The dynamic factors of ethical leadership and support are identified as key determinants of credible accountability. Firstly, the Australian Education Department ensures quality education based on the principles of equity and support, creating a warm platform

where academic accountability can take place (Queensland University of Technology, 2015). In the researcher's view, this is a prerequisite for achievable standards and resultant academic accountability. Additionally, district support and schools' academic accountability should go hand-in-hand. The researcher is of the view that these practices should be combined in such a way that support is not deemed to precede accountability. This means that they co-exist and consequently run parallel throughout the education, assessment and accountability processes.

1.5.2.6 The role of education stakeholders in academic performance accountability

Various education stakeholders can impact academic performance accountability. Through the lens of existential theory, these stakeholders are deemed important as entities, and their role is realisable together as a system, as upheld by systems theory. Stakeholders include parents, teachers, learners, the education department, and the community (Metu, 2017; Botha, 2013:236).

Parents

According to the South African Schools Act (SASA) (1996, s 3(1)), parents are required to ensure that children of school-going age attend school. This makes parents stakeholders within the school community (Hess, 2021; Mkhabela, 2019:62). As a result, schools should maintain contact with parents through various means of communication (Botha, 2013:230). One could think of parents' meetings and various media platforms. It is a well-known fact that schools report to parents through the issuance of learner performance report cards, among others (Metu, 2017). The researcher believes that this process serves as some form of accounting to parents.

Principals

By virtue of their positions as representatives of the provincial HoD (South Africa 1996, ss 16A(a)), principals are accountable for academic performance (South Africa, 2022). The SASA No. 84 of 1996 (1996 S 16A) details the duties of principals in relation to their relationship with the provincial HoD. They are accountable to the HoD, parents, and fellow colleagues for the academic performance of their institutions (Mbele, 2021:4) and the management of school programmes (Wang, Hauseman & Pollock,

2021). Taking these duties of the principal into consideration, the researcher concludes that every part of their duty is tied to accountability or feedback (Moore *et al.*, 2017:483), in line with systems theory.

Departmental heads (DHs)

Together with other members of the SMT, DHs are responsible for curriculum delivery (Mbele, 2021:33). As the third in line of control after the principal and deputy principal, DHs also provide feedback to the system (Moore *et al.*, 2017:483) regarding curriculum coverage. Thus, one can conclude that DHs are accounting officers in respect to teaching, learning, and the curriculum (Buthelezi, Mhlongo & Msweli, 2020:16019). Their job description, as outlined in Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) (South Africa, 2022), confirms their accountability expectations.

Teachers

Teachers' contribution to the educational performance of learners is undeniable (Metu, 2017). As agents of information, their performance can be improved by teacher appraisals, incentives, and training (EU, 2020). As previously discussed, Moloi (2020) holds the view that it is teachers who experience continued accountability pressure and, in response, yield the fruits of better academic performance. Thus, the researcher views teachers as accounting officers.

Learners

In light of the systems theory, learners as recipients of education can also be considered stakeholders in their own education, as far as academic accountability is concerned (Metu, 2017). In fact, "school leaders should embrace the responsibility of holding students accountable" (Tyner & Petrilli, 2018). The researcher embraces the opinion about learner accountability. Aren't learners responsible for their own learning? Informed by the existential theory, are they not responsible for willingly and continually availing themselves for education to both equally and equitably take place? However, the researcher found that the literature does not provide much information on the subject of learner accountability.

Circuit managers (CMs)

CMs are members of the district in which they are situated (Cibane, 2020:12). The role the district plays in responding to the needs of schools as microcosms of the DoE ensures that accountability does take place (Cibane, 2020:11). As such, the researcher posits that the district members should also be held responsible for learners' performance. Conversely, if district members are not held accountable by the provincial department, no accountability should be expected from locally based stakeholders, namely, parents, teachers, and the community.

1.5.2.7 Challenges facing principals during accountability sessions

Principals are blamed for abusing departmental plans to enhance performance. It is this attitude that led to the dissolution of Multiple Examination Opportunities (MEOs) (Mail & Guardian, 2020). Additionally, principals face harsh reactions for failure to perform at the required level (Mohlomi, 2018; Maluleke, 2024; Mohapi, 2024). This has become evident in principals being moved to other schools, as was stressed by Moloi (2022). In Tanzania, failure to produce positive academic results can even lead to the demotion or removal of principals (Matete, 2021). The researcher believes that the discomfort principals experience during accountability sessions can be mitigated by developing a common tool that consistently encourages the concurrent application of support sessions alongside academic accountability sessions.

1.5.2.8 The implications of accountability sessions on principals and teachers

A closer examination of the SASA No. 84 of 1996 and PAM led the researcher to deem these laws as the framework that calls for principals' accountability obligations. The principal is held accountable for various things (Dwangu & Mahlangu, 2021), including academic accountability (Smit, 2021:46). These ideas about academic accountability sessions are essential for justifying one's actions, which is aligned with Frankl's theory of existentialism (Moore *et al.*, 2017). As the principal is accountable to the district (Smit, 2021), one would believe that teachers are accountable to the principal of the school. This makes accountability crucial, where a person, as an entity (existential theory), accounts to a higher authority (systems theory). However, reports indicate that district officials have reacted harshly to the SMTs. In this way, a supposedly critical

call for accountability is transformed into a stressful and resisted practice, as is the case with principals in South African (EELC, 2022) and Tanzanian schools (Matete, 2021).

1.5.2.9 Participants for academic accountability sessions

CMs, principals, SMTs, and teachers (Economic and Social Research Council [ESRC], 2020:6; Kipkemoi & Simon, 2022:31) are all accountable for their performance in terms of the learners' pass rate. Principals, deputy principals, and DHs are subject to accountability by virtue of the job descriptions attached to their post levels (South Africa, 2022). However, for DHs, the issue of accountability is only alluded to (South Africa, 2022:39). A key point to remember, though, is that accountability is made possible by the provision of incentives (Mbiti, 2016) and can eventually involve all stakeholders, including those funded by external agencies. These participants are required to account in countries such as the United States (US), India (ESRC, 2020), Kenya (Mbiti, 2016), and South Africa (South Africa, 1996). In most countries, accountability is formally made to the education department (Mbiti, 2016) and informally to parents (South Africa, 2022). Notwithstanding this, the researcher can conclude that academic accountability is essential but can be compromised by the threats and aggression of officials to whom accountability is made. Moreover, such threats can attract reactionary measures from teacher unions.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Ngulube (2015) views the research methodology as a researcher's plan that is essential to the research course. It is, analogically, a lens through which a researcher looks to attain facts about social trends to address research questions. As a result, the research methodology encompasses the processes involved in the research, which are based on the research design. According to Ngulube (2015:127) and McMillan and Schumacher (2014), research methodologies begin as a research design, which is an idea or overall blueprint for the research. The research paradigm, approach, and design employed in the study are explained below.

1.6.1 Research approach

As the study approach determines both the generation of data and its examination (Patel & Patel, 2019:51), this study employed a qualitative research approach. Taherdoost (2022:54) concurs with Patel and Patel (2019:49) that the qualitative approach is useful for generating ideas through interpretivist means, among others. The researcher found this explanation to be relevant to the phenomenon under study, which, through the lenses of existential and systems theories, calls for the voices of the participants regarding academic accountability processes.

1.6.2 Research paradigm

This study was conducted within the framework of the interpretivist paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm propagates that realities are ontologically multiple (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:14). Furthermore, this paradigm holds that, with regard to epistemology, realities are subjectively accessible through socially constructed means (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:14; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016:55). In the study, data generated qualitatively lend itself for hermeneutical interpretation (Romm, 2018:14) to a certain extent, which the research limited through triangulation of various qualitative instruments of data generation as explained by Kivunja and Kuyini (2017). The interpretivist paradigm enabled the researcher to engage verbally with participants, seek additional information, and conduct follow-up sessions to understand the social and experiential aspects within qualitative, ontological, and epistemological frameworks (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020:42; Alharahsheh, Pius & Usmani, 2021:9).

1.6.3 Research design

The study employed the case study research design to attain the required data. The case study is defined as the activities of exploring a person, a cluster, or a phenomenon under study (Haradhan, 2018:11) within a restricted system (Coombs, 2022:1). The study examined the phenomenon as experienced by different stakeholders, with common aspects synoptically compared to establish themes. Thus, the research design employed is the multiple case study research. The multiple case study research calls for contrasting or similar results (Coombs, 2022:2). The study sought to establish stakeholders' perceptions about academic accountability, the

views of SMTs, and the support offered by the education district. The case was studied within the peripheries of existentialism and systems theory.

1.7 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

1.7.1 Population

Willie (2023:76) and Shukla (2020:1) view a population as an entire cluster to which research findings can be generalised. This means that a population provides the researcher with a sample for the study. Members of four dominant teacher unions in the Free State, comprising 12 CMs and 87 SMT members, were considered the population for the study. The teacher unions included SADTU, National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA), and Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysers Unie (SAOU). These teacher unions are nationally recognised as equal signatories in matters affecting teachers in the country (DBE, 2012). On the other hand, SMTs included the principals and DHs.

1.7.2 Sampling of participants

A sample is a group of participants from whom researchers generate data (Willie, 2023; Ahmad, Alias & Razak, 2023:19). Participants are sampled from the population to which results will be generalised (Shukla, 2020:1). In this study, the researcher employed the qualitative research design of a case study to generate data. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014:349), sampling for a qualitative study requires purposeful sampling, where prospective participants are likely to possess information-rich data needed for the study. Consequently, sampling for this study was purposive. CMs, principals and DHs were selected for their known participation in academic accountability sessions. Union representatives were selected based on their position in union branches, regional, and provincial offices. The study drew information from 19 participants who were purposively selected. Four participants were CMs, and four were principals. The researcher further sampled four DHs from various schools who recently participated in the academic accountability sessions. Perceptions of members of teacher unions were obtained from three teacher unions, namely, SADTU, NAPTOSA, and SAOU.

1.8 INSTRUMENTATION AND DATA GENERATION TECHNIQUES

Data were generated using the following data generation instruments:

1.8.1 In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews are recognised as comprehensive and probing methods for gathering information through open-response questions (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022:1). In-depth interviews were conducted through both focus group and one-on-one interviews. In-depth interviews helped the researcher to gain insight into the experiences, habits, views, ethics, facts, and perceptions of the participants. Additionally, interviews allowed for return visits where necessary. Moreover, interviews were conducted to facilitate further clarity-seeking questions (McLeod, 2024).

1.8.2 Observations

According to Ellis (2024:81), observation actively involves senses of seeing and hearing when the researcher is in natural sites. The researcher observed academic accountability sessions conducted by the FSDoE in their natural setting as a non-participant observer. Mohapatra (2018:3) is of the view that an observation becomes structured when it has descriptors set in the observation grid. The research employed a structured observation method to generate data. The researcher developed an observation grid structured to include various descriptors (refer to Appendix L). Observation grids depicted facts relating to the research questions.

1.8.3 Document analysis review

Relevant documents were analysed in the study. Morgan (2022:64,65) and Lumivero (2023) elucidate document analysis as the process of reading and critically analysing documents to achieve the required information pertaining to the phenomenon under study. Analysed documents included academic performance reports for 2023, letters or circulars that informed stakeholders of the upcoming academic accountability sessions, and presentation slides used by schools to account for academic performance. The performance report was downloaded from the national education website. Presentation slides were requested through principals, circuit, and district offices. The researcher's particular interest was in the inclusion of psychosocial

support and the strategies employed by the school to improve results. The idea was to present facts related to the research questions of the studied phenomenon.

1.9 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The researcher treated data analysis and interpretation as two distinct steps within a single process. However, the steps were complementary to one another. These steps are explained below.

1.9.1 Analysis of data

The data generated through focus groups and one-on-one interviews were transcribed verbatim. The researcher inductively worked with the data, following the research questions as the main themes of the study. Thus, the data were thematically analysed. According to Dawadi (2020:61), thematic analysis is viewed as the process of organising and reorganising data to search for themes that provide answers to the research questions. Data obtained through observations and document analysis were synoptically associated to exclude irrelevant data (Naeem, Ozuem, Ranfagni & Howell, 2023:2; Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011). The researcher adopted the six stages of structured thematic analysis, as elucidated by Naeem *et al.*, (2023). The steps followed in the data analysis are discussed in Chapter 5.

1.9.2 Interpretation of data

Data generated through focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews, document analysis, and observations were systematically analysed. The system developed related themes. Data were presented in tables, graphically, statistically, and in words. Findings were presented both descriptively and statistically, using tables, graphs, and percentages to illustrate the results.

1.10 CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

All researchers essentially yearn for truth and convincing facts through the application of trustworthy principles (Kakar, Rasheed, Rashid & Akhter, 2023). This study involved human beings as both the researchers and participants. As a result, bias and subjectivity may directly or indirectly affect the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

It is for this reasonable fact that Hafeez-Baig, Chakraborty and Raj (2016) pointed out the need for trustworthiness in the study. Using these strategies helps minimise the possible unintended traces of subjectivity that can occur in any study. These strategies were considered in the research to validate the study, as explained below.

1.10.1 Confirmability

Another criterion enhancing certitude about the study is confirmability (Ahmed, 2024: 2). Nowell *et al.*, (2017) view confirmability as the process of ensuring that findings and recommendations can be traced back to the generated data. Following this view, the researcher will keep data safe for as long as possible. During the processes of data generation and analysis, it is very likely that the researcher's interest will influence the study. It is against this possibility that confirmability should guard. As a result, the researcher employed audit trail and reflexivity as strategies for ensuring the confirmability of the study.

An audit trail is a qualitative researcher's explanation of the steps taken in the study, from data generation to data presentation (Shenton, 2004:72; Ahmed, 2024:2). Additionally, an audit trail can be advanced by keeping all data safe for immediate provision when needed for any reason (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Following this, the researcher detailed all the processes carried out, from data generation through to the analysis and interpretation of data, and the development of themes. On the other hand, reflexivity, as part of confirmability, can be clearly understood as the strategy that the qualitative researcher employs to examine their own environment and position to determine how these factors influence the research process (Ahmed, 2024:2; Haynes, 2012). To achieve this, the researcher used a special diary, journal or incident notebook. On these, the researcher's interests were relentlessly noted (Nowell *et al.*, 2017).

1.10.2 Credibility

According to Stahl and King (2020:26), credibility requires the researcher to establish the difference between the study's findings and reality. The idea behind this is to ensure veracity and make the study factually reliable (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Triangulation also ensures the credibility of research (McLeod, 2024b). In the study,

the researcher employed various data generation instruments to minimise the risk of compromising the study's credibility. In addition to various data generation methods, various sources of information were consulted.

1.10.3 Dependability

Dependability can be defined as the degree to which the findings remain consistent if the study were to be repeated (Stahl & King, 2020:27). Notably, this study was conducted for academic purposes. As a result, the researcher was supervised. This assisted in ensuring dependability. Additionally, the researcher sought peer review by a fellow scholar (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, the researcher made return visits to request assurance and revision of the findings. Data were analysed repeatedly before the final presentation was made.

1.10.4 Transferability

Transferability refers to the possibility of applying the findings to other situations (National University of New Zealand, 2025; Korstjens & Moser, 2018:122). Korstjens and Moser (2018) further indicate that it is not always possible to apply findings of a particular study to a different situation. To mitigate the problem, the study was clearly presented. Furthermore, the research questions and objectives of the study were clearly stated. Data generation methods and findings were unambiguously stated. In this way, readers are likely to identify the research context as their own. Consequently, transferability was somewhat met.

1.10.5 Triangulation

The University of New Zealand (2025) concurs with Korstjens and Moser (2018:121) that triangulation involves using multiple methods, data sources, observations, or theories to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. In the study, data were qualitatively generated. Interviews, document analysis, and observations involved a purposively selected sample. Data generated through qualitative instruments were synoptically compared, merged, and integrated (Naeem *et al.*, 2023). In this way, triangulation of data generation instruments and data were employed as a powerful strategy to validate the data (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:5). The researcher used this strategy to compare and reorganise data into manageable

themes, leading to conclusions and recommendations. Furthermore, the researcher paid return visits to seek further explanations and pose clarity-seeking questions.

1.10.6 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is viewed as an attempt to answer the question of whether the findings are reliable (Korstjens & Moser, 2018:121). The aim of applying strategies 7.1 to 7.7 is to predominantly achieve the trustworthiness of the study, as further explained by Korstjens and Moser (2018:121). In concurring with this sentiment, Nowell *et al.*, (2017:1) add that the process leading to trustworthiness of the study should be rigorously applied. This means that they should never be compromised. Consequently, one may conclude that the study should be trusted from its inception, based on a detailed review of relevant literature, data generation, data analysis, and the presentation of findings and conclusions. This study employed the above-discussed strategies to minimise the chances of leading to a lack of trustworthiness.

1.11 RESEARCH ETHICS

The importance of research ethics is discussed by Mager (2020). It is a way of precluding improper conduct during research. The need to guard against what is morally improper is made essential by the fact that most studies involve human participants (Mirza, Bellalem & Mirza, 2023:442). As a result, the following points were taken into consideration to mitigate any possible psychological harm that participants might experience during data collection.

1.11.1 Ethical clearance

Given that the phenomenon under study inherently involved human beings, ethical responsibilities were acknowledged (Mirza *et al.*, 2023:442; Akaranga & Makau, 2016:1). The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical terms required by both the university and the FSDoE. This resulted from the mandatory application for research ethics clearance, which was obtained following a thorough review of ethical considerations. The FSDoE and all institutions that granted permission for the study to take place also considered the application upon realising that the university had offered ethical clearance. The study was therefore conducted with the approval of the ethics committee. Furthermore, the university clearance certificate bore the contact

information of university officials who could be contacted should an offence or deviation of any sort be suspected.

1.11.2 Informed consent

Letters requesting research approval and confirming participants' free will participation in the study were sent to individuals and institutions. The researcher carefully ensured that the informed consent forms and copies of the ethical clearance certificate were attached to these letters. Participation in the study was based on participants' free volition (Mirza *et al.*, 2023; Akaranga & Makau, 2016:6; Parveen & Showkat, 2016:4). All the details about the study were enclosed. The expected benefits of the study were also disclosed to prospective participants. Additionally, it was also indicated that participation in the study would be strictly voluntary. As a result, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any time. The prospective participants were assured of the privacy of the process and confidentiality of their names during data generation and presentation.

1.11.3 Privacy and confidentiality

The study was conducted with strict adherence to privacy and confidentiality in matters relating to participants (Akaranga & Makau, 2016:6). The well-being of participants was enhanced by upholding the values of privacy and confidentiality (Arafat, 2023). During the processes of data analysis and data presentation, pseudonyms were used for data classification (Parveen & Showkat, 2016:3). The results were not linked to specific schools to prevent participants from being easily identified by associating them with their schools.

1.11.4 Participants' well-being

The researcher valued individual participants as essential sources of information in the study (Akaranga & Makau, 2016:1). Consequently, the purpose of the research was disclosed beforehand (Arafat, 2023). Research questions were also set with this in mind. The data generation processes were conducted with utter respect. The researcher employed the strategies of pausing, simmering and withdrawal of possible interference to ensure that ethics of respect were enhanced during interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The participants were promised to receive feedback

on findings upon request. Additionally, the researcher promised that the generation of findings would be strictly meant for academic purposes.

1.12 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher attempted to meet all the requirements that make up a successful study. The requirements include selecting a suitable research paradigm, approach, and design. The employment of these methodologies culminated in a detailed data analysis, which led to the development of reasonable themes and conclusions. However, the following limitations and delimitations were evident from the outset of the research planning.

1.12.1 Limitations of the study

Scholars generally explain limitations as restrictions imposed by the chosen research methodology itself (Miles, 2019:2). The implication here is that these constraints are not entirely avoidable. The researcher notes that the research was limited to a few research instruments, whereas empirical research is often characterised by a diverse range of them. However, practically, they cannot all be applied together. Moreover, given the limited instruments employed, the study relied on a relatively small number of participants and sources, despite the population being as large as a district. As a result, this could pose a serious challenge to generalisations and transferability. Moreover, the data generation was conducted within the restricted timeframes allowed by the FSDoE and the central offices of the unions. To mitigate the limitations, the researcher expanded the data generation instruments to include the examination of documents, observations, and as many participants as possible, as required by a case study (Miles, 2019:6).

1.12.2 Delimitations of the study

Contrary to limitations, delimitations of a study are self-imposed boundaries that a researcher sets (Miles, 2019:7; Coker, 2022). The study was conducted in the Motheo District, which is part of a province comprising five districts. Furthermore, the study employed a limited number of data generation methods, including interviews, observations, and document analysis. Consequently, the findings may not be generalised to other provinces of the country. Again, within a province, such as the

Free State, various districts may have experienced and conducted academic accountability sessions differently. Additionally, the study was conducted at a specific time, and thus, the findings may be affected by theoretical, conceptual, and temporal constraints.

1.13 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The study was based on various distinct concepts that can be defined in multiple ways. The following concepts and definitions were assumed relevant for the study.

1.13.1 Accountability

Accountability typically requires one to justify the choices made and explain the actions taken (Dillard & Vinnary, 2018:20). According to Evans (2018), accountability strengthens relationships. It concerns humane relations. It makes people answerable to one another. It is this feeling of unmet quality which calls for accountability. In this study, accountability refers to the obligatory defence of one's actions, with room for improvement, as advised or positively critiqued by those to whom accountability is owed.

1.13.2 Quality

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2020, s.v. "quality") explains quality as "degree of excellence." This meaning carries a connotation of something of the highest value. The idea left behind is that of education processes of the highest value, and they are excellent. According to the United Nations (UN), education is of high quality if it enables all learners to reach their full potential and fully prepares them to become productive citizens (Agnihotri, 2017:4882). This notion is concurred with by Hay (2018:21). In this study, the quality of education is deemed the highest value of education offered equitably to attain the desired end.

1.13.3 Stakeholders' perceptions

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2020) views a stakeholder as "one who is involved in or affected by a course of action." On the other hand, perception is viewed as the personal image of the situation observed or experienced (Merriam-Webster

Online Dictionary, 2020, s.v. “perception”). Ackermann (2015:12) concurs and adds that this image is influenced by one’s experiences, personality, and environment. Hence, an individual's perception can also be their understanding of the situation (Ntimane, 2025:129). This study views ‘stakeholders’ perceptions’ as the stakeholders’ understanding of the situation.

1.13.4 Academic performance

In her words, Bell (2018) opines, “In educational institutions, success is measured by academic performance.” However, according to Kumar, Agarwal and Agarwal (2021:3091) and Hamal (2015), the explanation of the concept ‘academic performance’ should extend to include all factors that set the stage for learning to take place. In this study, ‘academic performance’ may be reconceptualised to mean creating an environment conducive to learning, which leads to the achievement of academic results expected by the school and the DoE.

1.13.5 Teacher unions

McCollow (2017:1) adds the variation of ‘education union’ to the concept of teacher union. In practice, teacher unions are organisations which consider the well-being of teachers and other education department employees (Mccollow, 2017:1). In the RSA, teacher unions include the National Teachers’ Union (NATU), the South African Democratic Teachers’ Union (SADTU), the SAOU, and NAPTOSA (Barnes, 2018:1; Department of Labour, 2007; DBE, 2012). The researcher concurs that teacher unions are expected to serve their members and ensure their well-being.

1.14 THESIS CHAPTER OUTLINE

The thesis consists of six chapters, which are organised in the following way.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

Chapter 1 laid the groundwork for the entire study. The introduction and background to the study were discussed under Chapter 1. The researcher also explained the rationale for the study to elucidate to the readers the need for undertaking the study. The gap in the literature was explicitly explained. Furthermore, the problem that

necessitated the study was explained. A brief literature review was also conducted to pave the way for the detailed discussion of relevant literature in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Chapter 2 outlined the theories which underpinned the study. The important information about the two theories, namely, existentialism and systems theories, was clearly detailed, and the researcher also explained how the theories are linked to the phenomenon under study.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

In Chapter 3, articles, books, and previous studies were explored to determine what was known about the title and purpose of the research. The consulted literature was duly referenced in accordance with the Harvard referencing style.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 4 details the research methodology proposed for the study. The research approach, research paradigm, and research design underpinning the study were discussed. The researcher explained the population from which the sampling was done. Processes of sampling were also explained. The tools employed for generating data were subsequently explained, and the choice of specific data generation tools over others was duly justified.

Chapter 5: Data Presentation, Analysis, and Discussions on Findings

Chapter 5 started with an introduction which links Chapter 4 and the new chapter. The data generated were discussed and classified according to the emergent themes and sub-themes. Themes were linked, and data from various sources were triangulated by being viewed together. Quotes bearing verbatim words were used. The data were organised and then presented using explanations, descriptions, charts, and tables.

Chapter 6: Findings and Recommendations

This chapter concludes the study. Chapter 6 presented the conclusions drawn from the study. Conclusions were presented in a detailed and unambiguous manner, offering suggestions to the relevant stakeholders.

1.15 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 1 discussed the need to conduct the study. To this end, the researcher outlined the basic introduction of the study, which led to the rationale necessitating the study. Through a literature review, the researcher identified the problem the study aims to address and developed the study's objectives. The research methodology explaining the strategies and limitations within which the study was conducted was also explained. The researcher also explained the theories as the lens through which to view the processes of data generation, data analysis, and data presentation. Lastly, the researcher established the trustworthiness, limitations, and research ethics of the study. In Chapter 2, the researcher detailed the two theories that underpinned the study, namely, the existential and systems theories.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 of the thesis introduced the reader to the problem that the study seeks to address. Thus, the introduction and background to the study were explained in detail. Based on Chapter 1, it can be said that democracy inherently requires accountability at all levels of government, including national, provincial, and local governments. This includes both the districts and circuit offices of governmental or political spheres. Moreover, every department in government is bound to account for performance in accordance with the Constitution. As a result, the education department is no exception. Cascading from the national level down to schools where tuition takes place, accountability is the unavoidable obligation of all stakeholders to one another.

2.2 THEORIES UNDERPINNING THE STUDY

A theory can be viewed as an established framework of tested ideas, often coalesced into a single principle (Plaatjies & Gcelu, 2020:7). This means that a theory is composed of ideas that are viewed as one unified model. Attesting to the idea, Kawulich (2009:2) opined that a theory could be viewed as a set of basic principles about a particular theme. On the same note, Yahaya, Oyediran, and John (2019:845) concur with this sentiment, emphasising the idea that multiple principles comprise the theory. Moreover, there is also a consensus that theories inform research (Joas & Knobl, 2009:3; Rasmussen, 2017:55; Silver, 2019). Thus, one can opine that theories link what is already known and what is yet to be discovered. This explanation can be synoptically correlated with that of Varpio, Paradis, Uijtdehaage and Young (2019:10), who opine that “A theory is a set of propositions that are logically related, expressing the relation(s) among several different constructs and propositions.” Considering all the explanations, the researcher assumes the theory as a body of abstract ideas that explain a pattern of behaviour, practice, or culture.

The importance of theoretical framework in research is covered in the statement that it “provides a structure for what to look for in the data, for how you think of how what you see in the data fits together, and helps you to discuss your findings more clearly,

in light of what existing theories say” (Kivunja, 2018:47). One can deduce from the views provided that the researcher can approach the study through the lens and constraints of a particular theory or theories. Simply put, the researcher can opine that a theory will subsequently provide parameters within which the research can be conducted.

Moreover, the theoretical framework of the study comprises various theories that the researcher intends to employ to guide the study (Kivunja, 2018). Kivunja (2018) further adds that a theoretical framework is based on published knowledge relevant to the study. Kivunja (2018) opines that the theoretical framework guides “all your data analysis, interpretation of results and discussion of findings” (Kivunja, 2018:48). In other words, the theoretical framework determines the parameters of all aspects of the study from the review of literature to the presentation of findings and recommendations.

Consequently, this study was underpinned by the theories of Viktor Frankl and Humberto Maturana in order to provide a theoretical framework for the study. The study employs two theories due to the nature of the phenomenon under investigation. The study encompasses stakeholders as individuals and, therefore, relates to Frankl's existential theory. On the other hand, stakeholders and institutions, as juristic persons, form part of the broader system. This brings forth another theory, namely, Maturana's systems theory. According to the researcher's assessment, basing the study on one of these theories and excluding the other would render the results unreliable, since a system is composed of elements. The precepts of these theories are explained below.

2.2.1 Existential theory

Frankl's theory of existentialism came as a result of the criticism posed at Freud's belief that human beings live for the satisfaction of needs. Further criticism was directed at Adler, whose theory posited that people are in a perpetual quest for power (Moore, Viljoen & Meyer, 2017:433). In contrast to the theories of Freud and Adler (Devoe, 2012:4), Frankl posited that human beings are uniquely responsible individuals who actively seek meaning in all situations (Moore *et al.*, 2017:433). It is this point that encouraged the researcher to select this theory as a theoretical framework for the study. The theory emphasises people as responsible individuals,

which perfectly complements Maturana and Varela's theory of systems, which is based on individuals who together form a system. The researcher holds the view that while Maturana and Varela emphasise the value of systems, Frankl's theory indirectly acknowledges the value of responsible individuals or elements within the system.

The need (or at least the impact) of Frankl's theory is presented in the example of a real-life incident that occurred at some point in time (dates deliberately withheld) somewhere in the Free State during the course of the academic accountability session. The District Curriculum Education Specialist (DCES) discovered that a certain Mr(s) X (fictitious name to conceal identity), for fear of public admonition, uploaded false marks to a DBE system ahead of the upcoming accountability session organised by the directorate. While the principal had valid reasons for the delay in uploading marks for a particular subject, s/he chose to avoid confrontations. According to the researcher's own assessment, this was a matter that directly required simple accountability. However, as a result of possibly tense accountability sessions, evasion turned out to be the best option for the accounting principal. The matter required the actor to attach meaning to the situation of precedent delay and find a healthy way out. Unfortunately, this could not happen and the principal had to resign pending the possible charge which could see her/him lawfully dismissed in line with the Employment of Educators Act (EEA) No. 76 of 1998 (1998 ss 17(1) (a)), which clearly states that "An educator must be dismissed if he or she is found guilty of – (a) theft, bribery, fraud or an act of corruption regarding examinations or promotional reports."

The researcher's assessment of the situation, which also sparked the need for the study under the stated phenomenon, established that, indeed, Frankl's theory addresses matters such as these. The tenets of Frankl's theory are discussed below, and the basis on which the theory lays its foundation for the study is also laid bare.

2.2.1.1 Origin of existential theory

Viktor Frankl's theory of existentialism is, in fact, a person-oriented approach (Moore *et al.*, 2017). However, individuals exist within a larger ecosystem and the contribution they make as mere elements benefits the larger social group. This theory was developed by the Russian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl (1905-1997). His work was the result of the direct influence of well-known theorists, namely, Alfred Adler and Sigmund

Freud. Frankl became critically dissatisfied with the views about human beings that presented them as people seeking power and pleasure. Against these theories, Frankl argued that human beings can obtain the purpose of life in both favourable and unfavourable situations, and he introduced the concept of 'will for meaning' as the underlying factor for his newly developed existential theory (Moore *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, the researcher can infer that, in light of Frankl's theory, individuals can thrive and become productive in all diverse situations by attaching meaning to personal experiences.

2.2.1.2 Freedom of choice

The theory of existentialism raises humanity above all else (Moore *et al.*, 2017). Human beings become distinct from other creatures by their capacity to choose between what is right and what is wrong (Devoe, 2012:4). Since in real life the surrounding environment presents various choices to human beings, it lies with the ability of human beings to choose the best out of the good (Grinstead, 1989:4). In schools, the school principal as the accounting officer is often presented with strategies they could employ to advance the school to optimal academic excellence. As a school, they may have their own generatively organised strategies, but as both an individual and an accountable person, the principal may decide on one or two of their own. This aligns with what Frankl calls the "noogenic dimension" (Moore *et al.*, 2017:433; Devoe, 2012:5). This generally refers to a person's ability to arrive at decisive resolutions and the freedom to choose between them.

In the researcher's view, 'noogenic dimension' explains human beings' ability to arrive at decisions directed at handling difficult situations and solving problems. This view effectively rules out the idea of influencing individuals' decisions or "operant conditioning" (Woofolk, 2014), as proposed by Skinner (Moore *et al.*, 2017:273). Given this information, the researcher opines that decision-making is both an essential and inevitable aspect of human existence. Additionally, one is likely to be required to take responsibility and account to both oneself and others for the choices made. Furthermore, according to the researcher's view, decision-making is the strength that informs accountability. Decision-making is the dynamic quality of accountability. It is this quality that enabled the researcher to establish a complementary link between Frankl's theory of existentialism and Maturana's systems theory. Simply put, if an

individual operates responsibly within systems, organisations are very likely to operate smoothly.

2.2.1.3 Quest for meaning

Human beings commonly experience various life challenges. These challenges leave a vacuum when meaning is not duly attached (Grinstead, 1989:4; Devoe, 2012). An existential vacuum is explained as “a state of meaninglessness” due to a purposeless life (Moore *et al.*, 2017:444). Some of the challenges people face are positive, but many are negative. Frankl is of the view that people are inherently capable of intentionally seeking and attaining meaning in all situations. This explains the reason why some heavily laden sufferers do not readily choose suicide as a quick way out. Conversely, it is a vacuum that leads to decisions to commit suicide, where it is not influenced by external influences such as drugs. It is the acquisition of meaning which satisfies a human being (Moore *et al.*, 2017) and which consequently gives birth to a new, brighter day. As a result of its ability to soothe an individual (school or any education stakeholder) in both adverse and positive situations, the researcher considers ‘meaningfulness’ as a virtue that speaks to optimal growth. People as elements of social systems need to find meaning within their areas of existence and operation. Eventually, systems are likely to function very well where individuals are psychosocially healthy.

Interestingly, Frankl contends that “if a situation cannot be avoided, what is retained is the freedom to change ourselves” (Moore *et al.*, 2017:445). Applied to schools, schools as entities may experience the same socioeconomic challenges regarding learners’ backgrounds. The support offered by the department may be of the same value. Yet, academic performance may reveal a significant discrepancy, thereby creating an unwanted existential vacuum, namely, meaninglessness. This means that the stakeholders in such a school are likely to feel despondent and worthless when there is still room for improvement. According to the theory of existentialism, a positive mission in one school is fostered by the attitude of meaningfulness when applied to situations. Conversely, every school should strive to find positivity when performance is unacceptable. This means that the school may simply reorganise its programmes or even implement new strategies. Moreover, accountability sessions may be seen as opportunities to learn about good practices employed successfully by other schools.

2.2.1.4 Tasks

According to Frankl's theory, human beings' lives are naturally inundated with endless tasks. One of the tasks is the work or profession of a normal individual (Moore *et al.*, 2017; Devoe, 2012:4). Naturally, people are both consciously and unconsciously in pursuit of new tasks. Subsequently, fulfilment ensues as a result of the successful completion of each task or a step in the task. According to Frankl, responsible people deem work or a profession as an individual calling. One realises that the calling benefits both oneself and others. This is what Frankl terms 'self-transcendence' (Moore *et al.*, 2017:448). Self-transcendence is a term coined to mean a state of serving others more than oneself. Moreover, Frankl is of the view that the recognition of the inherent desire to complete tasks as a value is somehow future-directed (Moore *et al.*, 2017; Devoe, 2012:4). This perspective relates to goals and visions, as one intentionally or unintentionally sets achievable objectives and missions. The researcher concurs with the value that tasks play in the lives of human beings, every time a goal is achieved. However, the researcher believes that we should set realistically achievable goals to boost our ego when goals are reached.

By its very nature, the school involves various individuals or stakeholders who are required to work as a team. In their roles, stakeholders must responsibly carry out tasks assigned and fully fulfil the job description provided. Failure to do so will negatively impact the entire school as a system or organisation. At some point, choices will need to be made to improve performance, for which one may also be held accountable (Moore *et al.*, 2017:433). Schools, circuit offices, and the directorate also have tasks to fulfil for the benefit of the entire system. Thus, people need one another; systems depend on the performance or operation of individual people and on other systems that together make up a functional organisation. Conversely, schools are microcosms trusted by the national DoE to achieve its international (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2017) and national goals. Schools serve as points of contact where the government's mandate is conveyed to its citizens.

2.2.2 Systems theory

This study is also based on systems theory. The theory of systems, as propounded by Maturana and Varela, among other theorists, holds dear the dynamics of organisations, systems, perturbation, and organisational performance (Moore *et al.*, 2017). When the system's performance is unhindered, the system itself, other systems, and the organisation as a whole receive optimal performance (Moore *et al.*, 2017). Dangara (2016:271) identified the school as a "social system" due to its nature as an organisation of teaching and learning. The systems theory and its relevance to both schools and the education department are discussed below. In the discussion below, the researcher also established links between systems theory and the phenomenon under study.

2.2.2.1 Origin

The Systems theory was originally proposed by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (Seidi, 2004). The theory was developed and subsequently shaped to incorporate insights from other disciplines by Luhmann (1995). The ideas held by Frankl and those of Luhmann are deemed complementary by the researcher and are discussed below.

2.2.2.2 Maturana's ideology of systems theory

Originally a study purely biological in nature, systems theory has its foundations in the concept of autopoiesis or self-production (Luhmann, 1995:25). The theory sought to establish a distinction between living and non-living things. Maturana and Varela established a line of demarcation between the two concepts, namely, living and non-living, in that the former has the capability of producing young ones after its own kind, a process biologically known as reproduction (Seidi, 2004). Compared to non-living things, one would immediately realise that non-living things do not readily multiply as living things do. The researcher can make an example of a rock that only wears out and is ultimately reduced to dust. It is the ability of self-production in living things that led to the coining of a special term, "autopoiesis" (Mingers, 1991:319; Luhmann, 1995). In the biological world, it is not difficult to understand self-production. For example, biology teaches that cells reproduce cells of the same kind, which later die and give way to the newly reproduced ones.

According to Maturana and Varela, autopoiesis or self-production is an indication of life in living things (Moore *et al.*, 2017). The most distinct characteristic peculiar to self-production is that of reproducing oneself, that is, cells reproducing cells, elements reproducing other elements. In the researcher's view, this explains the peculiar specialisation of every element in the living organism. In the process of self-production, elements interact with each other without responding to any external intrusion. According to Seidi (2004:3), such a process is set to be operationally closed. Conversely, when an element experiences external intrusion, the resultant influence is merely the exchange of dynamic energies; thus, the 'exchanging' process is termed interactional openness (Seidi, 2004).

The theory establishes a specific connection with the mental processes of an individual that are also considered to be actively engaged (Seidi, 2004). Self-production processes are generally equated with mental processes, where ideas are generated and perceived as innate and integral to the system (Luhmann, 1995). Simply put, "Cognitions are only produced by other cognitions of the same system" (Seidi, 2004:3). However, autopoiesis does not preclude the fact that entrance from the environment is unavoidable, but that it does not completely bring change to the process. As a result, there is considerable interest in self-production as a complete system in its own right. In the actualisation of the process, elements that seem distinctly different yet are part of the system are ultimately produced. Seidi (2004) provides an example of the blossoming flower that, in turn, produces leaves, seeds, or fruits. Flowering is itself an autopoietic process, while flowers, seeds, and fruits are elements within it. According to the theory, elements are not to be deemed as things different in nature from the process of self-production. Likewise, the products of ideas in the cognitive or mental processes are simply elements of autopoiesis. In relation to cognition as autopoiesis, it can be said that ideas generate more ideas. It is against this background that Luhmann based his argument, as discussed below.

2.2.2.3 Luhmann's development of systems theory

The theory of autopoiesis was embraced and adopted by Luhmann (Seidi, 2004; Luhmann, 1995). Luhmann considered the possibility of applying the theory to other spheres of life, such as social areas. One can also consider other areas of life, such as the political and economic spheres. As a result, the outcome of Luhmann's

development of systems theory was the branching of the elements of the theory into organisations, structures, and systems. At this point, the direct words of Luhmann explain his adoption of the theory more clearly “[I]f we abstract from life and define autopoiesis as a general form of system-building using self-referential closure, we would have to admit that there are non-living autopoietic systems, different modes of autopoietic reproduction and general principles of autopoietic organisation which materialise as life, but also in other modes of circularity and self-reproduction. In other words, if we find non-living autopoietic systems in our world, then and only then will we need a truly general theory of autopoiesis which carefully avoids references which hold true only for living systems” (Seidi, 2004). In light of the quotation above, one can think of a school, a circuit office, and a district as distinct systems within the national DoE that can be considered an organisation. In turn, all provincial departments of a country can also be regarded as systems of the national DoE. Moreover, each system comprises smaller systems that offer smaller operations, without which the larger system cannot operate.

2.2.2.4 Organisation

On the issue of autopoiesis, self-production is made possible by the functioning of the whole organisation (Luhmann, 1995). When the word ‘organisation’ is mentioned, one cannot detach one’s mind from the organs which have been put together to function as a whole. According to Maturana (Moore *et al.*, 2017:481), an organisation is “what defines the system as a unified entity.” Functions of devices, for example, are designed in light of the device itself, not its components or parts. In the researcher’s assessment, one can relate to credits that have been given to organisations instead of organs that are the actual parts that made production possible. Moore *et al.*, (2017) provide an example of a washing machine with a distinct function of washing clothes, although different parts thereof work together to achieve the specified objective, apart from laundry washing. It is important to note that if one part malfunctions, the whole system or organisation fails.

In the light of systems theory, the researcher recognises the school as an autonomous institution or organisation. In its composition, it is undeniable that various people, structures, and systems comprise the school. Each year, mention is made of the school's success or failure in its academic results. As an organisation, the school is

therefore held accountable for its academic performance. However, one cannot deny the distinct positions of education districts, provincial departments, and national departments as separate organisations with specialised duties, each in its own right. This is evident in the autonomy granted by education laws to provincial departments to create their own provincial laws for the benefit of their respective provinces.

Moreover, as an organisation, the province may include schools as microcosms or systems of the larger provincial organisation. The same thing can also cause the national education department to view provinces as mere parts or systems of the national DoE. In the researcher's view, these structures explain the dire and inevitable need for accountability, where one structure accounts to another.

2.2.2.5 Structure

Systems are organised in a way that is referred to as organisational structure. The structures of systems or organisations control the effect of perturbation on the system (Moore *et al.*, 2017; Seidi, 2004). This implies that the external impact cannot and should not alter the system's structure. Sometimes, the systems occur together in a way that one perturbation can only trigger the reaction expected by the other. This is structural coupling, as described by Seidi (2004). According to Moore *et al.* (2017:482), "Although a system may be perturbed by another system, the reaction to the perturbation is determined by the system itself."

Considering structures as part of the system (Seidi, 2004; Moore *et al.*, 2017), the researcher can infer that organisational and systems structures are particularly relevant to schools. School systems are structured so that any external impact is minimal. Only schools or other educational institutions can successfully permeate the school's structure. The researcher further notes that its distinct mission is a key factor in this: teaching and learning (Cuthbert & Standish, 2021). This is structural coupling, as only impacts from systems of the same kind can trigger action on the impacted (Seidi, 2004). The researcher provides an example of an in-service training strategically organised to professionally develop teachers. The training session so organised is likely to trigger or stimulate the expected reaction, as conducted by the ally of the system, that is, any sector of the education department. In cases where developmental training is undertaken by non-governmental organisations (NGOs),

triggering an expected reaction is possible, as such organisations partner with the education department to understand its mission. Luhmann conceptualises such expected reactions as “expectations” (Seidi, 2004:9; Luhmann, 1995). Given the unique structures of systems and organisations that allow some ‘expectations’ and set aside others, it is no wonder that schools or other sections of the DBE are called to account for the choices they make and the actions they embark on.

2.2.2.6 System

Maturana and Varela’s theory, which the researcher has adopted as a theoretical framework, is a systems theory. According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2021), a system can be defined as a “regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole.” To clarify the theory, Maturana and Varela cite examples of cognitive systems or brain processes. In light of this, one can also consider systems in the human body, such as the digestive, hearing, and reproductive systems. Some elements, that is, organs (in the body), function together as one system that, in turn, needs other systems to form one organisation. According to Moore *et al.* (2017:483), systems function better to achieve lasting equilibrium when all elements of the system receive the same energy. Conversely, the element that malfunctions in the system only draws back the overall functions of the system or the organisation as a whole. Regarding schools, the researcher considers this drawback to be a need to account for how the element is to be integrated into the system or organisation.

A characteristic of the systems is that each system is operationally closed, yet open in terms of interaction. The former explanation means that “On the level of its operations, the autopoietic system does not receive any inputs from the environment but only perturbations” (Seidi, 2004:3). On the issue of interactional openness, Seidi (2004:3) explains that “autopoietic systems are, nevertheless, also open systems: all autopoietic systems have contact with their environment.” An example is further made on the cells that need to exchange energy with the outer world for their (cells’) continual existence. However, operative closure holds that “The contact with the environment, however, is regulated by the autopoietic system; the system determines, when, what and through what channels energy or matter is exchanged with the environment” (Seidi, 2004:3).

Based on the discussion above, Luhmann states that the theory can be applied to social organisations (Seidi, 2004). Thus, the researcher realises that every distinct part in the DoE that can be identified as an organisation can be viewed as a system of the larger body, namely, the DoE. As an organisation, schools also serve the mandate of the national DoE. The relationship between schools and the national DoE is that of schools being systems of the DoE. As microcosms that are operationally closed yet enjoying interactional openness as a result of unavoidable perturbation, the researcher is staunchly of the view that schools consequently need to account to the larger body. Supporting the idea of schools as systems, Chikere and Nwoka (2015:5) explain that the school is ultimately dependent on the synergy that exists among all its parts or structures. Inferencing from this statement, one would soon realise that synergy exists, which networks the entire DoE from national to local levels, and it is closely tied to education. Another noteworthy point emphasised by Chikere and Nwoka (2015:3) is that systems are dependent on inputs, leading to outputs through monitored processes. One can also think of human and material resources as inputs and academic performance as the desired output. The processes leading to outputs encompass all the actions that actors take to achieve the desired results.

2.2.2.7 Perturbation

Perturbation is defined as a process in which external systems and the environment send promptings to the inner system, which can exert disturbances on the functioning of the affected system, that is, the inner system (Moore *et al.*, 2004:482). The term originates from Latin, where the word ‘per’ (meaning ‘thoroughly’) is combined with the word ‘turbare’ (meaning ‘disturbance’). The resultant idea is that of external elements attempting to enter the system, which can either disturb its processes negatively or positively. Luhmann admits, as do Maturana and Varela, that external environmental forces always seek ways to penetrate the system (Seidi, 2004). Penetration or permeation does happen, but cannot directly affect autopoiesis. The system only experiences irritations from the outer world, which “trigger internal processes, but they cannot determine those processes” (Seidi, 2004:3). Concerning schools as systems or organisations, the researcher is of the view that perturbation calls on the schools or organisation to apply their own autonomous yet not predictable reaction in response to disturbances.

Furthermore, in the case of schools, the researcher believes that 'perturbation' is initiated by the DoE, parents, the community, and NGOs. Directives, advice, contributions, and instructions typically enter the school organisation as words of encouragement or criticism, in the form of circulars and letters, among others. In line with the theory, one realises that the impact experienced might be essentially great, but it ultimately depends on the school's ability to accountably proceed towards its academic goal. Despite being operationally closed, the concept of self-determination is used to mean that systems are not directly influenced by perturbation (Moore *et al.*, 2017:481). According to the researcher's view, perturbation does not directly bring about changes in systems or organisations; instead, systems choose how they can be affected, and only then do schools need to account to stakeholders for their choices, regardless of whether perturbation occurs.

2.2.2.8 Feedback

Systems occur together in an organisation. As a result, interaction between systems is very likely (Moore *et al.*, 2017). Through interaction, one system receives information about the other. As a result, a loop of feedback exists between systems. Feedback can be either positive or negative. When feedback is effectively received and integrated by the receiving system, it is considered positive.

On the other hand, feedback that has no substantial impact is regarded as negative (Moore *et al.*, 2017:483). Moore *et al.*, (2017) provide an example of a baby born to a couple to illustrate different kinds of feedback. If the couple chooses not to reorganise themselves or the environment to accommodate the new baby, the feedback becomes negative since the old system of doing things is maintained. Where the newborn's birth brings about change in family patterns, the feedback will be positive. In the former example, there is no change; therefore, the stability of the organisation is maintained. On the other hand, positive feedback brings about considerable changes and stability is to a certain extent compromised. However, according to Moore *et al.* (2017:483), both processes are equally essential for the system and are complementary to one another.

According to the researcher, a particular perspective can be taken on feedback as a result of interaction with regard to schools as systems or organisations, thereby

justifying systems theory as a theoretical framework for the study. According to Grimsley (2021), “Feedback loops provide information to the organization about the successes or failures of the organization's system.” In the researcher’s view, when applied to organisations, feedback connotatively refers to accountability for failure or success brought about by elements within the system. Shewbridge, Fuster and Rouw (2019:10) elucidate that in the education sector, accountability provides the necessary feedback that shapes the institution’s performance. As Grimsley (2021) adds, “A positive feedback loop means that the organization is functioning well. A negative feedback loop means that there are problems in the systems that need to be corrected.” The researcher further opines that every stakeholder, particularly those who are directly involved or are accountable, would want to correct the system for better, unhindered production. This necessitates practical accountability.

2.2.2.9 Optimal performance

All systems have specific functions (Moore *et al.*, 2017:485). Systems have elements that in social organisations may be people (Moore *et al.*, 2017). The performance of each element benefits the system, which is only a part of the whole organisation that also exists as an entire entity. The failure of a small element, if not addressed, can render the entire organisation inoperable. Moore *et al.*, (2017) emphasise the importance of the performance of the smallest element in the system. In the case of organisations, the contribution made by one person helps maintain the equilibrium of the entire organisation. According to the researcher’s assessment, this precept of the system’s optimal performance creates a particular link with Viktor Frankl’s existential theory, as it emphasises the well-being of the individual element within a system and the well-being of a system within an organisation. Thus, the importance of an individual in a system is deemed profoundly essential.

This explains the researcher’s employment of both theories to provide a theoretical framework for the study. While the existential theory focuses on the individual, the systems theory emphasises the uniqueness of the particular system. However, the individual health of a person, as propounded by Frankl, is indirectly embraced by systems theory as a building block for working systems and organisations. It is through the lens of these theories, employed together, that the researcher approaches the phenomenon under study. Moreover, the choice of an appropriate research design,

research approach, and research paradigm, coupled with relevant data generation methods, was informed by the theoretical framework discussed above. The concept of accountability is discussed below in relation to the theories discussed above.

2.2.3 Accountability: The common factor in the theories underpinning the study

The researcher found the concept of accountability to be the pivotal principle determining both existential and systems theories. It gives meaning to individuals in line with existential theory and determines the health of systems. As a result, the aspect of accountability warrants closer dissection. Accountability has become the buzzword in South Africa and globally (Jita, 2021; South Africa, 2012). The purpose of this sub-topic is to characterise accountability as understood by various individuals, governments, and NGOs. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2017:2), accountability is the most poorly defined aspect. McGrath and Whitty (2018:687) concur with the idea and add that the term rarely receives much attention from scholars. According to Khotami (2017:32), "Most scholars discussing accountability never define it."

Moreover, Brady (2020:2) views accountability as a concept that changes like a chameleon. Notably, this is not a new issue, as Lindberg (2009) noted that accountability was the most confusing term, which has lost and continues to lose its real meaning as it was applied across various sectors of the government and was never fully covered in formulated policies at the time. It is no wonder then that accountability has been considered a "phenomenon, concept, policy, and social practice within different systems of educational governance" (Skedsmo & Huber, 2019:251). Given this argument, it becomes necessary to redefine the term in a more nuanced way and ensure a common understanding of the topic of accountability.

2.2.3.1 Accountability as a legal aspect

The word "accountability" has its origin in the Anglo-Norman word for book-keeping (Khotami, 2017:30) and financial accounting (South Africa, 2012). Ketab (2016) considers accountability as a term originating from the marketing and business sector. However, the word takes on newly different meanings when used in various spheres such as finances, politics, education, and other spheres (South Africa, 2012:20; Hwang, 2017:2). As a result, the WHO (2017) views accountability as the liability or

legal responsibility for identifying and removing emergent obstacles. The notion here is that every process can develop obstacles or weaknesses which accountability can help to thwart. This explanation attaches two aspects to accountability: answerability and the legality of accountability. With a view to 'answerability,' the idea is to stand by one's course and take responsibility for the actions one has taken (Khotami, 2017). The legal aspect involves developing bills and policies that foster a legal demand for accountability (Skedsmo & Hubert, 2019). Where necessary, bills and policies are enacted into law. Once enactment has taken place, one is obligated by the law to account for one's own actions.

On the other hand, Hysa and Yunitsyna (2022:102) note that accountability is based on the past. It reports on the past actions. One justifies the process, the procedure, and the outcome. According to Shah (2021) and Khotami (2017), accountability arises from evaluations made of the implementation processes of promised services. An example of this explanation is found in the recent incident where an initiation school failed to render its licensed service (Mahopo, 2022). Many inmates ended up in the local hospital for continued healing after undergoing careless circumcision. To evaluate the operation, the relevant officials were required to account for the operation that went wrong. According to the South African parliamentary definition, accountability refers to the feeling of obligation to explain one's actions. Given this definition, the researcher considers the definition lacking in legal binding and suggests removing the word "feeling" from the definition. In the education sector, the school principal is expected to account to the district (Skedsmo & Hubert, 201; South Africa, 1996). In this relationship that the researcher can label as legal, Skedsmo and Hubert (2019:252) note that the principal is the executor of the laws and policies produced by the education department.

2.2.3.2 Accountability and responsibility

Khotami (2017), Shah (2021) and the WHO (2017) add the element of 'responsibility' to the definition of the term accountability. However, McGrath and Whitty (2017) sought to draw a clear distinction between accountability and responsibility. Notably, Hysa and Yunitsyna (2022) mention responsibility and accountability as distinct practices. This sparked the researcher's interest in the significance of responsibility and its relationship with accountability. As already alluded to, McGrath and Whitty

(2017) dedicated their research to finding the distinction between accountability and responsibility. They established that responsibility is more informal than accountability. In their own words, “accepting responsibility” is tantamount to “accepting an obligation to satisfactorily perform a task” (McGrath & Whitty, 2017:697). This aligns with Kenton's (2022) view, who claims that accountability can be “self-assigned” or even result from the task assigned. This explains the reasons put forth by McGrath and Whitty (2017), who emphasise that responsibility needs to be accepted by the actors. According to the researcher's view, the action of ‘accept’ may detach the term from the ‘binding’ responsibility. However, they conclude that the difference between accountability and responsibility lies in the fact that accountability includes liability, whereas responsibility incorporates an obligation into its definition. This draws a line of demarcation between accountability and responsibility.

The ideas of McGrath and Whitty (2017) about accountability and responsibility are indirectly portrayed in the words of Guerin, McCrae and Shephard (2018). “Ministers do not always take responsibility for ensuring that policies have effective accountability arrangements” (Guerin *et al.*, 2018:6). The implication here is that responsibility is a practice one chooses to adopt or accept. The researcher concurs, but holds a different view that the responsibility attached to accountability enhances the understanding of accountability for everyone. However, separating accountability and responsibility as McGrath and Whitty (2017) do is quite understandable. According to Hysa and Yunitsyna (2022), the difference between accountability and responsibility lies in the fact that the former addresses past actions, while the latter focuses on future plans and actions. Simply put, actors take responsibility and then account for their actions to improve the situation.

2.2.3.3 Linking accountability with the theories of existentialism and systems

In an article on educational accountability, Brady (2020:4) explains that a human being is an individual who, upon maturing, develops a sense of belonging through relationships with others. A closer look at this statement would lead one to realise that it refers to the theories of existentialism (Individual) and existentialism (sense of belonging). Attesting to this, Gottlieb (2020:5) opines that “Accountability can deliver on the promises it makes, but it will require more of us-of each of us....” Analysing the expression “more of us-each of us...,” the researcher could infer that accountability

starts with individuals, which aligns with the theory of existentialism. Moreover, being a social custom (Hysa & Yunitsyna, 2022:96; South Africa, 2012:20), accountability involves individuals who exist and work among other individuals or within an organisation, thus attesting to Maturana's systems theory. Supporting this opinion, Hysa and Yunitsyna (2022:96) further demonstrate that accountability is characterised by exchanges of reasoning. This implies being answerable to others.

The theory of existentialism focuses on individuals as people. On the other hand, systems theory involves direct participation by parliaments, committees, and institutions. Moreover, by mentioning teachers, parents, learners, and the community as stakeholders in education (Janmaat, McCowan & Rao, 2016), that is, a system, one attests to the theories of Frankl and Maturana, as developed by Luhmann. This ties in with the notion of accountability to both theories. The link between accountability and the theory of existentialism becomes evident from the statement by Hysa and Yunitsyna (2022), who opine that accountability begins with human beings as individuals and extends to groups. Frankl's theory emphasises individuals and the meaning they attach to various life situations. In the researcher's view, this makes them ready to account to others. In line with the relationships outlined in this sub-section, Shewbridge *et al.*, (2019:10) view the education system as one of the complex systems, given its composition and structure. This confirms the relevance of the theories mentioned to educational accountability.

2.2.4 Theoretical framework on the review of literature

This sub-section aims to clarify what a literature review entails. Chapter 2 thoroughly elucidates the meaning and tenets of a research theory. This establishes a line of demarcation between the theoretical framework and the literature review. The literature review captures the scholarly discussions of all literature related to the phenomenon under study. Thus, the literature review is conducted within the parameters of the theoretical framework discussed and the research question, to focus on the aspects covered in the literature review. In essence, a literature review refers to a discussion of current sources on the phenomenon being studied (Booth, Sutton, Clowes & James, 2021). A theory is believed to be a set of principles that guide the study (Levine & Markowitz, 2023:154). As a result, a theoretical frame funnels sources relevant to the phenomenon under study.

2.2.5 Theoretical framework on research design and methodology employed in the study

The researcher aims to clarify the interpretive and constructive research paradigms, as McMillan and Schumacher (2014:344) realised that the concepts of interpretivist and constructivist paradigms are so closely tied together that they are often used interchangeably in some studies. However, although they are often understood as one, these concepts—namely, the constructivist paradigm and the interpretivist paradigm—are discussed in this sub-section as separate items with the aim of divulging the researcher's perspective. Schwandt (1994) and Mukhles (2020) contend that a constructivist paradigm empowers researchers to construct knowledge as they gather information from a field of study. In this interaction, as alluded to by Jakubik (2011:10), knowledge is produced, moulded, and augmented (Cunningham & Fitzgerald, 1996:36; Mukhles, 2020:79). This clarifies the potential confusion between the two and elucidates what research design and methodology are deemed as in the study. The study is qualitative, as its enquiry involves human beings within an interpretivist design. This is made possible by the theory of existentialism, which values individual opinion (Moore *et al.*, 2017). The interpretivist design calls for verbal engagement alongside observations and document analysis. Thus, the study calls for subject engagement with the data, where the researcher thematically develops the data into meaningful themes.

2.2.6 Theoretical framework on arrangement, analysis and discussion of data

The researcher strives to clarify the importance of clarifying the basic tenets that inform data handling and reorganisation through this sub-section. This is done as required to avoid ambiguity and misunderstanding related to the arrangement, analysis, and discussion of data. Theories on various aspects of the study may not be compromised (Levine & Markowitz, 2024:154). The researcher employed the thematic strategy to organise the generated data into themes. This theory posits that upon coding data (Groeneland & Dana, 2022), themes emerge. This is followed by a synoptic look at the data through the strategy of triangulation. This was done within the latitudes of the theories underpinning the study, namely, existential and systems theories.

2.2.7 Theory on the development of a model for accountability sessions

Models of research vary and are informed by the area of study (Maydiantoro, 2022), depending on the study's findings and research questions. The researcher developed a model that addressed the research questions. The theoretical framework refined the model to make it appropriate to the study undertaken. The end product was the own-source model, linearly arranged, which covers aspects relating to the education system. In relation to the study, this involves teacher unions, CMs, principals, and DHs.

2.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This study employed two theories, namely, the existential theory of Viktor Frankl and Luhmann's theory, which is based on Maturana's theory of systems. Individuals should realise the importance of the meaning attached to every situation. In organisations, people's dedication to tasks set leads to profound feedback systems that are called for. When individuals are healthy in all areas of their lives, the whole organisation performs. In schools, this refers to teacher unions, CMs, principals, and teachers, among others, who are generatively responsible for the well-being of the institution through the principle of accountability. An organisation is a system, and so are the school, the district, and the provincial government. Any discrepancy in their function will adversely affect the national department. Human beings and systems are closely tied through the principle of accountability. Accountability cannot be avoided as a result of the organisation of systems, organisations and governments. Furthermore, Chapter 2 also detailed the theories adopted in the review of literature, data analysis, and formulation of the proposed model of practice for academic accountability.

Chapter 3 discusses related literature deemed appropriate for review. During the review of the literature, Chapter 3 also identifies gaps in the existing research regarding the phenomenon under study.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 examined the literature relevant to the theoretical framework purposefully selected to underpin the study. The study was based on two theories, namely, existentialism and systems theory. The two theories were detailed in Chapter 2. In addition to the two theories, Chapter 2 also discussed the worldview of the concept of accountability as depicted in the literature. The researcher also highlighted the global view of individual countries regarding accountability.

Chapter 3 discusses the literature review pertaining to the phenomenon under study. According to Mudavanhu (2017:190), a literature review is a purposeful description of other scholars' published literature. Concurring with Mudavanhu (2017), Kivunja (2018:48), and Cantero (2019:1) state that the researcher should demonstrate mastery of the literature related to the phenomenon under study. The process involves a critical engagement of the researcher with the literature (Skills for Learning, 2018:1). Furthermore, the researcher is expected to demonstrate an insightful understanding of the literature that pertains to the phenomenon under study (Mudavanhu, 2017). The idea is to convince the reader of the suitability of the topic and to justify the stated research questions. Through the lens of the stated theories, Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive examination of the literature related to the concept of accountability. This literature review draws on both conceptual and empirical studies of the concept of accountability. As a starting point, the researcher discusses the theory surrounding accountability in the education sector. The discussion culminates in the discussion of accountability as a principle practised primarily in the RSA and globally. Accountability is required in all departments and is, therefore, related to politics and democracy (Hunter, 2017).

3.2 THEORISING THE PRINCIPLE OF ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

According to Amazon (2020), the education sector comprises various elements and sub-systems and is, therefore, a system (Amazon, 2020:1). Thus, the education sector

is expected to perform optimally. As already evidenced in Chapter 2, educational accountability is inevitable. Most countries have established legally binding policies that necessitate academic accountability (Skedsmo & Huber, 2019:251).

3.2.1 Education policies and educational accountability

Shewbridge, Fuster and Rouw (2019) generatively opine that policymakers are considered part of the actors in the education department. They note that educational policies are formulated to achieve specific objectives. On the contrary, Alaoui (2022:3) contends that most policies are formulated to address emergent crises. However, policies are related to reformation (UNESCO, 2017c). Concurring with the opinion, Shewbridge *et al.*, (2019:7) add that these policies guide the transformation processes. The importance of policies in the education sector is further endorsed by UNESCO (2017:i). Sawaneh and Fatajo (2022) support this sentiment, adding that the implementation of policies can be maintained through robust processes of monitoring and evaluation. From the stated argument, one can infer that education policies promote educational accountability. Furthermore, the education department must consult with various stakeholders or actors for the policies to be harmoniously acceptable. According to UNESCO (2017c:58), teachers, as implementers of education policies, should be actively engaged in policy formulation. However, Sawaneh and Fatajo (2022:112) caution that policies are worthless unless they are implemented and closely monitored. As Shewbridge *et al.* (2019) note, policies aim to simplify the implementation of the law and the administration of academic accountability.

Notably, Mpungose and Ngwenya (2017) critically examined the impact of policies on educational accountability. They established that policies remain effective when consistently applied (Elgart, n.d.:5; Mpungose & Ngwenya, 2017). Moreover, policies may either be amended or scrapped to meet international demands. Mpungose and Ngwenya (2017) further contend that in the process of policy transformation, education stakeholders, particularly principals, are negatively affected, and work relations may be compromised. The researcher can provide an example of the shift in the USA from the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017:1; Gottlieb, 2020:1). However, Elgart (n.d.:3) defends the contention that ESSA was enacted to address the flaws of the previous Act. Likewise,

educational policies in South Africa were altered several times. Although change affects stakeholders (Mpungose & Ngwenya, 2017), the researcher holds the view that when situations call for improvement, elements (theory of existentialism) (Seidi, 2004) of the education system (systems theory) should embrace change.

3.2.2 Forms of accountability in education

The literature indicates that accountability can be classified into five forms depending on how it is carried out (Spaull, 2015). The types or forms include bureaucratic accountability, professional accountability, vertical accountability, horizontal accountability, and political accountability. Although these forms are discussed below, Reddick, Demir, and Perlman (2020) consider bureaucratic accountability to encompass both vertical and horizontal forms. They further add the fifth form, the hybrid accountability. These forms are discussed below.

3.2.2.1 Bureaucratic accountability

Spaull (2015:18) deems bureaucratic accountability as one of the most effective means of allowing supervisors to exercise control over institutional behaviour. By its nature, bureaucratic management is shaped by its hierarchical structure characterised by rules, regulations and laws (Igbokwe-Ibeto, Osakede & Nwobi, 2020; Skedsmo & Huber, 2019:252; Shewbridge, *et al.*, 2019:10). Moreover, Igbokwe-Ibeto *et al.*, (2020:167) further aver that bureaucratic accountability calls for officials to report on their stewardship. Based on the information provided, the researcher considers the bureaucratic structure to be the simplest due to its strict adherence to a fixed hierarchical management structure. However, as simple as the researcher may deem it to be, Hwang (2017) states that bureaucratic accountability is strengthened by the fact that this form is developed externally by its very nature. The researcher opines that this explains the strictness and tightness of hierarchical accountability. Shewbridge *et al.*, (2019) assert that school academic performance accountability thrives well in a hierarchical structure. However, the researcher believes that academic accountability can still materialise in all forms of accountability.

3.2.2.2 Professional accountability

Teachers are uncontestably professionals (Brady, 2020:3; Representative Council of Learners [SACE], 2020). According to Brady (2020), professionals bear a professional

burden based on their own self-evaluation. Concurring with Brady (2020), Gill (2017:2) contends that peer observation also works well through classroom observations. On the other hand, Mutereko (2019:68) views professional accountability as the simplest way of demanding accountability. Brady (2020:2) concurs and adds that professional accountability involves a shift from a coercive, intimidating moment before the authorities to one that involves self-willing. Thus, the idea of 'self-willing' in professional accountability is assertively stressed (Brady, 2020:4). Professional accountability refers to simply holding professionals accountable for professional duties (Mutereko, 2019:85). With the education department getting fully engaged in teachers' professional development and teachers availing themselves for development, mutual responsibility ensues and quality education becomes unavoidable (Ndou, 2020:4). Uniquely inherent in professional accountability is that teachers feel accountable before they can be called to account in a formal setting (Brady, 2020). Rahmatollahi and Zenouzagh (2021) have a different view on professional accountability. They argue that professional accountability extends to improve learners' academic performance. The researcher concurs with Rahmatollahi and Zenouzagh (2021) and can conclude that these aspects are practical enough to better prepare the teacher to account when required to do so in a "forum" (Reddick *et al.*, 2020:2).

3.2.2.3 Vertical accountability

Khotami (2017:30) and Amazon (2020:5) explain vertical accountability as a way of reporting to one's senior supervisor about one's performance. Although Khotami's 2017 study looked at good governance (Khotami, 2017), the implication one can deduce is that of a school accounting to the circuit. Concurring with this view, Sawir (2017) points to Makassar as an example. The Makassar free education system has developed a reporting channel from schools through various structures to the government (Sawir, 2017:21). Comparing the vertical and bureaucratic accountability, one may realise that these have a lot in common (Skedsmo, 2019). Vertical accountability is likely to thrive well in a bureaucratic or hierarchical structure and management form. According to Lai and Lin (2017:4), vertical accountability is closest to the systems theory, which is realisable in the hierarchical structure where the line of management is clear.

3.2.2.4 Horizontal accountability

Accountability becomes horizontal when the reporting party reports directly to parents or the community (Khotami, 2017:30). According to Reddick *et al.* (2020:7), horizontal accountability links an administrator with the individuals they serve. Following its definition, horizontal accountability involves justifying one's actions horizontally (Amazon, 2020:5). It is essential to remember that, as a school, educators are accountable to stakeholders, such as the community and parents, regarding the learners' performance, among others (South Africa, 2015). While one may be tempted to call administrators' reporting to the public a form of vertical accountability due to their position as community members, Reddick *et al.*, (2020) justify this form as horizontal accountability. They argue that administrators, teachers, and other reporting officials are in office to serve the public and should not be considered superior to the people they serve (Reddick *et al.*, 2020:8).

3.2.2.5 Political accountability

Accountability can also be political (Skedsmo, 2019:252). Attesting to this opinion, Rasmussen and Zou (2014:4) are of the view that accountability is more attached to the political system than any other system. Education is considered an aspect of politics (Skedsmo, 2019). Skedsmo (2019) and Reddick *et al.*, (2020:3) further agree that in a representative government, political accountability is essential, as ministers are required to report on their departments to the cabinet. It is important to note that Greene (1993:218) opined in the period prior to democracy that centralised government does not offer enough room for accountability. Conversely, the researcher acknowledges that a decentralised government offers room for accountability. Moreover, the researcher can opine that political accountability can be applied in schools.

3.2.2.6 Marketing accountability

According to Jita (2021:4), marketing in education refers to the transaction of education as a commodity, calling for financial exchange. Mpungose and Ngwenya (2017) concur, but argue that marketing is a practice originating from the private sector that primarily focuses on production and distribution. Relating this to the systems theory, one would argue that marketing has entered education through perturbation,

which could be duly controlled. Marketing accountability in the education sector has evolved into a global principle (Falabella, 2014; Verger & Skedsmo, 2021:2). The concept of quasi-marketing of schools is implied in the words of Allen and Burgess (2020:6) who claim that “Schools must find it advantageous to be popular.” Parents are recognised not only as stakeholders but also as consumers for learners’ performance. Notably, the ideology of marketing schools is not new, as alluded to by Green (1993) and Falabella (2014). Moreover, Allen and Burgess (2020) raise important issues that are resultant from marketing. Firstly, schools should strive to deliver the advertised outputs. Additionally, with marketing, constructive competition among schools arises. Marketing raises the interest of parents in seeking admission for learners at a particular school. In some countries, the national DoE uses league tables to help schools account for and raise their performance (Verger & Skedsmo, 2021:3). According to this strategy or principle, schools are classified in accordance with their performance over the years. This depicts schools’ consistency and fluctuations in terms of performance, thus attracting or repelling consumers. According to Verger and Skedsmo (2021:3), this is a form of quasi-marketing strategy.

Notwithstanding all that quasi-market accountability can achieve, UNESCO reports the downside of it. The fact that quasi-market accountability often draws the public's attention leads to the marginalisation of economically deprived sections of the population (Vegner & Skedsmo, 2021; UNESCO:xiv). On the other hand, it can also encourage schools to set narrow admission criteria, which may only cater to the psychologically advanced learners (UNESCO, 2017:xiv; Falabella, 2014:12). In this way, the democratic principle of educational equity is compromised (Refer to sub-section 3.2.12). Moreover, quasi-marketing incorporates the private school approach to public education, which may not benefit citizens due to selective admission and high standards of expectation (UNESCO, 2017:107). Mpungose and Ngwenya (2017:4) also argue that the introduction of marketing accountability has had a negative impact on education as a whole. They argue further that it overlooks the holistic approach to education. Considering all the negative outcomes that quasi-marketing can bring, the researcher believes that quasi-marketing accountability only exacerbates marginalisation and leaves many children behind, ultimately leading to doom.

3.2.2.7 Hybrid accountability

All the forms of accountability mentioned above are important, as discussed. Accountability can be escalated to a robust position (Reddick, 2020). In this state, this form involves all the forms deliberated above taken together or at least interchangeably. All forms—formal and informal, legal and political, vertical and horizontal—when employed together, lead to a fully hybrid accountability within and across systems (Reddick, 2020). Given the weakness identified by Spaul (2015), as discussed in sub-section 3.2.2.1, the researcher is of the view that bureaucratic accountability should not be practised as the sole form of accountability but should be complemented by others. As a result, engaging these interchangeably may not be effective. Although the idea of hybrid accountability may seem appealing, the researcher also believes that a policy to this end needs to be developed. The policy guides procedures and processes which may lead to hybrid accountability. Through a co-signed policy that involves all stakeholders, possible union-related reactions can be minimised.

On the other hand, Shewbridge *et al.*, (2019:24) coined a new term for hybrid accountability, consistent with the explanation of Reddick (2020) and Spaul (2015). The concept of ‘multiple accountability’ refers to all forms of accountability employed together. This suggests that, through all the forms, namely, hierarchical, horizontal, professional, and political, the school is accountable to the government, the district, parents, learners, community members, and NGOs.

3.2.3 Areas of accountability in education

Accountability in education does not happen haphazardly. There are areas in which the school principal needs to account.

3.2.3.1 Finances

Brill *et al.*, (2018) recognised finances as one area of accountability. According to these authors, departments and schools should report on financial veracity (Brill *et al.*, 2018:iii). Concurring with the opinion, Dwangu and Mahlangu (2021) state that one of the duties of school principals is to ensure proper management of school finances. According to Khotami (2017), the institution's finances need to be handled appropriately. This requires individuals who receive financial support to report on its

use to the donor (Brill *et al.*, 2018). Concurring with this sentiment, Amazon (2020:1) also notes that the monetary support provided to schools directly calls for accountability regarding the appropriate use of the grant. This is necessary since, by 2015, a study conducted by Spauld had found that an extremely weak association existed between expenditure and results (Spauld, 2015:114). This means that the outcomes in the education sector could not match the expenditure. In such cases, the researcher deems educational accountability necessary, as the state's money has been spent, yet production remains low.

3.2.3.2 Academic performance

Skedsmo (2019) refers to academic performance as an area of accountability in the US education department. In agreement with the idea, Sawir (2017:19) points out that learners' performance should meet a particular target set nationally. On the other hand, Rahmatollahi and Zenouzagh (2021:2) also deem student performance as a matter requiring teacher accountability. This matter is also drawing governmental attention in England (Education Department of the United Kingdom [UK], 2021). Failure to meet the target typically results in formal accountability from those in charge. It is important to note that Sawir (2017) equates meeting the target with quality education. Conversely, when the school meets its target, it is considered a sign that it is offering quality education. In the RSA, meeting the target is primarily measured through academic performance in the Grade 12 class, the exit class of basic education (Msila, 2014:259; Mohokare, 2021). The researcher deems the practice unfair since it focuses on only one grade, whereas basic schooling progresses learners through 12 grades.

3.2.3.3 Other areas of accountability

According to Rahmatollahi and Zenouzagh (2021:2), accountability in education encompasses health, employment, transportation, school management, educator training, and learners. Brill *et al.*, (2018:2) concur and add school safety to the list. With learners, the issue of academic performance may be inherently considered. However, the issue of healthcare is part of learners' well-being, which makes them readily receptive to education-related matters. The researcher deems the issues of employment, transportation, and teacher education as matters that can be addressed by both the provincial department and the national department. The matter of school

administration concerns the principals and SMTs. The school offers various programmes, including teaching, feeding, and a learners' code of conduct, among others. According to Brill *et al.* (2018:2), learners' academic performance and school evaluation are fundamental areas that call for profound accountability.

3.2.4 Characteristics of accountability

According to Hwang (2017), accountability has five dimensions: transparency, liability, controllability, responsibility, and responsiveness. Kenton adds effective communication to the list. The list is further complemented by Khotami (2017:31), who adds justice, democracy, efficiency, and integrity. On the issue of transparency, Khotami (2017), Hwang (2017) and Kenton (2022) all share the same sentiment. On the other hand, Khotami (2017) and Hwang (2017) both agree on the inclusion of responsiveness and responsibility as two distinct dimensions. The researcher noticed that although these characteristics are expressed individually.

3.2.4.1 Transparency

The importance of transparency in accountability is endorsed by Shah (2021:2), Baraka (2020:33) and Onah, Eteng and Adie (2021:129). It is this element that leads to the sharing of valuable information between the actors and recipients of services. Dossing, Mokeki and Weideman (2011:10) concur with this sentiment and further opine that transparency and accountability are incompatible with corruption and poor governance. Based on this view, the researcher can conclude that corruption is the opposite of transparency. The importance of transparency in educational accountability is further emphasised in the words of Gill (2017:2), who opines that professional accountability encompasses the transparency of practice. It is important to note that this statement directly links transparency with professional accountability. While Onah *et al.*, (2021:129) opine that accountability and transparency are interrelated, Hwang (2017) deems transparency as one of the key factors influencing accountability in education. Concerning transparency, Khotami (2017:31) concurs that transparency can become one of the cornerstones of accountability in a democratic country. Moreover, Amazon (2020:1) and Onah *et al.*, (2021:129) aver that accountability taken with accountability provides transparency to all stakeholders about the methods followed and the output made by the actor. Based on the

information provided above, the researcher assumes that accountability and transparency are parallel, meaning one cannot replace the other. The researcher also believes that accountability sessions in the Motheo District ought to be characterised by much transparency for actors to achieve their intended objectives with the implementation thereof.

3.2.4.2 Effective communication

Amazon (2020:3) maintains that for accountability to be effective and clear, attainable goals should be set. The actors should be engaged verbally in discussing the expected goals before they can be held accountable. They should be made aware of their responsibilities and the accountability procedure. Effective communication is essential for engaging actors in the system and fostering the ensuing accountability. Amazon (2020:5) and Kenton (2022) further argue that all forms of accountability, whether hierarchical or horizontal, formal or informal, can employ the principle of effective communication to enhance efficiency. Motshekga (DBE, 2013) explains the value of communication throughout the DBE structure. An example is the circuit office, which serves as the primary point of contact or communication between schools and the district office. What one immediately learns here is that a line of management can be used as a strategy to monitor, evaluate, and communicate within an institution. It becomes clear to the researcher that failure to communicate can compromise the value of accountability in the institution and throughout the system. This means that the formulation of policies and their implementation can become the generative responsibility of the actors when consultations have been conducted and communication has been transparent. The researcher believes that effective collaboration among stakeholders regarding policy formulation and implementation can foster a sense of co-ownership among stakeholders.

3.2.4.3 Democracy

As Khotami (2017:31) indicated, democracy is an element of accountability, while Asmal (2001) viewed it as the other way around; that accountability characterises open democracy. Given these contradictory ideas, the researcher is left with the impression that accountability and democracy are equivalent aspects and that one cannot exist sufficiently without the other. One qualifies the other. Shewbridge *et al.*, (2019) note that policymaking in the education sector requires the direct involvement of various

stakeholders for it to be implemented effectively. This is considered a direct element of democracy. Furthermore, decentralising management and governance to become school-based (SASA, 1996) is also evident in the element of democracy in educational accountability (Shewbridge *et al.*, 2019:9). According to Hunter (2017), accountability is a principle of democracy. The primary importance of accountability lies in ensuring the assurance of service delivery (Amazon, 2020). It requires members of parliament to account for their departments. According to Asmal (2001) and Msila (2014), the concept of democracy is closely tied to accountability in the educational sector. As already alluded to, educational accountability protects democracy at all levels of government, including schools.

3.2.4.4 Justice

The SASA (1996), drawing on the Constitution, promotes justice as an essential element of democracy. This is evident in the call for every learner in the school-going age to be at school (South Africa, 1996). South African and some European schools offer education in the “framework of democracy, human rights and social justice” (Besson, Huber, Mompoin-Gaillard & Rohmann, 2015:7). A close study of the document led the researcher to the impression that in every sphere of the democratic country, democracy, human rights, and social justice go together. According to Alaoui (2022:4), social justice, as a component of educational accountability, is a governmental endeavour to address social inequality in all its forms. On the other hand, Khotami (2017) views social justice as the element of accountability. Thus, one would view the call to formal accountability as a demand for justice. However, Asmal (2001) views both accountability and justice as integral to the values of education. Consequently, the researcher is left with the impression that learning and teaching are actions that ensure social justice, while accountability requires one to defend the actions taken to ensure that justice has been achieved. When this viewpoint is adopted, the researcher views current academic accountability sessions as a necessary advancement of social justice in the Motheo District and the Free State province as a whole.

3.2.4.5 Liability

Hwang (2017) and Rahmatollahi and Zenouzagh (2021:2) agree that accountability can be examined through the element of liability. Concurring with the idea, Khotami

(2017:31) explains that accountability avouches that someone is liable to another. The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2022) explains 'liable' as being "subject to appropriation or attachment." This leaves one with the impression that liability in accountability connotes two or more parties working together as part of a system (Moore *et al.*, 2017), where one party reports to another. Thus, the efficiency of one benefits the other. When one examines the principles of Batho-Pele, it becomes easy to realise that liability cannot occur without one being held accountable. According to the Batho-Pele principle, as asserted by Khotami (2017:31), one quickly realises that governmental departments are more answerable to the community they serve. Thus, academic accountability is a required practice as advanced by mutual liability.

3.2.4.6 Integrity

Integrity in educational accountability is closely tied to the acceptable use of school finances (Brill *et al.*, 2018:iii). On the contrary, Dossing, Mokeki and Weideman (2011:5) are of the view that integrity in the education sector can extend beyond financial accountability. They hold that educational integrity involves the actions of the actors that are consistent with ethical standards or applicable laws. Given this definition, in conjunction with the perspective of Brill *et al.* (2011), the researcher opines that financial integrity is only one aspect of educational integrity among many components that comprise the educational system. This makes the view of Brill *et al.* (2011) understandable; they argue that both individuals and institutions can uphold their integrity by simply adhering to applicable laws, policies, and principles. The researcher could identify both the aspects of existentialism and Systems theories in Brill *et al.*, (2011). Thus, existentialism and systems theory can undergird policies to ensure that everyone in the education system is accountable to one another.

3.2.4.7 Efficiency

The school is considered a system (Amazon, 2020; Budrich, 2021). Every system is expected to operate efficiently (Moore *et al.*, 2017). Amazon (2020) notes that the evaluation, control, and monitoring of school processes can lead to the efficient functioning of the school as a system. Consequently, quality of education ensues (Sawaneh & Fatajo, 2022). In line with this opinion, Khotami (2017) further suggests that all processes in the school should be interconnected to enhance the system's efficiency and ensure valuable accountability. This is further made possible by

encouraging the actors in the system to fulfil their distinct roles excellently (Amazon, 2020:4). However, Jita (2021) offers a different view. She opines that efficiency in education, as it relates to accountability, refers to the alignment of DBE educational goals with the actual performance of the school. The researcher concurs and adds that if actors could each concentrate on their own roles without unnecessary overlap, the system's functioning and accountability could be significantly more effective. This highlights the need for efficiency in all steps of accountability as practised by the Motheo Education District. When embraced by everyone in the education system, efficiency is likely to eliminate threats and harsh reactions.

3.2.4.8 Controllability

Control is the aspect of accountability. This becomes evident in the study by Khotami (2017:31), who asserts that accountability is achieved through joint control by various stakeholders. In line with this idea, Sawir (2019) links controllability with supervision as key characteristics of accountability. To effectively control performance, one must consistently supervise and be supervised. According to Amazon (2020), it becomes clear that the concept of evaluating processes is closely tied to control and supervision. Activities, processes, and outcomes are some of the key elements that should be subject to control for accountability to be effective. The researcher believes that consistent supervision is likely to facilitate accountability. Moreover, it becomes clear that the concept of control involves two parties, thereby underscoring the value of systems theory in the education sector. Without a system, education is likely to become immeasurable, and as a result, its value will not be open to improvement. Regarding the phenomenon under study, the researcher notices the need for observing line functions in matters related to control and monitoring within the system.

3.2.4.9 Responsibility

Much has been said about the aspect of responsibility. According to Brady (2020), the term responsibility in education has two dimensions. Firstly, it addresses what one is responsible for. For example, the researcher could establish that the school leaders and teachers are responsible for the performance of learners (Motshekga, 2022:2) and school finances (SASA, 1996). On the contrary, Brady (2020:1) adds that the most relevant issue schools are responsible for is the subject matter. The second dimension is that of stakeholders to whom teachers and principals are responsible (Brady, 2020).

Based on the provided information, the researcher concludes that schools are responsible to education stakeholders for the academic performance of learners.

3.2.4.10 Responsiveness

Shah (2021:23), Hwang (2017) and Khotami (2017) agree about the inclusion of 'responsiveness' as a principle or cornerstone of general accountability. However, Shah (2021:23) notes that responsiveness operates unhindered where management is decentralised, that is, in a democratic environment. Notably, the concepts of responsiveness and accountability are mentioned together (Shah, 2021:5) as 21st century principles of decentralised government. Responsiveness can be viewed as the actor's reaction to emergent challenges, such as the 2020 outbreak of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in school environments (Siakalli, Mousoulidou, Christodoulou, Savvidou & Kouppa, 2022:412). According to Brady (2020:2), professional accountability is directly linked to responsiveness. Thus, in relation to educational accountability, the researcher opines that responsiveness connotes the teacher holding themselves accountable without coercion, as in professional accountability. On the other hand, Brady argues that responsiveness can be classified as a value that people independently choose to develop (Brady, 2020:3). Examining this view critically, the researcher can infer that responsiveness is purposively acquired; that is, one deliberately undertakes to develop oneself. This is directly linked to the theory of existentialism, which posits that individuals make resolutions to attach meaning to every challenge they encounter (Moore *et al.*, 2017). Schools' position in the system (or district) occurs as entities expected to address their own challenges as they appear.

3.2.4.11 Continuity

According to Khotami (2017:30) and the European Commission (2018b), continuity is one of the processes of accountability. This is realisable in the statement made by the DBE. It is stated that, for the sake of maintaining continuity, the 2014 vision was not changed and is continued as the 2030 vision (DBE, 2020:vii). The perception of accountability as a continuous process is also buttressed by Elgart (n.d.). The impression one gets is that accountability is a continuous process and should not be a one-time shot. When done continuously, accountability produces mutual trust. Khotami (2017:30) further opines that continuity is closely tied to consistency.

Conversely, the researcher can opine that when robbed of continuity, accountability becomes a useless tool. Elgart (n.d.:7) supports this opinion and adds that accountability can be maintained when based on both tests and contextual factors. Since accountability is a governmental policy informed by the global approach to education (Verger, Novelli & Altinyelken, 2018), it can be disturbed by a change in leadership and a reshuffling of the structures of leadership composition (European Commission, 2018b:70). Sustainable leadership is deemed the key issue leading to continuous accountability (European Commission, 2018b). Given these two perspectives, the researcher considers the element of accountability as an ongoing and uncompromising process of holding actors accountable. This should encourage educators to adopt accountability as a permanent practice in education.

3.2.4.12 Decision-making

Shah (2021:11) and Abadzi (2020) highlight another aspect of accountability, specifically decision-making. It results from decentralised management (Shah, 2021:11). This refers to the latitude of principals to make decisions, allowing for accountability (Abadzi, 2020:72). What, then, would these decisions entail? Abadzi (2020) explains that principals should decide on how and when to delegate to colleagues. Abadzi (2020) asserts that accountability is always based on the decisions made by the people within the institution, but presented by one person, who may be the principal or a delegate. Shah (2021:13) supports this idea by stating that when actors are offered the space to participate in management, decision-making becomes a generative responsibility. A synoptic study of decision-making as an element of accountability, combined with Frankl's theory, led the researcher to notice that accountability and Frankl's theory of existentialism are closely related. The theory of existentialism teaches that a person finds meaning in decision-making about things that concern them (Devoe, 2012:7). The researcher can thus infer that decision-making is a crucial aspect of accountability, and actors can still devise meaning from it. Thus, schools based in the Motheo District and elsewhere in the Free State province should be prepared to practice autonomous management characterised by the power to choose what to act on.

3.2.5 Social accountability versus educational accountability

Education is trusted for combating social inequalities (Caturianas, Užpelkienė & Migliarin, 2017) and bringing about social change (Chakraborty, 2018; Bhat, 2016:17). According to Caturianas *et al.* (2017), these inequalities encompass gender, health, and socioeconomic disparities, among others. On the other hand, communal change includes change in the environment, institutions, and relations (Chakraborty, 2018: 2). Based on the argument, the researcher concludes that education is an aspect of society. This view is also expressed by Chakraborty (2018) and Bhat (2016:17), who regard education as an active agent of social development. Given the position of a social agent, the researcher finds education embedded within social interactions, leading to both personal and social growth. According to Chakraborty (2018), education and social change are closely related. The determining factor, namely, the socioeconomic statuses learners find themselves experiencing, is not embraced; therefore, educational accountability is eventually rendered inadequate (Hevia & Vergara-Lope, 2019:6).

Hevia and Vergara-Lope (2019:8) further draw a line of demarcation between educational accountability and their view of social accountability. As a point of departure, their view centres on the unavoidable need for governments to embrace constitutional rights. Sharing their sentiments, the researcher fully concurs with their view of social accountability. While educational accountability requires educational actors to justify their own decisions and implementations, social accountability prompts citizens and communities to demand educational accountability from the school community (Hevia & Vergara-Lope, 2016). Common to both forms is the involvement of social relationships (Rasmussen & Zou, 2014:2; Reddick, Demir & Perlman, 2020:2). This leaves the researcher with the impression that successful educational accountability and social accountability could lead to justified actions by the educational community when achievable goals are reasonably set.

3.2.6 Accountability and support

According to Elmore's 2006 study (Skedsmo & Hubert, 2019:252), accountability should be reciprocal. Elmore and Mutereko (2019:85) further opine that accountability should be based on support. Such support can take the form of equipping educators

in the workforce. In-service training and workshops are some of the programmes teachers may be subjected to in an effort to enhance their knowledge, skills, and competency. According to Ndou (2020:13), the failure to capacitate teachers through in-service training and workshops is partly one of the factors that led to low academic performance in the Limpopo Province of the RSA. The researcher concurs and can opine that support should precede formal accountability. Besides capacitating educators, support can also mean providing educators with resources (Ndou, 2020). Mutereko (2019:91) further opines that training and support undermine compliance-based accountability and promote performance-based accountability. It is crucial for the district to provide sufficient support for its officials to hold teachers accountable.

3.2.7 Management of school-based academic performance

Abadzi (2020) highlights the importance of school-based performance in relation to the principal's role. The principal, along with various stakeholders, may collaborate to devise strategies for improving results. According to Msila (2014, 2022), School-Based Management (SBM) can collaborate with teacher unions and other stakeholders to achieve significant improvements in overall school performance. According to Msila (2022:266), teacher unionism and politics are feared and can be effectively employed in school management processes to improve schools' academic results. Msila (2022) further notes that policymaking can also be done in collaboration with teacher union members at the school, district, and provincial levels to increase the feeling of co-ownership of school policies among teacher unions. Conversely, school managers who disregard teacher unions or view them through a negative lens only minimise the school's performance. The researcher concludes that the involvement of all stakeholders can lead to better academic performance.

3.2.8 The relationship between accountability and equity

Asmal (2001) recognised equity as one of the values of education and democracy (Asmal, 2001). Jita (2021:3) explains equity as the action of ensuring all learners reach a minimum level of aptitude in core subjects. Complementing this definition, Naslund-Hadley and Arcia (2021) argue that equity is based on the various statuses of schools, as schools are not all the same. This affects the resources needed (Naslund-Hadley & Arcia, 2021), the nature of the human resources required, and consequently, the

academic performance of learners is likely to differ. In such cases, accountability is required. To be fully accountable, the provision of resources and financial grants should be based on equity (Naslund-Hadley & Arcia, 2021; SASA (ss 4(34))). Based on this, the researcher can infer that since resources are provided equitably, accountability should also be provided equitably.

On the other hand, schools are situated in different areas. This refers to the socioeconomic challenges that each school experiences (Shewbridge *et al.*, 2019:19; Auler, 2021). A closer study of South Africa (1996) supports this, hence the classification of schools into Sections 20, 21, and partly Section 21 schools. Schools are financially supported in accordance with the section in which they are classified. However, Auler (2021:2) argues that equity goes beyond these classifications to involve social, emotional, and academic support. This means that all schools should endeavour to involve all sections of the DoE to meet the needs of all learners. The researcher concurs with Auler (2021:4) that, where equity is evenly applied, the academic performance is considerably elevated and academic accountability becomes factually possible.

3.2.9 Accountability and the school curriculum

The literature discussed in the study demonstrates a global acknowledgement of the concept of accountability. As previously stated, accountability improves learners' performance (Dizom-Ross, 2018), amongst other things. However, Brill, Grayson, Kuhn and O'Donnell (2018) demonstrate the profound impact that accountability can have on the curriculum. Where accountability is based on one-shot tests, accountability can likely be one-sided. According to Brill *et al.* (2018), some subjects may be disadvantaged in the development process, which can hinder their ability to meet the standards of the district or examining body. For example, in the case of NCLB, it was demanded that only Mathematics and Reading be assessed on the same standard, the end of which called for formal accountability (Gill, Lerner & Meosky, 2016:57). Aren't all subjects contributing equally to the learners' progression? Are the subjects not equally viewed? In the RSA, various subjects have peculiar weightings (DBE, 2020:41). Does this put subjects with high weightings in a better position, calling for a higher level of accountability? If that is the case, the researcher concurs with Brill *et al.*, (2018) and Gill *et al.*, (2016) on the negative impact that accountability can have

on the curriculum. Brill *et al.*, (2018:ii) contend that skewed accountability, targeting particular subjects, may affect planning and policy formulations to the detriment of other subjects, thus negatively impacting the general curriculum.

3.2.10 Effects of early accountability

Given all the discussions about accountability, especially in education, one would not deny the impact that accountability can have on general education if it were implemented earlier in learners' school life (Henry, McNeill & Harbatkin, 2022). This would lead to accountability becoming a cultural norm in the education sector, particularly in schools. Mohokare (2021) established in his study that the DD for Motheo District in the Free State expressed concern about the number of learners who enter the basic education system at the Grade 1 entry level, but do not all reach the Grade 12 exit level. The researcher concurs with Henry *et al.* (2022), who contend that introducing accountability earlier in the primary school system, with its peak effect in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase, would have a positive effect on the entire schooling system. However, Henry *et al.*, (2022:190) also established that accountability implemented in the early stages can lead to a focus on tested grades and the shifting of low-achieving teachers to untested grades, thus causing more trouble than the intended solutions (Henry *et al.*, 2022:191). Notwithstanding this, the researcher believes that when early accountability is applied appropriately and equitably, it will inevitably lead to the early identification of gaps and problems.

3.2.11 The value of the element of trust in educational accountability

The literature established the need for trust (Abadzi, 2020:74; Baraka, 2020:32; Hwa, 2021; Ehren, Paterson & Baxter, 2020:4; Smith & Benavot, 2019) and mutual trust needed in social accountability, which also includes the education sector (Hevia & Vergara-Lope, 2019:6). Hwa (2021:237) views 'trust' as an insight that the trusted is competent. Based on this information, the researcher considers it essential for the education department to ensure that their clients, namely parents, are satisfied. Hevia and Vergara-Lope (2019:18) refer to this type of trust as public trust. The role that 'trust' plays in improving accountability is explained by Smith and Benavot (2019). In an analogy to a machine, trust is likened to the oil that enables the machine to function efficiently (Smith & Benavot, 2019:197). Hevia and Vergara-Lope (2019:33) opine that

public trust can be improved and mistrust fomented. Another point to note is that public trust in education is attainable, as exemplified by Finland and Singapore (Hwa, 2021:223). However, this is not the case with the RSA, where trust is lacking in education (Ehren *et al.*, 2020:4). When one examines the strategies peculiarly practised in Finland and Singapore, one realises that each country should develop its own area-bound strategies. According to Hwa (2021:224), Finland's strategy commences with teacher training. In Contrast, in Singapore, teachers are subjected to a high-level performance management system, including penalties and rewards. The researcher cautions against placing too much trust, as it should not replace the need for control.

3.2.12 The procedure of conducting academic accountability

Although the idea of accountability is important, the procedure followed to require accountability from stakeholders can spoil it. The researcher concurs with Schleckser (2018) that a clear tool should be used to control accountability, especially where schools must account for academic performance, given the socioeconomic status of learners who converge at school. Biesta (2004) suggests that a formal relationship needs to be established between the service provider and the recipient of the service. This leaves the researcher with the impression that schools are bound to formally account for their own actions. According to Brill *et al.* (2018:iii), for accountability to be effective, three key considerations should be taken into account. Firstly, those who are responsible should be clearly informed about their responsibilities. Secondly, clear and attainable objectives should be set across the curriculum. This implies that all subjects should be treated equally or at least equitably. The objectives should be clearly communicated to those in the field. Lastly, the criteria used to assess performance should be transparently communicated. The researcher embraces these ideas. The researcher is of the view that the third step also refers to a tool used to measure performance. The idea is that those who are accountable should have access to the tool at all times before the day of accountability. According to the researcher's assessment, these steps can make accountability simple and non-judgemental.

3.2.13 The impact of academic accountability on teachers

Policies associated with school-based administration have a positive impact on academic excellence (Sumarsonoa *et al.*, 2019:187). Sumarsonoa *et al.*, (2019) further established a link between SBM and mandatory accountability. Komba (2017:1) raises a crucial point: learners do not end up requesting admission to a particular school; rather, schools are chosen carefully, which poses a challenge to principals and teachers. Newsroom (2016) reported the unfortunate incident that led to the responsible teacher's immediate dismissal. The teacher had recorded false marks in a bid to meet the required quality standard.

A critical study of the report by Baker, Barton, Darling-Hammond, Haertel, Ladd, Linn, Ravitch, Rothstein, Shavelson and Shepard (2010) examines how teachers' performances are evaluated in relation to learners' academic performance. In addition, a recent study conducted in Chile by Hofflinger and Von Hippel (2020) explains how principals attempt to avoid tense accountability sessions demanded by the education department. On the other hand, teachers may feel helpless since learners' performance where test-based accountability is implemented may call for the subject teachers' rewards or penalties (Rahmatollahi & Zenouzagh, 2021:2). The researcher deems this as an unfair move since it is likely for learners to perform differently in accordance with the demands of various subjects.

3.2.14 The importance of academic performance accountability

Khandpekar (2016:32) notes that education is significant for both individual development and population growth. One can infer from this that, through academic accountability, various education actors should share a common goal: providing skills and professions that benefit all. In the RSA, the National Development Plan (NDP) states that by 2030, schools should be at a particular state and education at a world standard (Manuel, 2011). As early as 2016, the Nigerian education department viewed accountability as one factor which, if integrated firmly in education processes, can take the country forward (Dangara, 2016:265). In concurrence with this view, Onah *et al.*, (2021) also bear witness to this state of accountability in Nigeria. In support of this view, Ng (2019) argues that accountability in education can help the country rank high in global standards. The statement implies that countries yearn for international status

and global recognition, and education is considered one of the factors that could lead to this. As previously discussed, accountability combined with education can lead to the desired outcomes (UNESCO, 2017). Whilst the researcher concurs with the stated importance, one can argue that countries should be cautious about teaching that focuses on outcomes rather than content.

3.2.15 Test-based accountability

One form of academic accountability is test-based academic accountability. According to Amazon (2020) and Rahmatollahi and Zenouzagh (2021:3), it is outcomes-based since it focuses on the outcomes of standardised tests. This led to a comparison of performances on the same tests in previous years (Gill, 2017:1). For this reason, Ketab (2016:134) argues that educational accountability is closely related to marketing or economic accountability. This raises concern for the researcher, as strategies leading to performance in these tests may be overlooked. It is important to note that in countries like the US, test-based performance is rewarded (Brill *et al.*, 2018), while falling below the required performance is penalised by school closure or the replacement of the principal. Whilst the researcher deems the penalty for low performance as harsh and unjustified, the German education department does not. Blamed for lower performance following the lifting of penalties and rewards associated with academic performance, Gill (2017:2) and Elgart (n.d.:2) share the same opinion that test-based accountability has some weaknesses. The practice is one-sided (Elgart, n.d.:2) since it may focus on certain identified schools, whereas all schools should be evaluated for development-bringing evaluation. Secondly, test-based accountability does not offer opportunities for practice development (Gill, 2017:2). Moreover, Mpungose and Ngwenya (2017) concur that test-based accountability hinders institutions' holistic development, as tests or examinations are merely a product of the institution's systemic functioning. The researcher concurs that test-based accountability is interested only in the outcome, when there are also inputs and processes within the institution.

3.2.16 Data-based accountability

Baraka (2020:68) maintains that monitoring and accountability are possible when based on concrete, precise data. This leads to reliable decision-making (Gottlieb,

2020:1) and provides facts and evidence for reporting. In the South African education sector, educational accountability was ineffective before 2011 (Spaull, 2015). The primary challenge was the lack of data to hold educators accountable. According to Spaull (2015:116), this led to the introduction of nationally standardised tests that could be used to generate the necessary data. This explains the importance of data, which should inform educational and general accountability. According to Jita (2021) and Amazon (2020), the current democratic era calls for data generation to enable accountability to thrive. Benefits include simplifying accountability in education (Skedsmo, 2019; Verger & Skedsmo, 2021) and informing formal procedures of teachers' performance evaluation (Gottlieb, 2020:3). Moreover, it provides the basis on which we can base our plans (Sawir, 2017:15; Gade & Mbude, 2017:4). However, Mpungose and Ngwenya (2017) sternly warn against quantifying unquantifiable data that misinforms the actors and eventually affects the value of support needed.

On the other hand, Holloway (2020:3,4) notes that data-based accountability undermines the teaching fraternity's professionalism and may introduce a third party into the system. The researcher considers this the perturbation referred to by systems theory, which underlies the study. The FSDoE boasts itself as a data-driven department. This can be realised by visiting the FSDoE website on www.ddd.fsdoe.fs.gov.za. Given these facts, the researcher values data generation for accountability and believes that both quantifiable and unquantifiable data are equally informative. Although the use of data enables educational accountability, the ESRC (2020:3) argues that it increases the volume of work teachers must complete within the specified period of time. However, when supervised strictly, the burden would not be much as information may be compiled at a time (ESRC, 2020). When learners are not supervised and information is needed, their learning time may be adversely affected.

3.2.17 The role of education stakeholders in academic performance

Msila (2014) states that academic performance is a joint venture among all stakeholders in the education sector. The researcher views this as a direct reference to the education sector as a system with stakeholders as its elements. This is the idea indirectly assented to by Spurrier (2020), who views the local public school system. As discussed earlier, a system (in this case, the education department) depends on

the well-being of its parts (that is, the stakeholders of education). In the school, these stakeholders include, but are not limited to, parents, learners, and the community (Spurrier *et al.*, 2020:3). Nevertheless, the study by Dangara (2016) also adds NGOs as another stakeholder. Despite these parties being stakeholders, everyone in the community and across the country is affected by the education sector (Dangara, 2016:269). According to Dangara's view, this makes everyone responsible, leaving the researcher with the impression that if it affects one, one consequently becomes accountable. Additionally, Brady (2020) and Rahmatollahi and Zenouzagh (2021:2) note that schoolteachers are responsible for informing stakeholders, including learners and the community, about the subject matter. This necessitates a discussion on the roles of education stakeholders in academic performance.

3.2.17.1 The district

The role of the education district in every province is outlined in the policy developed in line with the National Education Policy Act (NEPA) of 1996 (DBE, 2013). All districts are responsible for ensuring quality education in their areas of jurisdiction (DBE, 2013). The literature also infers that quality education is closely linked to educational accountability. This becomes clear with the realisation that the DD is accountable for the educational performance of all schools, principals, teachers, school governing bodies and learners (DBE 2013, ss 4(42)). The districts are answerable to the HoD in the province, who, in turn, is responsible for staffing and resourcing districts according to their specific needs (DBE, 2013). In the process, it is no wonder that the DD may, in turn, demand performance from school-based officials through formal accountability (DBE, n.d.). Inferring from this, the researcher opines that schools are the face of the district offices under which they serve.

3.2.17.2 Teachers

The role of teachers as stakeholders in education cannot be overstated. According to Khandpekar (2016:32) and Haag (2020), the main functionaries of the education sector are teachers. Concurring with Khandpekar (2016), the researcher holds the view that academic performance is directly related to teachers' performance since they engage directly with the recipients of education, namely, the learners. Dangara (2016) also contends that teachers are accountable for their own work. According to USAID (2014) and SACE (2020:8), the primary work of teachers is the delivery of content. If

teachers are to be held accountable, they should be held accountable for the primary duty of delivering content. The researcher also considers this a key justification for those who require accountability for academic performance from teachers.

3.2.17.3 Parents

Parents are also stakeholders in education (Komba, 2017; Haag, 2020:1; Spurrier *et al.*, 2020:3). Mbiti (2016:120) asserts that parental involvement can significantly contribute to learners' academic performance. The researcher views this relationship between parents and the school as one of mutual accountability. This is supported by Haag (2020), who claims that, in one way or another, parents become aware of teachers who do not attend to learners, who are absent from school, and who do not teach; yet, the doors leading to accountability demand are closed. According to Mbiti (2016) and Zarei *et al.* (2019), parents can contribute to their children's education by clearly voicing their expectations. Quietly, parents have the latitude to transfer children from one school to another based on the school's performance. Mbiti (2016) views these practices as evidence of the need for parental accountability in South African schools. Mbiti's study also discovered that increased parental concern in schools could advance academic accountability (Mbiti, 2016:120). In South Africa, the participation of parents in schools is provided for by Section 84 of the SASA Act of 1996. The SASA (ss 23 (2) (a)) provides for membership of parents in the SGB. Based on this information, the researcher can conclude that parents are stakeholders and members of the education system.

3.2.17.4 Learners

Learners are the most important stakeholders of education (Mohokare, 2021). They are not merely stakeholders but are also recipients of education. One would state that education is targeted at learners. The importance of accountability in education is apparent when one realises that learners from families of educated parents are likely to pursue professional jobs (Caturianas, 2017:6). Since learners from positive socioeconomic and psychological backgrounds have the advantage of performing well (Caturianas, 2017), the researcher believes that accountability covers those from negative socioeconomic and psychological backgrounds. In addition, learners are individuals who, together with the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) and other stakeholders, are responsible for their own learning (Radebe, 2019; Ayish & Deveci,

2019:224). The researcher can, consequently, conclude that learners are accountable for their own learning. Oddly, some countries have developed systems of accountability that allow learners to evaluate the performance of teachers (Gill, 2017:4). However, the researcher holds a contrary view, suggesting that learners may take advantage of the system by favouring some teachers over others. Thus, the system can be abused since learners' levels of understanding differ.

3.2.17.5 Community

Every school is located in a specific area. As Meier and Marais (2018:116) note, the school serves the community. Spurrier *et al.*, (2020) view communities as taxpayers. As a result, one would deem the community as people who indirectly provide funds, which make education possible. The researcher believes that the school is directly indebted, or at least accountable, to taxpayers who make schooling possible. When one takes an analytical look at Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (Botha, 2013), it is quickly realised that both the school and the community are mentioned together as factors that influence children as individuals. The impression the researcher is left with is that both the community and the school can work together to influence the individual.

Moreover, in relation to the phenomenon under study, the school can be expected to account to the community for the contribution made to the child's academic development. The quality of learning and teaching campaign requires the community to also observe school performance and report challenges to appropriate authorities (DOE, n.d.:9). This suggests that the relation between the school and the community towards the academic development of the child is both mutual and reciprocal. This explains the same feeling that each partner should have towards the other and the beneficiary, namely, the learner. Whilst teachers are expected to account for learners' academic performance, the community should ensure that every child is at school (DOE, n.d.:9). In addition, Vishnoi (2021) views schools as microcosms of the community they serve. This makes the school part of the larger system and aligns with the systems theory. This suggests that the community is incomplete without schooling. On the other hand, the ineffective system of schooling has an adverse impact on community life.

3.2.17.6 Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

As stakeholders in the education sector, NGOs are responsible for providing programmes that develop learning (Khandpekar, 2016:32). According to Mhaule (2025), the DBE benefits from the support of many of them. Consequently, the researcher views the role of NGOs as the support which leads to the thriving of education. The researcher believes that NGOs can be considered as part of the education system once they make their contributions. The idea stems from their role as vehicles for alleviating poverty and providing emotional and psychosocial support (Khandpekar, 2016:40). The DBE has long acknowledged the importance of NGOs in the education system (DBE, n.d.). According to Angie Motshekga, former Minister of Basic Education (DBE), Professional Educators Union (QLTC) builds on active interaction with stakeholders in business and community organisations to ensure that no school is left without the support it requires (DBE, n.d.:5). Thus, one is left with the impression that the DBE alone cannot achieve the desired results without the intervention of non-educational organisations.

3.2.17.7 School Governing Body (SGB)

According to the SACE, the SGB supports the curriculum (SACE, 2020:7). However, the researcher is concerned about its limited term of office, as the 3-year term can expire before a lasting effect is assured (SACE, 2020; Meier & Marais, 2018:193). On the other hand, one cannot deny the need for financial resources in the operation of the school curriculum. Finances are 100% supportive of the curriculum. Where schools have been permitted to manage their own affairs according to Sections 20 or 21 (SASA, 1996), SGBs work with the principal to ensure schooling is wholly supported. This highlights the urgent need for effective financial management, which SGBs undertake on behalf of the school (Dwangu & Mahlangu, 2021). Consequently, the SGB can also be held accountable for the duties entrusted to them to ensure that academic programmes are not hindered. As Meier and Marais (2018:190) elucidate, the SGB is answerable to parents, learners, and teachers.

3.2.17.8 Teacher unions

According to Msila (2014, 2022), the teacher unions are also responsible for better academic results in schools (Msila, 2014; Msila, 2022). This was discovered through

case studies based on sampled schools in the country. However, the study examined a few schools where principals were active union members holding senior positions in the union offices. The researcher is of the view that the positive results established by Msila (2022) might be influenced by the positions the principals held in teacher unions. Nevertheless, Han and Maloney (2021) contend that, in their pursuit of better working conditions, teacher unions may indirectly enhance teacher performance by achieving their demands, which could ultimately lead to improved learner performance (Han & Maloney, 2021:44).

3.2.17.9 Circuit Managers (CMs)

The system of basic education is never complete without the office that bridges schools with the district and the HoD. Their work involves executing the duties of the office higher than theirs in schools, under the supervision of the school principal (Bantwini & Moorosi, 2018). Whilst Bantwini and Moorosi (2018) identified the office of the CM as a weak link between schools and the district, Mthembu, Blose and Mkhize (2024) found that CMs can have a profoundly positive impact on learner performance. Moreover, Shamase (2022:36) opines that CMs can achieve their goals by engaging with principals and by ensuring they directly support the office of the principal. The researcher believes that, informed by the systems theory, the concern that the office of the CM is the weak link can better inform their roles and strengthen the whole system.

3.2.18 The value of School-Based Management (SBM)

SBM is a direct product of decentralisation (Komba, 2017; Sumarsonoa, 2019; Amazon, 2020:1; Budrich, 2021). Spaul (2015:114) and Budrich (2021) agree that SBM was introduced to address both poor academic performance and inadequate educational accountability. In favour of SBM, Budrich (2021) adds that centralised management only leads to compliance by principals. On the contrary, SBM leads to school-based decisions, thus highlighting the need for scheduled accountability (Budrich, 2021; Galabawa, 1997, as cited in Komba, 2017; Couto & Ferreira, 2016; Spaul, 2015). Based on the information provided, the researcher infers that, as a result of decentralisation, one would be required to report on the necessity of decisions taken at the school level. Notably, Komba (2017) further reminds schools to be client-

oriented. Clients of schools are primarily parents, who choose schools for their children (Edwards & Meaning, 2019:13). Unfortunately, Komba (2017) notes that shortcomings in educational performance may lead parents to send their children to private schools. It is worth noting that decentralisation strengthens SBM (Komba, 2017; Sumarsonoa, 2019), which, in turn, calls for formal accountability (Couto & Ferreira, 2016). This makes accountability inevitable (Komba, 2017:2; Sumarsonoa, 2019).

3.2.19 Advantages of accountability

Accountability can be advantageous. This is one of the purposes of enacting policies of accountability (Reddick *et al.*, 2020; Edwards & Means, 2019; Matete, 2021). Matete (2021) notes that accountability enhances curriculum performance for the benefit of the entire system. It is also believed that corruption is lessened by subjecting relevant officials to mandatory accountability and transparency (Kalu & Okeke, 2020; Mpungose & Ngwenya, 2017). This includes the education department, which is responsible for teaching and learning. Kalu and Okeke (2020) further associate accountability with the provision of excellent services. The advantages of accountability in relation to service delivery in education are two-fold (Dangara, 2016). Firstly, quality is assured and school development is consistently advanced (European Commission, 2020; Dangara, 2016; Zarei, Bagheri & Sadighi, 2019:2). Further advantages of educational accountability become evident when accountability and incentives are coupled together (European Commission, 2020:3; Spaul, 2015). This comes as a result of satisfactory performance, which is linked to incentives. Teachers become encouraged, and the capabilities of individual teachers and schools become noticeable. However, the researcher warns against enticements to cull students for better performance.

Academic accountability can lead to a situational analysis, which facilitates the diagnosis of potential problems (Baldoni, Baroglio, May, Micalizio & Tedeschi, 2017:2; Rahmatollahi & Zenouzagh, 2021:2; Reddick, Demir & Perlman, 2020). Regarding situations, one cannot deny the uniqueness of every situation. The researcher believes that challenges that lead to low academic performance are uniquely contextual. For example, some Free State schools are situated in violence-torn areas (Mohokare, 2021) where ill-behaved individuals can disrupt the learning of learners. According to Baldoni *et al.* (2017:2), accountability can help bring the problem to light. The

researcher also realised that such schools would call for a different approach or strategy. Baldoni *et al.*, (2017) also recognise the importance of mutual engagement with immediate supervisors. In the case of education, one could think of the engagement of schools with the district. According to the researcher, regarding both the theory of existentialism and systems theory, mutual engagement is necessary, as institutions are considered integral parts of the larger body. The closeness of the two theories is also evident in the words of Baldoni *et al.* (2017:5), who aver that accountability is a bond that involves principals within a system.

Simply put, engaging with others allows the efficient operation of the system. According to Baldoni *et al.* (2017:4), engagement with supervisors pays off. The researcher concurs with Baldoni (2017), as engagement with supervisors reveals the targets of superiors and exposes the failed plans of those held responsible. As Baldoni *et al.*, (2017) have also alluded to, contextual challenges peculiar to a school or organisation are also laid bare. The researcher views peculiar problems as a means of calling for innovative strategies to achieve better performance.

Educational accountability is generally trusted for increasing academic excellence (Amazon, 2020:3). Empirical research by Dizon-Ross (2018), conducted in New York, found that educational accountability can lead to a significant improvement in learners' performance. The study noted that teacher development and collaboration are some of the principals' strategies following accountability sessions, which the principal could adopt and implement (Dizon-Ros, 2018:22). On the other hand, a study conducted by Mbiti (2016) discovered that teachers who were hired on a contract basis were able to produce high performance compared to full-time teachers. Notably, the study found that the cause of such performance was the provision of incentives (Mbiti, 2016:116). The European Commission (2018) adds that the provision of incentives can be a crucial part of accountability. However, the researcher warns of the culling of learners influenced by the need for incentives.

3.2.20 Disadvantages of accountability in education

Although accountability is vital in education, it can have adverse effects (Spurrier, Aldeman, Schiess & Rotherham, 2020:3). Spurrier *et al.*, (2020) further mention three disadvantages of accountability. Firstly, accountability has led to a practice where

teachers target attainable low-level skills to improve the final mark (Spurrier *et al.*, 2020). This may lead teachers to focus solely on examinable content. The second problem associated with mandatory accountability is that learners who perform well above or below the set mark are often overlooked (Spurrier *et al.*, 2020). Learners who perform significantly above the desired level can still achieve even better performance and higher levels of achievement.

On the other hand, learners whose performance is below the radar would still see an improvement in their academic performance if teachers are required to account for the improvement strategies employed to help them academically. The third disadvantage of accountability is that the policy, which aims to make accountability a success, has set very low passing standards (Spurrier *et al.*, 2020). In the researcher's view, it is clear that various officials could easily evade accountability.

A further assessment of the practice would lead one to the realisation that justice in teaching is compromised in two ways. Firstly, learners are denied the opportunity to learn the entire content, as only parts relevant to the examination can be taught. Secondly, low passing standards only help teachers avoid mandatory accountability, while learners do not benefit significantly. Additionally, learners who perform way above the low-level passing standards are only held back by the system. In response to this, the European Commission identified further disadvantages of academic accountability. Accountability is likely to focus on blaming stakeholders for failure rather than addressing their weaknesses (European Commission, 2020). In line with this finding, Rahmatollahi and Zenouzagh (2021:2) noted that accountability can lead to some form of punishment. According to the researcher's point of view, this means that the blame only robs education systems of better ideas, should the respondents be listened to, or at the very least, those with low academic performance be subjected to mandatory re-skilling.

3.2.21 Strategies to improve educational accountability

In terms of its nature as a management task, accountability can be improved from as low as a school level (Dangara, 2016). Dangara (2016:265) provides the following strategies to improve educational accountability.

3.2.21.1 Regular supervision

According to the DBE, the role of the HoD is to supervise the districts, which involves overseeing the circuit office (DBE, 2013:19). The process also states that the CM's role is to supervise and support principals in their circuit offices.

3.2.21.2 Staff motivation

In the educational system, accountability should not be a challenge. Reddick *et al.*, (2020) opine that in schools, teachers should be self-motivated to take responsibility for their own actions. This means that teachers should be accountable both horizontally and vertically, in formal and informal situations. Conversely, the relevant officials should engage in motivational sessions with the staff. According to Hwa (2021:18), Singapore's Department of Education relies heavily on the strategy of motivation, among others. Teachers are motivated in every aspect. Hwa (2021) further states that this is achieved through the local programmes and interlocking systems to ensure that it is done throughout all levels of the department. However, the researcher points out that staff motivation is impossible without effective communication. This can take place through verbal engagement and by simply appreciating and recognising teachers' inputs (Msila, 2022:266).

3.2.21.3 Effective communication

The power of effective communication in educational accountability has already been discussed as a key characteristic of effective educational accountability. Given the discussion in Section 3.2.4.2, the researcher opines that effective communication is a vehicle which moves accountability and educational responsibility forward. The importance of communication is further highlighted in the Government Gazette No. 36324 of 3 April 2013. According to this policy, lucid organisational channels of communication between provincial and district offices are indispensable (DBE, 2013:19). However, according to the ESRC, it is the role of the SMT to establish verbal engagement strategies with the parents and other stakeholders (ESRC, 2020:2; Smith & Benavot, 2019:197). Educational programmes and school policies are among the issues that require effective communication with parents. The 2015 PAM document defines effective communication as a common factor in the job descriptions of the teacher, DH, deputy principal, and principal (South Africa, 2015).

3.2.21.4 Evaluation of school programmes

Dangara (2016) and Shewbridge *et al.*, (2019) contend that the evaluation of school programmes should be established at the school level. The researcher concurs since this motion sets the tone for external accountability. The evaluation of school programmes calls for an organised evaluation of chosen procedures. The principle of democracy in education leads to full autonomy of schools where decision-making can be made on context-based school improvement programmes (Shewbridge, 2019:29; Gottlieb, 2020). Regarding evaluation as a strategy to improve school programmes, the researcher suggests that schools can evaluate programmes by determining their values, implementation challenges, and input-to-output processes to determine if the programmes are still effective, whether they require some changes, or should be discarded altogether. Discarded programmes may need to be replaced. Today, for example, the education sector is moving towards more data-based or data-driven programmes (Holloway, 2020:30). This is one of the programmes that the educational sector or schools should consider implementing.

3.2.21.5 Career development

Career development should lead to teachers' professional development (Msila, 2022). By nature, professional development ensures job satisfaction and independence in decision-making. This means that teachers develop their own subject-related plans in addition to those provided by the district. Msila (2020:266) contends that in every step involving teachers, it is wise to involve members of teacher unions. This includes planning of career development programmes at the school level. The Singapore government ensures teacher training is offered to competent applicants (Ehren & Baxter, 2021). Once trained and placed in various schools, the government ensures that its teachers are provided with the necessary programmes that support their career development. With this effort undertaken, the researcher concurs and may state that, consequently, reasonable accountability may follow.

3.2.21.6 Funding

The need for funding in education is fundamental (Shewbridge *et al.*, 2019). According to Brill *et al.* (2018), governments are liable for expenditures related to public funds; they, in turn, hold schools accountable for school-based production, which may include

academic performance. All school resources, including textbooks, teaching aids, learning aids, and educational programmes, are funded by grants for public schools. Notably, South African schools are legally classified as Sections 20 and 21, respectively (Asmal, 2020:41; South Africa, 1996; Mohokare, 2021). Needless to say, with funds provided, school improvement programmes may run efficiently.

3.2.21.7 Educational auditing

In educational terms, auditing is equivalent to inspection by authorised parties (Tyagi, Vishwakarma, Alexandrovich & Mohammed, 2020:486). Tyagi *et al.*, (2020) believe that, in most cases, auditing is external and is conducted by officers who voluntarily contribute to the advancement of the institution's educational performance. Although the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2022) explains the term 'audit' in relation to its link with financial management, Tyagi *et al.*, (2020:486) contend that auditing is also applicable in education, where it calls for accountability in the areas of quality management of education and educational programmes. This function of auditing is further supported by Tabrizi and Farahsa (2015), who also link auditing with the evaluation of processes and systems at large. However, a closer look at the argument offered by Tyagi *et al.*, (2020) and the definition of the term according to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2022) led the researcher to the assumption that auditing and evaluation of every aspect in the education department has monetary implications since every programme in the education sphere should be funded (UNESCO, 2017). In this way, one may conclude that educational auditing is essential in the educational sector for improving institutional performance.

3.2.21.8 Parental involvement

The role of parents in the educational sector is profound (Zarei *et al.*, 2019:4). The SASA legally obliges parents to be stakeholders in the education sector (South Africa, 1996). Parents can be elected to become members of the SGB and consequently play a part in decision-making on things that directly affect their children (Zarei *et al.*, 2019:4). According to Dangara (2016), parental involvement can be elevated to become a purposive strategy to improve educational accountability. ESRC contends that parents are not only recipients of information about their learners but should be provided with a platform to voice their expectations (ESRC, 2020:2). Reporting to parents about learners' behaviour and educational performance (South Africa, 2015)

cannot be considered a strategy. However, the researcher contends that this is a legal obligation. The researcher views the era in which we live as a hindrance to the strategy. As a result, many learners are orphans, while others have become key determinants of family well-being in child-headed families (Mohokare, 2021). The implication of this is that many learners would feel marginalised by the development and implementation of this strategy.

3.2.21.9 Bottom-up strategy

Shewbridge *et al.*, (2019:29) contend that the bottom-up strategy can be employed to improve accountability in education. According to the strategy, schoolteachers should work together to draw a framework or programme that they can co-own. This will lead to better performance, as teachers who were involved in drawing up the programme are accountable to one another. Shewbridge *et al.*, (2019) further argue that the bottom-up strategy is beneficial in ensuring uncompromised teaching, learning, and assessment, which in turn enhances school performance.

Considering the case of India, where educational accountability is expected from schools and teachers by the educational offices (ESRC, 2020:2), the researcher cannot consider this a good example of the employment of the bottom-up strategy. This is based on the fact that there is insufficient evidence to suggest that planning is done generatively by teachers. Additionally, the researcher believes that the bottom-up reporting could only be a form of compliance. However, according to Shewbridge *et al.* (2019), the essence of a bottom-up strategy lies in generative planning at the local level, which enhances collaboration.

3.2.21.10 Democratic voice

Smith and Benavot (2019:198) mention democratic voice as one of the strategies that both push accountability forward and make it an acknowledged educational practice. Brazil, Argentina, Ethiopia and Malawi are cited as examples of countries where the voices of stakeholders are considered at the governmental level. UNESCO (2017c:7) notes that the democratic voice leads to reform. The researcher is of the view that, since most of our countries are democratic, their principles are reflected in lower-level organs. Consequently, various actors in policy may require the involvement of stakeholders in the policymaking and implementation processes of accountability. In

the words of Smith and Benavot (2019:199), accountability does not exist separately but within a societal, fiscal, and political context. The implication is that all stakeholders in the system may be required to have a voice to enhance the system's functioning. For this strategy to work effectively, Smith and Benavot (2019:198) believe that the democratic voice should be structured so that every actor feels obliged to participate.

3.2.22 The importance of monitoring accountability

According to the systems theory, an organisation's effectiveness is dependent on its members (Moore *et al.*, 2017; Haag, 2020:6). Notably, the ineffectiveness of the system can be remedied (Sawaneh & Fatajo, 2022:102) by engaging all parts of the system (Moore *et al.*, 2017). Haag (2020:6) contends that inconsistencies among stakeholders can significantly hinder academic performance. On the other hand, Reddick *et al.*, (2020:8) and Sawaneh and Fatajo (2022) established the importance of monitoring accountability. Reddick *et al.*, (2020:8) also contend that all programmes should be closely monitored. By nature, monitoring involves checking if goals are reachable and ensuring the implementation of programmes (Sawaneh & Fatajo, 2022:102). According to the Presidency's 2007 Monitoring and Evaluation Policy Framework, the monitoring process begins with the generation of relevant data (Presidency, 2007:1; International Labour Organisation [ILO], n.d.). Following this, data undergoes the processes of analysis and reporting is made through inputs, performance, outputs, inner, and outer factors relating to the subject under scrutiny (ILO, n.d.:1). Through the lenses of the two theories, namely, existentialism and systems theories, the research views monitoring of academic accountability as the required practice by open perturbation (refer to Chapter 2).

3.2.23 The importance of evaluating accountability

Monitoring and evaluation are closely linked and are often mentioned as essential components of the accountability process. This becomes obvious when one studies the governmental policy framework for the Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation System (GWMES) (Presidency, 2007). The sentiment is further supported by Sawaneh and Fatajo (2022:103), who also note that both monitoring and evaluation depend on a working tool that incorporates key descriptors. The government-wide Monitoring and Evaluation Policy Framework defines evaluation as a time-bound

practice that provides realistic information to address specific concerns. This process leads evaluators to informed decisions about the subject under scrutiny (Presidency, 2007:2; ILO, n.d.:1). The researcher also asserts that accountability should be regularly evaluated.

While monitoring the gauges' progress, the evaluation assesses the validity of the choices made, their relevance, and whether implementation was done consistently (ILO, n.d.:1; Presidency, 2007; Sawaneh & Fatajo, 2022). Thus, one would conclude that monitoring and evaluation are reciprocal in nature. However, the researcher also opines that they may be carried out together where possible; yet, on the other hand, one can still be carried out after another. The critical analysis of the 2007 Monitoring and Evaluation Policy Framework led to the conclusion that monitoring can produce better results, leading to improvement, if it is conducted prior to evaluation. Still, evaluation can be conducted after every monitoring step has occurred, allowing for periodic adjustments to reporting.

3.3 GLOBAL VIEWS OF THE CONCEPT OF ACCOUNTABILITY

The concept of accountability is not new (Ketab, 2016; South Africa, 2012), and it is well-covered in the literature. According to Dangara (2016), general accountability should include reporting on system performance, learning situations, and defending the procedures followed to attain the specified goal. On the other hand, education-related accountability “ensures a rational critical and a systematic analysis of activities of the education production process” (Dangara, 2016:268).

Evidently, accountability is considered a valuable practice and culture by many countries around the world (Brill, Grayson, Kuhn & O'Donnel, 2018). With the realisation of the education-based mandate of UNESCO (2017), it is undeniable that several countries around the world collaborate to achieve peace, security, health, and educational standards (Kluge, 2020; UNESCO, 2017). Simply put, most countries strive to meet national and international standards. This highlights the importance of establishing regional, continental, and international bodies, such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), and the United Nations (UN). Like systems, these organisations exist as single structures made up of various countries (elements) with their individual goals for a

common benefit. This explains the need for a view of accountability as envisioned by different countries around the world.

3.3.1 United Nations (UN)

According to Tyagi, Vishwakarma, Alexandrovich, and Mohammed (2020:435), all countries are accountable to the UN for meeting the 2030 Agenda's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The researcher could infer that the country's members are subject to educational accountability at the international level. In addition, UNESCO (2017) found that approximately 264 million children worldwide were not school attendants at the time of reporting, while almost 1.4 billion others lived in low- and middle-income countries by 2019 (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2019:5). The implication is that the same number of people is likely to remain illiterate for years. This highlights the importance of accountability in various countries, given that "every child has the right to learn" (UNICEF, 2019:3). UNESCO (2017) further emphasises that everyone should be held accountable for this educational restriction, which could have a negative impact on the world. It is, therefore, the responsibility of individuals, citizens, organisations, institutions, and governments to ensure children of school-going age are enrolled in schools (UNESCO, 2017). Conversely, individuals, citizens, organisations, institutions, and governments should hold one another accountable for illiteracy.

Interestingly, the researcher notes that education is, in itself, a political concern, in addition to being a social issue (Maroy & Voisin, 2017:13). As a result, governments should be at the helm of control to ensure countries produce the necessary skills that can benefit the country. According to UNESCO (2017:3), this calls for accountability from every stakeholder, as "the lack of accountability risks jeopardizing progress, allowing harmful practices to become embedded in education systems" across the globe. According to Verger, Novelli, and Altinyelken (2018), this is supported by the world-renowned UN, making educational accountability a global issue. The importance of accountability in education is to enhance the achievement of set goals.

3.3.2 Africa

3.3.2.1 Nigeria

The African state of Nigeria also practises accountability in various spheres of government (Dwangu, 2016; Kalu & Okeke, 2020). However, Kalu and Okeke (2020:36) found that Nigeria had not developed any law requiring employees to be held accountable. The researcher aligns with Kalu and Okeke (2020), who recognised that accountability is beneficial in combating possible corruption at the governmental level. With the scholars' recommendation that the Nigerian government should develop a clear system of accountability and publicly published penalties for offenders, the researcher is of the view that the Nigerian government could have saved millions of Nigerian Naira. According to Kalu and Okeke (2020), governments should disclose their intentions and only withhold information that could compromise the country's security measures. If the country does not embrace accountability by instituting relevant laws, those responsible for the education of its citizens will likely not be held accountable for academic outcomes.

3.3.2.2 Tanzania

Tanzania embraces accountability (Matete, 2021; Komba, 2017). This is necessitated by the devolution of power to SMTs in Tanzanian schools. The Tanzanian National examination is used as the assessment that determines the overall national performance as well as the performance of head teachers in local schools (Matete, 2021). It is this assessment that procedurally calls for academic performance accountability. Sadly, head teachers in Tanzania who perform poorly are demoted. According to Matete (2021:4), "head teachers and teachers have to give an account and be answerable to the school committee for what they do with what effects, including the teaching itself." Academic accountability must be made before the school committee is formed to involve all education stakeholders, "overseeing and supervising the day-to-day functions of the schools" (Matete, 2021:4). Whilst teachers in Tanzania are receptive to the required academic accountability, Matete (2021) found that Tanzanian teachers call for a more professional body to advance the accountability process. Dissatisfaction has been raised with the relevant officials regarding the composition of the school committee in Tanzania.

3.3.3 Europe

3.3.3.1 European Union (EU)

The establishment of the EU saw various European countries become members, thereby becoming bound by common policies and laws. A practical example of a common law adhered to by member states is the Paris Declaration, aimed at achieving a uniform approach to education (Caturianas, Užpelkienė & Migliarin, 2017:4). According to Caturianas *et al.* (2017), the importance of education has become increasingly noticeable to all stakeholders within the European social system. The noticeable distinct reason calling for more inclusive education was necessitated by terrorist attacks ravaging some European towns. Education actors chose to employ education as a means of embattling extremism in the religious sector and other social spheres. In this way, fighting terror with terror is deterred. To this end, member governments have developed inclusive education offered within the restrictions of equity as a right (Caturianas *et al.*, 2017). Apart from the terror attacks posing as social challenges, “Europe has a persistent problem of educational poverty, defined as a failure to reach minimum standards in education” (Caturianas *et al.*, 2017:4).

While public schools in European countries struggle to provide the necessary resources, private schools have been found to exacerbate learning disparities. This is evident, as public schools often perform better than private schools; many learners whose parents could not afford private schooling were offered better educational opportunities by the education system. Notably, Caturianas *et al.*, (2017:13) found that most European countries experience a “lack of standardisation in curricula and assessment systems.” The researcher views this as a problem hindering educational accountability, as common tests set to a particular standard prompt schools and districts to focus on educational accountability (Queensland University of Technology, 2015). Conversely, based on the findings of Caturianas *et al.* (2017), the researcher opines that European states, which are members of the EU, lack a high level of accountability due to the lack of standardised assessments and testing.

3.3.3.2 United Kingdom (UK)

The UK, in particular, also embraces the need for accountability in various spheres, including education (European Commission, 2020). Approximately 5.3 million public

servants provide services in the UK, and 21,000 more are expected to be held accountable for “financial mismanagement, chronic underperformance and service collapse” (European Commission, 2020:4). A close comparison of reports by the EU above and the European Commission provides complementary information about accountability in EU member countries. According to the European Commission (2020), accountability in the UK is insufficient to eradicate corruption. Furthermore, the European Commission (2020) reports that transparency in the UK is inadequate to meet the need for increased mandatory accountability. This is evident in the fact that citizens lack clear information on what services their money buys (European Commission, 2020). This leaves the researcher with the conclusion that there is, in fact, no mandatory formal accountability by service providers in the UK. Based on the meanings and definitions of accountability discussed throughout the thesis, transparency and accountability are mutually dependent. Conversely, transparency is the gateway to formal accountability.

3.3.4 America

3.3.4.1 United States of America

Previously, the use of incentives to improve academic performance had proved to be futile (USAID, 2014). As a result, the US government has developed policies to ensure the care and advancement of accountability within its working system. According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (2014), the US government “establishes the processes for monitoring, analysing, and improving the performance of individuals and institutions, and as such, it is a key mechanism for achieving good governance outcomes.” This is established through policies that promote and safeguard both external and internal accountability. The main idea was to “hold schools accountable for helping students achieve” the highest possible levels of performance (USAID, 2014). It is further stated that the policies incorporated ‘equity’ as a value of education provision.

Additionally, the policies provided for the continuation of the provision of ‘incentives’ under the domain of accountability. The researcher highly values this approach for its endeavour to accommodate learners’ various socioeconomic statuses, while, on the other hand, incentives serve as a strategic form of motivation. Combined with ‘equity,’

the USA's accountability systems have enabled the country's education department to address inequalities and level the bar of performance across the board.

3.3.4.2 External system of accountability

As connoted by the word 'external,' the idea of accounting to the public for one's actions becomes explicitly evident in the external system of accountability. This explains the idea behind the USAID's (2014) embracement of the contribution of civil society to ensure fair governmental operations. Operations include policy formulation and its implementation. As fellow system members with parliament, civil society is required to gather data relating to the provision of services as determined by specific governmental policies. The next step would then be to provide feedback while the government intentionally considers their proposals (USAID, 2014). The researcher values this idea as the most understanding-generating practice as it endeavours to appease both the government and citizens of the country.

According to the researcher's view, it is likely to lead to co-ownership of the policies. In their own words, USAID (2014) holds that "Strong civil society networks, with the capability and relationships to influence policymaking and implementation, are a key component of the accountability system." Interestingly, the process of external accountability essentially involves all available forms of media. Considering the nature of schools, one can link the external system of accountability to the relationship between schools and their stakeholders, that is, parents and the community to which the school may need to account.

3.3.4.3 Internal accountability

Internal accountability involves governmental officials, where the application of accountability tests the functionality of government (USAID, 2014). USAID (2014) lists approximately six duties of the governmental officials for which internal accountability is legally expected. These include, but are not limited to, formulation and enactment of rules and laws, performing oversight of policy implementations, provision of resources, ensuring social involvement, and "answering to their citizens for pledged" (USAID, 2014:1). Government leaders are expected to carry out their duties with utmost transparency, which will attract due need for accountability. To be transparent, policymaking should become an open and inclusive process that encourages social

engagement. In the process, all stakeholders, including the public, are granted access to official documents (USAID, 2014).

The researcher values this exercise as transparent, with accountability maintained at every step. According to the researcher, being transparent in this way involves producing the final document and executing duties with accountability, both informally and formally. Moreover, the researcher views informal accountability as the process of executing duties responsibly without formal reporting. In contrast, formal accountability refers to an organised formal accountability session that may include parliamentary debates on the responsibilities entrusted to a particular governmental official or office. The researcher further views this questioning by fellow cabinet members or parliament as necessary to determine the functionality of the whole body, the social system as propounded by Luhmann (Seidi, 2004; Moore *et al.*, 2017). When things go right, the whole body or government shares the glory, and blame is attached when a particular system dismally (or slightly) performs. In relation to schools, one is left with the impression that schools can also hold their own constructively organised internal academic accountability sessions to develop the whole system.

3.3.5 Asia

3.3.5.1 Indonesia

The Asian country of Indonesia practises mandatory academic accountability. This resulted from the decentralisation of education management, which directly affected schools in particular (Sumarsonoa, Triwiyantob, Kusumaningrum & Gunawand, 2019). To ensure that accountability is practised, a special policy was developed. The policy first explains the need for devolution of managerial powers to schools, then endorses the need for professional and public accountability. Due to geographic challenges, SBM has proved beneficial in Indonesia (Sumarsonoa *et al.*, 2019). Schools in Indonesia are expected to account for financial support, resources, and academic performance.

3.3.5.2 Japan

According to Brill *et al.* (2018), Japanese schools are more subject to external inspection than they are to formal accountability. A common assessment is made to determine the effectiveness of education policies and learners' abilities (Nakayasu,

2016). Japanese schools are only required to evaluate themselves and eventually receive departmental support. Based on the information provided, the researcher's understanding of the situation in Japan is that low-level accountability is practised, as schools are compelled to evaluate themselves by specific statutes. According to the researcher's analysis of accountability, countries that demand accountability from schools typically start by subjecting schools to mandatory self-evaluation, as noted in Japan; hence, the researcher coined the concept 'low-level' accountability. Simply put, self-evaluation is only the beginning of accountability, which should be developed to become more intensive. Alternatively, self-evaluation should inform broader mandatory accountability.

3.3.6 Australia

In Australia, teachers are held accountable for learners' performance. For example, "there is statutory national assessment in the primary phase. The assessments are used to hold schools to account" (Brill *et al.*, 2018:9). In addition, Australian schools are also subjected to School Self-Evaluation (SSE) and external assessment (Brill *et al.*, 2018). Self-assessment is a method by which school-based officials evaluate their own performance, whereas external assessment involves formal accountability before departmental officials. Based on the information provided throughout the thesis, both internal and external assessments can be employed by schools to implement accountability locally prior to a formal district-based academic performance accountability.

3.3.7 Republic of South Africa (RSA)

South Africa wholly supports the notion of accountability. This is evident in Mokgobo's (2022) study, which declares that the 21st century can be summed up in three words: "era of accountability." Basing arguments on the country's Constitution, the DBE's mandate is to continue focusing on accountability imperatives throughout the systems (DBE, 2018:1). This is evident in the development of systemic evaluation, which calls for the continuous assessment of governmental systems, including all departments in national and provincial spheres. This includes schools as microcosms of DBE systems. The following sub-sections bear witness to the call for accountability in all departments of the South African government, including the education department. It

is not possible to distinctly separate education as a stand-alone department, as all aspects of the government have some relation to education. Moreover, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa does not address accountability as a singular, department-related aspect. This suggests that the scholars must link the particular aspect of the Constitution to the phenomenon under study. In the following sub-sections, the researcher presents evidence of the inevitable notion of accountability in other governmental departments and demonstrates that the matter cannot be ruled out of the education sector.

3.3.7.1 Accountability and the Constitution

It is worth noting that the issue of accountability originates in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. All laws governing the country are based on the Constitution. As the Constitution states, “it is the supreme law of the country; every law or policy that contradicts it is invalid” (South Africa, 1994, s 2). In this way, the Constitution does not attribute more accountability to a particular department or situation. Conversely, accountability is equally and equitably for all. A close scrutiny of the quoted section left the researcher with the realisation that two important aspects are distinctly evident. Firstly, the laws of the country were drawn within the restrictions of the Constitution. Secondly, all conduct by anyone, including any governmental or non-governmental department, should be consistent with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. In his calibre as the provincial CD, Mokgobo (2022) claims that the RSA is in a state of embracing accountability; thus, a question can be raised as to whether accountability features as either a law or a principle in constitutional law. Furthermore, one would also want to know if everyone is subject to the account, and if so, to whom and on what terms.

The idea of actions should be consistent with the Constitution (South Africa, 1994, ss 2). The researcher believes that the conduct and speeches of high-calibre officials can be judged by their closeness to the Constitution. Consequently, the researcher learnt that the idea of accountability is closely tied to the execution of laws and the daily conduct of individuals, as well as governmental and non-governmental groups or organisations. According to the researcher’s assessment, accountability in schools cannot be entirely disconnected from politics, health, resources or defence. Through the School-Based Support Team (SBST) and QLTC, schools are connected to various

departmental and NGOs. Consequently, the researcher duly opines that the inclusion of members from these structures can involve them in mandatory accountability. The following aspects of the country are discussed below in relation to the education sector, illustrating that accountability is an interdepartmental aspect of the South African government. For example, education is an aspect of politics (Verger *et al.*, 2018:3), and schools require the services of the safety, health, and finance departments (Mbiti, 2016) in the country. To be more specific, the COVID-19 disease directly affected schooling in 2020 and 2021.

3.3.7.2 Politics

The importance of accountability in a democratic country is so essential that it is likened to yeast that causes fermentation to raise dough (Hoffman, 2018). In the analogy, the dough represents democracy, while the yeast represents responsibility or accountability. In the same vein, one political leader opined that the importance of oxygen to life can be held tantamount to the importance of accountability in a democratic country (Hoffman, 2018). According to the researcher's evaluation, the two analogies effectively explain the breadth and depth of accountability in the state. One is left with the impression that accountability and democracy go hand-in-hand (Hunter, 2017). Based on the analogies, one may infer that democracy and accountability run parallel, not in sequence, and do not alternate. The Constitution leaves no one immune to the demand for accountability. Section 92 (South Africa, 1994, ss 92) is an example of the subjection of political leaders to mandatory accountability based on the offices they hold.

This section of the Constitution directly addresses the political subjection of Members of Parliament (PMs) to mandatory accountability. Section 92(1) is clear. The Deputy President and Cabinet, as Members of Parliament, were entrusted with relevant powers and detailed job functions. As Sub-section 92(3) (a) states, all Members of Parliament have the country's Constitution as the code of precepts to which they should adhere. One can infer from the quoted law that accountability attempts to keep ministers on track and ensure that governmental services reach the people at the grassroots levels. By its very nature, accountability calls for those entrusted with responsibilities to "explain their actions rationally and justify the reasonableness of

their decision making” (Hoffman, 2018). Of course, the president cannot be immune from accountability. No one is above the Constitution.

3.3.7.3 Defence

One would not want to think of a situation where the safety and defence of the citizens of the country are compromised, and insurgency and terrorism crop up. The importance of holding office bearers accountable in the Department of Defence becomes obvious when one notes the discovery of possible fraud and corruption within the department (Shabalala, 2021). Shabalala records the accusation made against the defence department’s failure to account for some of its endeavours. The researcher establishes from the report that formal accountability detaches every governmental department from possible fraud and corruption. Sub-sections 200-204 of Chapter 11 of the Constitution detail the operations in which the defence department may be involved (South Africa, 1996, ss 11). Moreover, the procedure to be followed is also noted. In light of that, no action of the defence department may take place without presentation of the matter before the parliament. Reading this part in conjunction with Section 13 (South Africa, 1996, ss 13(2) (a)), one realises that it requires accountability to subject the defence to specific operations. This section requires government officials to account for their operations and the monetary implications associated with them. Given these facts, one may conclude that accountability is a crucial aspect of the governance and management of the Department of Defence in the country.

3.3.7.4 Health

Issues involving one country, such as health, politics, and economy, always have a profound impact on other countries (Elsevier, 2020:1). Elsevier (2020:1) explains that this comes as a result of globalisation. This also impacts education, as social lives are affected (Elsevier, 2020). According to the Constitution, everyone in the country is entitled to a healthy environment (South Africa 1996, ss 2(24)). This directly calls on the government to ensure that the law is accounted for. The researcher believes that as pandemics impact lives and governments formulate strategies to curb them, the law can be compromised. On the other hand, corruption, through perturbation (Moore *et al.*, 2017), may infiltrate the system through one or more of the actors. Eventually, this may spark dissatisfaction that the public can express in various ways. As a result, the need for accountability cannot be disregarded.

Battles against cancer, tuberculosis, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), as well as COVID-19, involve significant funds and recruitment of highly experienced and qualified personnel. According to the WHO (2019), accountability directly drives equity in health dispensation. Through the incorporation of the principle of accountability, various setbacks can be prevented, the Department of Health can be improved, and the health of individuals can be transformed (WHO, 2019:9-15). Simply put, the person responsible for each task outlined by the health department must still provide feedback to the provider. In 2020 and 2021, one experienced firsthand the impact of COVID-19, which led to school closures and social isolation, affecting the education sector and other sectors, respectively.

3.3.7.5 Revenue

The country is responsible for managing billions of dollars to run various departments for the benefit of all citizens (Acosta, 2013). Consequently, one must account for the distribution of funds and their management by the receiving departments (Acosta, 2013). The primary purpose of accountability in this area lies in the fact that the government accrues money through taxation; consequently, all attempts should be made to avoid possible corruption (David, Nyereugwu, Maduabuchi & Gwamniru, 2021). As tax is generated from citizens (David *et al.*, 2021), it becomes implicit that mismanagement of funds will also invite mandatory accountability to immediate supervisors. The researcher concludes that accountability influences how a country's funds are disbursed and spent.

According to David *et al.* (2021:175), taxation and accountability are governed by the development and implementation of national laws or policies. Since taxes are extracted from the people (Acosta, 2013; David *et al.*, 2021) and the government is accountable for their disbursement (David *et al.*, 2021), one can deduce that the country is accountable to both parliament and its citizens. One of the spheres the government has to fund is the DoE. In South Africa, this is particularly crucial due to the country's free education, which is financed by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, commonly referred to as NSFAS. NSFAS is responsible for disbursing financial aid to every qualifying student in the country, thereby promoting accountability among scheme officials.

3.3.7.6 Education

Most countries allocate billions of their national funds to the education sector (Mbiti, 2016). Based on this information, the researcher considers this a call for strict accountability in the education sector. This indirectly calls for education stakeholders to be more accountable for their duties. In the RSA, the list would include everyone from the President of the country, the Minister of Education and their office, Member of the Executive Committee (MEC) for education in the province, district, circuit, schools, and the people they interact with.

3.4 PRACTICAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN BASIC EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

This sub-section examines the principle of accountability and its application in South Africa. The researcher also relates accountability in South Africa to educational accountability in other countries, where it is practical.

3.4.1 Educational laws

The researcher noted that one important way to ensure that actors in education become accountable to one another is by ensuring that enacted laws completely address the aspect of educational accountability. The following laws depict both direct and indirect attachments to accountability.

3.4.1.1 Accountability and the Employment of Educators Act (EEA)

Given the phenomenon under discussion, three factors in the EEA become apparent. Firstly, Frankl's theory of existentialism becomes distinct. The theory posits that life issues are approached from the individual's perspective (Moore *et al.*, 2017). This is evident in Sections 17 and 18 of the EEA, where the individual educator becomes accountable for misconduct committed (EEA 1996, ss 17, 18). According to Frankl, the educator so charged should see meaning in such occasions. Secondly, according to the researcher's analysis, one can conclude that the structures in the school, as explained in EEA, relate to Maturana's systems theory, as explained by Moore (2017). The misconducts explained in EEA Sections 17 and 18 can only be committed in a system where the process is disrupted through poor relationships, mismanagement of funds, and corporal punishment inflicted on learners. Lastly, where systems are interlocked, accountability is both inherently and unwittingly required. Once one is

required by law to state their side of the story in hearings (EEA, 1996), the accountability principle is implied. Moreover, the job descriptions of various position levels in the education sector are explained in the PAM, as part of the EEA, and have direct reference to issues of academic accountability.

3.4.1.2 Accountability and the National Education Policy Act (NEPA)

In South Africa, the formulation of educational policies is provided for by the NEPA No. 27 of 1996. NEPA provides for the development of the two structures of education at the national level. These structures include the Council of Education Ministers and the Heads of Education Departments Committee (South Africa 1996b, s9,19). Firstly, the development of these structures indicates the need for educational systems that facilitate swift operations. Moreover, systems emphasise accountability in that one party must be held accountable for its actions, which may hinder or impact the system.

Additionally, the principle of accountability is alluded to in Section 2 of NEPA (South Africa, 1996b, s 2(d)). As already discussed, accountability involves monitoring and evaluation as strategies to improve its implementation. It was demonstrated that the areas of accountability include programmes, finances, teacher and learner performance, and general administration. These areas of accountability are mentioned again as reasons calling for the formulation of national policies by the National Minister of Education (South Africa 1996b, s 3(4)). Consequently, the researcher assumes NEPA as a necessary law leading to accountability in education. Moreover, it becomes understandable that NEPA does not directly denote accountability, but rather the policies it provides for will subsequently be based on the Constitution and other educational laws.

3.4.1.3 Accountability and the South African Schools Act (SASA) No. 84 of 1996

Based on an analysis of the SASA No. 84 of 1996, the researcher concludes that the Act strongly emphasises accountability. This education law outlines the functions of the SGB, RCL, and the school principal. The principal serves as an ex officio member of various committees of the SGB. Moreover, the law is clear about the principals' duty-related relationship with the Provincial HoD. The principal serves as the representative of the HoD in the school (SASA 1996, ss 16A). The implication here is that the principal is accountable to the HoD, in addition to being answerable to the district. The SASA

further explains the duties of the school principal in relation to school finances, the SGB, and the entire school. Regarding finances and resource provision, SASA makes the principal accountable to the SGB. Sub-section 16A (2)(k) explains that the school principal reports to the SGB regarding the maladministration and mismanagement of school finances.

When one examines the SASA in relation to school accountability, the school principal becomes the most accountable officer in the school. In this way, the researcher discovered that the phenomenon of educational accountability is closely tied to the duties of principals, parents, learners, and the community, as stipulated in the SASA. The researcher further noted that the learners would soon be held accountable for their actions. This becomes clear by the legitimacy of the RLC as the only recognised body of learners in the school (SASA 1996, ss 11). However, the possibility of holding learners accountable for their own education when the school and the district have played their roles is yet to be researched. Lastly, the SGB can also be held accountable for its own actions. The composition of the SGB includes representatives from parents, learners, and teachers (SASA 1996, ss 23).

3.4.1.4 Accountability and the National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU)

The National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU) is the direct result of the 2007 education conference held in Polokwane by the African National Congress. The national education website, namely, www.education.gov.za, provides necessary information about the foundation and development of NEEDU. The aspects around the foundation, development, and composition of NEEDU are provided for by the National Education Evaluation Unit Bill of 2011 (South Africa, 2011:11). As is evident in its name, NEEDU is an independent body that is lawfully tasked with evaluating the national education department for the sake of identifying areas in need of development (South Africa, 2011). The researcher identified a link between NEEDU and the principle of perturbation in systems theory. Further evidence of its relation to the systems theory is in its prescription that NEEDU “evaluate the school system: national DBE, PDEs, Districts, schools” (NEEDU, 2013:2).

The second point to consider about NEEDU is its relationship with educational accountability (Ehren *et al.*, 2020). As previously stated, the primary duty of NEEDU is to evaluate the education system (South Africa, 2011; NEEDU, 2013). Portela (2012) established the close relationship between accountability and evaluation. Accountability and evaluation occur together (Portela, 2012:74). The researcher sought to reconcile the operation of NEEDU with educational accountability. One can, therefore, infer that NEEDU evaluates the education system for possible development that is necessitated by accountability. This means that the findings of NEEDU's evaluation can lead to a demand for accountability from those in charge.

3.4.1.5 Accountability and the South African Council of Educators (SACE) Act

The SACE Act No. 31 of 2000 outlines the responsibilities and rights of teachers, among others (South Africa, 2000). A quick perusal of the main responsibilities of teachers (SACE, 2022:8) leads the researcher to the conclusion that the council upholds the duties of the principal, deputy principal, DH, and the teacher in accordance with the PAM. According to SACE (2020:9), the district's relationship with schools should be characterised by support. Schools are funded and provided with the necessary teaching and learning aids, where possible. The researcher believes that supported teachers may focus on academic improvement and prepare to account for their performance.

3.4.1.6 Accountability and school-based support

Schools are juristic persons (South Africa, 1996). This means that at the school level, horizontal engagement with stakeholders can occur. Thus, schools are likely to attract support from private or NGOs without district engagement. Organisations which support individual schools include UNESCO, UNICEF, and USAID (Sumarsonoa *et al.*, 2019). These organisations demand accountability from the school to ensure acceptable implementation of programmes and reasonable expenditures. Additionally, schools can organise in-service training and workshops to equip teachers (Dangara, 2016:265; DBE, 2015).

3.4.2 The flow of the accountability chain from parliament to local individuals

Nnadozie (2017) explored the principle of accountability as embraced in the education sector of South Africa. Nnadozie (2017) explains that the national development plan

is then developed and cascaded down to the people through the principle of accountability. The aim is to hold actors accountable should the process fail or be disrupted. This is achieved through the GWMES, which permeates all governmental spheres to promote accountability by monitoring and evaluating operational processes (Nnadozie, 2017:5; South Africa, 2007). Given the possibility, the researcher values the purpose of GWMES. This would also require controlled accountability at the school level, held by every school-related stakeholder. Given these points, the researcher can opine that accountability is a vehicle that carries the national mandate down to schools. It is accountability that enables the education minister to present the Grade 12 academic results at the end of the academic year.

3.4.3 Accountability and School Self-Evaluation (SSE)

Schools are required to engage in two types of school evaluation: whole-school evaluation and SSE.

3.4.3.1 Whole School Evaluation (WSE)

Whilst Metu (2017) explains Whole School Evaluation (WSE) as an external evaluation of a school, Madikida (2016) links WSE with accountability. WSE promotes accountability in education and school development, which also reflects the attainment of quality in education (Madikida, 2016:34). According to Hislop (2017), in Ireland, quality education is supported by quality teacher training and development, which Dublin University undertook to fulfil ardently. When a country has reached a state of producing world-class teachers, further inspection can be made to evaluate school readiness and quality production in schools. This notion is also held by DBE (2002), who espouse that WSE is primarily interested in quality education. These explanations collectively address a comprehensive WSE. For effective and developmental WSE, Hislop (2017) suggested that Irish schools develop a joint code of practice. Various comprehensive descriptors should be developed as a checklist for evaluation. According to Hislop (2017), the principle of accountability is effective in requiring stakeholders to hold one another accountable. Whilst schools are required to account to the education department, the education department in turn accounts to the public. Given this, the researcher can deduce that WSE calls for educational accountability.

It is essential to note that Madikida (2016) asserts that WSE involves both external evaluation by evaluators and self-evaluation by school-based officials.

3.4.3.2 School Self-Evaluation (SSE)

Informed by the national policy, which receives its mandate from NEPA, the SSE is an interactive tool that processes evaluations as entered into its computerised system (DoE, 2002). This tool is considered an evaluation framework by the Nigerian Department of Education (Metu, 2017). The ratings are expressed as numbers, where the lowest rating indicates the area that requires development (Madikida, 2016). It then becomes the responsibility of the SMT, SGB, and staff members to undertake strategic school improvement (GDE, 2020). In relation to the phenomenon under study, learners' academic performance can be singled out as one of the areas to be valued (DoE, 2002; Madikida, 2016:25). The second relevant issue is the evaluation of teaching and learning. SSE is carried out as early as possible in the academic year or towards the end of the year in preparation for the next (GDE, 2020). The researcher believes that the demand for quarterly academic accountability is timely and therefore required. It is worth noting that the SSE process produces a mandatory school improvement plan, which is used for reporting purposes (GDE, 2020). In South Africa, SSE determines WSE (Madikida, 2016; GDE, 2020).

3.4.4 Strategies to improve results at the school level

Jimenez and Sargrad (2017:16) argue that every school operates more effectively when goals and expectations specific to that school are jointly developed and communicated throughout. However, schools would also want to set their own targets. Additionally, schools would also want to use the results obtained to monitor their progress (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017:17). This can be done by analysing performance per subject to identify learners who struggle to achieve higher levels in the education sector (Moloi, 2022). Schools would then act to support such learners by providing individualised instruction. The researcher posits that where the district requires these strategies, schools should be cognisant of undertaking them for improvement instead of compliance.

Additionally, sacrifices by the teachers can be made to ensure extensive teaching (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017). This can take the form of extra classes offered outside the

normal tuition period (Gade & Mbude, 2017:5). Gade and Mbude (2017) make a notable contribution in terms of strategies to improve Grade 12 results. Learners may be required to camp at designated places to reduce distractions from home-related challenges. However, with camping, the researcher cautions that learners come from various socioeconomic backgrounds, and camps may expose these weaknesses to the detriment of the learners' morale. Moreover, learners should be familiarised with assessment through the regular writing of mock tests (Gade & Mbude, 2017:5). Additionally, learners should be continuously motivated. The school can also arrange peer support, where learners are grouped equitably to meet their learning needs, with every group having both high and low achievers (Gade & Mbude, 2017). With peer-tutoring, the researcher would encourage schools to approach it with care since the intelligent learner may feel slowed down by the system. Lastly, Gade and Mbude (2017:5) suggest that academic performance can be improved and maintained by scheduling monthly accountability sessions for schools and departmental officials. The researcher concurs with Gade and Mbude (2017) on the matter concerning monthly accountability. However, this should be approached with care to avoid making accountability a usual practice of no value.

3.4.5 Improved performance

DBE boasts the ever-improving Grade 12 results (Motshekga, 2021). The table below presents the performance results at both the national level and within the Free State Province. According to the DBE, these results were made possible by the chain of accountability designed to leave no learner behind (Motshekga, 2021:5). Thus, the idea behind the accountability chain is to hold every actor or stakeholder accountable for the performance of Grade 12 learners.

FREE STATE PROVINCE

Table 3.1: Free State academic performance

Year	Performance %	Position in country
2022	88.5	01
2021	85.7	01

2020	85.1	01
2019	88.4	01

As indicated in Table 3.1 above, the Free State Province holds the first position in terms of Grade 12 results among the nine provinces of South Africa. However, in 2019, Free State performed better than in 2020 and 2021. This does not preclude the fact that the country experienced a pandemic, which affected schooling in both 2020 and 2021 (SABC, 2021; Khumalo, 2020).

NATIONAL (RSA)

Table 3.2: National academic performance

Year		Performance %
2022		80.1
2021		76.4
2020		76.2
2019		81.3

The table above depicts the national academic performance. The 2019 Grade 12 results were a significant achievement both nationally and specifically in the Free State Province. The researcher suggests that the decline in performance in 2020 and 2021 is attributed to COVID-19 (Khumalo, 2020; South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC, 2021). However, the role of teachers' unions in both 2020 and 2021 can be scrutinised. According to SABC (2021), teacher unions, particularly SADTU, challenged the government on the attendance of schools by both teachers and learners in both 2020 and 2021. The reason cited was that schools provide social relationships that could lead to COVID-19 infections. Khumalo (2020) explains that the government could not accept the proposals made by SADTU. On the other hand, SADTU deemed the re-opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic a unilateral decision. This led to tension, which had an adverse effect on schooling.

According to Khumalo (2020), former Minister of Education, Angie Motshekga, stated that teacher unions, which opposed the government's decision, only yearned to be treated differently from the rest of the public servants. According to these views, the researcher believes that the national and provincial performance, as quantitatively depicted in the tables above, can be attributed to two factors. Firstly, the pandemic's impact on education could have led to COVID-related national and international lockdowns. Additionally, the spread of the pandemic led to the deaths of teachers, and much trauma was inflicted on the learners. Secondly, with the Minister of Education calling for schools to re-open and teacher unions opposing, the teacher unions could account for the decline in the results of 2020 and 2021. This raises the question of academic accountability, where teacher unions could be held accountable.

3.4.6 Teacher unionism

3.4.6.1 Legality of teacher unionism

The formation and registration of teacher unions in South Africa are provided for by the Education Labour Relations Act (ELRA) No. 66 of 1995 (DBE, 2012). This makes unionism a legal movement in the teaching fraternity (Mafisa, 2017:71). According to the DBE (2012:1), five teacher unions were registered by 2012. The unions comprise South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU), the South African Teachers' Union (SAOU), and the National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA). Furthermore, teacher unions registered in accordance with the ELRA include the Professional Educators' Union (PEU) and the National Teachers' Union (NATU). Thus, teacher unions were legally established in South Africa (Mafisa, 2017:71). These unions co-sign agreements with the DBE on behalf of teachers. Furthermore, as Wachira and Odhiambo (2021:596) found, some teacher unions establish political alliances or affiliations with political parties, as is the case in South Africa. Consequently, the researcher can infer that teacher unionism operates legally in South African schools.

3.4.6.2 The scope of teacher unionism

One factor that should be highlighted in relation to teacher unionism is the scope or mandate of teacher unions. Maharaj and Bascia (2021:34) are of the view that the scope of teacher unionism is unknown to many stakeholders, except during strikes,

when only violent engagement becomes news. This has often led communities to associate teacher unions with strikes, while their true mission remains concealed. (Maharaj & Bascia, 2021). According to McCollow (2017:1), teacher unions are interested in the protection and advancement of their own generative interests.

On the other hand, Wachira and Odhiambo (2021) noted three duties or interests that define the scope of the mandate for teacher unions. Firstly, teacher unions are concerned with the well-being of their fellow teachers. This explains the assertive reaction that teacher unions exhibit when faced with challenges from employers (Yusuf, Adedina & Ayelotan, 2015). Secondly, teacher unions generally seek to recruit more members. One could deduce that the greater the membership, the more powerful and recognised the teacher union becomes. Thirdly, teacher unions may assist in improving the country's education standards (Wachira & Odhiambo, 2021:593; Msila, 2022), a commitment that the research asserts requires accountability.

The scope of teacher unions can also encompass the professional needs of teachers (Stevenson, Milner & Winchip, 2018; Symeonidis & Stromquist, 2020:24). Stevenson *et al.*, (2018:30) consider this the most crucial aspect of the scope of teacher unions. The researcher finds this fact indirectly alluded to by Msila (2022) and Wachira and Odhiambo (2021:593), who refer to teachers' wellbeing and the state of education as areas of concern for teacher unions. This is the case with teacher unions, which focus on professional interests (Sikhosana, 2004). According to Sikhosana (2004) and Msila (2004), when SADTU undertook to play the revolutionary role, other unions, such as NAPTOSA, adopted professional strategies of engaging in union-related operations. The researcher considers it crucial that researchers explore the aspects of professional unions and compare those in South Africa and Europe (Stevenson *et al.*, 2018). Notably, the professional needs of teachers can include training and professional development, among other things (Stevenson *et al.*, 2018:31).

3.4.6.3 Unionism and academic outcomes

Cowen and Struck's (2014) study found no significant relationship between teacher unions and learners' academic outcomes; However, Han and Maloney (2021:42) found that teachers' general performance can be improved by teacher unionism,

driven by a desire for better working conditions. However, a conflicting idea expressed by Han and Maloney (2021) is that teacher unionism may also lead to low performance, where teacher unions may prevent the system from removing poor teachers. Thus, the researcher believes that where teacher unions have improved learner performance, the outcome is likely unintentional.

Msila (2022) believes that when fully engaged at the school level, teacher unions can have a positive impact on learner performance. The researcher questions the finding, as the study involved only two schools, using a case study approach, and generalisation is limited. The idea of schools working together with teacher unions is further endorsed by Smith and Benavot (2019:198), with Brazil serving as an example of positive achievement. On the other hand, Uruguay (Benavot, 2019) and Tanzania (Matete, 2021:2) experienced a profound rejection of government policies, mainly due to the perception that teacher unions had not been involved from the outset. Gill, Lerner and Meosky (2016:57) also recorded that the US suffered a blow from teacher unions, which rejected accountability informed by high-stakes tests in mathematics and reading. However, the unions were successful in eliminating NCLB, and the new ESSA was eventually introduced (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017:1; Gottlieb, 2020), which focuses on improving the performance of individual schools. Based on these arguments, the researcher can deduce that the rejection of these policies occurred during the implementation stage, suggesting that governments should involve all stakeholders throughout the policy formulation and implementation process.

3.4.6.4 Accelerating learners' performance through engagement of teacher unions

Whilst teacher unions are often associated with low academic performance in schools, studies by Msila (2021, 2022) have proven otherwise. The studies were conducted differently, involving various schools, yet the results were remarkably similar. It takes cooperation between the teacher unions and SMTs (Msila, 2022) and cooperation between the teacher unions and the district to improve the schools' academic performance (Mafisa, 2017:71). Considering these findings, the researcher noted that the bottom line of the matter suggested by the term 'cooperation' is that of mutual engagement of all the parties, namely, parents, teachers, learners, community

members, teacher unions, RCL, and SGBs. According to Msila (2014, 2021, 2022), teacher unions must be actively involved in the policymaking, design, and implementation of school programmes. The Canadian study by Maharaj and Bascia (2021) also emphasises the need for this collaboration. To bring about common understanding and lasting harmony, it would be appropriate for educational leaders to embrace the views of teacher unions (Maharaj & Bascia, 2021:44). Based on this information, the researcher avers that holding to the perception that teacher unions only bring down the value of teaching fraternity is to miss the value that collaboration with teacher unions can bring.

3.4.6.5 Teacher unions and academic accountability

According to critics of teacher unionism, teacher unions aim to shield their members from being held accountable in the education sector (Symeonidis & Stromquist, 2020:26). However, this perspective is limited to the spectators. The researcher found that, although the idea of accountability may be appropriate, teacher unions are quiet about it. Their views about teachers' mandatory academic accountability could not be established in the literature. It is common knowledge that when teachers complain about forced accountability or adverse procedures that challenge their work-related well-being, unions would naturally address the matter head-on (Symeonidis & Stromquist, 2020:26; Maluleke, 2024). As a result, the impact of unions' reaction on what is expected of unions to account for, such as learners' academic performance, would be detrimental to the learners' education (Yusuf *et al.*, 2015). As a result, this study aims to address the existing gap in the literature and establish, among others, the views of teacher unions regarding teacher accountability. The idea is to determine whether teacher unions can be held accountable for learners' performance and to explore the views on teachers' academic accountability in relation to learners' academic performance. Furthermore, it could benefit all stakeholders if this study establishes a common understanding of the need for verbal accountability sessions. Examining the studies by Msila (2014, 2021, 2022) and Symeonidis and Stromquist (2020), one would assume that accountability would not be a complex task, as these scholars encourage collaboration between administrators and teacher unions.

3.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 3 critically reviewed the literature pertaining to the phenomenon under study. This was done through the lenses of both existentialism and systems theory. The literature explored the various education stakeholders, namely, departmental officials, teachers, parents, learners, NGOs, and teacher unions. The advantages and disadvantages of academic accountability in education were explored. The literature provided evidence that teachers are directly accountable for learners' academic performance. However, other stakeholders were exempt from direct academic accountability. Moreover, it was found that collaboration between departmental officials and teacher unions would have a positive impact on learners' academic performance. However, the voices of teacher unions regarding academic accountability were largely absent. Evidence abounds that teacher unionism has led to a decline in learners' academic performance. Moreover, the literature review has led to the realisation that learners, parents, and NGOs are not held accountable for learners' academic performance.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter explored the literature relevant to the phenomenon under study, specifically teacher unions' perceptions of academic accountability sessions in the Motheo District, Free State Province. Guided by the research questions explained in Chapter 1, the researcher critically reviewed the literature in Chapter 3. In addition to the research questions, the researcher discussed the literature in light of the two theories that underpin the study, namely, Frankl's theory and systems theory. The two theories shed light on the fact that the education sector is dependent on various interdependent stakeholders. Consequently, the researcher identified multiple stakeholders in the education sector and critically explored their stance regarding the principle of accountability. Stakeholders include teachers, teacher unions, parents, the community, and officials from the DoE. In the literature, the stance of teacher unions on academic accountability remains unclear. Following this, Chapter 4 elucidates the research methodologies employed by the study to generate data on teacher unions' perceptions of academic accountability. The research paradigms, research approach, and research design employed in generating the data are explicitly explained in this chapter. The researcher further explained how the chosen methodologies and design are the most relevant to the study.

4.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN THE STUDY

Ngulube (2015) and Mukhles (2020:77) view the research methodology as a fundamental plan for the researcher, essential to the study's process. It serves as the lens through which researchers gaze to arrive at answers to the posed research questions. Concurring with Ngulube (2015), Swarooprani (2022:537) notes that the research methodology is followed both scientifically and systematically. Inferred from these views, it becomes evident that the research methodology encompasses all the processes involved in the research and is based on the research design. Attesting to this, Ngulube (2015:127) and McMillan and Schumacher (2014) agree that research methodologies begin as a research design, that is, an idea or overall blueprint for the

research. Igwenagu (2016:5) concurs that the research methodologies guide research. Conclusively, it goes without saying that all studies are based on research methodologies.

The study's research methodology was carefully selected to address the following research concerns.

Main research question

The study aims to address the following research questions:

- What are the stakeholders' perceptions of the Department of Education's academic performance accountability sessions in the Motheo District, Free State Province?

Sub-research questions

- What is the importance of the Department of Education's academic accountability sessions?
- What is the role of stakeholders in academic accountability sessions of the Department of Education?
- How can stakeholders' perceptions of accountability sessions affect learners' academic and school performance?
- What are the challenges faced by stakeholders in the Department of Education's accountability sessions?
- How can the Department of Education mitigate challenges faced by stakeholders in academic performance accountability sessions?

4.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY EMPLOYED IN THE STUDY

The following research methodology guided the study:

4.3.1 Research paradigm

The study called for a research paradigm that is harmonious with the phenomenon under study. Alharahsheh and Pius (2020:40) share the sentiment with Junjie and Yingxin (2022:10), and together they contend that a research paradigm is understood

in its four elements: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and method. Concurring, Junjie and Yingxin (2022) and Kaliyamurthi (2021:1) also highlight the values of ontology and epistemology in understanding a research paradigm. The scholars agree that while ontology concerns the nature of truth, epistemology speaks of the meaning attached to data (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020:40; Junjie & Yingxin, 2022; Kaliyamurthi, 2021), as extracted by the researcher. From an ontological perspective, this study posits that truth is naturally existent yet subjectively multiple (Mukhles, 2020:86). This notion reflects the diverse views of participants, as required in an interpretivist paradigm. In the study, this assisted in obtaining the views of stakeholders regarding formal academic accountability sessions.

On the other hand, from an epistemological perspective, the researcher maintains that the study necessitated a subjective approach to data handling (Kaliyamurthi, 2021:2), which allowed for questioning and probing. Thus, the subjective view of epistemology called for an interpretivist paradigm, where the researcher engaged with participants to gather qualitative data (Mukhles, 2020:86). Consequently, the study involved participants in in-depth and focus group interviews. CMs, principals, DHs, and members of unions were interviewed to gather their perspectives on academic accountability sessions.

The qualitative research essentially calls for extensive hermeneutical interpretation of data and is, therefore, interpretivist in nature (Romm, 2018:14). Consequently, the data generated would be triangulated with other data generated through different data collection instruments (Creswell & Clark, 2018; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). In the study, triangulation is one of the steps that ensures both credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

In the study, the researcher favoured the interpretivist paradigm. Interestingly, Nwanna (2007) singles out the interpretivist quality of a qualitative study as a benefit, together with its 'explanatory' quality. This also highlights the importance of an interpretivist paradigm in the qualitative approach. On the other hand, an interpretivist paradigm teaches that reality is neither singular nor complete (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Reality changes as engagement with people and processes is continued. Conversely, the processes of qualitative data generation, as explained following the inductive

approach, cannot be entirely free from the researcher's subjective involvement. Rehman and Alharthi (2016) hold the view that the inductive approach involves the researcher attempting to discern patterns that lead to the identification of themes. To accomplish this, the researcher employed an interpretivist approach.

Consequently, this study required data from a variety of sources, which were generated through interviews, observations, and documents. Realities remain latent (ontology) until interpreted through the dynamic involvement of the researcher (epistemology). As a matter of caution, given the subjectivity of involvement in the paradigm, it may lead to some unintentional manipulation by the interpreter. The researcher may unwittingly engage their own self in the study and render the findings biased (Nickerson, 2024). To minimise the chances of bias and subjectivity, the researcher employed various strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of the study (refer to sub-section 4.7).

4.3.2 Research approach

A research approach is considered a method for examining and explaining the study and its findings (Taherdoost, 2022:53). The study employed a qualitative research approach, as opposed to quantitative and mixed methods research approaches. Ugwu and Eze (2023:20) view the qualitative approach as research on the nature and quality of phenomena. This includes the settings and manifestations that are readable through direct engagement with data sources. This makes qualitative research inductive in nature, yet it offers the researcher a structured approach to data generation (Haradhan, 2018:23). Busetto, Wick and Gumbiger (2020) identified a unique aspect of qualitative research; it is interested in the context of the phenomenon. Thus, one can infer that the qualitative approach indirectly examines how the environment influences the situation. The peculiar advantage of the qualitative approach is its notable ability to lead to the required improvement of a programme and thus invites the intervention of relevant and external organs (Busetto *et al.*, 2020). However, qualitative research, when carried out alone, deprives the research of its necessary gauging and expression, which determines the frequency and statistical presentation of practices (Ugwu & Eze, 2023:20). Moreover, it may invite undesirable bias and subjectivity that may affect the research findings. However, the researcher

employed triangulation of data through generating data by means of interviews, document analysis and observations (refer to sub-section 4.7).

This study was conducted within the framework of the qualitative research approach. While the position of the DoE concerning academic accountability is already well-known and well-documented in the literature, as evidenced in Chapter 3, the researcher employed qualitative methods with union representatives to acquire the teacher unions' stance regarding the research questions and objectives of the study. As elucidated by Swarooprani (2022:538), qualitative methods can capture participants' opinions about situations as they are experienced. This approach also enables the researcher to analyse relevant documents and step into the scene to observe events in their natural setting (Taherdoost, 2021:23). Thus, in addition to teacher union representatives, CMs, principals, and DHs were interviewed. However, the qualitative approach requires ample time for observations (Taherdoost, 2021). To address this challenge, the researcher spent time as set by the accountability panel observing live events.

4.3.3 Research design

The study employed the multiple case study research design. Within the qualitative research approach, there are various research designs to choose from. These include ethnographic, case study, phenomenological, grounded theory, and critical research designs (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:368). This study was interested in a phenomenon which affects various entities in a system. Through the lenses of existentialism and systems theory, the researcher examined how stakeholders, particularly teacher unions, perceive the phenomenon of academic accountability. As a result, the research employed a multiple case study research design, as it investigated a single entity and compared participants' views to establish similarities and differences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:370; Coombs, 2022). This explains the appropriateness of the multiple case study as the research design for the study, given the phenomenon under study. As McMillan and Schumacher (2014:371) elucidate, the case study involves an in-depth understanding of the case. However, the case study is bounded by area, period of time, and participant features. This eventually affects the possibility of generalising the study findings. The researcher

addressed the challenge by acknowledging the trustworthiness process of the study, as outlined in sub-section 4.7.

4.4 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

4.4.1 Population

A population is simply the large number of individuals subjected to the study from which we draw samples and to which we would generalise our findings (Willie, 2023:76; Shukla, 2020:1). The population for this study entails 12 CMs, 87 secondary school principals, DHs of 87 secondary schools, and four teacher unions based in the Motheo District in the Free State Province.

4.4.2 Sampling of participants

Sampling is defined as the process of identifying prospective participants who can provide data representative of the larger population (Willie, 2023). This study employed a case study research design. As a result, qualitative methods of data generation were used. Participants were purposively sampled. The purposive sampling employed was non-probability sampling based on convenience. Thus, readily available participants were sampled (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

4.4.2.1 Circuit Managers (CMs)

Motheo District comprises 12 circuits. CMs were purposively and conveniently sampled. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014:151), convenience sampling involves selecting participants who are readily available for the study. This means that convenient sampling is not dependent on a strictly organised procedure. Thus, the researcher conveniently sampled four CMs based on availability.

4.4.2.2 School Management Teams (SMTs)

As previously stated, the Motheo District in the Free State Province has a population of 87 secondary schools. Sampling of SMTs will be conducted purposively, ensuring even representation of schools among the selected participants. In purposive sampling, the selection of participants is based on the knowledge that the researcher is likely to obtain information-rich data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Makwana, Dabhi, Engineer & Chudasama, 2023:776). The study drew information from purposively sampled SMTs. Thus, four principals and four DHs were sampled. Two of

the SMTs were drawn from schools that had recently participated in the accountability session because they had failed to meet the required pass rate. On the other hand, two SMTs were sampled from schools that had not been called for academic accountability.

4.4.2.3 Teacher unions

The study involved members of the teacher unions in the Free State. As a result, three teacher unions were selected for sampling. The researcher focused on teacher unions that were involved in Free State school politics. These include NAPTOSA, SADTU, and SAOU. The researcher generated data from four SADTU members, two NAPTOSA members, and one provincial member from SAOU. The number of members from each teacher union was based on the membership number of each in the Free State. Thus, seven members of teacher unions voluntarily participated in the study.

4.4.2.4 Snowball sampling

Both convenience and purposive sampling, as explained above, were employed to locate suitable participants for the study. However, snowball sampling was allowed. Thus, the researcher created a platform that enabled referral to information-rich participants. This is a snowball sampling approach (Makwana *et al.*, 2023:766). In snowball sampling, participants themselves recommend possible information-rich participants to the researcher (Taherdoost, 2021:22). However, snowballing was not necessarily employed to replace convenience and purposive sampling; instead, the processes were carried out together. Through snowballing, the provincial member of SAOU was identified as an information-rich participant. School-based participants identified this participant as a source of general information affecting the wider area under scrutiny.

4.4.2.5 Selection of events to observe

The Motheo Education District usually holds various engagement sessions with stakeholders, particularly school-based educators. On the other hand, teacher unions periodically hold meetings with members. However, for this study, the research questions were considered when events were selected for observation. The researcher has selected the education department's academic accountability sessions

as events to be observed. The researcher also noticed that teacher unions rarely hold meetings with members. The researcher managed to attend some of the meetings as a passive observer. It is important to note that meetings were attended on the condition that the researcher could receive information pertinent to the meeting, taking into account the accessibility factor related to the meeting. Moreover, the researcher managed to attend meetings where the DD of the Motheo District verbally engaged with Grade 12 teachers.

The researcher attended events after establishing the relevance of the agenda to the phenomenon under study. In brief, the researcher selected the teacher unions' general meetings, the DD's meetings with Grade 12 teachers or SMTs, and the formal academic accountability sessions as events warranting observation in the context of the study. In relation to the underlying theories, SMT members, teacher unions, and departmental officials are equal contributors to education. Consequently, they are individuals who contribute to the efficient operation of the education system, working towards a common goal of education. The following factors were guiding descriptors in the observation grid.

- District/provincial members in attendance and offices held
- School members in attendance and offices held
- Union members in attendance
- Indication of support from district/provincial offices of education
- Data presented
- Emergent points to consider

4.4.2.6 Selection of documents for analysis

Every organisation relies on documents to operate lawfully, efficiently, and productively. As a result, there were numerous documents that could be analysed, but only a few were relevant to the phenomenon under study. In relation to the selection of documents for analysis, Armstrong (2021:2) avers that documents provide basic evidence needed. According to Morgan (2021:64), the documents analysed in the study include various items, such as artefacts, videos, and documents like

newspapers and books, from which we can derive some information relevant to the phenomenon under study. The list of documents includes calendars and diaries.

Accountability sessions involve various documents. Documents were selected using the strategies outlined by Morgan (2022:71). The aspects involved are legitimacy, integrity, representativeness, and sense. Firstly, the researcher was able to establish the genuineness of the document. According to the study, the researcher deemed genuine documents those that are signed and on letterheads, or those that were handed out during live events. Regarding the second strategy, namely, integrity, the researcher checked the extent to which the document is error-free. Error-free documents were assumed to have passed the test based on the second strategy. Errors included, but were not limited to, incorrect dates, unorganised content, and unsigned letters. In terms of strategy three, the researcher verified that the document was a representative of the other versions of the same document.

Furthermore, the researcher considered whether the document was original, that is, it was not merely a summary of other documents. Lastly, the researcher checked if the document carried aspects relating to academic accountability. All the documents that passed the four steps were selected for analysis. As a result, letters inviting principals to one-on-one accountability sessions were selected for analysis. Moreover, when members of SMTs are summoned to make presentations about their schools, slides are prepared for these accountability sessions. The researcher also selected these slides for document analysis. According to Triad3 (2016), the selection of the mentioned documents in relation to the phenomenon under study helps to answer questions such as who wrote the document, why, and when. Triad3 (2016:3) offers these questions as guidelines validating the appropriateness of documents. Consequently, schools' presentation slides were selected for their significance regarding the aspect of academic accountability.

Moreover, at the beginning of each year, schools are typically presented with abridged overall performance documents for all public secondary schools in the country, which portray their academic performance. In essence, the document bears the annual academic report. Alternatively, the district office could also provide information on schools' performance. The document covers the performance of each school over the

past three years. The researcher used the document to identify underperforming schools, their performance percentages, and the Minister of Education's speech. The researcher analysed the document and sought information relevant to the phenomenon under study and the research questions.

These documents made triangulation possible. Accountability presentation documents were used to confirm claims made by CMs, principals and DHs. The letters inviting stakeholders to academic accountability and feedback reports for members were analysed, and it was verified that the claims made by teacher unions—that they are not considered stakeholders due to fear of resisting accountability (Symeonidis & Stromquist, 2020:26)—are indeed true. As a result, they are not invited to attend academic accountability sessions. The teacher unions' claim that they support accountability was verified in the document, which called for members to be awarded for academic excellence. Lastly, feedback reports following the WTR campaigns by Teacher Union 1 were analysed, and confirmation of the challenges experienced by stakeholders during academic accountability sessions was obtained.

4.5 INSTRUMENTATION AND DATA GENERATION TECHNIQUES

The study engaged participants in qualitative verbal exchanges of information, known as interviews (Sahoo, 2022:1). Interviews are further explained as a qualitative instrument that utilises focused conversational communication between the researcher and the participant(s) (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022). In research, interviews include one-on-one and focus group interviews (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022). Furthermore, interviews provide a verbal description of the situation (Sahoo, 2022). In the study, the researcher conducted both one-on-one and focus group interviews with participants. Moreover, as both observations and document analysis are important for triangulation in qualitative data generation (Bowen, 2019), the study employed observations and document analysis to generate more data. In brief, data were generated through four techniques: one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, document analysis reviews, and ethnographic observations of live events in their regular sessions. The qualitative data generation instruments employed in the study are discussed below.

4.5.1 Focus group interviews

Taderhoost (2021:20) explains the focus group interview as a process of interviewing a group of people with a homogeneous experience. Concurring with this idea, Sahoo (2022:8) adds that focus group interviews endeavour to create a natural setting in which a group of participants can be interviewed together. They agree further that focus group interviews help to stimulate participants to engage in action and inspire responses. This is achievable through the focus group's inherent characteristic of continued discussion, more so than mere interviewing (Taderhoost, 2021:20). However, the element of semi-structured questioning also forms part of focus group interviews. The researcher felt the need to conduct focus group interviews with union office holders, specifically the chairperson, secretary, financial officer, and their deputy officers, in their offices, where they receive complaints and discuss issues together.

The researcher conducted two focus group interviews to determine the stance of teacher unions regarding formal academic accountability sessions in the Free State Province. Procedurally, cases from site structures are often elevated to branches through which further elevation or referral can be made to the provincial office. The national office is directly responsible for communicating with the DOE's national office on behalf of all the member teachers of the country. Thus, the study also allowed snowball sampling to reach information-rich members. This was achieved through one-on-one interviews conducted either face-to-face or by telephone, depending on the accessibility of the participants. Following the discussion above, members of teacher unions who share the same sentiments (Taderhoost, 2021:20) on union politics, based in schools and branches, were interviewed through focus group interviews. Two focus groups, involving both SADTU and NAPTOSA, were conducted. This created a natural setting.

However, it is important to note that the focus group interview often depends on group members, where everyone is expected to contribute (Empower, 2024). To minimise challenges, the researcher appeared presentable. The participants were duly informed of the purpose of the interview and of their rights to participate voluntarily. The researcher requested that participants allow the recording of the interview sessions. An advanced technological recording device was used to record the entire session. Pausing and probing were also employed to request additional information. After every

session had expired, the researcher transcribed the session verbatim. This prepared data were generated for the next stage, known as data analysis.

4.5.2 In-depth one-on-one interviews

CMs, principals, and DHs each formed a smaller sample compared to the teacher union's samples. As a result, the study employed one-on-one, semi-structured, in-depth interviews to generate data from CMs, principals, and DHs. Moreover, since the study focused on teacher unions' perceptions of the FSDoE's academic performance accountability practices, the researcher opted for generating richer qualitative information that only interviews could provide. Makwana (2023) explains that interviews can help acquire personal experiences, ideas, ethics, facts, and perceptions.

Interviews were conducted at the locations deemed most suitable by the participants. Procedurally, interviewees were asked to consent to the recording of their individual sessions. An advanced electronic device was used to record interviews. Before the interviews began, the researcher employed the strategy suggested by Sahoo (2022), who noted that interview sessions should be piloted to identify weaknesses associated with questioning and the comfort of the participants. The researcher piloted the study by interviewing with a prospective volunteer participant. During the pilot test interview process, the researcher verified that the questions were clear, answerable, and free from potential bias (Taherdoost, 2022b:39). The questionnaires were then restructured and tailored based on the revealed weaknesses.

For the in-depth interview to be successful and yield the required results, the researcher took heed of the cautionary measures suggested by Sahoo (2022:9). These measures include the researcher's appearance, explanation of the research purpose, recording of answers, note-taking, probing, and planned pauses. The researcher carefully employed these measures to address the possible challenges that arose during the interviews, where interviewees appeared to be reluctant to reveal certain information (EMpower, 2024). These measures were useful since accountability is a broad aspect of education. These measures were considered as the interview unfolded. The researcher took heed of their own posture when seated. Body language speaks as loudly as words. Coupling a good, inviting posture, the

researcher sought to appear presentable. The site was visited beforehand to verbally engage with potential participants and inform them of the research's purpose (Sahoo, 2022). They were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time during the research if they so wished, as required under ethical considerations. This helped establish the friendly rapport necessary for interviews (Awan & Lanjwani, 2017:13).

During the research, the researcher jotted down notes that depicted verbal and non-verbal cues (Ruslin, Mashuri, Rasak, Alhabsyi & Syam, 2022: 22). These notes were intended to assist in identifying points that required clarification and to facilitate a comprehensive analysis. The researcher was able to match notes with answers to determine moods where needed. Notes assisted in probing. Viewed as the process of seeking elaboration during the interview (Ruslin *et al.*, 2022), probing allowed the researcher to gather more information following the participants' responses. The element of probing was employed in the research to seek clarity and gain a deeper understanding.

Additionally, one-on-one interviews allowed for return visits to further clarify questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Thus, the study employed in-depth, semi-structured interviews, allowing probing and return visits for further enquiries. Moreover, the researcher's process of interviews was marked by a few pauses to allow for thinking and invite further explanations. After the one-on-one interviews had taken place, the recordings were ready to be played back, and the interviews were transcribed precisely.

4.5.3 Observations

The study generated data through observations of key events. Observations were conducted to enhance the triangulation of data generation methods. Ellis (2024:81) explains the process of observation as a way for the researcher to actively engage the senses of sight and hearing in what is naturally occurring at the designated research site. However, Ekka (2021:17) warns researchers to guard against possible bias attached to observations. To mitigate the problem, the researcher constantly examined the processes and findings to ensure consistency with existential and systems theories.

Furthermore, the researcher continually judged the findings against the set research questions. The importance of this method, chosen for this study, lies in the fact that data generation was conducted without making participants aware of the process, thereby mitigating possible subjectivity in a naturalistic manner (Ellis, 2024:81). Ekka (2021:17) refers to this method of data generation through observations as covert. The importance of this covert method of observation lies in the fact that participants will likely behave naturally when the research takes place without their knowledge.

Since the study explores the principle of academic accountability, the researcher observed live academic accountability sessions conducted by the FSDoE in a natural setting, that is, at the location designated by the FSDoE. The data generation method in the research was structured. According to Mohapatra (2018:3), observation becomes structured when it is "characterised by a careful definition of units to be observed." Consequently, the observation grid was developed and structured to entail various descriptors. The descriptors aligned with the research questions that comprised the study. Additionally, the descriptors were developed to align with the two theories guiding the study, namely, Frankl's theory of existentialism and Maturana's systems theory. As a result, the role of an individual school or principal was observed within the larger system of the education department.

During the data generation, field notes were recorded. Genkova (2020) explains field notes as notes taken during observations. Notes can be descriptive and reflexive (Genkova, 2020:2). Descriptive notes are explained as a way of capturing information about the participants' demographic characteristics, the physical settings where the events take place, and their behaviour. On the other hand, reflexive notes are the researcher's reflection on each session conducted. Field notes appear to record all information alongside the observation descriptors. The understanding is that unnecessary information will be discarded during the data analysis process. The researcher took descriptive notes during sessions, avoiding possible judgements. This was done to detach personal feelings from dominating note-taking, as advised by Ciesielska, Katarzyna, Bostrom and Ohlander (2018:41). After exiting the setting, the researcher will reflect on the session and write notes that bear important information about the event or session.

4.5.4 Document analysis

Bowen (2009:27) explains document analysis as a systematic procedure of evaluating documents. This process is qualitative in nature (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014) and involves the researcher's interpretivist engagement (Bowen, 2009:27). The researcher chose this method of document analysis because a large number of documents pertaining to the phenomenon under study are available. Moreover, as Bowen (2009) elucidates, documents provide a stable and intact record of information on a particular subject. Put differently, the researcher can opine that the importance of document analysis lies in the fact that documents speak for themselves.

Academic accountability is facilitated by various written documents throughout the process. As Karppinen and Moe (2019:6) elucidate, since documents are information-carrying texts, they naturally warrant document analysis to extract the required significance. Moreover, academic accountability is dependent on data (Baraka, 2020:68) as explained in sub-section 3.2.16. Documents can be analysed to triangulate research methods and increase trustworthiness. As Bowen (2009) and Morgan (2022) explain, document analysis provides "supplementary" (Bowen, 2009:30) information and complements the study (Morgan, 2022:66). The researcher can infer that document analysis benefits significantly when carried out in conjunction with other data generation methods.

In the study, selected documents were thematically analysed as elucidated by Triad3 (2016:1) and Morgan (2022:72). This process was followed by content analysis, which provided common keywords and repeated ideas (Namey, Guest, Thairu & Johnson, 2008:137). Selected documents include letters and circulars informing stakeholders of the upcoming academic accountability sessions, as well as presentation slides. Usually, schools are required to prepare presentation slides for accountability sessions. Presentation slides were requested through the offices of principals and circuits. Moreover, minutes of meetings relevant to the phenomenon were requested. All documents were thematically analysed. The researchers' particular interest was in the inclusion of psychosocial support and the strategies employed by the school to improve results.

Most importantly, themes that pertain to the research questions were developed. The developed themes were presented qualitatively and then quantified. Throughout the process, the researcher employed the strategy of reflexivity. Morgan (2021:64) and Bowen (2009:31) concur that reflexivity seeks to detach the researcher's subjective inclusion of self-mood from the selected documents.

4.6 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The researcher will discuss data analysis and interpretation as two distinct steps within a single process. However, the steps will complement one another. These steps are discussed separately below.

4.6.1 Analysis of data

In the study, data were generated in various ways. The instruments employed include one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, observations of events, and document analysis. As a result, the study presented a wealth of data that required specialised analysis. Thus, the data were thematically analysed (Dawadi, 2020) and merged into a comprehensive format, following the six steps outlined by Naeem, Ozuem, Ranfagni and Howell (2023).

4.6.1.1 Thematic data analysis

The researcher employed the thematic analysis of qualitative data. Dawadi (2020:62), Naeem *et al.* (2023), and Castleberry and Nolen (2017:2) concur that thematic analysis in research is the process of separating data into various aspects, which leads to the identification of relevant ideas or themes. The advantage of thematic analysis lies in its ability to incorporate both deductive and inductive forms of data coding (Dawadi, 2020:62), thereby offering the researcher a choice of analysis appropriate to the study. This is attainable through the process of data coding (Dawadi, 2020; Castleberry & Nolen, 2017; Archer, 2018). Archer (2018:2) explains coding as the researcher's ingenuity in breaking data into the smallest components. The researcher read the data several times to familiarise themselves with it. In the process, patterns emerged and were inductively identified. Thus, data were inductively coded.

As previously stated, the researcher employed an inductive approach to formulate themes during the data analysis. Data are thematically produced when patterns are

developed in relation to pre-set themes (Byrne, 2021:1396). Thus, the researcher sought to directly link themes emergent from data with the research questions. Emergent themes were adopted (Naeem *et al.*, 2023). In essence, the researcher was faced with data generated through various instruments, including focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews, observations of events in natural settings, and analysis of documents.

To successfully integrate data and produce comprehensive themes, the data were synoptically arranged following the six steps outlined by Naeem *et al.*, (2023). The steps followed provided a systematic arrangement of data that thematic analysis calls for (Dawadi, 2020:62; Castleberry & Nolen, 2017:2). Systematically handled, the data were analysed in the following way (Naheem *et al.*, 2023). The researcher adopted this form of data analysis for its practicality. The form also allowed for a detailed inductive approach, where the data led to the identification of themes (Naeem *et al.*, 2023). However, the researcher noted the shortcomings in the thematic analysis methods as offered by Naeem *et al.*, (2023). The steps did not adequately cater to intentional triangulation or data merging.

Regarding multiple instrumentation, triangulation of instruments is viewed as a generation of data through the employment of various instruments (Nugraha, 2002:150). In the study, the researcher generated data through focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews, observations, and document analysis. As a result, the researcher employed triangulation of data obtained through various instruments at every stage of thematic data analysis.

4.6.1.2 Six steps of inductive analysis

As previously stated, the researcher adopted the six steps of inductive analysis offered by Naeem *et al.* (2023). The steps embraced the inductive method of thematic analysis.

Step one: Transcription of and acquaintance with data

This is the first stage following the acquisition of data. The stage refers to the first step of engaging with raw data that has just been generated. The researcher generated a substantial amount of qualitative data through focus groups and one-on-one

interviews. The researcher used an advanced technological device to record the interviews. In this stage, all data generated were documented. Audio tapes were transcribed into documents word for word. The researcher listened to the recordings repeatedly and transcribed them verbatim. This led to the researcher's familiarisation with the data generated through interviews.

The researcher also examined the data generated through observational instruments and documents. The data generated were read repeatedly for familiarisation. The researcher also reviewed field notes and linked them to data generated through observations. The process prepared the way for the next step. This ensured a clear understanding of the data, allowing the researcher to identify keywords and their relationships with possible themes and sub-themes.

Step two: Identification of keywords

This stage continues from the previous one. The researcher actively engaged with the data and began to notice patterns and keywords (Naeem *et al.*, 2023:4). The researcher scrutinised all forms of data and started to identify distinct keywords. Keywords were picked as they occurred (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011:5; Namey *et al.*, 2008:137) and in their raw format. In the data generated from the interviews, keywords included quotations as participants stated them. During this step, data were visualised for easy handling. This is the step that Onwuegbuzie and Combs (2011:5) identified as the visualisation of data. Data visualisations also make data linkable. The researcher used tables to classify visualised data (Freeman, Walters & Campbell, 2008; Verdinelli & Scagnoli, 2013). This step preceded the coding of data.

Step three: Data coding

Coding was performed by classifying data using codes (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:404). In practice, Step three was embedded in the previous step and eventually carried out together. In Step three, data were given meaning. At this stage, the data began to shed meaning for the researcher. Through repeated data review, the researcher removed unidentified data (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011:5; Namey *et al.*, 2008:137; Saldana, 2013). Data which were developed and coded as keywords were developed into segments (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The segments were

labelled and tabulated. Vivo codes were used to categorise the perceptions of participants according to three categories: teacher unions, CMs, and SMTs. The researcher began the process of sorting codes in accordance with the research questions (Naeem *et al.*, 2023:8). At this stage, the researcher associated the data generated through various instruments. Thus, the correlation of data took place. During the process, the researcher attempted to fit data generated through document analysis and observation into codes developed by interviews. Thus, the development of themes ensued. Document analysis was used to verify the data generated through interviews. The researcher had managed to acquire the letter inviting stakeholders to accountability sessions, the teacher union report, and the accountability presentation slides. These were used to triangulate the data generated, and the reality of the accountability sessions was verified through ethnographic observations.

Step four: Development of themes

As Naeem *et al.* (2023) elucidate, keywords and codes always lead to themes. Various related keywords were coded as one aspect (Naeem *et al.*, 2023:3), which would be recognised as a theme of the study. Themes developed were tested against the study to determine their relevance to the research questions. However, not every theme seemed relevant to the study and the research questions (Saldana, 2013:259). Some themes were broader, while others were considered sub-themes. The researcher classified the coded keywords as themes and tabulated them to display the categories and their corresponding sub-themes.

Step five: Conceptualisation

The fifth step followed, namely, conceptualisation. As implied by the title, conceptualisation involves seeking to grasp and describe concepts arising from keywords and themes (Naeem *et al.*, 2023:4). Evidently, conceptualisation cannot be carried out with keywords and themes in isolation from the entire dataset. At this stage, to ensure a robust conceptualisation, the researcher examined the themes and linked them to the research questions. Themes were polished and linked to research questions. Data from documents and observations were analysed. The researcher used tables to fit data from documents and observations into appropriate themes and sub-themes. Thus, triangulation of instruments was continued. Eventually, data

received advanced meaning. The researcher refined the themes, further discarding irrelevant themes and sub-themes.

Step six: Data representation

This step called for the development of the conceptual model. Naeem *et al.*, (2023:4) view this step as the culmination of dealings with data. During the sixth step, the conceptual data are examined further through the lens of the theoretical framework underpinning the study. A conceptual model has been developed, and the data are now ready for presentation. Recommendations may be developed based on the conceptual model. The researcher compared the data and its sources to verify the steps taken and whether all points had been addressed. After verification was completed, the researcher fitted the data within the latitudes of the two theories, namely, the theory of existentialism and systems theory. With this completely done, the researcher accepted the document or compilation as a whole. Thus, data analysis was finalised.

4.6.2 Interpretation of data

All data were presented in relation to the research questions guiding the study. Furthermore, the themes were presented within the framework of the theories underpinning the study, namely, existential and systems theories. The data were presented separately in the following manner.

4.6.2.1 Focus group and one-on-one interviews

Qualitative data were generated through focus groups and one-on-one interviews. Data generated through interviews were recorded using a sophisticated recording device. Data were thereafter transcribed verbatim. A document bearing transcribed data was developed. Keywords and coded points were used to develop themes. Qualitative data were presented descriptively and statistically. Thus, qualitative data were also quantified. While data presentation was done descriptively, the researcher ensured that direct quotations were made and presented in their original form. Moreover, the researcher ensured that graphs were used to express the extent of impact on participants. These formats allowed the data to speak for itself, as they could

be easily interpreted. Thus, the combination of qualitative data and quantified explanations thereof made interpretation simpler and more understandable.

4.6.2.2 Observations

As previously stated in the previous sub-sections, the observed accountability sessions were analysed. The researcher observed the live sessions of accountability and other events as a distant observer. That is, the researcher was not involved in the processes. The structured grid was employed to first record and later analyse the events in their natural form. Moreover, the researcher had recorded emotions and emergent behaviour as they occurred. The grid contained pre-determined aspects or descriptors that aligned with the research questions (refer to Appendix L). The researcher had ensured that reflex notes were taken, which further clarified the events. The researcher took reflex notes during and after sessions had expired. Such were interpreted both in words and quantitatively. Moreover, the grid allowed for the emergence of aspects related to the research questions. Aspects were fitted into the themes using the triangulation of instruments strategy. The researcher reported on themes, quoting related aspects from observations.

4.6.2.3 Document analysis review

On the other hand, documents were analysed according to the grid that was developed for this purpose. Available relevant documents were acquired and duly analysed. Thus, data generated through document analysis were interpreted both descriptively and statistically. Findings were presented in both verbal and quantitative terms, as well as through tables and graphs. According to Shenton (2004:3), document analysis assists in the verification of data. Thus, triangulation took place. The researcher interpreted the findings by linking them across all data generation methods, namely, one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, document analysis, observations, and field notes. Furthermore, the researcher interpreted all the stated findings in relation to the theories underpinning the study, namely, Frankl's theory of existentialism and Maturana's systems theory. Moreover, the interpretations were made to relate to the stated research questions. Lastly, the recommendations were clearly presented in words. Recommendations were made to answer the main research question and sub-research questions.

4.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

All researchers are required to strive for truth and authentic facts by employing trustworthy principles (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017:3; Naeem *et al.*, 2023:5). In many cases, the research process involves human beings as both researchers and participants in the study. Consequently, bias and subjectivity may directly or indirectly affect the qualitative part of the study (Taherdoost, 2022b:39). For this reason, Hafeez-Baig, Chakraborty and Raj (2016) draw attention to the need for trustworthiness in the study. It becomes evident when perusing Hafeez-Baig *et al.*, (2016) that the employment of these strategies typically helps to minimise unplanned traces of subjectivity that are possible in any study. Stahl and King (2020) emphasise the importance of the confidence that trustworthiness of the study ought to produce. Both the researcher and the reader should become confident that the study will almost certainly address the research questions. The factors related to trustworthiness were employed in the research to validate the study, as explained below. The primary objective was to achieve a state where the study can be trusted, in accordance with the mandatory trustworthiness of the research.

4.7.1 Confirmability

Another criterion that enhances certainty about the study is confirmability (Statistics Solutions, 2021). Shenton (2004:72) and Nowell *et al.*, (2017) view confirmability as the process of ensuring that findings and recommendations can be traced back to the data generated. In accordance with this view, the researcher considers the safekeeping of data to be a critical practice in all research. During the processes of data generation and analysis, it is likely that the researcher's interest influenced the study (Shenton, 2004). The researcher employed the following criteria to ensure the confirmability of the study.

4.7.1.1 Audit trail

An audit trail is understood as the process by which the researcher comprehensively explains the study (Shenton, 2004:92; Statistics Solutions, 2021) to address the component of confirmability. This includes elucidation of data generation methods, data generation instruments, and findings. An audit trail can be advanced by keeping all data safe for immediate provision when needed (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Following this,

the researcher provided detailed information on all processes carried out, specifically data generation, data analysis, interpretation, and theme development. To ensure confirmability, the researcher acknowledged their own interests to guard against biased results. Data analysis was conducted systematically, with each step clearly outlined. Words, graphs, and tables were detailed in such a way that the data provided and the quantitative figures presented speak for themselves. The data will be stored securely in a password-protected computer and online on OneDrive for the provision of evidence should it be needed in any way (Nowell *et al.*, 2017).

4.7.1.2 Reflexivity

Reflexivity, as part of confirmability, can be clearly understood as the strategy that the qualitative researcher employs to examine their own environment and position to determine how these factors can influence the research process (Statistics Solutions, 2021). According to Shenton (2004), the researcher may be biased and consequently subjective in their findings. In such cases, reflexivity should be employed. To achieve reflexivity and enhance the confirmability of the study, the researcher used a special diary, journal, or incident notebook. On these, the researcher's interests and possible environmental influences were relentlessly noted (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Care was taken to ensure that personal interests did not impact the study. Moreover, the study employed a multiple case study design, where data were generated through diverse data collection techniques. According to Shenton (2004:72), the triangulation of generation methods and instruments verifies findings and ensures the confirmability of the study.

4.7.2 Credibility

According to Statistics Solutions (2021), credibility essentially requires the researcher to link the research findings to reality, thereby conveying the validity of the research's findings. Concurring with the view, Stahl and King (2020:26) explain credibility in terms of the relationship established between findings and reality. Based on these facts, one can infer that credibility seeks to bridge the gap between the study's findings and the truth as it naturally exists. Supporting this idea, Korstjens and Moser (2017) elucidate the purpose of credibility as a means of ensuring the study's veracity. This can make the study more reliable. Stahl and King (2020) further explain that credibility is more

achievable in quantitative studies than in qualitative studies. This is made possible by the data generation instruments employed in the quantitative study, which require more factual, statistic-based data. Consequently, by triangulating data generation methods and findings, the researcher minimised the credibility of the study (Stahl & Kings, 2020:26).

Statistics Solutions (2021) and Shenton (2004:65) confirm Stahl and King's claim that triangulation increases the credibility of research. In addition, Stahl and Kings (2020) concur and further suggest that triangulation can be applied at the levels of data generation methods, data analysis, and interpretation of findings. Following this, the researcher employed various data generation instruments to minimise the risk of compromising the study's credibility. The instruments used include focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews, document analysis, and observations. In addition to various data generation methods, multiple sources of information were employed, including human participants, live events, and documents (Statistics Solutions, 2021; Shenton, 2004:66). A sufficient number of participants were selected for a multiple case study research design. Various relevant documents were analysed. Moreover, common themes were identified from multiple qualitative data sources. Consequently, findings were based on varied data. Care was taken to ensure that every area of stakeholders or the affected population is represented.

In accordance with Shenton (2004:67), the researcher ensured that the participants in the study participated voluntarily. The researcher informed the participants that, according to research ethics, they could withdraw from participating in the study at any time. In addition to this, the researcher employed probing as an interview technique to facilitate the generation of reliable data (Shenton, 2004:67). Furthermore, the participants were not rushed into providing answers but were given sufficient time through the use of probing. This was done by requesting more information where necessary. The researcher also employed the strategy of intermittent pausing to allow the participants to take their time. Moreover, at every step of the study, the researcher was able to revisit and describe the phenomenon under study (Shenton, 2004:69). In addition to the triangulated findings, the researcher clearly explained the phenomenon under study, the research methods employed, and the interpretation of the findings. Thus, the credibility of the study was established.

4.7.3 Dependability

Dependability is considered the counterpart of reliability (Oluwatayo, 2012:395). However, some researchers link dependability with credibility (Shenton, 2004:71). Examining Oluwatayo (2012) and Bannigan and Watson's (2009) research, one quickly realises that the element of consistency becomes a common feature in both reliability and dependability. This makes dependability and reliability interdependent. The results of the study should be reproducible when repeated. Whilst reliability focuses on the quantitative data generation instruments, dependability can be explained as the consistency of findings should the study be repeated multiple times (Statistics Solutions, 2021). Conversely, Stahl and King (2020:27) view dependability as a means of developing trust with readers. The main purpose is to make the study more dependable.

This study was conducted for academic purposes. As a result, the researcher was supervised. This assisted in ensuring dependability (Stahl & King, 2020:27). Additionally, the researcher sought peer review from fellow scholars (Nowell *et al.*, 2017; Stahl & King, 2020:27). Furthermore, the researcher made return visits to request assurance and revision of the findings. Additionally, while the researcher remained vigilant not to include their own thoughts in the study (Stahl & King, 2020:28), the study data were analysed repeatedly before the final presentation was made. As previously mentioned, this study utilised a range of data generation instruments. In this way, data is synoptically comparable and can eventually be integrated (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011).

4.7.4 Transferability

Another aspect of trustworthiness is transferability. Transferability refers to the possibility of transferring the findings to other situations (Nowell *et al.*, 2017; Korstjens & Moser, 2017:122; Shenton, 2004). Notably, Stahl and King (2020:26) explain that transferring findings to a different situation is the responsibility of the reader, while the researcher is responsible for ensuring the study's reliability and trustworthiness. Korstjens and Moser (2017) further show the difficulty of applying findings of a particular study to a different situation. Put differently, it is not always possible to transfer findings to all areas, but generalisation can be selective. According to Shenton

(2004:69), transferability becomes more challenging in qualitative studies than in quantitative studies.

In the study, the researcher did not overlook this aspect of trustworthiness due to its possible impracticality. As a result, the study aimed to gather data from the Motheo District-based SMT, CMs, and members of teacher unions. This was expected to enhance the transferability of the study. Stahl and King (2020:27) opine that transferability is probable when descriptions are “thick” to portray circumstances as they are. As previously stated, the study was clearly presented, and the research questions and objectives were clearly explained. Data generation methods and findings were also explicitly stated. Moreover, as encouraged by Stahl and King (2020:27), the researcher adhered to the timeframes offered to generate data. According to the researcher’s understanding, this refers to the study’s delimitations. Consequently, the researcher ensured that the delimitations and limitations of the study were clearly and comprehensively explained.

4.7.5 Triangulation

Bans-Akutey and Tiimub (2021) opine that the importance of triangulation as an aspect of trustworthiness is evident in the fact that is featured in all principles to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, as explained above. As Statistics Solutions (2021) put it, “Triangulation involves using multiple methods, data sources, observers, or theories in order to gain a more complete understanding of the phenomenon being studied.” In this study, data were generated through interviews, document analysis, and observations to enhance triangulation. Data generated through various instruments were integrated to produce various themes on which the findings were based. In this way, triangulation was employed as a powerful strategy to validate the data (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:5). The researcher utilised this strategy to compare and reorganise the data into manageable themes, leading to conclusions and recommendations. Furthermore, the researcher was open to participants in the study. The researcher also paid return visits to seek further explanations and pose clarity-seeking questions.

4.8 RESEARCH ETHICS

The importance of research ethics is discussed by Mager (2020) and McMillan and Schumacher (2014). It is a way of putting aside improper conduct during research.

The need to guard against what is morally improper is made essential by the fact that most studies involve human beings as participants (Mirza *et al.*, 2023). As a result, the following points were taken into consideration to mitigate potential harm and psychosomatic problems that participants might experience during data collection.

4.8.1 Ethical clearance

The study was conducted with the provision of ethical clearance from both UNISA and the FSDoE. This followed the mandatory application for research ethical clearance that was only obtainable after scrutiny of ethical considerations and terms (Hayes & Rockwood, 2020). The FSDoE and all institutions expected to grant permission for the study to take place also considered the application upon receiving confirmation of ethical clearance from UNISA, as required by research procedures (Kazeroony & du Plessis, 2019). The study was therefore conducted with the approval of the ethics committee. The university clearance certificate bore the contact information of university officials who could be contacted should an offence or deviation of any sort be suspected.

4.8.2 Informed consent

Letters requesting research approval and participants' individual and generative participation were sent to individuals and institutions in accordance with Arafat (2024:143). Copies of the research ethical clearance certificate were attached to these letters. It was explained that participation in the study would be based on participants' free will. Details about the study were disclosed to prospective participants (UNISA, 2016:14). The expected benefits and the envisaged contribution of the study were also disclosed to prospective participants. Moreover, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time during the research.

4.8.3 Privacy and confidentiality

The study was conducted with strict adherence to privacy and confidentiality in all matters relating to participants (UNISA, 2016). The well-being of participants was enhanced by adhering to privacy and confidentiality. The names of participants were not required in any way. During the processes of data analysis and presentation, pseudonyms were used for data classification instead of real names (Arafat, 2024).

Results were also not linked to real school names to prevent participants from being easily identified by associating them with specific schools.

4.8.4 Participants' well-being

The researcher recognised individual participants as important and informative sources of information in the study (Dev, 2024). As a result, the purpose of the research was disclosed beforehand. Research questions were set with this in mind. The data generation processes were conducted with respect. Pausing and simmering, characterised by the withdrawal of possible interference, were used to ensure the ethics of respect were enhanced during the focus group and one-on-one interviews (Dev, 2024). It was guaranteed that participants would receive feedback and that the findings would be made available upon request. Participants will be provided with links that lead to the automatic download of the thesis. Moreover, the researcher assured participants that the findings would be generated strictly for academic purposes.

4.9 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher attempted to meet all the requirements that made up a successful study (Pubrica, 2024). The requirements include selecting a suitable research paradigm, approach, and design. The employment of these methodologies culminated in a detailed data analysis that led to the deduction of reasonable themes and conclusions. However, the following limitations and delimitations are unavoidably evident from the outset of the research planning.

4.9.1 Limitations of the study

Scholars generally explain limitations as restrictions impacted by the chosen research methodology (Miles, 2019:2; Pubrica, 2024). The impression here was that these constraints are unavoidable. The researcher notes that the research was limited to a few research instruments, whereas empirical research is often characterised by a diverse range of them. However, practically, they cannot all be applied together. This could not yield trusted results except when acknowledged. Moreover, given the limited data generation instruments, the study relied on a small number of participants and sources, despite the population being as large as the Motheo Education District in Free State province. As a result, this could pose a serious challenge to generalisations and transferability. Moreover, the data generation was conducted within the restricted

period as allowed by the FSDoE and the central offices of the unions. Additionally, further limitations were imposed by the fact that the researcher is employed, and data generation was, therefore, conducted within limited timeframes.

4.9.2 Delimitations of the study

Contrary to limitations, delimitations of the study are “self-imposed restrictions to your study compared to limitations which have inherent restrictions to your methodology” (Miles, 2019:7). For the study, the findings may not be generalised to other provinces of the country. Furthermore, within a province, such as the Free State, various districts may experience and thus conduct academic accountability sessions differently. This may cause the study to fall outside their scope.

The study is limited to the SMTs of secondary schools, among others; yet, the sample was not drawn from every secondary school in the province. SMTs were recognised as participants by virtue of their positions as school managers, while all teachers conduct teaching. Moreover, considerable attention was on Grade 12 results, as much accountability is expected from them in terms of the academic accountability sessions in the Free State. This poses a limitation, as the study also aims to highlight the need for reasonable academic accountability across the board.

4.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 4 focused on the research methodology employed in the study. The research took place within the laterals of the interpretivist research paradigm. This necessitated that the research be conducted using a qualitative research approach within the framework of a multiple case study design. Data were generated through qualitative research techniques, including one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, observations, and document analysis. The chapter further explained how the methods of trustworthiness were addressed. The research ethics required for conducting the study were also detailed to minimise possible harm inherent in the study. Moreover, the study's limitations and delimitations were also discussed. Chapter 5 presents the data, followed by its analysis and interpretation.

CHAPTER 5

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Chapter 4 detailed the data generation processes of the study. The study was conducted within the framework of existential and systems theories. These theories position every stakeholder in the education department as equal role players, leading to effective accountability in a democratic era. It has become evident in Chapter 4 that the study was qualitative in nature. Consequently, the qualitative nature of the study informed the research approach that was predominantly interpretivist and constructive. The research detailed the need for multiple case studies as the research design. In this study, focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews, observations, and document analysis provided rich and valuable data that only qualitative research can offer.

Chapter 5 presents the analysis and interpretation of data compiled through various methods. One-on-one and focus group interviews were employed to generate data, which were analysed following emergent themes. Observations and document analysis were done using structured tools designed to describe factual data related to the research questions. In Chapter 5, data are analysed and presented statistically and descriptively. Thus, qualitative data were described in words and correspondingly quantified to enhance clarity of information. Moreover, Chapter 5 deductively develops common themes related to research questions within the limitations of two theories embraced in the study, namely, existential and systems theories. Themes were explicitly explained and linked to each other. Consequently, triangulation occurred at the levels of data generation, data integration, and data interpretation. This relates to the synoptic evaluation and integration of data to meet the rigour of the study. It is essential to reiterate the study's aim and objectives.

Aim of the study

- To explore stakeholders' perceptions of the Department of Education's academic performance accountability sessions in the Motheo District, Free State Province.

Objectives of the study

- To determine the importance of conducting the Department of Education's academic accountability sessions.
- To identify the roles of education stakeholders in the academic accountability sessions of the Department of Education.
- To determine how stakeholders' perceptions of academic accountability sessions may affect learners' and schools' academic performance.
- To explore the challenges facing stakeholders in the Department of Education's academic accountability sessions.
- To determine how the Department of Education can address the challenges faced by stakeholders during accountability sessions.

5.2 PROFILING OF PARTICIPANTS

Turner (2019:8) explains sampling as the process of selecting a reliable, smaller group of subjects to study from the population of possible participants. The study drew samples from the population of teacher unions based in the provincial offices and the branches. The researcher observed that SADTU, NAPTOSA, SAOU, and NATU are active teacher unions in the Free State Province. Three of these teacher unions were sampled. The study also drew samples from the 12 circuit offices of the Motheo District in the Free State Province. Moreover, the school sampled participants from the population of 87 SMTs based in 87 secondary schools in the Motheo District, Free State Province. The choice of population was influenced by the theories underpinning the study, namely, existentialism and systems theory. The theories fitted individual circuits, teacher unions and members of SMTs into the broader perspectives as stakeholders in the education system. Sampling of participants was done in the following way.

Table 5.3: Circuits

Item No.	Circuits	Participants	Number of participants	Gender	Experience as circuit managers	Type of interview involved
1.	Circuit A	Circuit Manager A	1	Male	15 years	One-on-one
2.	Circuit B	Circuit Manager B	1	Male	18 years	One-on-one
3.	Circuit C	Circuit Manager C	1	Male	5 years	One-on-one
4.	Circuit D	Circuit Manager D	1	Male	7 years	One-on-one
Total number of participants			4			

As previously stated, the Motheo District in Free State Province consists of 12 circuits led by 12 CMs. The researcher sampled four out of 12 CMs based in the Motheo District. Selection was based on convenience. The researcher concealed the real names of CMs for ethical reasons and to prevent the linking of information provided to the CM. The researcher renamed the selected managers for this purpose. Thus, circuits A, B, C, and D were selected. It is important to note that Circuit A does not relate to Circuit 1 of the district; however, the pseudonyms were randomly assigned to sampled educational circuits. This also explains the naming convention for CMs, which is based on the circuit's name. All CMs were males with varying work experiences. CMs A and B have been serving in circuit offices for a while, while Circuit Manager D has been serving in the circuit office for seven years. The researcher conducted in-depth one-on-one interviews with four CMs.

Table 5.4: Schools

Item No.	School	Data pertaining to the sampled school						
		Type of school	Quintile	Number of learners/ Grade 12 learners	Facilities aiding performance	Subject streams	2023 Grade 12 pass %	2024 grade 12 pass %
1	School A	Public	1	820/113	Library	Science/ Commerce/ Humanities	92.9	88.9
2	School B	Public	1	927/148	Library	Mainly Science	98.6	96.8
3	School C	Public	1	600/65	-	Mainly Art	100	88
4	School D	Public	1	962/114	Library/ Laboratory	Science/ Commerce/ Humanities	93	86.5

The Free State-based Motheo District comprises 87 secondary schools. Four of these schools were sampled based on academic performance, made possible by convenience. Thus, the researcher purposively sampled conveniently accessible schools. The schools were renamed School A, School B, School C, and School D. As all the schools were public, they were all classified as quintile 1 schools. Such schools are dependent on governmental grants to meet their financial needs. These schools may not require school funds from learners' parents and guardians, except when adequate arrangements have been made through the SGB.

Both School A and School D offer three main streams in the FET phase: science, humanities, and commerce streams. School A has achieved a Grade 12 pass rate of 92.9%, while School D achieved a performance of 93% in 2023. School A has a library, while School B has both a library and a science laboratory. School C achieved a 100% grade 12 performance in 2023. The school faces a challenge due to the lack of facilities, resulting in inadequate co-curricular support.

The challenge noted from the synopsis, based on Grade 12 performance, pass percentage, and co-curricular support, is an inequitable approach to support and demand. While some schools do not enrol more than 100 learners, the streams offered are different with inherently different challenges; yet, all schools are valued the same way in terms of pass performance.

Table 5.5: School principals and departmental heads

Item	School	Principals	Experience in office	Departmental heads	Experience in office	Subject streams headed by departmental heads
1.	School A	Principal A	12 years	DH 1	4 years	Creative Arts
2.	School B	Principal B	8 years	DH 2	6 years	Languages
3.	School C	Principal C	7 years	DH 3	9 years	Humanities
4.	School D	Principal D	12 years	DH 4	3 years	Geography

Principals of the sampled schools were identified by pseudonyms assigned to schools to meet the ethical requirements of the study. Thus, **Principal A** was the principal of **School A** when the study was undertaken. This means that the principals were named **Principal A**, **Principal B**, **Principal C**, and **Principal D**. The researcher sampled available DHs in Schools A, B, C, and D. DHs of the schools sampled were named DH 1, DH 2, DH 3, and **DH 4**, respectively. Thus, **DH 1** and **Principal A** were both from **School A**. In this manner, as matched in **Table 5.2.3**, **Principals B, C, D**, and **DHs 2, 3**, and **4** were from schools as matched.

Table 5.6: Teacher unions

Item No.	Participants	Number of participants	Position in the union	Pseudonym	Type of interview
1.	Teacher Union 1 members	4	Branch office	Teacher Union 1 participant 1	Focus group
				Teacher Union 1 participant 2	
				Teacher Union 1 participant 3	

				Teacher Union 1 participant 4	
2.	Teacher Union 2 members	1	Provincial office	Teacher Union 2 participant	One-on-one
3.	Teacher Union 3 members	2	Provincial office	Teacher Union 3 participant 1	Focus group interview
4.				Teacher Union 3 participant 2	
Total number of participants:				7	

Table 5.2.4 depicts the union members who voluntarily participated in the study. The researcher proposed engaging all members sampled from the population in focus groups where the union members would be interviewed together as a homogeneous group. In practice, only members of **Teacher Union 1** were available at the branch level for the focus group. The researcher conducted a focus group interview with four members of **Teacher Union 1** from a specific branch office in the Motheo District.

Regarding **Teacher Union 2**, the researcher secured a formal interview with the provincial secretary. This is the office that serves the union members based on the membership roll. The researcher also managed to engage with the provincial office member of **Teacher Union 3**. Through snowballing, the provincial office member of **Teacher Union 3** was able to direct the researcher to another member referred to as **Teacher Union 3 Participant 2**. **Teacher Union 3 Participant 1**, as a provincial office-based member, volunteered to gather information required by the study from the various districts in the Free State Province. Thus, the researcher managed to acquire rich information from provincial officials who are in direct interaction with associates in various districts and the Free State Province.

Table 5.7: Comprehensive summary of participants

Item no	Participants	Number of participants	Type of interview
1.	Circuit managers	4	One-on-one
2.	Secondary school principals	4	One-on-one

3.	Departmental heads	4	One-on-one
4.	Teacher Union 1 members	4	Focus group
5.	Teacher Union 2 members	1	One-on-one
6.	Teacher Union 3 members	2	Focus group
Total number of participants		19	

The study involved nineteen members out of the intended twenty-four. There were four CMs, four secondary school principals and four DHs. Moreover, representatives from unions numbered seven, comprising one representative from **Teacher Union 2** and two from **Teacher Union 3**, who represented members from the Free State Province. The study also involved four members from **Teacher Union 1**. These members were verbally engaged in the qualitative study through one-on-one and focus group interviews.

5.3 THEMES EMANATING FROM INTERVIEWS

A theme is the peak of the study and should be realised as the heart of the context. SAGE (2020:189) considers a theme as the concept that speaks to abstract patterns of a phenomenon. Thus, the analysis of qualitative data in the study was thematically arranged. During the analysis of documents, in-depth interviews, and observations, the following themes and sub-themes emerged to represent the research objectives in the study.

Themes

- Views of stakeholders on academic accountability
- The importance of academic accountability
- Challenges resulting from academic accountability sessions
- Mitigation of challenges resulting from academic accountability sessions
- The roles of stakeholders in academic accountability sessions
- Stakeholders' image of academic accountability can enhance learner performance

Table 5.8: Themes and sub-themes

RESEARCH QUESTIONS		THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Main research question	What are the stakeholders' perceptions of the education department's academic performance accountability sessions in the Motheo District, Free State Province?	1 Views of stakeholders on academic accountability	1.1 Academic accountability is real 1.2 Academic accountability is required 1.3 Current accountability in education has notable flaws 1.4 Academic accountability and support go together
	What is the importance of the education department's academic accountability sessions?	2 The importance of academic accountability	2.1 Circuit managers' views 2.2 Principals' views 2.3 The views of departmental heads
Sub-research question	What are the challenges faced by stakeholders in the education department's accountability sessions?	3 Challenges resulting from academic accountability sessions	3.1 Challenges of academic accountability sessions from the perspectives of teacher unions 3.2 Challenges of academic accountability stemming from the perspectives of circuit managers 3.3 Challenges of academic accountability stemming from the perspectives of SMTs
	How can the education department mitigate challenges faced by stakeholders in academic performance accountability sessions?	4 Mitigation of challenges resulting from academic accountability sessions	4.1 Formalise academic accountability 4.2 All stakeholders should account 4.3 Embrace learners' psychosocial and educational challenges 4.4 Take heed of the importance of the line function in the system
	What is the role of stakeholders in academic accountability sessions of the Department of Education?	5 The roles of stakeholders in academic accountability sessions	5.1 Principals' views regarding the roles of stakeholders in academic accountability sessions 5.2 The views of departmental heads regarding the role of teacher unions in academic accountability sessions
	How can stakeholders' perceptions of accountability sessions affect learners' academic and school performance?	6 Stakeholders' image of academic accountability can enhance learner performance	

5.3.1 Theme 1: Views of stakeholders on academic accountability

5.3.1.1 Academic accountability is real

- **Data presentation**

The researcher posed a question to teacher unions to enquire if they are aware of the academic accountability sessions underway in Free State schools, particularly those situated in the Motheo District. The purpose of the question was to determine the view of the teacher unions on academic accountability. The question was phrased in the following way: *“Are you aware of the call directed to SMTs to account for academic performance during formal sessions organised by the Free State Department of Education?”*

The teacher unions provided their input as follows.

Teacher Union 1 Participant 1: *“Yes, we are aware, the union is aware that teachers, principals and SMTs are quarterly called to the so-called accountability sessions, and as a union we know about that. We know about these sessions.”*

Teacher Union 1 Participant 2: *“I think your study is important, and I think your findings will also assist the department. Yeah, as a union, we are aware of the accountability sessions that the department organised for SMT members. Yes, we are aware...we know about these sessions. I think as a union we do understand the... the issue of accountability and we support it that we must account for our work...the work that we are doing as per our... our contract.”*

Teacher Union 2: *“Yes, I am, in the province...in the province. I don’t know what other provinces do, but I am aware of sessions like that in the Free State.”*

Teacher Union 3 Participant 1: *“Yes, we are aware of the academic accountability that the district of education holds to ensure that schools account for their own results...how they worked in a particular year or term.”*

Teacher Union 3 Participant 2: *“Yes we are aware, although it is not with all sessions that are convened because we are not necessarily invited by the department to those meetings, how we come to know about the sessions will be through the members, the members will inform us to say on this date there is this accountability session so they members will be seeking advice on the approach on what they will have to*

do....questions like that. So, it is true that through such questions we come to know that... there will be ...eh... formal sessions for accountability.”

The same question was also posed to the principals: “Are you aware of the call directed to SMTs to account for academic performance during formal sessions organised by the Free State Department of Education?”

The principals responded to this question in the following way:

Principal A: *“Yes, I am aware of that. Every time the department...eh... call underperforming schools for accountability sessions.”*

Principal B: *“Yes, these accountability sessions are held every term by circuit managers, district director and by province for performing and underperforming schools.”*

Principal C: *“Yes, I am aware. I have been in accountability many times.”*

Principal D: *“Yes, I am aware, School Management Teams are required to account for the results.”*

- **Data analysis**

The members of teacher unions affirmed that they were aware of the academic accountability sessions organised by the FSDoE. Teacher unions’ responses clarify that the DoE does call SMTs to accountability sessions. What becomes evident from the answers provided is that academic accountability is a matter of the province and the district. Whilst **Teacher Union 1 Participant 2** and **Teacher Union 3 Participant 2** mention the department as the organiser, **Teacher Union 2** mentions the matter as the responsibility of the PED. On the other hand, **Teacher Union 3 Participant 1** attributes the accountability session to the education district.

Principals sampled also affirm the reality of academic accountability, which involves sessions with SMTs. **Principal B** attributes the academic accountability sessions to the offices of CMs, districts and PED. According to **Principal A**, underperforming schools are required to account for their results, as attested to by Principal D. However, Principal B adds performing schools to the list of those required to account for their academic performance.

▪ Discussion on findings

All participants responded that academic accountability is taking place in the Free State, as well as in PEDs and districts. Thus, accountability in education is real, and it takes place in the form of verbal engagement in formal sessions. The responses received attest to the statement by Mokgobo (2022) in sub-section 2.3.7, as well as Jita (2021) in section 3.2.16, who concur with the idea that the era of democracy has ushered in accountability in the education sphere as well. Confirmation is achieved that academic accountability does indeed take place in the Free State Province. However, the researcher could discern from responses that academic accountability, as employed by the FSDoE, is not entirely documented to embrace stakeholders such as the teacher unions. For example, none of the teacher unions referred to the policy covering the aspect of formal academic accountability. Attesting to this, **Teacher Union 3 Participant 2** was frank that teacher unions are never invited to the accountability sessions with the department. Teacher unions become aware of the sessions when members consult them for advice and guidance. This suggests that teacher unions often prioritise opposition to accountability in education. Thus, the researcher finds it appropriate to conclude that teacher unions are not regarded as stakeholders of the system where academic improvement is intended to be improved through academic accountability.

The reality of academic accountability sessions is confirmed by data generated through observation of four sessions held in four different settings. **Accountability session 1 of 2024** was the responsibility of the circuit managers; **Accountability session 2** and **Accountability session 3** were both led by the DD. *The HoD headed the Accountability session 4 of 2024.* This confirms the statements in interviews that mention the PED, districts and CMs as the offices to whom accountability is required to be made. Moreover, the researcher successfully obtained the academic accountability presentation slides of **School A**, **School B**, and **School C**, thus authenticating that academic accountability is real and is taking place in the Free State, particularly in the Motheo Education District. It, therefore, becomes an established finding that academic accountability is a real phenomenon and that the current era is characterised by accountability; teacher unions are aware of this trend. Viewed through the lens of a theoretical framework, it is confirmed that accountability

is the responsibility of members of the system. Moreover, it becomes clear that teacher unions are among the key stakeholders in education. It is no wonder that theme 2 emphasises that academic accountability is required of members of the system.

5.3.1.2 Academic accountability is required

- **Data presentation**

The researcher aimed to investigate the significance of academic accountability from the perspective of teacher unions. Consequently, a question was posed to teacher union participants, requiring them to evaluate academic accountability sessions in the Motheo District. The question was stated as follows: *“How do you value academic accountability?”* Teacher Unions responded in the following manner.

Teacher Union 1

Teacher Union 1 Participant 1: *“We think accountability is good when it is done in a building way... we admit that we must all account.”*

Teacher Union 1 Participant 2: *“We understand the issue of accountability. We know that as workers we must account for work as per the... our contract. But we don’t... from my point of view... we do not value the accountability sessions because they do not serve the purpose they are intended to serve. I mean if we can eliminate the judging part of it.”*

Teacher Union 1 Participant 4: *“As a union, we do hold our members responsible, that is why the union is also holding award ceremonies to honour teachers whose learners have passed in flying colours or at least who passed in great numbers. This is proof that, as a union, we value accountability as a good thing. The thing is that it should be done in a good way and with a good intention.”*

Teacher Union 2

Teacher Union 2 Participant: *There should be accountability, I mean... eh... how can you... how do you evaluate performance correctly and shortfalls if there is no accountability? If there is no accountability, it means that I can do as little as I want and get away with it because I don’t have to account for it. We have been appointed within the Department of Education for a specific position to perform certain functions. You are supposed to perform those functions to the best of your ability, and if you don’t*

do that, you must be held accountable. I mean the low marks provision for accountability.”

Teacher Union 3

Teacher Union 3 Participant 1: *“We, as Teacher Union 3 (Name deliberately withheld), take high regard for the academic accountability. None in the union is expected to say that it is wrong for the district to require schools to account. We should all account for our own work.*

Teacher Union 3 Participant 3: *“Look, I think accountability... it shouldn’t be interpreted as a negative concept unless it is tainted by what happens at that time. For us, accountability is necessary because it is valuable in the sense that the atmosphere should be such that you are not blamed for anything, but you are given the opportunity to reflect on how you have been performing, and surely, there must be some help provided in the session. So, it has got value if it is not a session where people are going to be slashed for poor performance. From our side, I want to believe that you can even still account for not sustaining your previous year’s performance. Accountability should not be limited to those who haven’t reached a particular mark. If we take it with that positive attitude, then I think the value of accountability is really high. It is needed, necessary, and assists on both sides.*

▪ **Data analysis**

All three teacher unions responded positively to the question. This is verified in their responses that accountability is required. **Teacher Union 1** indicates evidence of the value of academic accountability. It is stated that, as a union, they also hold members responsible for their performance in assigned duties. This is supported by Teacher Union 1 Participant 2, who notes that the contract between the employer and employee calls for accountability. Speaking on behalf of **Teacher Union 1**, **Teacher Union 1 Participant 1** responded that accountability “... is good when it is done in a proper way...” **Teacher Union 1 Participant 2** alludes to the negative aspect of it by stating that academic accountability sessions should ensure that candidates called to account are not judged. Concurring with **Teacher Union 1 Participant 2**, **Teacher Union 3 Participant 3** employs the verbs ‘blame’ and ‘slash’ to explain the negative consequences of accountability. Thus, one could conclude that the good of it would

mean replacing blame, slash, and judge with their opposites. Failing to do that, as **Teacher Union 3 Participant 3** indicates, academic accountability would be tainted.

These responses shed light on the value of academic accountability as advanced by the districts and the province. Concurring with the sentiment, **Teacher Union 1 Participant 2** is of the view that *“we admit that we must all account.”* The view was buttressed by **Teacher Union 1 Participant 4**, who assertively said: *“We also account to our superiors.”* **Teacher Union 2** also concurs, stating the importance of accountability. In their opinion, academic accountability lifts performance, and employees should be held accountable for their contributions. In a nutshell, **Teacher Union 3 Participant 3** clears all doubts by stating that academic accountability *“is needed, it is necessary, and it assists on both sides.”*

- **Presentation of findings**

The answers provided refute the notion that teacher unions thwart accountability (Symeonidis and Stromquist, 2020:26) (refer to sub-section 1.2). Furthermore, the teacher unions' views on academic accountability sessions are contrary to the view that the scope of teacher unionism centres mostly on the well-being of teachers (Wachira & Odhiambo, 2021:593) (Refer to Section 3.3.6.2). However, within the framework of systems theory, caring for one's members is acceptable, as the theory holds that entities should be in a position to facilitate the efficient functioning of the system.

In accordance with the answers provided by participants of **Teacher Union 1**, it becomes clear that academic accountability is required and is valuable in education. One should provide a record of performance in accordance with the job description provided. In all the accountability sessions observed, the researcher witnessed SMTs giving an account of their performance. This is supported by the words of **Teacher Union 1 Participant 1**, who reiterated that a contract is struck between two parties, the employer and the employee. Concurring with the sentiment, **Teacher Union 3 Participant 1** also answered in much the same way, *“We should all account for our own work.”* With this in mind, the researcher concludes that the statements further rule out the possibility that the employee in the DoE was exempt from accountability for

their own responsibilities. This aligns with Motshekga (2021:5), who asserts that no one should ever escape academic accountability (refer to sub-section 5.4.3).

The importance of academic accountability also becomes evident in the words of **Teacher Union 2 Participant**: *“There should be accountability, I mean ... eh...how can you...how do you evaluate performance correctly and shortfalls if there is no accountability?”* According to **Teacher Union 2**, performance in education is subject to correct evaluation, which can only be provided by academic accountability. The implication here is that teacher unions take high regard for academic accountability.

Teacher Union 3 also upholds academic accountability. This becomes obvious in the words of **Teacher Union 3 Participant 1**, who holds that no one is ‘*expected to say that it is wrong for the district to require schools to account.*’ Whilst other participants held that academic accountability is required, **Teacher Union 3 Participant 1** is very specific that schools should account to districts, a notion supported by Motshekga (2022:2) (refer to sub-section 3.2.4.9). This refers to a hierarchical accountability system, where accountability is a bottom-up system (Igbokwe-Ibeto, Osakede & Nwobi, 2020; Skedsmo & Huber, 2019:252; Shewbridge et al., 2019:10) (refer to sub-section 3.2.21). According to Hwang (2017:2), this is the most preferred form of accountability due to its formal procedure, which requires the employee to report to their supervisor. Since everyone in the system is supervised, all employees as individuals are subject to accountability. This becomes notable in the answer provided by **Teacher Union 3 Participant 2**, who presented the view that accountability should not be restricted to those who have not reached a particular mark. In conclusion, the researcher can infer that teacher unions support academic accountability and that no education actor should be exempt from it.

5.3.1.3 Current accountability in education has notable flaws

- **Data presentation**

The literature review revealed that academic accountability is made to various members of the panel. It is also a fact that academic accountability thrives well in the hierarchical structure (Shewbridge *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, systems theory asserts that all members of the system, referred to as individuals with tasks to complete in the context of existential theory, are accountable for the system's efficiency. Following

this, a question was posed to teacher unions, asking about the importance of the line of function in the school system. The question was posed in this way: *“How do you value the importance of line function with regard to academic accountability?”* The following responses were received.

Teacher Union 1

Teacher Union 1 Participant 1: *“Very, very important. It is the key to labour peace and success. It can make people feel responsible. How do you want the HOD to account to the director or to the chief director? If we can maintain line function, we can increase performance... I tell you.”*

Teacher Union 1 Participant 4: *“My leader, I think this one of line function is very, very important and we value it as a union. Imagine the circuit manager coming to your school. You are an English teacher. The circuit manager is a math teacher. How is he going to assist you? How will he moderate your books? So, the line function is very important. The relevant person to go to your books, as we always maintain as a union, is your immediate supervisor. In the absence of the immediate supervisor, the deputy principal can step in. However, if we do this line function accordingly, we would be where we are today, discussing the accountability sessions, because everyone would have done their job. And I think the support will be efficient because you will be supported by someone who knows what he or she is doing. Imagine the subject advisor of Physical Science coming to support me as the History teacher, or coming here to request the scripts of my learners to monitor or control me. How is he or she going to support me after that? So, line function is very important and we normally tell our members that if the circuit manager comes to school or the principal comes to your class and requests your work, remind him or her about the line function.”*

Teacher Union 2

Teacher Union 2 Participant: *“There is a line function, and it is for a reason. If you think about it. Let’s say the Departmental Head in school does what he or she is supposed to do and then moves up to the deputy principal and the principal addresses the... the issue of accountability there in school. Ideally, it would not be necessary for the department to have these large formal settings where principals and SMTs are pinpointed to say your school is this and this. And your school is that and that and that*

and you're useless and you're because those are the things that have been said in those meetings. So, it will resolve a lot of things. I think if you think about academic performance, you also need to think further. You need to think in terms of subject advisors, the availability of subject advisors, how the department actually appoints subject advisors in all the subjects, and whether the department provides transport. Things like that are very complicated systems. Then you get issues with veering off the point, but then you get issues of learner transport. The learner transport isn't functioning as it should. Then the learners arrive at school at 10 o'clock. They are dropped off, and the transporter arrives at 2:00 to take them back. This is the time I have to teach the learners. But do you think the department takes that into consideration? It doesn't. There's a school in the Free State that's so full that the school has been divided into two halves. I don't know how those teachers do it. Half of the learners go to school from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm, and the other half arrive at 2:30 pm. So, you get a teacher to stand in front of the learners from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm. They have 40 to 50 learners in the classes. They have to mark assessments, grade papers that set up assessments, and perform other related tasks. How sustainable do you think that is? So, this system is a fraud...but. Line function is important. If the line function were followed, I think accountability would have taken place as it should have. I think our education in the Free State would have been a lot healthier than it currently is. This is the province that has been performing well for about four or five years, being the top in the republic, as long as the system is not manipulated. If they see the Grade 12 learner is not going to make it, they convince the learner to write three subjects now and let the other three he or she struggles with go over to next year. So then that learner's results aren't actually calculated. This needs to be corrected because it drops many learners who are supposed to make it to Grade 12 class.

Teacher Union 3

Teacher Union 3 Participant 1: *Line function is important everywhere... in every area of work. We cannot support when a teacher is called to the office of the director and asked about their work. As a union, we support line function. Teachers should report to Departmental Heads, then to deputy principals, and finally to principals. With principals, you shall remember that there is a law in place. At school, they represent the Head of Department. They can be the only ones who report to higher structures,*

such as the HOD. However, for labour peace, let them report to circuit managers and then directly to the district. In the office, we only hear of these things when they are reported. When they are not, we will think that everything goes right. The department knows what they need and should call us, but in reality, we only know when they are reported.

Teacher Union 3 Participant 2: *I think line function is very crucial and it is very important because I can't say... let me make an example, we have a teacher and the Departmental Head earning more than a teacher, we have a deputy principal earning more than the Departmental Head, we have the principal earning more than the others below, and there's a reason for that. The reason is that those who are earning more they have more responsibility. They also have more responsibility to support those below them. There is no way that the principal can know my problem as the teacher without my... my Departmental Head. I think the line function should be in a good state that the principal in his office they learn issues of principals through the Departmental Head and deputies but imagine my Departmental Head being told by the principal that I have a problem of discipline, I have a problem of poor performance in accounting because certain learners do.... I can't hear that from the principal as the Departmental Head. My teacher should have informed that... you know.... So, I think what is also important is that everyone wants to be recognised for who they are. Imagine if principals discuss certain things with the Departmental Head, and the deputy does not know. You will feel unrecognised, and this creates a bad feeling. It destroys the moral. Therefore, we ought to respect each level, but we must make sure all levels are connected. Issues should flow in the correct way from the lowest to the highest level, so that everyone is part of what is happening.*

- **Data analysis**

All the teacher unions agree that line function is important in education. According to **Teacher Union 3**, recognition of line function ensures that “issues are flowing in the correct way from the lowest to the highest level so that everyone is part of what is happening.” This notion is buttressed by **a Teacher Union 2 Participant who states that the purpose of the line function in education is to advance** issues from the lowest office to the immediate supervisor. Uniquely, participants of Teacher Union 1

responded that the line function in management is “very, very” important. Thus, recognition of its establishment in education is stressed.

According to **Teacher Union 1 Participant 1**, observance of the line function in education brings labour peace. The participant assertively stressed further that line function brings success. Moreover, line function increases academic performance and that *“it is of course what lacks in academic accountability sessions in the district.”* The idea behind this thought is that academic accountability sessions do not consider the line of function. **Teacher Union 3** deems the education department’s academic accountability unhealthy without recognition of line function. The participant further cited that what the Free State Province attributes to hard work is compromising learners’ rights by influencing the dropping of subjects to ensure such learners are not counted in when academic performance is determined.

Furthermore, all the teacher unions reestablish the line function in the order of levels of posts in the schools. Level 1 teachers are expected to report to the DHs, who are supervised by deputy principals. At the highest level in schools is the school principal, who, by virtue of appointment, represents the HoD in schools. They can report to both the district and the CM. **Teacher Union 1** and **Teacher Union 3** add to the line function the contribution of subject advisors as district-based officials working directly with DHs. According to Teacher Union 2, observing the line function could help resolve the issue of academic accountability. It will eliminate the blame referred to in the previous subsection.

▪ **Presentation of findings**

Other teacher unions also shared the same sentiment that the current system of academic accountability contains flaws. **Teacher Union 1 Participant** had this to say regarding line function in the education system: *“There is a line function and it is for a reason.”* The participant then indicated that proper channels of accountability go from the teacher through the DH to the deputy principal, and that *“ideally speaking, it would not be necessary for the department to have these large formal settings.”* **Teacher Union 3 Participant 1** also concurs on the importance of line function in academic accountability and further brings an important matter to the fore: *“With principals, you*

shall remember that there is a law in place. At school, they represent the Head of Department.”

The participant further avers that, for the sake of labour peace, CMs can account on behalf of schools to the district. **Teacher Union 3 Participant 2** hammered on the feeling of other participants: *“The reason is that those who are earning more have more responsibility.”* Thus, accountability should honour the line function in the system. This supports the bottom-up structure averred to by Haag (2020:4). Thus, teacher unions deem it a flaw in academic accountability that SMTs report to the district and HoD.

Based on deliberations with teacher unions, the current academic accountability meetings in the district and province can be presented as shown in Figure 5.1 below. Based on Figure 5.1, one can observe that current academic accountability compromises the tenets of systems theory, as academic accountability is bottom-up and involves only some candidates, thus compromising the role expected of all entities.

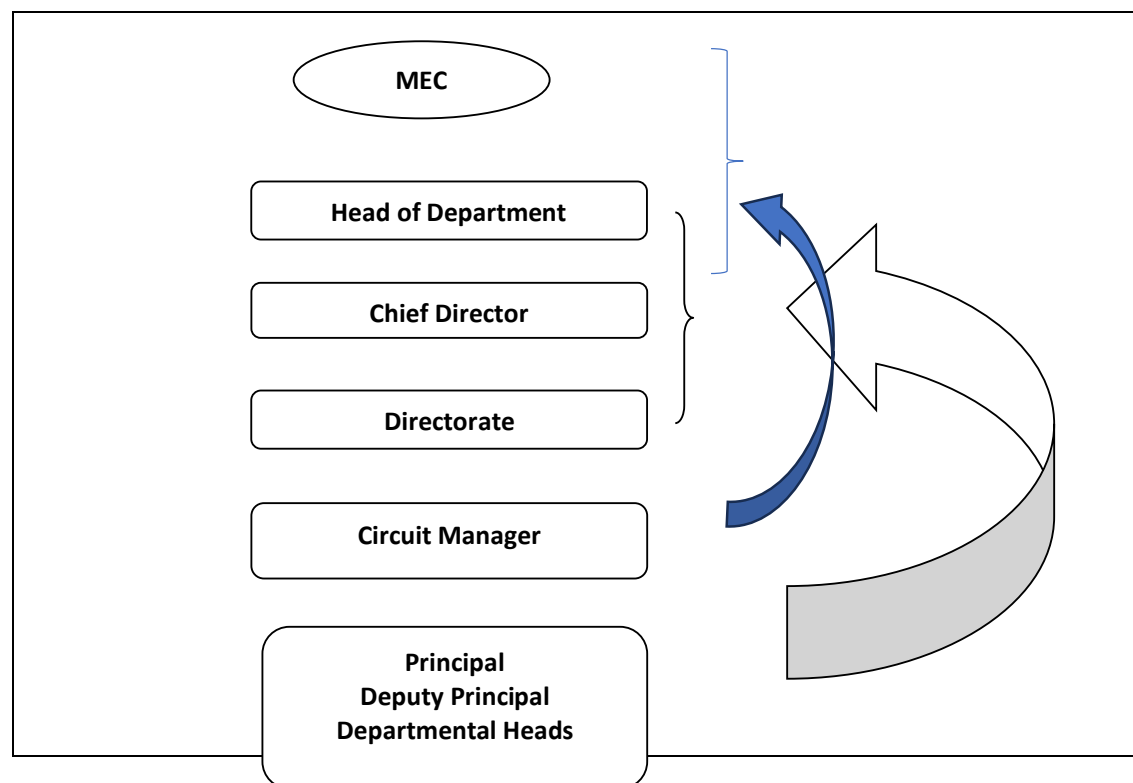


Figure 5.1: Current academic accountability

Thus, SMTs are called to academic accountability sessions where presentations are made before the directorate or the provincial HoD. As shown in Figure 5.1, the office of the CM remains between the schools and the district. **Teacher Union 1 Participant 4** indicated that accountability before the district panel is not effective unless it is changed to involve subject advisors, who are specialists in their own subjects. That is to say, the performance of subjects is reported to the district managers when there are also offices of CMs. Given the details provided, the researcher concludes that academic accountability sessions should be reorganised to recognise lines of function.

Moreover, teacher union interviews reveal their belief that academic accountability does not benefit learners to whom it is worth it. The belief is that SMTs attempt to evade formal accountability at the cost of learners' rights. The notion is expressed with concern by **Teacher Union 2** and stands out among the various questions that teacher unions raise. The issue of dropping learners arose with the following question addressed to **Teacher Union 1**: *"How does the union assist the complainants?"* The question was posed to explore various ways of mitigating the challenges associated with academic accountability.

Teacher Union 1 Participant 2: *"Man, it is very sad when you realise that many learners are kept at Grade 11 because they will get bad results in Grade 12. We tell educators when we hold award ceremonies that they should never fail learners. We know that some learners are forced to write fewer subjects so that they do not affect that year's results when they fail. The department must stop this position thing because it fails many learners. It makes principals pass possible pass learners. This is not good."*

For the same purpose mentioned above, a question was posed to teacher unions: *"What do you think FSDoE can do to mitigate the challenges faced by stakeholders?"*

Teacher Union 3 Participant 2: *"We want to be more into assisting the development of our own members and make sure that there is a smooth running, there is improvement in the general performance. Unions have resources and expertise to assist in those things, so if we are not involved, I think the department is sticking to the old practice of us versus them, you know, meeting when to fight. Really, things need to change. Although we have not submitted evidence, we have heard allegations of*

the culling of results. We raised the issue to ELR and the department that the obsession with Grade 12 results is dangerous to the system. It is dangerous in the sense that every province wants to be number 1. Therefore, every district in that province would like to be number 1, and every school in every district would also like to be number 1, and every teacher in every school would like to be number 1. Now that attitude, that approach at the lower level in class makes such practices possible. To be number 1, I must eliminate what I consider bad by lying to the learner. I can advise them to drop a certain subject. It is very unfortunate. My advice is that we must teach. I am convinced that we are no longer teaching the kids.”

The quoted questions and responses highlight the concern of **Teacher Union 2** that the system fails to support learners in the name of academic accountability. Schools do that to influence the higher percentage of passes. Considering this in light of the literature, it may not be beneficial to acknowledge that learners are also stakeholders of the education system (Spurrier *et al.*, 2020). When learners are left behind in one way or another, it constitutes a failure of the proper education system (Moore *et al.*, 2017). **Teacher Union 1** referred to this matter when asked how they assisted with cases brought to them regarding academic accountability sessions held in the Free State.

The answers indicate the loophole in the education system. **Teacher Union 1** believes that learners are culled to achieve better results to evade formal accountability. This is done by keeping learners who may be incapable at Grade 11. Teacher Union 3 confirms the negative impact that academic accountability has on learners.

Teacher Union 3 Participant 2: *“Although we have not submitted evidence, we heard of an allegation of culling of results”*

As a **Teacher Union 2 Participant** confirms, it is alleged that principals encourage those who manage to advance to Grade 12 to write fewer subjects so that they cannot be included in the overall roll of the registered Grade 12 learners.

This is in line with Spurrier *et al.*, (2020) and Mohokare (2021), who note that learners may be negatively affected by the system. This is confirmed by Hofflinger and Von Hippel (2020), who found that principals do find means to avoid formal accountability sessions.

According to **Teacher Union 1 Participant 2** and **Teacher Union 3 Participant 2**, the attempt to avoid academic accountability is caused by the education department's tendency to rate teachers, schools, districts and provinces in rating positions.

The “...fail many learners...” expression, as expressed by **Teacher Union 1 Participant 2**, can be linked to previously mentioned expressions indicating failing learners as a point of concern. In the previous quotations mentioned above, the issue is alluded to 5 times in a response to a single question. In her answer to this matter, **Teacher Union 1 Participant 1** displayed a stern face and leaned her elbows on the table. Whilst **Teacher Union 1 Participant 2** assertively avers that the department should find a way of ending the tendency, **Teacher Union 3 Participant 1** went on to indicate their provincial office had already taken a move that “*We raised the issue to ELRC and the department that obsession with Grade 12 results is dangerous to the system.*” This shows the Teacher Unions' concern regarding the negative impact that academic accountability sessions have on learners' educational rights. In a nutshell, the researcher concludes that two major concerns of teacher unions undermine academic accountability sessions, namely, failure to observe the line of function and the demand for high performance without monitoring the number of learners registered against the actual number of learners who sit for the examination.

5.3.1.4 Accountability and support go together

- **Data presentation**

The following question was posed to teacher unions: “*Do you feel that the support given is adequate?*” The question was posed to locate the teacher unions' view regarding the support required by schools for academic accountability to take place. The question is motivated by the theories underpinning the study. The systems theory requires every stakeholder to play their part in a system. Moreover, the literature is clear that accountability should be based on support (Mutereko, 2019:85) (refer to sub-section 3.2.6). After all, academic accountability can be hybrid, incorporating both top-down and bottom-up reporting (refer to sub-section 3.2.2.7). The following responses were received.

Teacher Union 1 Participant 2: “*So the support is not adequate. We are playing a blaming game with the Department of Education.*”

Teacher Union 1 Participant 3: *“No. Which support. Money? Principals only get grants and JENN classes. That support is not enough. Schools are not the same. The art school cannot be supported the same way as a science school. They should establish libraries, laboratories for science, and provide tools for technical schools, and we can discuss support. They should hold development classes for SMTs.”*

Teacher Union 2 Participant: *“Like I said, there is no support. I cannot say it is adequate or value it in terms of whether it is enough or not. There is no support. What they give as support always comes a way after you have struggled.”*

Teacher Union 3 Participant 1: *“We do not think that the support is adequate in schools without enough teaching and learning aids... with racial differences still appearing like the one we are handling now in Welkom. Support is never enough... support can hardly be enough. No, the support is not adequate. If we had formal complaints, we would be able to say this is the list of complaints, these were the responses to the complaints, so let’s check how far these were addressed. So, I think it goes back to how we engage with the department. If we were to do these things formally, if our members submitted grievances formally, we would be able to know if there is adequate support.”*

The question, which enquired about the views of teacher unions regarding departmental support, was rephrased in the following way to seek triangulation with the principals’ views: *“How do you value the support you receive from FSDoE with regard to learners’ performance?”* The following responses were received from the principals.

Principal A: *“I value their support very much, especially since the roles of subject advisors are very important; they are welcome. When they come, they give positive feedback. Also, our learners face a lot of challenges, especially in their homes and townships. I usually say that if they are not provided with extra classes, you won’t get the results. The results are negative. Now the department comes in handy when it comes to providing material support and financial support. The parents, due to high levels of poverty are not able to provide support and sustain the... the extra classes. But my problem with the departmental support is it doesn’t come at the right time. For example, from January to May, we don’t receive anything; we are on our own. It is only*

in June that they start providing us with finance. However, we had submitted a request for Saturday classes from February to the end of the year, including March and April classes during the school holidays. We fill out the paperwork, but the money doesn't come. This is frustrating for the principal, who is under pressure from teachers. They want to be paid, and the school doesn't have money at that time. So... eh... the support is not timeous. The department does not provide us with money on time."

Principal B: *"Except for disciplining learners, the subject advisors, DCES, CES and PSC, provide support by giving us materials such as notes, standardised tests, file materials, curriculum coverage, ATPs, marksheets, workshops and other things to improve performance."*

Principal C: *"The support is mostly money for extra classes. They do not help much. They judge more than help. There is a visit known as a district support team visit. They judge more and end up not correcting much. However, the circuit manager and the subject advisors help a lot."*

Principal D: *"The department only supports us financially. They give us money so that we can organise programmes."*

- **Data analysis**

Teacher Union 1 and **Teacher Union 3** responded to the question in a similar manner. They believe that the support provided is insufficient. From their responses, one can identify the support that FSDoE offers. **Teacher Union 1 Participant 3** mentions two things, namely, monetary support and extra classes. However, it is clear to the researcher that extra classes have implications for funds. Thus, the support received is monetary in nature. Teacher Union 3 clearly states that the provision of teaching and learning aids is expected as some form of support, which, in their words, is not happening equitably. On the other hand, **Teacher Union 2 Participant** disagrees with **Teacher Union 1** and **Teacher Union 3** in stating that no support was received from the FSDoE. However, a closer examination of Teacher Union 2 Participant's words reveals that some form of support is received, albeit late.

Whereas principals are institution-based officials, teacher unions are based outside the teaching institution. Principals are the primary recipients of departmental support, while teacher unions typically intervene when complaints are received. As a result, all

principals agree that they receive some form of support from the district. **Principal A** mentions the support of subject advisors and funds, as well as the provision of necessary materials. Principal B concurs with **Principal A** and lists that material support entails notes, standardised tests, file materials, curriculum coverage, annual teaching plans and marksheets. **Principal C** adds the support of CMs to the list. The table below displays the things referred to as support by both teacher unions and principals.

Table 5.9: Support by teacher unions and principals

Teacher Union	View	Principals	View
Teacher Union 1	Inadequate support	Principal A	Subject advisors, material, funds
Teacher Union 2	No support, late contribution	Principal B	Subject advisors, material
Teacher Union 3	Inadequate support	Principal C	Circuit managers, subject advisors, funds
		Principal D	Funds
Common features	Inadequate support (3)		Funds (3), Subject advisors (3), Material (2)

▪ Presentation of findings

Teacher Union 1's view regarding the availability of support for the schools is evident in the statements of its participants. The notable concern is that where schools are supported, support is inequitably provided. This means that schools are treated equally despite being practically different. This highlights the compromise of equity in accountability and needs assessment in schools (Jita, 2021) (Refer to 3.2.8). The importance of equity of accountability and support is favourably buttressed by Naslund-Hadley and Arcia (2021). Thus, **Teacher Union 1** is adamant that the education department does not provide equitable support to schools. Thus, support is inadequate.

The union believes that schools should be treated considering the unique subjects they offer, the facilities they have to advance learning and the availability of teaching and learning aids. This is the sentiment that **Teacher Union 1** shares with **Teacher Union 3** that support is not enough when there is a lack of teaching and learning aids, libraries and laboratories in schools. When examining the profiles of schools at the beginning of this chapter, it becomes clear that **School A** and **School B** have working

libraries, while **School D** has more advantages, including both a school library and a science laboratory. However, **School C** has none of these. This confirms the teacher unions' view regarding compromised equity and insufficient teaching and learning resources. Based on this argument, the researcher can conclude that accountability would be fair when more could be demanded from more advantaged schools.

The view of **Teacher Union 2** is worth considering. The teacher union holds that there is no support of any sort. What they could label as support is what the department provides after schools have made their own efforts. This view is confirmed by **Principal A**, who also opines that the monetary support is always late.

A synoptic view of the teachers unions' and principals' views reveals disparity (refer to Table 5.3.1.4). Teacher unions find the support offered by the department to be inequitable and insufficient. Schools are not provided with facilities and teaching and learning aids. On the other hand, principals are satisfied with their engagement with district officials. Monetary support is received, but not when needed. Based on the argument, the researcher concludes that if the department can provide schools with the needed monetary support in a timely and equitable manner and require accountability for its use, most of these issues would be solved. After all, finances and academic performance are two areas that call principals to accountability (Dwangu & Mahlangu, 2021; Brill *et al.*, 2018) (Refer to 3.2.3.1).

5.3.2 Theme 2: The importance of academic accountability

Theme 2 stood out as a response to the question that sought to determine the importance of holding the education department's academic accountability sessions. Confirmed by literature, accountability has become the basis of democracy (Khotami, 2017:31), and education is an aspect of constitutional rights (Alaoui, 2022:4). Consequently, the researcher sought to find a way of establishing a relationship between academic accountability and learners' performance by looking into views of participants regarding academic accountability sessions held in Motheo District, Free State Province. The researcher could establish from the teacher unions' views under Theme 1 that although teacher unions fully support academic accountability to the strongest terms, they have not been part of the academic accountability sessions held

by departmental officials at any level. Consequently, the following question was posed to CMs and principals:

“How helpful is the academic accountability with regard to learners’ performance?”

5.3.2.1 Circuit managers’ views

- **Data presentation**

Circuit Manager 1: *“I think partly, I have answered to say that... it... It also helps to say, let us look at them in considering their diversity... their... challenges... so that we address challenges of different learners ...not to generalise. We used to generalise in identifying individual learners. It means we are going to customise the support for individual learners in order to assist those learners to perform better because if we generalise one would want to be taught in a specific way compared to the other and also... even when we... we conduct our extended programmes we need to regroup them to say this learner did not perform well in this topic. Therefore, the teacher will have to re-plan and re-strategize on how he is going to present that topic for the learners to understand it better. It gives learners more benefits because, in fact, the people who are to benefit in the academic sessions are the learners. It is for them to perform to the best of their ability... yeah so... it... it helps us a lot because we even share... eh... experiences, best practices which ultimately, when one goes back and implements, you’ll find that these are practical, these are given us results.”*

Circuit Manager 2: *“When you account, you feel pressure to work and make plans for learners to pass. The only challenge is that you may want you to work outside working hours, after school, weekends, Sundays and holidays. So, accountability is all about learners, although it is teachers who account.”*

Circuit Manager 3: *“It is helping learners to pass. Teachers explain why learners fail. We make plans, and learners start to pass. Accountability helps when we work together because together, we can assess whether the strategies planned by schools can work. We ask questions only to test if strategies are practical; that’s all. So that is helping. Again, when they account for other schools, take notes that they can share.”*

Circuit Manager 4: *“It helps. Academic accountability is done for learners. We rely on what we do to make learners pass. If a school in your circuit performs at 90% or above and the other at 50%, the difference justifies academic accountability. And ... it is not nice to account. The panel does not beg; they want answers. When you come there, you will have to make a plan for capable learners, learners at risk and average learners. So, SMTs who can stay long at school and put into practice their plans can improve learners.”*

- **Data analysis**

Three aspects can be drawn from the view of **Circuit Manager 1**. Firstly, the importance of academic accountability sessions is confirmed. Three aspects are cited as distinct benefits of academic accountability. It is all about the learners. **Circuit Manager 1** indicated that academic accountability sessions are useful for offering a differentiated approach to learner education, informed by learner diversity. According to **Circuit Manager 1**, the diversity of learners is exposed during accountability sessions. **Circuit Manager 1** further indicates that learners benefit from ensuing programmes organised to address challenges that were exposed by academic accountability sessions.

The third aspect raised by **Circuit Manager 1** is that during academic accountability, best practices leading to better performance in other schools are shared. Consequently, principals can pick feasible practices that relate to their own schools. Thus, the researcher can summarise **Circuit Manager 1's** views on academic accountability, which is that it helps learners pass. This idea is confirmed by **Circuit Manager 2**.

Concurring with **Circuit Manager 1**, **Circuit Manager 2** assertively stressed that academic accountability sessions are essential; that is, teachers are required to account for the improvement of learners' performance. **Circuit Manager 2** aligns with **Circuit Manager 3** and **Circuit Manager 4**.

Circuit Manager 3 sheds more light on the purpose of accountability in education. Teachers are required to account for the reasons learners do not make it. On the other hand, **Circuit Manager 4** further notes that a benchmark has been set for each district

at which they should academically perform; failing to do so would result in academic accountability being held in a formal session. Moreover, to clarify the ‘good practices’ that **Circuit Manager 1** spoke about, **Circuit Manager 4** indicated that they are required to share the strategies they employ to enhance academic performance.

- **Presentation of findings**

All CMs deem academic accountability to be advantageous to both learners and the entire system. However, they do not deny the negative aspects that accompany accountability and the entire processes of teaching and learning. **Circuit Manager 2** explained that learners face much toil on the part of the teachers. **Circuit Manager 2** mentions that accountability brings enormous pressure and requires teachers to work outside working hours and days. Looking and analysing CMs feelings displayed through body language, one would quickly realise that such pressure is valuable when it produces results. Confirming this, **Circuit Manager 4** believes that accountability sessions seek answers from SMTs on the plans made to enhance academic performance. He further mentions that academic accountability puts one in an awkward position and calls for a longer stay in schools.

Whilst SMTs condemned blame and harsh verbal criticisms experienced in the presence of other members of the system, **Circuit Manager 3** indicated that accountability becomes beneficial when it happens in the full presence of other members of the system. This confirms the importance of the individual in systems theory. The theory holds that all individuals or elements work together for the well-being of the whole system (Moore *et al.*, 2017). Based on the deliberations presented, the researcher can conclude that all the CMs hold academic accountability sessions in high regard. According to the CMs, academic accountability is essential.

5.3.2.2 Principals’ views

- **Data presentation**

The same question was posed to principals to gauge their views on the importance of academic accountability sessions. The principals presented their answers in the following manner.

Principal A: *"It is a very helpful process, depending on how it is approached. Accountability is a very important element of any system, whether in education or public departments. Accountability is very important because you need to keep track of whether the... the objectives and purpose are being reached, so it's very important. And with regard to learners' performance, because we are involved in education. It's a very important exercise. Even at the school level, we hold people accountable. It's a very important exercise. Sometimes, if you do not hold people accountable, you are not gonna get the kind of feedback that is accurate."*

Principal B: *"I think they are helpful!"*

Principal C: *"It is very helpful even if your school is performing. That is where we encounter challenges and failures due to underperforming schools. All these challenges or failures, even loopholes in their planning or strategies, come up as an eye opener not to repeat or do the same mistakes that led to them underperforming."*

Principal D: *"It is very helpful. It helps. In my school, learners' accounts and parents' accounts. You are here today. There is a meeting at half past one where parents will discuss learners' performance. It makes learners commit. Learners report after we get the raw marks without SBA."*

- **Data analysis**

Principals confirm the views of CMs regarding the importance of academic accountability. Firstly, principals, as members of SMTs who are required to account together with their fellow SMT members, were unanimous in their view that academic accountability is beneficial and that accountability sessions are required. **Principal A** explicitly offered his viewpoint that all members of a system are required to work efficiently and account for their performance accordingly. This confirms the importance of both the existential and systems theories in this study. This said, one can conclude that without individual contributions of principals, SMTs, schools and other elements, systems do not function efficiently and optimally. Furthermore, **Principal A** successfully links accountability with the required goal. They go together. Once the goal is set, accountability ensures the implementation of programmes leading to the achievement of the goal.

Whilst **Principal B** uttered a blatant response: “*I think they are helpful!*”, **Principal C** is of the view that everyone, performing or underperforming, should account for the academic accountability sessions held by the Motheo District, Free State Province. Academic accountability exposes the loopholes and failures in the system and, as CMs have already insisted, it offers good practices that only academic accountability sessions can provide. Put differently, regarding those schools that are already classified as performing, academic accountability provides strategies for improving performance.

On the other hand, **Principal D** offers an alternative perspective on academic accountability, in which learners, parents, and teachers are required to report on their individual performance. For learners, reporting on SBA is not available, but they receive their performance summarised in test marks only. Learners will eventually be required to account for their test-based performance. The analysed slides support this truth. More beautifully, at the time of the interview, the **Principal D** had called a parents' meeting where they would be required to discuss their support activities that enhance learners' individual performance.

▪ **Presentation of findings**

All the principals agree that academic accountability is essential. All participants employ the word ‘helpful.’ The usage of the word leaves the researcher with the impression that all the principals believe in the contribution that academic accountability brings. Notably, **School D** provides more opportunities to growth since accountability in this school is hybrid (Reddick, 2020) as it involves vertical (Skedsmo, 2019), horizontal (Reddick *et al.*, 2020:7), and marketing accountability (Allen & Burgess (2020:6). Thus, the researcher views academic accountability as practiced in **School D** to be more practical and more likely to be effective. The importance of academic accountability is illustrated in the table below.

Table 3.10: Table 5.3.2.2 Importance of academic accountability

Principals	Feeling about academic accountability	How helpful are academic accountability sessions
Principal A	Very helpful Very important	Track objectives Accurate feedback
Principal B	Helpful	
Principal C	Very helpful It helps	Exposes challenges and failures
Principal D	Very helpful	Learners' commitments Parental involvement

Table 5.3.2.2 illustrates the sentiments that principals hold regarding academic accountability sessions. As previously indicated, all the principals share the same sentiment about academic accountability sessions; they are very helpful. However, the furthest depicts the various gains of principals in academic accountability sessions. Whilst **Principal D** did not elaborate on how the practice benefited the school, **Principal A**, **Principal C**, and **Principal D** shared different benefits. The researcher believes that all the schools can achieve the shared benefits. This is based on the findings of document analysis. The analysed slides that the schools use to present their performance shared three key gains on the table, namely, tracking of objectives, exposure of challenges presented by learners, and parental involvement. Thus, the researcher concludes that all schools benefit from at least three of the provided benefits.

5.3.2.3 Views of Departmental Heads (DHs)

▪ Data presentation

The question posed to CMs and principals was rephrased and posed to DHs. The question was rephrased to avoid channelling, as the DHs are the lowest in terms of employment level in the SMT. The researcher would want the DHs to think of responding to the question in broader terms. Thus, DHs were asked the question that follows:

“Do you find academic accountability helpful?”

DHs responded to the questions as follows.

DH 1: *“Within the school, it can be a helpful platform. One needs to take a step back to reflect on the important challenges. Some educators fail to take a deep dive into the little things that might have been the case, such as the fact that poor performance tools used for accountability can help. On the circuit presentation platform. It is introduced as good practice, but in reality, we hardly leave anything fruitful there.”*

DH 2: *“No, not in any way whatsoever. I heard from a friend that in their school, they pass learners who are likely to pass the school in Grade 12. This helps them to achieve more than 90% pass rate, and as a result, they will not account. Again, learners who do not attend camps are forced to write a few subjects to take them out of the matric list. In my case, I was never helped but demotivated by accountability because I am the only one blamed.”*

DH 3: *“Lately, I found accountability sessions helpful in the context of roundtable discussions because schools are able to share good practices, learning from each other, and getting motivation from shared experiences, as well as from district officials. They become unhelpful when officials scold, reprimand and demean principals for failing to meet set targets. It only adds to their anxiety, confusion and self-confidence taking a knock.”*

DH 4: *“It is helpful for the educator if she/he is genuine and willing to improve, but if he/she is doing it for formality or conformity, it’s going to be fruitless. The thing is how you take it.”*

▪ **Data analysis**

To answer the question, **DH 1** indicated that accountability is helpful when implemented at school, as evident in **School D** (refer to Section 5.3.2.2). When taken at the circuit or upper levels, **DH 1** believes that academic accountability sessions are not helpful.

DH 2’s response was a sharp no with the reason provided. **DH 2** was adamant that academic accountability sessions are not useful. It is further indicated that accountability sessions have a negative impact on individual learners, as valued by existential theory, and those who complete the education system. Two reasons were

provided which contribute to the negative opinion of the DH. Firstly, schools consider holding back poor-performing Grade 11 learners to influence the Grade 12 pass mark in the following year. Firstly, learners who are likely to fail are advised to write a few subjects to ensure that they have not failed as full-time Grade 12 learners.

DH 3 and **DH 4** offer views opposite to those of **DH 1** and **DH 2**. Whilst **DH 1** and **DH 2** have negative feelings about academic accountability sessions, **DH 3** and **DH 4** have seen the beauty of it. **DH 3** offers the two sides of it. When sessions are held to share good practices, the school benefits. However, when language etiquette is not followed, SMTs are demotivated. On the other hand, **DH 4** deems the success of the accountability session to be dependent on the attitude of the SMT members involved. Thus, two DHs stand in favour while two do not support academic accountability sessions.

- **Presentation of findings**

The idea of **DH 1** confirms the importance of academic accountability practice done at the school level. One would realise that academic accountability should not start at the level of the circuit, but schools may require teachers to present their own challenges to the SMTs. This further confirms the importance of line management in educational accountability, as noted by teacher unions (refer to sub-section 5.3.1.3).

In support of this, **Teacher Union 2 Participant** shared:

“If they see the Grade 12 learner is not gonna make it, they convince the learner to write three subjects now and let the other three he or she struggles with go over to next year. Therefore, the learner’s results aren’t actually calculated. This needs to be corrected because it drops many learners who are supposed to make it to Grade 12 class.”

This is confirmed by Mail and Guardian (2020), Mohokare (2021), and Hofflinger and Von Hippel (2020) (refer to sub-section 1.2), who discovered that learners are likely to be subjected to sifting and writing of a few subjects to manipulate their academic results for the current year. As already explained in sub-section 5.3.1.3, the researcher is of the view that this practice presents itself as the case that calls for correction.

On the other hand, **DH 3** also has mixed feelings about the district's academic accountability sessions. **DH 3** indicated that when sharing good practices, accountability sessions become very useful, but may lose value when the departmental officials employ disparaging words to conduct these sessions. The researcher observed that **DH 3** requires more professional engagement among stakeholders during accountability sessions to enhance their value. The researcher observed various accountability sessions in their formal settings. In one of the meetings, the researcher witnessed an unhealthy confrontation between the director and the acting principal, who was ordered to return to the original post level. This incident confirms **DH 3's** concerns about academic accountability.

Generally speaking, **DH 1**, **DH 3**, and **DH 4** were adamant that academic accountability sessions are essential. However, the three DHs identified areas of concern that call for correction to further enhance academic accountability. **DH 1** advocates for academic accountability to be conducted at local schools, while **DH 3** calls for a more professional academic accountability session. On the other hand, **DH 4** calls for the SMTs to change their attitude regarding academic accountability so that it benefits the teachers. According to the researcher's assessment, the feeling of **DH 4** finds its answer in the tenets of existential theory (refer to sub-section 2.2.1). Given the deliberations, the researcher concludes that the problem with academic accountability sessions lies in the inclusion of DHs as members of SMTs who report to higher structures. One shall remember that CMs and principals are generally in favour of academic accountability, while DHs portray mixed feelings about the sessions.

5.3.3 Theme 3: Challenges resulting from academic accountability sessions

Academic accountability comes with challenges. This has become obvious in academic accountability in countries such as the US (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017:1; Gottlieb, 2020:1) and Uganda, Kenya, Chile and some Swedish schools (UNESCO, 2017:51). In line with the research problem probed, teacher unions, CMs and SMTs were required to pinpoint the challenges resulting from academic accountability sessions.

5.3.3.1 Challenges of academic accountability sessions from the perspective of teacher unions

- **Data presentation**

Teacher unions were asked the same question: *“Have you received grievances from your colleagues about the procedures followed during the accountability sessions?”* Since systems theory requires individual contributions (Moore *et al.*, 2017), as called for by the theory of existentialism, the question was posed to enquire about the challenges experienced by stakeholders, particularly the teachers. The researcher sought to establish the perceptions of teacher unions regarding the academic accountability sessions. Since teacher unions are responsible for the well-being of fellow members (Msila, 2022), the researcher believed that grievances from members could affect their perception of formal academic accountability sessions.

Teacher Union 1

Teacher Union 1 Participant 1: *“Yes, many grievances. Principals and teachers are complaining a lot about this accountability thing. Accountability sessions are held during the awkward times. Firstly, they are either disruptive to the tuition time, which the department complains about, saying we don’t follow it and must prioritise. But they come back and take teachers to these sessions. And also, they sometimes call the SMTs during weekends. A weekend is family time. So, there is no proper planning from the Department of Education when it comes to accountability sessions. The other complaint or grievance that we normally receive from workers about the... eh... the accountability sessions is the tone... the conduct of the accountability officials as well as their tone when it comes to these accountability sessions, they are... how to put it... they are addressing them as though they are not professionals. They blame them... and the way they talk with them is totally unprofessional. The way they conduct themselves when they address our members, they don’t address them as professionals as their... as their colleagues.”*

Teacher Union 1 Participant 3: *“We have records of complaints from the teachers. Yes, we have received grievances and we continue to receive a lot of grievances. Principals and teachers complain that they do not get grants on time, and at times, they work from their own pockets. They report to high-ranking provincial officials, such*

as the Head of Department and the Chief Director. They are called incapable. The director will tell them that he will take them to primary schools and replace them. They are called names in people-packed halls. They are disgraced and are not allowed to discuss the support, whether it exists or not. I can make you an example during COVID. They were not allowed to talk about real facts... that COVID is there and contact lessons sometimes not possible. They also complain about forced extra classes. Today, principals sleep with learners at school in so-called camps. And the department does not provide security."

Teacher Union 1 Participant 4: *"Yes, they are held for the wrong purpose... to judge and make them look as nothing. Mind you, the members of the panel that conduct accountability are members of the union too. Teachers complain that they are harassed, are called incompetent, and are threatened with not being promoted. They are forced to take the blame even when the learners misbehave."*

Teacher Union 2

Teacher Union 2 Participant: *"Yes, the complaints that we receive are officials threatening teachers or officials shouting at teachers...officials who become personal, they speak to the teachers in a very unprofessional manner, and you know they treat them like children, and they are not children. So, it's very unprofessional the way professional... the way the officials behave and... eh... in addition, they really ask teachers to perform impossible tasks and the problem I have with this is that these accountability sessions are very... as almost the 'one size fits all.' So even the guys who do their job... eh... even they... they are subjected to this type of session where they have to hear how bad they are, how useless they are, if they are not going to.... if learners don't get this you know you gonna be demoted, you gonna lose your job. It's very demoralising. I am not at all satisfied with how these accountability sessions are conducted."*

Teacher Union 3

Teacher Union 3 Participant 1: *"Yes, those who complain to our offices are not against the accountability; they are willing to account. They are only against the way*

the department officials treat them unprofessionally, as if they were children. They only want the accountability sessions to be professional, as they involve professionals.”

Teacher Union 3 Participant 2: *“Yes, they are harassed by those who hold accountability sessions. In most cases, people feel belittled because they have not performed adequately according to a set standard when they go to these sessions. It’s like they are failures, and officials are not supportive of the approach. It’s a blame game... why did you fail? You are not doing enough, and to the extent that they are told they are getting paid to perform. We are blamed as teachers and told that we failed.”*

- **Data analysis**

All teacher unions reported that they had received grievances regarding academic accountability sessions held by the district in relation to **Teacher Union 1** and by the province in relation to **Teacher Union 2** and **Teacher Union 3**. The responses from **Teacher Union 1** indicate that the union has received complaints regarding the formal sessions related to academic accountability sessions in the district. Stern answers were provided that grievances were not only numerous but also continuously received.

Teacher Union 1 Participant 1 raises two grievances with detailed examples. Firstly, **Teacher Union Participant 1** asserts that accountability sessions are not well-planned. Two examples are stated to support this conclusion. Firstly, accountability sessions are held during the tuition time when teachers are expected to be engaged with learners in their classes. In this way, the process of teaching and learning is disturbed. Secondly, academic accountability sessions are held on weekends when everyone is supposed to be with their families.

The second grievance that is extractable from the words of **Teacher Union 1 Participant 1** is a lack of professionalism in formal engagements with the teachers. This refers to the ‘tone’ and the unprofessional engagement where teachers are not addressed as professionals. The researcher found that conflicting words are used, and as a result, considers this a challenge that warrants stakeholders’ attention. Simply put, the teacher union noticed that the interviewing officials acted unprofessionally in a professional meeting.

The researcher found the third challenge mentioned by **Teacher Union 1**, as stated by **Teacher Union 1 Participant 4**. Academic accountability sessions involve shifted blame and threats. This suggests that the teachers may not raise issues relating to unruly learners in accountability sessions. The researcher found that the issue of unruly learners is related to managerial issues, as well as academic performance. However, the issue of threats and harassment relates to the second issue raised by **Teacher Union 1 Participant 1**, namely, the lack of professionalism in academic accountability meetings.

The fourth challenge resulting from academic accountability sessions is noted from **Teacher Union 1 Participant 1**. The issue of delayed monetary grants has already been discussed as an indication of delayed support. This marks the fourth challenge and has become a problem affecting schools. In addition, SMTs feel that being accountable to officers at a level higher than their offices, as post level 2, 3, and 4 educators, is a form of harassment by the DoE. Lastly, SMTs complain that they are not required to base their defence or plans on the support already received from stakeholders.

Teacher Union 2 also affirmed that, as a union, they received various grievances relating to academic accountability sessions in the Free State Province. Three challenges become distinct upon a closer examination of the words of **Teacher Union 2**. The issue of unprofessional conduct leading to threats in a formal session was raised again. Evident from this concern is the fact that teachers would like to be treated in the formal session as the teaching profession is. **Teacher Union 2 Participant** cited as an example of unnecessary threats, the indication that teachers failing to perform at the required standard run the risk of being demoted or expelled.

▪ Presentation of findings

Upon reviewing the report submitted by **Teacher Union 1** regarding the matter of time, the researcher found a loophole in that **Teacher Union 1** does not suggest an appropriate time of the week during which the academic accountability sessions could be held. Moreover, the researcher could not determine the time frame, as **Teacher Union 1 Participant 1** mentions weekends and weekdays as inappropriate.

From the perception of **Teacher Union 1**, the blame game is between fellow members of the same union and is unnecessary. This confirms Mohlomi (2018), who averred that SMTs are harassed through mandatory accountability sessions by district officials who could be labelled as “fellow comrades.” However, the European Commission (2020) and Rahmatollahi and Zenouzagh (2021:2) have opined that accountability is very likely to focus on blaming stakeholders for failure and attract penalties.

Teacher Union 2 raised the issue of threats, which include expulsion or demotion. The researcher found this to be linked to penalties for low performance as practised in other countries, where teachers are dismissed or demoted for poor performance (Matete, 2021; Huber & Skedsmo, 2016). As previously stated, threats arise from the failure of SMTs to meet the set targets. This speaks of the high pass percentages as targets set for schools. According to Mail and Guardian (2020), high percentages have led to the bottlenecking of learners promoted to a Grade 12 class. By 2020, schools were required to ensure that learners' pass rate in Grade 12 stood at a minimum of 90% (The Free State, 2021). Defending the 90/40 pass rate, the DD for the Motheo educational district had indicated that the directorate is stringent in its approach to teachers to ensure maximum academic performance (Moloi, 2022). Deemed high by teacher unions, impossible tasks provide evidence rival to the theory of existentialism, which holds that tasks should always be attainable (Moore *et al.*, 2017; Devoe, 2012:4). However, one would enquire if setting low targets would not compromise hard work and only lead to attainment of low pass rates. The other problem raised by **Teacher Union 2** is that of treating schools equally. This raises the issue already discussed: the equity of support and the equity of academic accountability.

All the unions had received complaints relating to conduct when the process of academic accountability unfolded. This reflects a lack of professionalism in a formal setting involving stakeholders within a system. When one party feels unsupported, the whole system is adversely affected. This is the principle inherent in the systems theory that all parts of the system should be uplifted (Moore *et al.*, 2017). This adds to the issues relating to a lack of planning regarding formal accountability. **Teacher Union 3** further continued that unprofessionalism evident in formal academic accountability sessions is directly caused by a lack of planning. Once again, it is evident that districts

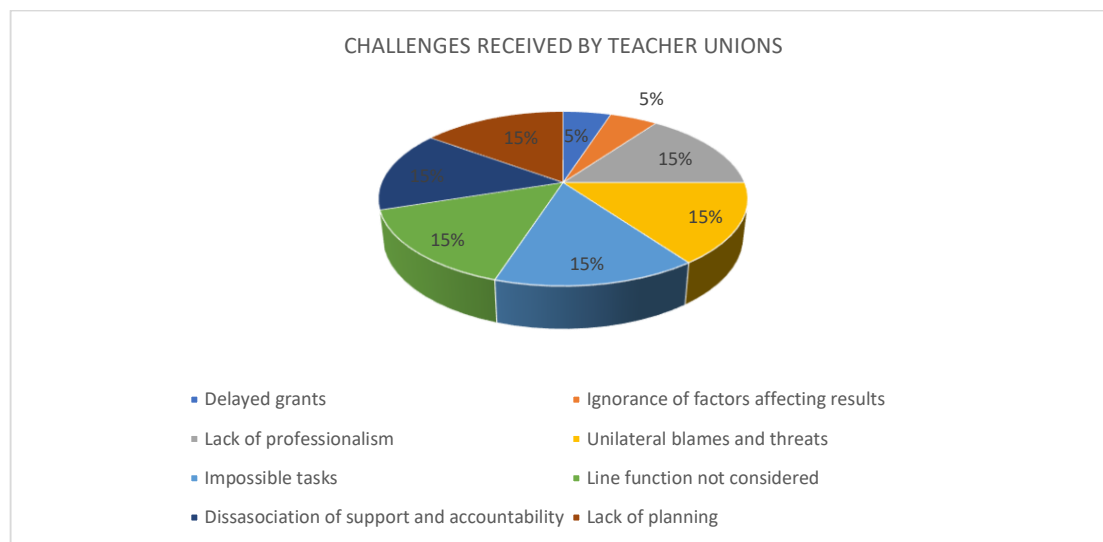
do not have a common policy on conducting academic accountability. Since there are clear tools with descriptors for monitoring and evaluation (Sawaneh & Fatajo, 2022:103), such as SSE (GDE, 2020), it would be beneficial to develop an accountability tool to manage academic accountability (Schleckser, 2018).

The following table depicts the various challenges faced by teachers from the perspective of teacher unions. Three teacher unions presented various challenges as tabled below. On the far right is a common list of challenges as presented by three teacher unions. The teacher union requires the professionalisation of academic accountability meetings and that meetings be well-planned and standardised throughout the entire Free State Province. Moreover, they hold that all stakeholders should account for the support provided and that members of the system should account to their immediate supervisors. Additionally, it is essential to set achievable tasks that leave no learner behind.

Table 5.11: Challenges experienced by teachers

Teacher Union	Challenges	Common challenges for all teacher unions
Teacher Union 1	• Delayed grants • Contextual factors affecting results are not considered • Holding sessions on holidays and weekends	• Lack of professionalism in accountability meetings • Lack of planning • Unilateral blame and threats • Impossible tasks are set • Line function not considered • Support is disassociated from accountability
Teacher Union 2		
Teacher Union 3		

Quantified challenges can be represented in a pie chart to illustrate the relative weight each carries. The common challenges will each account for 15% of the weight, while challenges presented by individual teacher unions will account for 5% of the weight each. This means that the common challenges account for 90% of the total weight, compared to only 10% of the individual tasks. Based on the data reflected in the pie chart, the researcher concludes that challenges weighing 90% call for immediate attention. However, this does not preclude the importance of individual challenges, as the chart can never be complete without them.



5.3.3.2 Challenges of academic accountability sessions from the perspective of circuit managers

▪ Data presentation

The researcher posed a question to the CMs regarding the challenges that stakeholders experienced in formal accountability meetings. The question was posed to gauge the CMs' perception of the academic accountability sessions and to establish common ground on the perceptions of CMs and SMTs. The ultimate goal would be to investigate possible ways of finding a lasting solution to the problems and to establish a common understanding of the concept of academic accountability. Consequently, the following question was posed to the CMs:

“What are the challenges that you noticed teachers experienced when the process of accounting was unfolding?”

The CMs responded to the question in the following way.

Circuit Manager A: *“Yes... eh... one thing is the **negativity** that goes with the session because during the previous years these sessions...I... used to... to be handled in a way one would say in an arrogant manner which **somehow didn't show respect to the teachers**, so this has led to them being uneasy. And the thing is that at times they become or they go there being **unprepared**... preparedness. They just do it for the sake of **compliance**. At times, you find that the principals would sit down in their office*

and type everything without consulting or involving the teachers, because this is about the work of the school, and the teachers must be involved. And then again, you find that there may be errors. Data may not correlate. You find that adding stats and all those things brings tension when they are being pointed out. But here, you did not do justice to this. So, if our people can understand that this is for the better of the school and also for their development.”

Circuit Manager B: *“I have found that teachers do not relax. They make many excuses when they should account. They do not prepare well for accountability. Sometimes their data does not correlate with SA-SAMS data. They do not work together as SMT. They cannot answer accountability questions. They also give strategies that are not practical. They get scared when the HOD and Director are there.”*

Circuit Manager C: *“They already come with an attitude that accountability is bad. They complain that they are forced to account for learners who do not care. They want to mention learners when they account. Accountability is about us, who deal with learners, not learners. When they account, they feel targeted. They only read slides they wrote and never explain further when asked. It is easy to realise when they have prepared and when they have not prepared. You take one person to account and another from the same school, and you make them account. You learn that they speak differently, and you also realise that this data is one man’s work. They take us for enemies who only look for mistakes. They lack confidence, and you realise they account for compliance and to defend.”*

Circuit Manager D: *“Like I said, they are not begging in accountability; they demand understanding. You may think you are losing your job. To be specific, teachers are accountable for complying with the demands of the department. Teachers do not relax during accountability. Teachers think accountability checks for wrongs. They make many mistakes because they don’t know the stats. What is important to know is that accountability is based on stats per subject, showing performance in that subject. Teachers present about stats, but when you ask them, they don’t know what they just presented. Sometimes they inflate marks to impress...but in reality, it is the child who loses. Again, teachers cannot answer questions about practical things they do. They*

complain about learners who cannot read or write when accountability only wants what they do. They complain about a lack of money, books and other things and...and if we can look at that, we will allow learners to fail.”

- **Data analysis**

The response of **Circuit Manager A** highlights three key points related to the challenges faced by teachers during the academic accountability session. Firstly, the CM mentions that academic accountability was characterised by utter negativity. This confirms what teacher unions mentioned regarding the use of negative words against teachers during the session (refer to Table 5.3.3.1). This led teachers to become uneasy during the session. However, the CM mentions this as conduct that has already been dealt with.

Secondly, the issue of unpreparedness was brought to the fore. While teacher unions blamed the department for failure to plan and prepare thoroughly for the session (Refer to 5.3.3.1), **Circuit Manager A** noticed the same problem with SMT members who are called to account for the academic performance. It appears that teachers do not prepare well for the sessions. This was attributed to their inability to accumulate convincing data, which led to their disappointment when questioned about their own findings. Teacher unions blame the departmental officials for failure to plan their sessions. On the other hand, the CM saw an element of unpreparedness with the SMT members. The researcher noticed that it leaves a researchable gap on how much the issue of preparedness by either stakeholder affects the accountability principle or the entire system.

Thirdly, **Circuit Manager A** found that SMTs are accounted for, for compliance's sake. According to the CM, this becomes obvious by the number of loopholes revealed during the presentation. **Circuit Manager A** still states that this is realisable through the data that lacks accuracy.

On the other hand, **Circuit Manager B** was straight to the point regarding the challenges of SMTs that are realisable during the process of academic accountability. Three points could also be deducted from the CM. The issue of uneasiness among SMT members is recurring. Moreover, **Circuit Manager B** also realised that the level

of preparation by SMT members is not as expected. Unpreparedness is realised when the data provided does not match the data generated by the South African Schools Administration and Management System (SA-SAMS) tool. Inferred from this is that the system can provide data that can be shared with schools to alleviate paperwork.

The response from **Circuit Manager C** is also worth consideration. Upon analysing the response from **Circuit Manager C**, the researcher identified distinct challenges that are closely related. **Circuit Manager C** reports that teachers who account for their students develop a preconceived assumption that they are targeted. As a result, they develop a negative attitude, which manifests during the accountability session. Moreover, it is alleged that the panel can realise when the data presented is prepared by an individual rather than the team. **Circuit Manager C** also notes that where questions are asked and the presenters happen to be in a position to respond, most of the time, a response is provided for defence's sake.

Additionally, **Circuit Manager C** confirms the view of Teacher Union 1 that teachers would like to present some cases related to learners. This is realisable in the words *"They complain that they are forced to account for learners who do not care."* Thus, it is confirmed that teachers as stakeholders feel that accountability should encompass the state of learners.

It is important to note that the response provided by **Circuit Manager D** encompasses all the responses already provided by other CMs, and one aspect that relates to the 'teacher unions' views. It has become obvious in the responses of circuit managers that teachers do not relax during accountability sessions. This was alluded to by teachers' views that they feel harassed and threatened by the panel to which they should account. As a result, **Circuit Manager D** reiterates that *"Teachers are accountable to comply with the demands of the department."* With the recurrence of the feeling of possible compliance, 'accountability for compliance' stands out as a distinct challenge calling for correction. **Circuit Manager D** also notes that the department demands understanding during accountability sessions. According to the researcher's own evaluation, this relates to questions posed during the session, which other CMs have clearly indicated that teachers fail to answer well or are answered to defend.

Moreover, the issue of learners emerged. **Circuit Manager D** states that teachers endeavour to state the state of learners' inability to read or write. It is further stated that if issues relating to learners are addressed, learners are likely to fail. To make ends meet, the researchers observed that **Circuit Manager D** believes addressing issues with learners might shift the blame to learners, and teachers might do less to support them. This issue is also the concern of teacher unions. Moreover, **Circuit Manager D** touches on the issue of lack of resources as one of the aspects that teachers attempt to raise during accountability sessions. This is to concur with the **Teacher Union 2 Participant** who avers that accountability is *"not only about the results, about resources, about infrastructure, about HR, about provision of textbooks."*

Lastly, the issue of gathering data for accountability was brought to light. **Circuit Manager D** states that schools falsify marks to present acceptable data to the panel. This becomes a problem because accountability depends on data (Baraka, 2020:68). The researcher has already shown that this can be avoided when the department provides data generated by the SA-SAMS system.

▪ Presentation of findings

The following table provides a synoptic overview of the challenges presented by CMs as experienced by stakeholders during the academic accountability process.

Table 5.12: Synoptic look at challenges

Circuit Managers	Challenges	Common challenges for all circuit managers
Circuit Manager A	Arrogance of departmental officials	- Negativity of teachers - Accountability for compliance - Unpreparedness of SMTs - Uneasiness of participants - No permission to cite learners' learning barriers
Circuit Manager B		
Circuit Manager C		
Circuit Manager D	- Lack of resources - Unreliable data	

The CMs presented eight challenges raised by SMT members during the accountability session. Of these, five were common, whereas three were aspects

peculiar to individual CMs. Figure 5,2 represents the eight challenges viewed as challenges by CMs. Each aspect mentioned below weighs 12.5%.

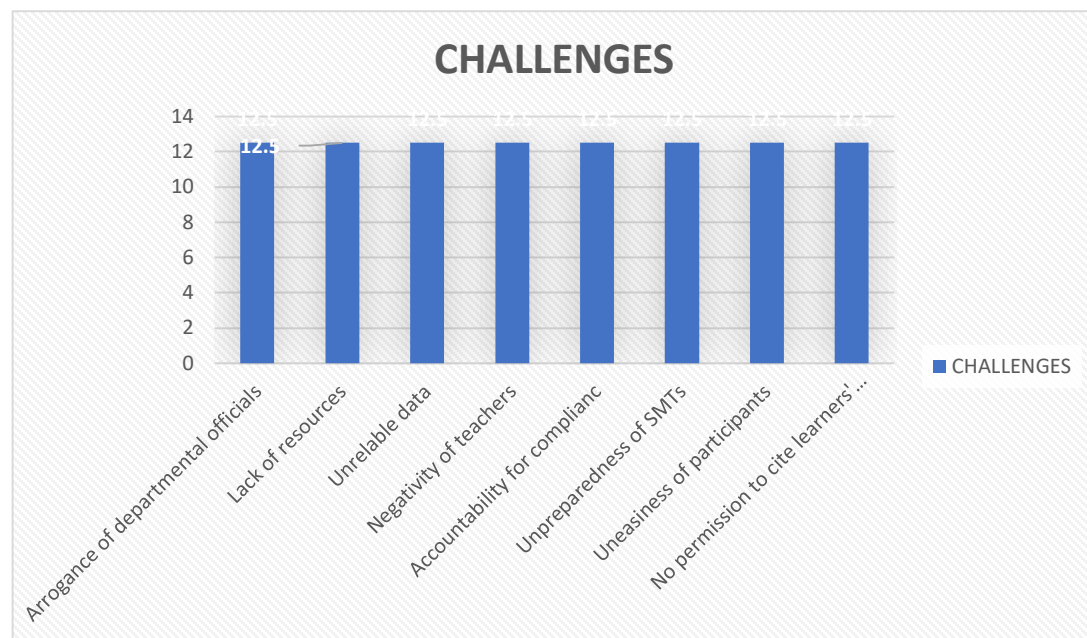


Figure 5.2: Challenges from the circuit managers' perspective

Three of these aspects, as shown in Table 5.3.3.4, would together weigh 37.5%. As a result, the remaining five aspects would together weigh 62.5%. Although added together, one aspect of the three standalone aspects weighs only 12.5%, while the repeated aspects would each weigh more when shared among the four CMs. Thus, the researcher can conclude that the five aspects mentioned on the far-right-hand side of Table 5.3.3.4 require more attention. However, it is important to note that two of the three aspects mentioned by the relevant CM feature in the principals' concern (refer to sub-section 5.3.1.3) and 'teacher unions' concerns (refer to Table 5.3.3.1), namely, lack of resources and arrogance of departmental officials.

With teachers being blamed for failure to prepare the required data, Baraka (2020:68) opines that the accuracy of data is crucial to enhance evaluation (refer to sub-section 3.2.16). Moreover, Holloway (2020:30) opines that the use of technological systems should be considered when data is needed. The third challenge is that the interviewing panel poses questions calling for immediate responses, some of which SMTs fail to answer. Failure to answer questions posed in one's school may lead to

embarrassment. The researcher believes that accounting stakeholders should be ready to respond to questions seeking clarity. However, Circuit Manager B mentions a presentation before the DD or the provincial HoD, which has become a concern for teacher unions. This might lead to uneasiness and failure to respond to the questions posed. Moreover, this could lead to the formulation of impractical strategies. However, the researcher believes that where strategies appear impractical, it takes correction to help SMTs provide better, feasible strategies.

Contrary to this, Amazon (2020:1) contends that those who account can yearn for accuracy of data and still account for compliance's sake (refer to sub-section 3.2.16). Based on the CM's statement, the researcher can conclude that when done to comply, accountability is likely to be ineffective or never achieve its intended goal. However, Mutereko (2019:91) opined that compliance-based accountability can be minimised by the departmental officials through support. Given all the deliberations, the issue of compliance becomes one of the common factors failing academic accountability. This is also realisable in the words of Circuit Manager C, who confirms the statement made by Circuit Manager B, who holds that teachers cannot answer questions posed as a follow-up to their own presentation. Additionally, the work prepared on slides is only read.

On the issue of SMT members being denied the opportunity to bring forth learners' challenges during academic accountability sessions, the researcher, through the lens of systems theory, holds that all stakeholders are accountable for their part regarding the academic performance of learners. This is the tenet propagated by systems theory (Moore *et al.*, 2017). When they each take responsibility, they stand as individuals within the system as propagated by the theory of existentialism (Devoe, 2012:5). Based on systems theory, learner-related issues may be raised for discussion during accountability sessions. After all, existential theory is based on the tenet that individuals should strive for meaning and should be offered individual opportunities to fulfil their tasks. Consequently, these two theories hold that stakeholders should never be exempted from academic accountability.

5.3.3.3 Challenges of academic accountability sessions from the perspective of SMTs

- **Data presentation**

The researcher sought to establish with SMT members the challenges which manifest during the process of academic accountability. Consequently, the following questions were posed to all principals sampled for the study.

“What are the challenges that you experienced when the process of accounting was unfolding?”

In addition to principals, the study sought to enquire about the challenges experienced by DHs during accountability sessions in the context of their responsibilities as executive officers of the curriculum. Thus, the same question was posed to the DHs. The data presented below were based on schools as microcosms of the education sector or on SMTs at the accounting officer level. Thus, the researcher hereby presents the cases per school.

School A

Principal A: *“Eh... the challenges with me are that, firstly, sometimes the department officials **are very rude**. They are very rude, very demanding, and sometimes they pretend they don't know about the challenges the school is experiencing. Let me give an example. In the accountability sessions, they don't want you to discuss the learners' misconduct, the parents' lack of support, or the parents themselves. Departmental officials do not want principals to discuss these issues, and sometimes you find that the child you are supposed to be accountable for is actually the problem. The problem is not the teacher, nor is it the content; the problem is the child, and you are not given the right... I wanna call it the right to express ourselves about these kids, so it's like the... the... sometimes the accountability sessions are used to **bash people, to criticise** people, so they leave the essence of being a support instrument that can be used to help schools to improve.”*

DH 1: *"We receive a **presentation template** before the accountability session, which ends up being a blanket approach. We come across lots of repetition from different schools. Yet we have different challenges from subjects to staff establishments, et cetera."*

School B"

Principal B: *"The major challenge or thorny issue, especially for an underperforming school, is the manner in which the SMT or principal of that school is **crucified** or treated in a terrible way, for example, do you still call yourself principal; are you not the problem, you are a failure. When you leave the podium, you feel belittled, and you doubt your leadership skills. In your encounters or answers, you cannot **mention learners or parents as a problem** or community. You are as good as your last performance."*

DH 2: *"In the first place, you are told from the onset that you should not mention learners. You are expected to present on how you helped learners to pass. In the case where you have learners who cannot read or write, you are asked what yo' will d', and 'nothing' will not be the accepted answer. When others present before you, you get nervous knowing that you are next. You present plans, and you are told they are not practical. You are called names when the presentation is not satisfying."*

Principal C: *"I was told in the meeting that I am **not marketable** because my school does not perform. Honestly, they are intended for a good return, but they are doing the opposite. You are embarrassed in the presence of all the students. You are told that you have two to three days to account, but you don't get enough time to prepare. When you are prepared, you are not listened to. You are told you are playful in the presence of other schools."*

DH3: *"Challenges that I faced when I was accounting for academic progress results were when I was asked unprepared questions, testing my ability to memorise figures/statistics as required to recall by heart. Convert the number passed to a percentage in front of the hall. It got me a little nervous about my performance for that presentation. Atmosphere is always intimidating, causing panic and discomfort."*

School D

Principal D: *“Since I accounted only once, the problem is **only of treatment**, that is, the only thing that I experienced. However, I was not called to account after the school achieved 85 per cent or above. I have been in this school for 10 years, and I have only accounted for once. I only attend good practices meetings.”*

DH 4: *“Two things are problems, and they are not allowed to blame learners. The other thing is the promotion criteria of the department. It must be corrected. For example, learners progress from one grade to the next, and wheⁿ they reach 12th grade, the 12th grade teacher is not allowed to mention the advanced learners. This means that it is the department with its promotion criteria that makes accountability particularly challenging. If every learner can pass on their own, then we will not account for much. I believe learners who pass the Grade 11 class can also pass the Grade 12 class. Let every learner work for himself.”*

▪ **Data analysis**

Schools responded to the question requiring challenges experienced during academic accountability sessions in much the same way. **School C** also identified challenges similar to those faced by other schools, teacher unions, and some CMs. **Principal C** also mentioned disparaging or belittling words, which, in terms of teacher unions, can lead to participants lacking support. The researcher successfully identified three challenges presented by **School A**. Three of these challenges are related to challenges already presented by teacher unions. It is no wonder, since the reports from teacher unions have been presented to them by teachers as members. Firstly, Principal A discussed two challenges. The first one is the rudeness of departmental officials to whom accountability is rendered. This relates to the aspect of professionalism as presented by teacher unions (refer to sub-section 5.3.3.1). According to **Principal A**, this is realisable in the fact that departmental officials *“are very demanding and, sometimes, they pretend they don’t know the challenges that the school is experiencing.”* Moreover, this excludes *“the essence of being a support instrument that can be used to help schools to improve.”* Linking this issue to the concerns of CMs, the researcher notices that it is the attitude of departmental officials

that leads to negativity among teachers during the accountability session. The principal further indicated that they are criticised and consequently are not supported. One shall remember that the issue of lack of support has been assertively mentioned as a challenge by teacher unions (refer to sub-section 5.3.3).

Additionally, **School A and School D** aver that they are not allowed to include other stakeholders' contributions in the educational system. **DH 4** even alludes to the learners' promotion policy that calls for concern. Learners, as stakeholders, should also take ownership; that is, learners have a role to play. **DH 1's** concern relates to the lack of planning mentioned by teacher unions. While a lack of planning encompasses various aspects, **DH 1** identified the problem with the template used. According to **DH 1**, the first problem with the template is that it is made known within a very short period.

Principal B and **DH 2** presented their challenges as participants based in **School B**. Both participants presented two common challenges. The third appears to be complementary to the two common challenges. The issue of the panel's attitude is evident in the above responses to presentations offered by teacher unions and **Circuit Manager A**. Thus, this presents the issue as a serious concern calling for intervention. To present this case, **Principal A** used cacophonous words, namely, "crucify" and "terrible way", accompanied by a stern posture, as observed by the researcher, to depict the seriousness of the matter. The principal further indicated that his position as the principal is questioned, and consequently, he ends up feeling inferior and incapable. **DH 2's** concern relating to the attitude is that *"You are called names when the presentation is not satisfying."*

Principal C quoted an example of the words used to describe him during the academic accountability session. According to the interviewing panel, **Principal C** was told he was not marketable. The problem was presented with lowered eyes, showing emotional pain. This is further evidence that interview candidates in academic accountability sessions use unpleasant words. **Principal C** lastly raised issues that have already been discussed and seem to secure a spot in correction matters, as it shall become clear in the proposed model of formal academic accountability. **Principal C** notes that academic accountability sessions can turn the principal into a laughingstock in formal settings and that learners should be the primary point of

concern in such sessions. These are realisable from his words: *“Every time I go there, I know I will come a laughingstock. I am not supposed to talk about learners who do not attend.”* Attesting to this statement, **Principal D** confirms that the only problem he has experienced regarding academic accountability sessions is the poor treatment of SMT members by officials to whom accountability is made.

Principal C cited an example of his engagement with learners who fail to attend the school’s programmes designed to improve learners’ academic results. The concern is that he should personally generate learners from home, and consequently, his safety is at stake. When this was said, the researcher felt that the principal wanted his contribution to be known and valued. **DH 3** further confirms what has already been established. Academic accountability sessions lack an environment conducive to support and open accountability. Thus, **DH 3** stated that the panel to whom they account captured and openly acknowledged the minor faults that emerged from his PowerPoint presentation slides. Inferred from this statement, the researcher observed that academic engagement often focuses on trivial matters. Where the presentation is not as expected, the researcher noticed that this is often related to a lack of preparation, resulting in a shorter preparation time. As a result, this is expected to cause uneasiness. Thus, **DH 3** completes the claim by stating that: *“... it got me a little nervous, impacting my performance for that presentation.”*

▪ Presentation of findings

The following table illustrates the challenges faced by stakeholders, as reported in stakeholder interviews.

Table 5.13: Stakeholders’ challenges

SMTs	Challenges	Common challenges
School A	Receiving templates within a short space of time	- Attitude of departmental officials - Refusal to mention issues relating to learners - Lack of planning - Nervousness of SMTs
School B		
School C	Line function is not considered	
School D	Promotion criteria of learners	

As previously stated, challenges have emerged that make academic accountability an unhealthy practice. Firstly, not being allowed to mention learners' challenges in the academic accountability meetings is a way of excluding stakeholders from the accountability designed to improve learners' performance. This is inconsistent with systems theory, which posits that all stakeholders or elements of the system should work in harmony to achieve effectiveness (Moore *et al.*, 2017). **Principal A** mentions learners, parents, and departmental officials as stakeholders (Smart, 2020) (refer to sub-section 1.5.2). They are not allowed to allude to their withheld contribution in the education system during accountability sessions. Based on this, the researcher believes that when system members fail to carry out their tasks or responsibilities according to the existential theory (refer to sub-section 2.2.1.4), the system may not work effectively. Thus, this becomes the challenge calling for attention in terms of systems theory (refer to sub-section 1.5.1.2).

The other issue mentioned here is of incomplete presentation slides. The problem is aggravated by the limited timeframe within which the templates must be completed (refer to sub-section 3.2.16). According to **Circuit Manager C**, SMT members only read slides and consequently fail to answer questions based on their own presentations. Thus, this issue appears to be one of the challenges experienced by SMTs during the accountability session. This highlights the aspect of lack of preparation from another angle. Teacher unions have shown that the lack of preparation by the departmental officials becomes evident during academic accountability sessions. However, the CMs view SMTs as the ones who do not allocate enough time to prepare for academic accountability. To support the claim, **Circuit Manager 3**, quoted verbatim, said: *"They only read slides they wrote and never explain further when asked. It is easy to realise when they have prepared and when they have not prepared."*

However, **Principal C** depicts the contradictory statement in relation to the matter. They are informed two or three days before the imminent accountability session, which does not provide enough time to prepare for academic accountability. The researcher noticed that the template used always differs from the one used previously and might not be used again. However, one cannot rule out the possibility that accountability should also respond to emergent challenges that may call for immediate, tailored

responses (Shah, 2021:23; Hwang, 2017 & Khotami, 2017) (refer to sub-section 3.2.4.10). The researcher acquired and analysed the Accountability Presentation 1, Accountability Presentation 2, and Academic Presentation 3 documents. The slides required the same information from schools. However, some of the information provided by one school could not be provided by the other school, possibly due to differences in subject streams. This ushers in the second problem with the template: it does not accommodate the diversity of schools, including the subjects offered and staff establishment, which are peculiar to different schools. Table 5.2.2 illustrates that schools offer various streams, which may not have equal weighting. Streams realisable from this table are science, commerce, humanities and arts.

Revisiting the teacher unions' concern about the lack of support in schools, as mentioned by **Principal A** as a concern, it becomes clear that issues like this one can be capitalised on to seek in-service training and recapacitating of principals. This aligns with Naslund-Hadley and Arcia (2021) (refer to sub-section 3.2.8) who aver that accountability and support do go together. Looking at the third aspect, it is realisable that the harsh attitude may result in feelings of fear and nervousness. This can be noticed in the words of **DH 2**, who said: *"When others present before you get nervous knowing that you are next."*

Regarding Principal C's indication that he was declared 'not marketable' in the academic accountability session, the researcher does not find the words 'you are not marketable' as intensely unacceptable, given that marketing accountability can lead to such expressions, even if they are not expressed with heightened emotions. Jita (2021:4) and Allen and Burgess (2020) favourably state that marketing accountability exists in education and is directly linked to performance-based accountability (refer to sub-section 3.3.2.6).

Moreover, **Principal C** indicated that they are expected to present to officials who are high dignitaries in the education department, namely, CMs, DDs and HOD. **Principal C**, quoted verbatim, said: *"... You don't get comfortable. HOD is the third man in the province. I am the acting principal. I present to him."* According to the researcher, this is contrary to vertical accountability, which requires reporting to the immediate supervisor (Khotami, 2017:30; Amazon, 2020:5) and is a point of concern for teacher

unions (refer to Section 3.2.2.3). Practically stated, the SMT members in their respective positions, at post levels 2, 3, and 4, find themselves accountable to the HOD, whom **Principal C** claims to be “... *the third man in the province....*” However, for principals, it is lawful as the law states that they are representatives of the HoD (South Africa 1996, ss 16A).

School D presented three issues, with the third being completely different from the other stated challenges. The problem associated with attitude was raised by **Principal D**, who said that: “*Since I accounted..., the problem is only of treatment, that is the only thing that I experienced.*” This completes the issue as a problem involving all educators and teacher unions. With **Principal D** stating that maltreatment of SMTs and comparing this statement with the views of teacher unions and SMT members, the researcher is left with the impression that academic accountability is not a wholly rejected practice but needs overhauling to cater to the individual needs of learners, teachers, and other stakeholders, in line with existential theory. It also needs to be aligned with the system's needs, holding every stakeholder accountable in accordance with systems theory.

DH 4 states that: “*they are not allowed to blame learners.*” Learners are participants in education systems, just like everybody else. As Mohokare (2021) noted, learners are the most important stakeholders in the education sector. This suggests that, at the level of accountability, it may be necessary to specify the position of various learners in terms of their socioeconomic and psychological standing. Notably, no participant whatsoever ever rejected academic accountability. With open hearts, the researcher noticed that teacher unions, SMTs and CMs openly accept. They all state that it is helpful for learners’ performance.

DH 4 added that the department's promotion criteria need to be reviewed. The participant feels that there are progressive learners in the school. It may be worthwhile to mention their position in the advanced class, Grade 12. These were the words of **DH 4**: “... *the department with its promotion criteria that makes accountability a very hard thing.*” The participant’s concern is loud and clear that the Department of Basic Education should look into the promotion criteria. With a return visit, seeking clarity on the explanation, **DH 4** explained that the idea behind her words is that if learners can

pass on their own, “... we will not account much. I believe learners who pass the Grade 11 class can also pass the Grade 12 class. Let every learner work for himself.” With this in mind, the researcher noticed that the matter calling for an overhaul of promotion criteria is policy-related and is an aspect suitable for a policy-related study. The following table categorises the challenges faced by schools into specific challenges and common challenges.

5.3.4 Theme 4: Mitigation of challenges relating to academic accountability sessions

Theme 3 was useful in depicting the challenges related to academic accountability sessions. Generally, teacher unions, CMs, and SMTs responded in favour of academic accountability proceedings in the Motheo District and the entire province. The challenges presented by participants indirectly depicted some ways that the education department at the district level could employ to mitigate the challenges experienced by SMTs during formal accountability sessions. Additionally, the researcher also asked questions to teacher unions, CMs and SMTs, which led to the realisation of the following sub-themes, contributing to the mitigation of challenges experienced by stakeholders during the accountability process.

5.3.4.1 Formalise academic accountability sessions

- **Data presentation**

Theme 3 explored the challenges arising from accountability from the perspectives of teacher unions, CMs, and SMTs. These challenges revealed, among others, that academic accountability sessions need to be formalised. This is realisable from the answers provided by teacher unions when asked whether they had received complaints. The question was posed in the following way: “If yes, which complaints have you received?”

Teacher Union Participant 1: “Teachers and principals complain about several things. Accountability sessions are held during the **awkward times**. Most of the grievances we receive from the comrades when you ask them about accountability sessions are organised by the Department of Education. Firstly, they are either **disruptive to the tuition time**, the very same tuition time that the department

complains about, saying we don't follow it and must prioritise. But they come back and take teachers to these sessions. And also, they sometimes call the SMTs during weekends. A weekend is family time. So, there is **no proper planning** from the Department of Education when it comes to accountability sessions. The other complaint or grievance that we normally receive from workers about the accountability sessions is the tone. ... the **conduct of the accountability** officials as well as their tone when it comes to these accountability sessions, they are...how to put it... **they are addressing them as though they are not professionals**. They blame them... and the way they talk with them is totally unprofessional. Remember, as a union, we have a bilateral process. As a branch, we hold bilateral meetings with circuit managers to discuss grievances and escalate complaints to upper structures. These bilateral meetings are where we discuss problems arising from bilateral. One of our... eh... the recent activity that we engaged in, **the Work-to-Rule is one** of the eh... eh... issue that we raised of the conduct of the... eh... education officials, the way they conduct themselves when they address our members, they don't address them as professionals as their... as their colleagues."

Teacher Union Participant 2: "They are held **for the wrong purpose**... to judge and make them look as nothing. Mind you, the members of the panel that conduct accountability are members of the union too. Teachers complain that they **are harassed**, called incompetent, and threatened with not being promoted. They are forced to take the blame even when the learners misbehave. I have said that the union values accountability when it is done in the correct way. Principals and teachers complain that they do not get **grants on time**, and at times, they work from their own pockets. They report to high-ranking provincial officials, such as the head of the department and the chief director, and are called incapable. The director will tell them that he will take them to **primary schools and replace**. They are called names in people-packed halls. They are disgraced and are not allowed to discuss the support, whether it exists or not. I can make you an example during COVID. They were not allowed to talk about real facts.... that COVID is there and contact lessons sometimes not possible. They also complain about forced extra classes. Today, principals sleep with learners at school in so-called camps. And the department does not provide security."

Teacher Union 2 Participant: *“The complaints that we receive are officials threatening teachers or officials shouting at teachers...officials who become personal, they speak to the teachers in a very **unprofessional manner**, and you know they treat them like children, and they are not children. So, it’s very unprofessional the way the officials behave and...eh... in addition, they really ask teachers to perform impossible tasks and the problem I have with this is that these accountability sessions are almost the ‘**one size fits all**.’ So even the guys who do their job...eh... even they... they are subjected to this type of session where they have to hear how bad they are, how useless they are if they are if they are not going to.... if learners don’t get this you know you gonna be demoted, you gonna lose your job. It’s very demoralising. In fact, I am not at all satisfied with how these accountability sessions are conducted.”*

Teacher Union 3 Participant 1: *“Yes, we have. Honestly speaking, we have complaints regarding the accountability sessions. Our teachers and principals are not against accountability. It is the responsibility of everyone to account for our work. It is just that the **sessions are battlegrounds** used by the department to demean our teachers.”*

Teacher Union 3 Participant 2: *“From colleagues in terms of union officials we talk about these things informally, we don’t have formal sessions and talk about ‘what is this accountability, are your members happy, but there’s always **informal verbal** concerns and complaints gathered from members so with regard to our members, yes we do have grievances and grievance procedure is a very formal procedure where people use a form to register a grievance and there will be a meeting. Grievance in this context is in the form of verbal complaints and very informal, and we haven’t had any formal submissions on grievances.”*

Moreover, teacher unions, as recipients of grievances from SMT members, were asked whether they felt supported by the departmental officials.

▪ **Data analysis**

Table 5.3.3.1 depicts the challenges that SMTs presented to teacher unions regarding academic accountability sessions. The challenges include delayed grants, contextual factors affecting results not being considered, holding sessions on holidays and weekends, and a lack of professionalism in accountability meetings. The challenges

further include a lack of planning, blame and threats, and impossible tasks and goals. Moreover, the line function is not considered. On the other hand, the support offered is mostly monetary and is received when not needed. Of these, the following were common to all three teacher unions.

- Lack of professionalism in accountability meetings
- Lack of planning
- Unilateral blame and threats
- Impossible tasks are set
- Line function not considered
- Support is disassociated from accountability

According to **Teacher Union 1**, the union had received enough complaints regarding academic accountability sessions that the complaint featured in their WTR campaign as a provincial grievance and was presented to the provincial office. However, **Teacher Union 3** had only addressed the challenges informally, without lodging formal grievances. Regarding blame and threats presented to SMTs during academic accountability, **Teacher Union 3 Participant 1** views academic accountability sessions as 'battlegrounds' victimising teachers, a problem that is also confirmed by **Teacher Union 1** and **Teacher Union 2**. On the other hand, **Teacher Union 1** and **Teacher Union 2** directly refer to the element of unprofessionalism characterising academic accountability. While Teacher Union 1 believes that accountability sessions are unplanned, Teacher Union 2 is concerned about the general approach to accountability, commonly referred to as the 'one size fits all' approach. Moreover, the issue of disregard for line function comes to the fore. SMT members find themselves presenting to the office-based officials in high-level positions.

▪ **Presentation of findings**

Through thematic analysis, the researcher was able to discern that the participants' responses actually call for formal or professional accountability sessions. One of the challenges presented by all participants was that all accountability sessions lack planning. This is notable from the interviews where teacher unions alluded to the lack of formal documentation that would turn academic accountability into common accountability. Firstly, it becomes evident that academic accountability practices are

not known by teacher unions. It is evident that teacher unions are aware of academic accountability from the grievances they receive, as they are informed by members of the current programme relating to teacher unions. The researcher managed to observe two events conducted by **Teacher Union 1** where the complaints were received, and the union included a matter as one of the aspects leading to a provincial WTR campaign.

Evident from the statements of Teacher Unions is also the issue of unprofessionalism that has been realised in the process of academic accountability. Unprofessionalism was alluded to and also directly referred to by teacher unions. There is also the issue of threats, which depict utter unprofessionalism. Moreover, participants were concerned about the information regarding imminent academic accountability, which they received only days before the actual date (refer to sub-section 5.3.3.3). They would be required to provide a lot of information within a very short period. When they managed to populate the required information, they would need to explicitly detail it in a formal setting, in the presence of other stakeholders of the system. With systems theory upholding the efficiency of each member (Devoe, 2012), participants often feel belittled when asked questions they cannot immediately answer. Moreover, it became apparent that during their meetings, the departmental officials would have their own version of data drawn from the SA-SAMS system (refer to sub-section 5.3.3.2) against which they would correct loopholes in the results provided by schools. It is therefore wise for the departmental officials to provide their own technologically generated data. In a nutshell, planning eliminates negativity leading to or caused by unprofessional language, threats, and nervousness among SMT members.

Based on the information provided, the researcher concludes that a well-planned academic setting will include a co-signed policy or memorandum of understanding that is known to all stakeholders in the system (USAID, 2014). The policy will encompass all aspects covering all issues raised as challenges, and provide detailed departmental support tailored to diverse school quintiles, with a focus on comprehensive secondary schools. Eventually, it will result in a yearly plan communicated to all stakeholders at the start of the academic year. The data on which arguments pertaining to academic performance will be based should be extracted from the SA-SAMS and provided to schools at least a month before the actual session date. The data should be provided

together with the templates tailored for the current term. The memorandum of understanding or policy should channel the actors envisaged into formal conduct and language usage. With all these measures in place, accountability can be ensured from all stakeholders without allowing any party to escape (Motshekga, 2021:5).

5.3.4.2 All stakeholders should account

- **Data presentation**

A question was posed to teacher unions to determine if, in their view, academic accountability should start and end with teachers who provide direct tuition. The question was necessitated by systems theory, which holds that a system is composed of various elements. With teachers required to account for their contributions as a fraction in the education system, the researcher considered establishing whether the contributions of other system members could alleviate the challenges experienced by teachers regarding academic accountability sessions. Consequently, teacher unions were asked the following question:

“Should all stakeholders account: teachers, principals, parents, learners and teacher unions?”

These were their answers:

Teacher Union 1 Participant 1: *‘Yes, everyone should be accountable because a child belongs to the community. So, everyone should account, and most of the time we talk about parental involvement... We do account my leader, even us as union leaders we account to each other that ‘my leader, we see your school did not perform well, what went wrong what was the problem and how can you be supported’, yes, we do account as union leaders.’*

Teacher Union 2 Participant: *“Yes, definitely yes, I mean there are lot of teachers who do not want to account. I think it’s an easy escape goat for the department that the unions are assisting the teachers in terms of not being accountable, and that is not true. In our union, we function strictly according to the existing legislation, regulations, and policies. I can only... when a member calls me... I can only assist them as far as the regulation allows me. I cannot claim to be right what the law does not give me. So, if you didn’t do your job and you are being held accountable like the individual teachers are now, they are receiving other letters left, right and centre in terms of... ok... OK,*

your performance for this subject is bad, and you are falling short by this percentage. Why? Or you? Why are you not performing? So, the member would come and say, 'listen, I received this audi letter.' Please assist. What should I do now? I suggest we compile a draft, response, and then read through your job responsibilities. But now if... if at the end of the day the teacher was lazy... eh... There is no way that I would go to the teacher or the department and say, "Don't take action." The best thing that I can do for my member then is to ensure that the processes that take place are fair and that my member was given a fair chance to state his or her version forward and a chance to respond. We are not one of those unions that eh we don't colour outside the line. We just can't afford to colour outside the line. but there is no... in general... there is no accountability process across the department in all the different sections. I mean, there is a lack of accountability amongst teachers as well, but this usually happens with schools that are either performing or semi-performing. The schools that really struggle hardly ever receive visits. And when they ever go there, the circuit managers are not held accountable, many of the teachers are not held accountable, the district directors are not held accountable. The HR officials who perform the HR functions are never ever held accountable. A teacher will get a formal hearing for, say, subjecting a learner to corporal punishment, writing answers on the chalkboard, or insulting a fellow colleague. They are held accountable in formal hearings. I have never heard of the eight-hour official who simply stacked all their work since, let's say, last October, and it was found. They ...they are never held accountable at all."

Teacher Union 3 Participant 1: *"It is obvious from the answers I have given so far that all of us... even the gate man must account. The union not only speaks on behalf of teachers. You remember that everyone in school can become a member. The gateman, the factotum, the teachers, in fact, everyone employed by the Department of Education. This means that we believe everyone, all of us, teachers, parents, and all workers must account. We are saying every employee who is a member must account."*

Teacher Union 3 Participant 2: *"Yes, in the concept of accountability not being a negative practice, we believe all should account, for example, let me start with us; unions. It is fair for the department to ask us a question 'How does **Teacher Union 3** (Name deliberately withheld) help with professional development? How does **Teacher***

Union 3 (Name deliberately withheld) assist lower-grade teachers? What type of professional development are you offering to your teachers? Whether it is management, discipline, or academic performance. Teachers are obviously the ones who are taking the lessons. Parents should also be asked whether the kids are operating in the family. Are kids doing their work? How do they assist kids? If parents are asked in an open atmosphere and feel trusted and assured of confidentiality, they will open up to say that my child does not want to see a book in front of her when they come back from school. Now, teachers will have to understand that we think these kids continue to do what is happening in class, but parents are saying it is not happening, so how can we assist in cases like that? So, parents, yes, they need to account. Again, I will go back to the understanding of accountability, where parents will not be asked 'Why are your kids failing? You are not doing your duty as parents. We must build an atmosphere where we will ask how they are supporting their children, and whether they are supporting them. If you are supporting, how are you doing it? Do you see yourself succeeding in making your kids love schooling? Principals, of course, the way principals account should be different from the way teachers account. Teachers will account in the context of delivering content to learners and providing specific support. Principals will account in the context of managers and heads of institutions. For example, is there an atmosphere created in that school that leads to good performance? Through your deputies and HODs, are you able as the principal to see whether the sheep is sinking or not, and are you bringing up intervention strategies to either sustain or improve? So, principals, I believe when they go to accountability sessions, they should have different sets of questions to answer because their role is different. I am not expecting officials to ask principals why their accounting is poor if the school's accounting performs poorly. I may not be teaching accounting. The question should be such that generally there isn't good performance at your school. What system are you going to use at your school? What systems are you having in place? As a principal, I'm paid for a different job than the principal. In the end, everyone contributes to good performance, but differently."

- **Data analysis**

All teacher unions responded in favour of the idea that all stakeholders should be held accountable for learners' academic performance. **Teacher Union 1** assertively

declares that the union stands in support of academic accountability demands and that every stakeholder should be subjected to academic accountability. In concurrence with **Teacher Union 1**, **Teacher Union 2 Participant** provided a blatant answer: “Yes, *definitely, yes!*”

In their response, **Teacher Union 1** refers to parents, the community, and union leaders. Thus, it is believed that everyone should be accountable for their performance. The participant further clarifies that teacher union leaders also account. **Teacher Union 2 Participant** further said that the DoE is wrong to think of them as people who are “...*assisting the teachers in terms of not being accountable, and that is not true...*”

According to **Teacher Union 2**, it is required that all teachers be held accountable for academic achievement. The participant went on to say that teacher members of the union should not misuse the support they receive from the union as an excuse for avoiding academic accountability. Stressing further the need for teacher accountability among other stakeholders, **Teacher Union 2** stated that their union strictly observes “... *existing legislation and regulation and policy.*” The participant further indicated that teachers are obliged to do their job or face accountability.

The indication here is that **Teacher Union 2** feels that it is within the limits of the law to demand performance. They indicate that they cannot stand for people who do not do their jobs. **Teacher Union 3** also concurs with **Teacher Unions 1 and 2**. The words of **Teacher Union 3 Participant 2** can be reiterated here: “... *all of us... even the gate man must account. The union not only speaks on behalf of teachers. You remember that everyone in school can become a member. The gateman, the factotum, the teachers, in fact, everyone employed by the Department of Education. This means that we believe everyone... all of us; teachers, parents and all workers must account.*”

Teacher Union 3 extends the list of participants. According to their opinion, the gateman, teachers, parents and every other employee are expected to account. The views of teacher unions regarding academic accountability and academic accountability sessions have already been established in **Theme 1**. The answers that all the teacher union participants provided to the question on whether accountability is everyone’s responsibility only buttress the opinion established under **Theme 1**.

▪ Presentation of findings

Chapter 3 of the study details the components of the education system in basic education (refer to sub-section 3.2.17). It was found that all stakeholders have their roles to play in accordance with existential theory, and their individual contributions build up to the broader system in accordance with systems theory. As discussed in sub-section 3.2.17, stakeholders in the education system include learners, teachers, departmental officials, parents, and the community (Spurrier *et al.*, 2020; Dangara, 2016; Haag, 2020). According to Brady (2020) and Rahmatollahi and Zenouzagh (2021:2), school teachers are accountable to learners and the community about the subject matter.

When examining Theme 3 in conjunction with the above-stated responses, the researcher noted that indeed teacher unions do support academic accountability and that academic accountability should be extended to all the stakeholders in the system. The table below displays the list of candidates subject to academic accountability, as per the teacher unions.

Table 5.14: List of stakeholders

Teacher Union	Stakeholders mentioned
Teacher Union 1	Everyone; parents, community, teacher unions
Teacher Union 2	Teachers, circuit managers, district directors, human resource officials
Teacher Union 3	All workers; the factotum, teacher unions, teachers, parents, principals, deputy principals, departmental heads

It has been established through investigating the challenges facing teachers in academic sessions that teacher unions believe the current accountability in education is unilateral in that SMTs are subjected to verbal engagement with the directorate over their performance as schools (refer to sub-section 5.3.3.1). However, **Table 5.3.4.2** summarises the responses of teacher unions regarding the stakeholders who should be held accountable. The list provided includes virtually every stakeholder, excluding learners. The responses received further refute the opinion that teacher unions oppose academic accountability (Caluza, 2022:29). Consequently, the researcher can conclude that teacher unions strongly support academic accountability to the extent that everyone in the education sector and the relevant community can be held

accountable. This suggests that teachers are not alone in ensuring that academic performance is achieved.

Concerning the exclusion of learners from the list, the researcher can refer to Theme 3, where it was established that CMs, teacher unions, and SMTs made a particular allusion to the need for learners' challenges to be featured in academic accountability (refer to sub-section 5.3.3). According to the researcher's assessment, this brings learners into the fold as stakeholders of accountability.

Given these concerns, the researcher can conclude that FSDoE can mitigate the challenges that educators experience during academic accountability by holding all stakeholders accountable, as established by their respective functions, and by allowing challenges presented by learners to be mentioned. When required to account, educators may be asked to identify the challenges presented by learners during academic accountability. After all, **Teacher Union 3** is of the view that one account is required to account in line with their responsibilities.

Considering this and the participants' call for permission to report on learners' socioeconomic and educational challenges, the researcher noticed that the benefit can be dual if the matter is allowed in academic accountability sessions. Firstly, the challenge facing teachers during accountability sessions would subside; secondly, all learners would be afforded a space to write a Grade 12 National Senior Certificate (NSC). In conclusion, the researcher believes that all stakeholders in the system should be taken into account. As **Teacher Union 3** suggests, accountability should be implemented on various platforms tailored for different stakeholders. Moreover, those who are accountable should be allowed to mention the learners' challenges to caution the relevant office in the DoE to undertake their duties.

5.3.4.3 Take heed of the importance of the line function in the system

- **Data presentation**

The question was asked to principals as heads of institutions directly accountable for academic accountability. The purpose of the question was to gather practical suggestions for addressing the challenges faced by stakeholders in academic accountability. As a result, the following question was asked: *"How do you think*

FSDoE can mitigate challenges faced by stakeholders in academic performance accountability sessions?” in the following way:

Principal A: *“Eh... from where I stand, I... I think the approach is wrong. Eh... in the first place, we’ve got an organogram, we’ve got the HoD, we’ve got chief directors, we’ve got directors, we’ve got the circuit managers. Why should I as the principal account to the Head of Department, to the Director when I’ve got my immediate supervisor with whom I’ve got a particular relationship... your immediate supervisor is the direct person that you must account to, yeah so accounting to the multiple layer of leadership is a problem according to me and it also says to me, the higher hierarchy of the Department does not trust their circuit managers because why the interfere in his area. The circuit manager must account to the CES, the CES must account to the director, the director to the chief director, the chief director to the DDG, the DDG to the Head of Department. That is, the hierarchy that exists within the Department, but when it comes to the accountability sessions, it is not followed. I think that is the problem, something that the Department of Education must take into consideration because it puts unnecessary pressure on... on those who are supposed to be held accountable, and sometimes... during these sessions these lines that are crossed that I find unacceptable for example, if I am the principal and a junior from the district office challenges and uses language that is unacceptable towards me, I... I feel very undermined, so that is why I want to say they need to look at the line of accountability that is in place, and how they approach it. We are not kids. Yeah, we cannot be talked to as if we are children.”*

Principal B: *“Honestly speaking, all stakeholders must account to immediate superiors. In a recent accountability, SMTs accounted to the HoD, the chief director was there, the director and the whole DMT was there. The only thing that they can do is to allow us to report to immediate supervisors. Again, accountability sessions should be contextual. My school is an arts school. We depend on a 50% theory and a 50% practical approach, but we are forced to account for theory only. Those two things are important, including immediate supervisor accountability and contextual accountability. Moreover, science schools should be separate from commerce schools. The same to other schools.*

Principal C: *“They must provide guidance and strategies on how to discipline learners. Learners with academic barriers must be placed in the relevant institutions as quickly as possible. Learners who are over-aged and problematic must be placed at ABET without too much interference from the department.”*

Principal D: *“Like I said, I do not go to accountability sessions. I went only once.”*

- **Data analysis**

Principal A and **Principal B** elaborated on the line function according to the offices of supervisors from the school to the office of the HoD. The participants believe that observing the line function can mitigate the challenges they face at live events of academic accountability. **Principal A** also cited the concern that the department is represented by an official of no higher office than his, in terms of post levels, and that he uses disparaging words against them.

On the other hand, **Principal C** brings up the issue of learners once. The participant felt that the district should address disruptive learners. Once the issue with the learners is addressed, **Principal C** believes that challenges related to academic accountability will subside. **Principal D** indicated that he had not been involved in academic accountability (refer to sub-section 5.3.3.3).

With the issue of line function raised once more by two principals, the researcher triangulated the answers provided to the question asked to teacher unions: *“How do you value the importance of line function with regard to academic accountability?”* as discussed in sub-section 5.3.1.3.

A synoptic analysis of the responses received from teacher unions and principals reveals that management represents the line of accountability. All the teacher unions believe that line management is very important in every department or organisation, crucial, and therefore a reason. **Teacher Union 3 Participant 2** indicates that higher offices have a greater responsibility to support their subordinates. While **Teacher Union 1** believes that observing the line of function enhances labour peace, as Principal A does, Teacher Union 2 and Teacher Union 3 mentioned various offices of reporting in schools.

Regarding the issue of Principal A and Principal B, DHs were asked if they were required to account for their actions in the official academic accountability and whether they reported to their supervisors. The issue is highlighted here to further investigate the line function reporting problem. The question followed the one which required DHs to indicate if they had accounted before, and the question was posed in the following way: *“Were you accounting to the immediate supervisor? Please elaborate.”*

DH 1: *“I would not say that as SASA acts states who we can account to and not the District Director.”*

DH 2: *“No, in my school, I have not accounted, not even once. My immediate supervisor is the deputy principal or the principal at least. I accounted twice to the circuit manager and more than twice to the District Director and Directorate.”*

DH 3: *“I was accountable to the HOD and the DDG in 2018, which occurs rarely. I also accounted to the DMT with the District Director present. I also attended the CES of the district with circuit managers present. These sessions are frequent as we account quarterly, especially when the school was underperforming.”*

DH 4: *“Yes, the principal had to go to the department to account. She summoned us HODs and the educators to account for poor performance of the department and to come up with strategies to improve, for her to compile the school improvement plan.”*

- **Presentation of findings**

All DHs concur that they had not accounted to their immediate supervisors. On the other hand, **DH 4** provides a conflicting response, stating that he had accounted to his immediate supervisor, yet mentions the principal as the candidate to whom he had accounted. As the principal (with a level 4 post), there is still the office of the deputy principal between the principal and the DH. This confirms that line function reporting has not happened in all participating schools, namely, **School A, School B, School C** and **School D**. With **School D**, **DH 4** is in remembrance of the principal calling for their strategies. In contrast, the principal himself indicates he had not accounted in ten years but had been involved in meetings strategised for sharing of good practices.

School A, presented by two participants, Principal A and DH 1, concur that line management reporting is not happening. While Principal A offers offices of reporting in their supervisory order, DH 1 reports that they had not reported to immediate supervisors. DH 1 further quotes SASA as the executive law offering the order of reporting. This is in line with Teacher Union 3 Participant 1, who indicated that principals represent the HoD (refer to sub-section 5.3.1.3). This is in line with SASA, which clearly states that principals, as headmasters, represent the HoD (South Africa, 1996). The sentiment of School A is shared by School B, whose participants also indicate that line function reporting is not happening. With School C, the DH 3 concurs with School A and School B. However, the principal appears to view this as normal practice, as he identifies the issue calling for attention as the learners' conduct.

The researcher observed four academic accountability sessions, which confirmed the words of the sampled schools. Accountability session 1 of 2024 was headed by the CMs. Accountability sessions 2 and 3 of 2024 were led by the directorate. Accountability session 4 of 2024 was done in the presence of the DD. Deputy principals of schools were present in the first three accountability sessions, where they directed questions to the accompanying SMT members. In Accountability session 4 of 2024, the CMs presented the overall performance, with school principals providing school-based performance reports. It was in this session that Principal X (Not real name and not sampled participant) indicated that he could not be present in the presence of the HoD. Notably, it was during Accountability session 4 of 2024 that the HoD reminded schools that principals were answerable to him and that they should not be intimidated by the CD and the DD. To the researcher, the statement by the HoD helped identify another researchable topic on the contractual duties of the CD and the DD in relation to learners' academic performance or the school's academic accountability.

The synopsis offered above leaves the researcher in no doubt that observing the line of function in schools when accounting for academic performance can bring lasting mitigation to problems experienced by stakeholders. This is the bottom-up strategy that Shewbridge *et al.* (2019:29) avers is beneficial in ensuring uncompromised teaching, learning, and assessment, which, in turn, enhances school performance

(refer to sub-sections 3.2.2.1 and 3.2.2.1). Furthermore, bottom-up reporting enables school-based evaluation to take place (GDE, 2020) (refer to sub-section 3.3.3.2).

5.3.5 Theme 5: The roles of stakeholders in academic accountability sessions

Teacher unions are believed to be a stumbling block in matters relating to academic accountability (Symeonidis & Stromquist, 2020:26). The researcher sought to determine whether, as members of the system, they hinder the system's efficiency. Principals and DHs were asked if teacher unions can play a role in academic accountability sessions.

5.3.5.1 Principals' views regarding the role of teacher unions in academic accountability sessions

- **Data presentation**

The following question was posed to principals: *“Have you ever felt you wanted teacher unions to participate in academic accountability sessions?”*

The principals responded in the following way:

Principal A: *“Yes, on the basis of what I have raised, yeah. I think the unions can participate because they can get there as observers, just to check whether the process is fair in the first place and also to protect the integrity of the members, because I remember the accountability sessions occur within the space of work.”*

Principal B: *“Yes, so that in their meetings with their comrades, they can share challenges or good practices instead of fighting for only money and disrupting schools. Again, they should protect their members from being humiliated by their superiors.”*

Principal C: *“Yes, of course. Teacher unions should represent us and them at the sessions.”*

Principal D: *“No. I don't think that teacher unions can be held accountable. But because of the treatment of teachers, they can take part.”*

The follow-up question was asked to inquire about the roles that principals envision teacher unions would entail. The question was phrased in the following way: *“How do you think teacher unions can participate in the process?”*

These were the responses of principals:

Principal A: *“Through observations, they must be observers so that at the end when they intervene, they intervene from a point of authority not as.... like third party participants but as people who have been part and parcel of the process like when interviews are held, they are there, they can be given the same status in the accountability sessions, remember to protect... the members.”*

Principal B: *“In the interviews, they act as observers to ensure interviews are fair and square and to offer advice if needed. They can do likewise during accountability sessions.”*

Principal C: *“They should observe the whole process and intervene where necessary. Accountability should be held professionally using professional language.”*

Principal D: *“By only observing.”*

▪ Data analysis

All the principals felt it was wise for the teacher unions to partake in the accountability process. While the three principals unanimously agreed on the need for teacher unions' involvement in the accountability process, Principal D felt somewhat sceptical and only affirmed because of the issue of negative consequences accompanying the academic accountability sitings. Thus, the message of all principals is that teacher unions need to be involved in academic accountability sessions. Principal A and Principal D share the sentiment that the involvement of teacher unions is required due to the attitude of district officials towards SMTs, as experienced during the academic accountability sessions (refer to sub-section 5.3.3.1). The view of Principal C is also related to the views of Principal A and Principal D. While Principal A and Principal D speak of the attitude of members to whom accountability is given, it is possible that they feel the need to be represented, which is the frank idea of Principal C.

On the other hand, Principal B states two needs for the involvement of teacher unions. The second need also alludes to the need for protection against the afore-mentioned humiliation. Principal B also feels that teacher unions should be informed first-hand from experience during live sessions, leading to the discovery of challenges and good practices as practised during academic accountability sessions.

When asked about the level of involvement of teacher unions in academic accountability sessions, all the principals unanimously mentioned that they expected the teacher unions to observe the proceedings. Individual principals provided further expectations. Principal A and Principal C were frank that they expect observations to culminate in intervention should maltreatment ensue. On the other hand, while Principal D offers no elaboration on the meaning of elaboration, Principal B explains that teacher unions should ensure that the process of accountability is fair and when needed, advice should be readily provided.

▪ **Presentation of findings**

Principals responded that they would need the involvement of teacher unions in active academic accountability sessions. However, they all limit the contribution of teacher unions to observe the process, with the possibility of offering advice and intervening when injustice happens. According to the researcher's assessment, principals require protection from possible maltreatment, as discussed in sub-section 5.3.3.1.

The researcher had noticed that the environment in the observed accountability sessions was tense when members of the district and province questioned the SMTs on strategies taken to improve Grade 12 performance. In Accountability session 4 of 2024, the acting principal of the presenting school was declared incapable, and the CD ordered him to immediately return to his former position. On the other hand, Accountability session 1 of 2024 saw the principal being dismissed on the pretext that the presentation sounded unilateral; that is, there was no evidence that consultation had been made. The dismissed principal left the building, never to return, after being given a second chance. Moreover, the researcher analysed the two documents by Teacher Union 1, namely, the Branch report for Teacher Union 1 members and the report back on WTR achievements. Both documents explained the queries relating to maltreatment and threats experienced by SMTs during academic accountability

sessions. According to the reports, academic accountability sessions would be transformed into performance reviews.

At this point, it has been established that teacher unions can be viewed as stakeholders of the system (Msila, 2021). As an entity with tasks to perform in the context of existential theory (Moore *et al.*, 2017), they are active elements of the educational system that co-sign agreements and policies alongside the DBE (2012). Thus, excluding teacher unions would not be effective for the system, as the researcher has already established that Teacher Union 1 and Teacher Union 2 have received formal complaints regarding the procedures for academic accountability sessions. In contrast, complaints received by Teacher Union 3 were only referred to as informal (refer to sub-section 5.3.3.1). According to systems theory (Moore *et al.*, 2017), the researcher concludes that excluding teacher unions from academic accountability sessions would undermine the efficiency of the education system.

5.3.5.2 The views of Departmental Heads (DHs) regarding the role of teacher unions in academic accountability sessions

- **Data presentation**

The question posed to principals was rephrased and posed to the DHs: *“Do you think that teachers should be represented during academic accountability sessions?”* This question followed the one where the DHs were required to indicate if they felt like leaving the teaching profession as a result of a call for accountability, to which they responded in favour. The following responses were received.

DH 1: *“Yes, if they go there to protect their members and not as guests of honour because there are lots of irregularities happening there, which is unlawful.”*

DH 2: *“A big yes.”*

DH 3: *“No, accountability sessions should not be a platform for bashing, attacking and humiliating teachers, but a round table discussion where teachers feel free and safe without a need for union intervention.”*

DH 4: *“No, they know about the process; they should have intervened a long time back... they should have supported the teacher a long time back. They allowed accountability to happen.”*

- **Data analysis**

DH 1 and DH 2 responded that they would need teacher unions to be represented in the formal sessions of academic accountability. DH 1 further indicated that they would need the protection services as a result of irregularities accompanying the academic accountability sessions. Thus, 50% of the sampled DHs as participants believe that teacher unions may participate in the academic accountability process.

On the other hand, DH 3 and DH 4 responded negatively with substantiations. Examining the words of DH 3, one would realise that DH 3 is actually of the view that “... *bashing, attacking and humiliating...*” teachers in academic accountability sessions must be lifted, and the sessions should go without the need to involve teacher unions. Conversely, the teacher unions will be required where there is much bashing, attacking, and humiliation of SMTs. However, systems theory still calls for the contribution of teacher unions to improve the system.

The response of DH 4, compared to other responses, is that since teacher unions have been aware of academic accountability sessions and have not intervened, intervention at this stage is not required. Analysing the response closely, the researcher could establish that there was a time when the intervention of teacher unions was required. This is supported by the indication of DH 4, who states that “*They allowed accountability to happen.*” However, one shall remember that Teacher Union 3 had received informal complaints calling for no reaction. Teacher Union 1 had taken a step to engage with the education department through the WTR campaign, whereas Teacher Union 2 had verbally engaged with the education department (refer to sub-section 5.3.4.1). This suggests that teacher unions have taken action on the matter, and where they had not acted, they were limited by the type of complaint received.

- **Presentation of findings**

It has become evident that teacher unions are not currently participating in academic accountability sessions held in the Free State, particularly in the Motheo Education District. As already indicated, principals responded in much the same way. They are all of the view that the teacher unions can assume the position of observers. As the accountability process unfolds, teacher unions should be prepared to protect their

members. The researcher can conclude that principals feel professionalism is compromised during the academic accountability process.

The responses from the DHs also indicate the protection of members with **DH 4**, suggesting that it should have occurred a long time ago. The idea of observation to protect members from unfair labour practices regarding academic accountability aligns with Wachira and Odhiambo (2021:593) and McCollow (2017:1), who argue that the primary duty of teacher unions is to protect their members. This can be triangulated with the two events that the researcher observed, namely, the Teacher Union 1 branch meeting and the Teacher Union 1 regional meeting. Both meetings deliberated on the maltreatment of fellow members in accountability sessions, amongst other things, and the stand of Teacher Union 1 regarding academic accountability sessions was presented. However, it is worth reiterating that teacher unions do not entirely reject accountability (refer to sub-section 5.3.1).

Following the deliberations already made regarding the challenges presented by SMTs, the researcher concludes that, by 'irregularities,' **DH 1** refers to the mistreatment, questioning of the information compiled in two or three days, and the use of disparaging words to convey the message (refer to sub-section 5.3.4.1). After considering the views of both the sampled principals and DHs, the researcher concludes that principals and DHs require the teacher union to observe all the meetings called in the name of academic accountability. This had not happened before and is evidenced by the letter analysed by the researcher, which informed stakeholders of imminent provincial academic accountability. According to the letter, the addressees mentioned exclude teacher unions.

5.3.6 Theme 6: Stakeholders' image of academic accountability can enhance learner performance

▪ Presentation of findings

To conclude the verbal engagements the researcher had with the teacher unions, the researcher sought to establish the link between the teacher unions' perceptions regarding academic accountability and learners' performance in the Motheo District and the Free State Province. The researcher posed the following question to members of the teacher unions: *"Based on the answers you have provided, how can teacher*

unions' perceptions of accountability sessions affect learners' academic performance and the school performance?"

The responses received are provided below.

Teacher Union 1

Teacher Union 1 Participant 1: *"Let us not put the blame solely on teachers while the departmental officials are being angels. We are saying that accountability sessions are being structured in the wrong way."*

Teacher Union 1 Participant 3: *"Involve the teacher unions in every plan department, and you will see results. They can best talk to their own members."*

Teacher Union 2

Teacher Union 2 Participant: *"The department should be frank enough with what transpires in the accountability seatings. That will give the unions a stand. Actually, we do have a standard of accountability; everyone is accountable, but we are saying that accountability should be professional. Accountability should not put other learners aside to make it possible for schools to be less vulnerable. In this way, accountability is not helping; it marginalises the struggling."*

Teacher Union 3

Teacher Union 3 Participant 1: *The fact that as a union we support accountability, that we also account for it means that we can encourage our members to work very hard... that after hard work, they must go to account... and learners will pass well. We not only represent teachers or bargain for them; no, we want them to work. We are part and parcel of the pass and failure of learners.*

Teacher Union 3 Participant 2: *"Look, I think the effect will be a positive one if unions are like in an interview like this. The silent message is, you know what, this is one of the things you should address in meetings and ask teachers to inform learners about academic performance and accountability. I think we should formalise and compile a presentation on accountability for all our mass meetings; this will be helpful. It will boost learner performance because it will be filtered down to the learner's level after teachers understand what it is, why it is important, and what the approach will be."*

Academic performance is affected by many factors. I think union intervention, positive intervention in all aspects of academic performance, can boost learner performance and the general school performance. That is what I think and it's an ongoing assignment, it's not static, it can't provide strategies now, you can provide now and stop because now things change, things develop, you have the BELA act now, it has impact on how things were done before, so your suggestions and your perceptions to learner performance and teacher performance will always be positively influenced."

- **Data analysis**

Firstly, Teacher Union 1 responded that they believe, as a union, they can work together with departmental officials when they are involved. Moreover, **Teacher Union 1** believes that if they are involved in every step of the planning and execution processes, they "...can best talk to their own members" into the programme. Consequently, the academic results will begin to manifest. Additionally, **Teacher Union 1** believes in joint accountability, where the department and teachers share the same burden.

On the other hand, **Teacher Union 2** affirms that, as a union, they support the idea that everyone is accountable; that is, accountability should not be solely burdened on teachers when there are other stakeholders in the education system. This means that the system is malfunctioning in the area of academic accountability due to the exclusion of other parties eligible for accountability. Another thing is that academic performance is likely to improve if all learners are afforded equal opportunities to sit for the NSC certificate. Moreover, according to **Teacher Union 2**, academic accountability should be an open and transparent practice.

Through **Teacher Union 3, Participant 1**, as the mouthpiece, reiterates that the union supports academic accountability for all its members. As previously stated, they would want the DoE or the district to professionalise academic accountability. As a union, they also assume responsibility when learners have either passed or failed. Upon closer examination, the researcher could infer that Teacher Union 3 advocates for the restructuring of academic accountability sessions to enable them to delegate responsibilities to their own members.

Teacher Union 3 concurs with **Teacher Union 1** that, if the academic accountability sessions can be professionalised, it will be their responsibility to communicate the importance of this to their members. Moreover, **Teacher Union 3** believes that academic accountability needs to be communicated to its members by the union, so that once they understand its importance, it can be cascaded down to the learners. That is, learners should also come to understand that teachers need to account for their behaviour on their behalf.

All three teacher unions are confident that the involvement of teacher unions can lead to improvements in both learners' and schools' performance. Teacher unions believe that every stakeholder is accountable, including them. The call for reshaping academic accountability is evident throughout the teacher unions' responses.

- **Presentation of findings**

The teacher unions' position with regard to academic accountability has been established. Teacher unions are in favour of academic accountability. They believe that every party should provide an account of their performance regarding their signed job contracts. This is directly linked to sub-theme 5.3.4.1, which calls for the formalisation of academic accountability sessions. According to **Teacher Union 2**, formalisation should be coupled with utter transparency, which, according to Kalu and Okeke (2020), is capable of eliminating corruption from governmental processes. Related to academic accountability sessions, the researcher can conclude that transparency will enhance accountability and maximise the level of support and academic performance. Moreover, the views of teacher unions can be linked to the findings of Msila (2014) and Msila (2022), who have established that the involvement of teacher unions in policymaking and the implementation of school programmes can positively enhance learner performance.

Notably, **Teacher Union 1** responded that they believe they can work together with departmental officials when they are involved as a union. **Teacher Union 1** indicated in sub-section 5.3.4.1 that they are accustomed to verbal engagements in bilateral meetings with CMs regarding schools' performance. Moreover, teacher unions believe that including teacher unions and other stakeholders in academic accountability would lead to the dissemination of the usefulness of the practice to fellow members. This

view was assertively presented by **Teacher Union 3**. The idea is that such knowledge will enhance learner performance and overall school performance, as teachers are responsible for the performance of learners (Motshekga, 2022:2).

Therefore, the researcher concludes that there may be a causative link between the teacher unions' perceptions of academic accountability procedures and learners' performance. Considering all the deliberations the researcher had with teacher unions, participants in academic accountability sessions would likely have no one to report to when teacher unions are fully involved in academic accountability. To put it differently, participants would have nothing to report to teacher unions. Thus, inclusion of teacher unions as entities or stakeholders with tasks to perform will optimise the performance of the system in academic accountability.

- **Presentation of findings**

CMs were asked a question to trigger the image they might have of academic accountability. The researcher sought to establish whether they had been involved in academic accountability sessions as accounting officers. The researcher believed that the responses they would provide would reflect their perception of accountability and how it would impact learners' academic performance. The question was posed in the following way: *"Have you ever accounted for the academic performance of your circuit?"*

The following responses were provided:

Circuit Manager 1: *"Yes, several times. Even when I joined, I remember I joined in March, but I had to account for the results of the previous year, when I was not even there. However, I had to give my perspective on how I see things and what led the circuit down. At the same time, I also learned because my presentation focused on specific things, and I left some of the gist that I would be helped with when we engaged in discussion. You must also look at this. For example, we could address the performance generally only to find that we also need to focus on differentiating these learners by subject, to identify those who are at risk, those who are progressing, and those who are high fliers. We must cater for those in our strategies in order to bring about performance, and in such a way that I learnt a lot from these accountability sessions."*

Circuit Manager 2: *“Yes, many times. I accounted when I was the principal and I am also accounting as circuit manager.”*

Circuit Manager 3: *“For many times, I account to DMT and to the province about my schools. So, it is normal to account. I have a few years of experience as a circuit manager. I was principal for two years, deputy principal for some years, and I spent all these years in accounting. The only problem is when you account and teachers do not show hard work.”*

Circuit Manager 4: *“Yes, many times. Actually, it is academic performance that made me the circuit manager. As a circuit manager, we account for every time when the results are released...at least three times a year.”*

- **Presentation of findings**

The responses of CMs shared a common element regarding their participation in accountability with the district and the province. They had all participated in the accountability meetings held for them several times. The observed accountability meetings do not provide evidence for CMs' accounting, as they were not in attendance or held accountable. **Circuit Manager 2** displayed much confidence in the fact that participation was made as both principal and as CM. On the other hand, **Circuit Manager 3** concurred with **Circuit Manager 2** that academic accountability extends beyond post levels to the level of school management. Additionally, academic accountability contributed to **Circuit Manager 4's** promotion. One could deduce that academic accountability can still have a positive impact on learners' performance if, as Circuit Manager 3 indicates, teachers put effort into their work.

Furthermore, **Circuit Manager 3** believes that academic accountability should be taken as normal practice. In that way, what Circuit Manager 1 said will happen: a positive view of academic accountability, coupled with action, would improve learner performance. The researcher could realise that performance in schools is possible and that feasible strategies could impact on learners' performance. This was obvious from the presentation slides of **Schools A, B and C**. One would realise that the positive image stakeholders could have of academic accountability, coupled with thorough implementation, could have a positive impact on learners' performance. These findings confirm the claim made by Smith and Benavot (2019:3, 4, 5) that academic

accountability can enhance learners' performance. This only requires the positive view thereof.

- **Presentation of findings**

The same question was asked of the principals, and these were their responses.

Principal 1: *"Yes, I have done it many times, even though sometimes the school does not necessarily underperform, but they call us where there is a need for that."*

Principal 2: *"For many times. I account for the performance. Whether they pass or not, I account. This year I was there two to three times, but my school got 100% last year."*

Principal 3: *"I only accounted once since I became the principal when the school obtained an 80% performance. Since we obtained above 85%, I have never been called to account because we perform."*

Principal 4: *"Yes, on the side of sharing good practices/ strategies with underperforming schools."*

- **Presentation of findings**

All the principals were positive about academic accountability as it relates causatively to learners' performance. This is clearly realisable from the responses of **Principal 3** and **Principal 4**, who shared that they had been required to share good practices leading to better performance for both principals. Thus, the image that principals can have of academic accountability can impact learners' performance. **Principal 2** also relates academic accountability to academic performance. Contrary to what **Principals 3** and **4** shared, **Principals 1** and **2** had been called for academic accountability regardless of their performance. The researcher could establish from the responses received that principals believe the image that education actors can conclude on regarding academic accountability can have a positive impact on learners' performance. The researcher had managed to observe four accountability sessions held before the CMs, the DD and the HoD. The list of documents acquired for analysis bears evidence to this statement. Accountability presentations for Schools A, B, and C acknowledge this reality. Indeed, two schools were required to share good practices in each session, while others were required to report on their performance. With much

positivity realised regarding the need for a positive image on accountability, it is confirmed that accountability should be self-assigned for it to be effective (Kenton, 2022; Moore *et al.*, 2017).

5.4 PRESENTATION OF DATA EMANATING FROM DOCUMENTS ANALYSIS

The researcher sought to triangulate findings from interviews, document analysis, and observations. Consequently, the researcher managed to acquire and analyse the documents depicted in Table 5.15.

Table 5.15: List of documents analysed

Item No.	Document	Title holder
1.	Letter inviting stakeholders to the accountability session	FSDoE
2.	Branch report for Teacher Union 1 members	Local branch
3.	Teacher Union 1 reports back on work-to-rule achievements	Free State Teacher Union 1 office
4.	Accountability presentation 1	School A
5.	Accountability presentation 2	School B
6.	Accountability presentation 3	School C
7.	Performance report 2022	DBE
8.	Performance report 2023	DBE
9.	Teacher Union 1 awards for excellence	Teacher Union 1 and NGO

5.4.1 Letter inviting stakeholders to the accountability session

Based on the information provided by SMTs and teacher unions, academic accountability takes place at various levels. This suggests that circuits, districts and the province may call SMTs to an academic accountability session with the selected panel. The researcher managed to acquire a provincial letter calling stakeholders to the accountability session with the provincial head of the department (Education). No evidence was found of a letter from the district or circuit regarding the invitation to the accountability session. The letter acquired was directed to the DD, CMs and SMTs. Thus, the teacher unions were not informed of the event. This confirms the concern of the teacher unions that they are not informed of the accountability meetings through school-based educators, and that there is no formal invitation or letter sharing information with them. However, the letter was formally arranged by the office of the

CD and states that the current era of education is one of accountability. The letter states the date and time of the event, along with expectations, and was duly signed. The researcher finds the letter to be formalising academic accountability in the Free State with the official invitation. However, the letter does not state a direct legal background on academic accountability.

5.4.2 Accountability presentation slides

The researcher successfully acquired accountability presentation slides for **Schools A, B, and C**. The format of the presentation slides was the same for all schools. The presentation slides indicate that schools were required to provide information relating to the performance of learners in Grades 9, 10, and 12, thus encompassing learners in other grades as well as a Grade 12 class. This partly addresses the teacher unions' concern that accountability should encompass all grades, specifically in the case of secondary schools. However, only intervention strategies for Grade 12 performance were discussed or addressed during the accountability session. This confirms that much of the time is granted to improve Grade 12 performance, while other grades are left behind.

Regarding learners, preconceived accountability slides require information to be provided on the progress of individual learners, those who performed well, and the progress of all learners combined. The SMT is required to provide feasible strategies to assist these learners. The involvement of learners here is limited to providing statistics only. The challenge that aligns with the concerns provided is that the presentation slides do not discuss the overall approach and do not provide an indication, perhaps in terms of statistics, of learners who require additional support. Thus, the issue of support rendered to schools or of schools rendering support to learners is not supported.

The overall look of the presentation provides a uniform approach to schools. Regarding schools that offer subjects with practical assessment tasks (PAT), their issue is addressed with a focus on the theoretical component of the assessment. This becomes an advantage for these schools, as it may spur SMTs to take more action, leading to improved performance. This approach lacks equity, as **Table 5.2.2** indicates that **Schools A, B, and C** offer diverse streams of subjects. Moreover, in relation to

the information provided by CMs and SMTs, the presentation slides require a substantial amount of information, mostly in the form of statistics, to prepare the presentation within a few days and to be ready to provide more information that may be required through questioning.

5.4.3 Performance reports 2023 and 2024

The performance reports of 2023 and 2024 were studied and analysed. The researcher was interested in the performance of schools located in the Free State, specifically in the Motheo District. **Table 5.2.2** was compiled using the information from performance reports for 2023 and 2024. The performance reports are based on the report made by the Minister of Education. Both documents reiterate the contribution of teachers, parents and other communities within the education system (Gwarube, 2025), and each one is accountable for the academic performance (Motshekga, 2024:4). The 2023 and 2024 national performance reports detail the pass and failure statistics, much like the presentation slides used in the academic accountability sessions. The performance reports provide the number of enrolled and progressing learners, as well as their pass rate, along with the number of promoted learners and their pass rate. However, the performance reports do not provide the number of learners who dropped or deregistered, in light of the teacher unions' concern that, in an endeavour to present well at the accountability sessions, many learners end up dropping or writing only a few subjects.

5.4.4 Teacher Union 1 reports and awards

The researcher was able to obtain documents reporting on the WTR campaign, which called for Teacher Union 1 members to engage in a strike, thereby ruling out any form of engagement with departmental officials. The branch report informs members of the achievements, which the provincial report also reiterates. Many reasons calling for the WTR campaign were explained. The researcher noticed that accountability sessions were mentioned as one of the reasons for WTR. The reports state that the union successfully engaged with the district and the provincial office to address the demands required by academic accountability. The reports state that the union had received various complaints regarding the conduct of departmental officials during the academic accountability processes. The reports state that the accountability sessions

will be restructured and that the union has managed to strike a generative agreement with the district and the provincial office. The researcher also acquired the document detailing the teachers' awards presented by **Teacher Union 1**. The document can be linked with the Teacher Unions' claims that they pursue academic performance and accountability. The awards were presented by Teacher Union 1 and an NGO to individual teachers whose learners achieved high pass rates during the given year.

5.5 PRESENTATION OF DATA EMANATING FROM OBSERVATIONS

As previously indicated, the study employed a qualitative approach. Yearning for more reliable study, the live events were observed as indicated in the table below.

Table 5.16: Events observed

Item no	Event	Responsibility
1	Accountability session 1 of 2024	Circuit managers
2	Accountability session 2 of 2024	District Director
3	Accountability session 3 of 2024	District Director
4	Accountability session 4 of 2024	Head of Department
5	Teacher Union 1 branch meeting	Branch office
6	Teacher Union 1 regional meeting	Branch office

5.5.1 Accountability sessions of 2024

The researcher successfully observed live events on accountability, specifically Accountability Session 1 of 2024, Accountability Session 2 of 2024, Accountability Session 3 of 2024, and Accountability Session 4 of 2024. Through these accountability sessions, the researcher acquired the presentation documents discussed under sub-theme 5.4.3. Accountability session 1 of 2024 was the responsibility of CMs. The researcher noticed that attendance at the session was not as expected, as the CMs had to phone and request attendance from the SMTs of some schools, who managed to arrive after being telephonically contacted. The attendants were required to make presentations one after another. Thirteen schools were involved. The SMTs were required to present on the performance of March 2024. The target group was the Grade 12 learners. That suggests that the academic performance of other learners, Grades 8-11, was not required or was not the issue of the day. The SMT from the other school was not allowed to finish their presentation, realising they had not

prepared well. The CM assertively ordered the school to prepare and would be given another spot in the following accountability meeting. Other presentations were made, and questioning ensued. The strategies presented were scrutinised, and those that were feasible were kept.

Accountability sessions 2 and 3 were the responsibility of the DD. The DD and the CESs based in the district office were members of the panel to which accountability was made. The CMs were also in attendance, but they were subjected to an account of where their schools had not performed well. The same process followed in Academic accountability 1 was replicated. The DD demanded that the deputy principals be the ones who make presentations as overseers of the school curriculum. Each school was represented by four people: the principal, deputy principal, and two DHs of subjects that had not performed well. Presentations were made, and questioning ensued. The DHs of subjects who did not perform well were required to state reasons for the failure and strategies to improve performance. The CMs needed to monitor the programmes that the schools indicated they would engage in. The researcher noticed that the environment was very tense. The DD assertively indicated his expectations and thanked schools which had performed well. Schools which had not performed well were pressurised to perform better.

In comparison, Academic accountability 1 involved learners in Grades 9, 10, and 12, and deliberations made in a Grade 12 class. All the accountability sessions confirm that there is a disparity in terms of level gaps between SMTs and the panel to which accountability is made. The teacher unions were not in attendance, except for union members who were part of the SMTs required to make presentations. All the presentations lacked support from the district and addressed learner challenges. Some presentations included the number of learners enrolled and the number of learners who wrote. Where the number of learners who wrote was lower than the number enrolled, the reasons explaining why the learners did not write were not demanded. Many of the strategies presented by SMTs were common across diverse schools and learner communities. A school with Grade 12 learners who exceeded 200 would share the same strategy with schools with 60 Grade 12 learners. The researcher noticed that schools with large enrollments might experience challenges with implementing some strategies, such as the one calling for one-on-one engagement.

5.5.1.1 Teacher Union 1 branch and regional meetings

The researcher managed to observe the meetings organised by **Teacher Union 1**. The first meeting was held by a branch located in the Motheo District. In the second meeting, the branch hosted the central office, which was addressed by the national general secretary. The researcher was unable to access the meetings held by **Teacher Union 2** and **Teacher Union 3**, or the meetings with members were not held at the time of data generation. Both meetings were reporting on the successes and failures of the WTR campaign. The issue of accountability meetings was addressed in both meetings. It was indicated that the union had reached reasonable conclusions regarding the processes of accountability. It became clear to the researcher that academic accountability is strongly supported, but that teachers' concerns should be heard.

5.6 PROPOSED MODEL OF ACADEMIC ACCOUNTABILITY FOR DISTRICTS OF EDUCATION: NOOGENIC-SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO ACCOUNTABILITY

The study involved four CMs, four principals, four DHs and three teacher unions. Based on the deliberations made regarding the views of the sampled participants, the researcher presents a model of academic accountability for educational districts. The model encapsulates the views of teacher unions and the grievances they have received, as well as the views of CMs and the challenges expressed by SMTs during academic accountability.

Firstly, the model encompasses all offices, ranging from the DH's office, based at the school, to the HoD's office, located in the province. Thus, all structures in the department are included. This is intended to observe the line function in the hierarchical system. According to the model presented, employees will report to their immediate supervisors. The DH is expected to account to the deputy principal and the principal. The principal should report to the CM. The structures beyond the CM will then have the DD, who, in turn, reports to the CD and the HoD. Based on the two theories underpinning the study, the researcher coined the term "appreciating individuals' contributions in the system" for the model, namely, the Noogenic-Systemic approach to accountability.

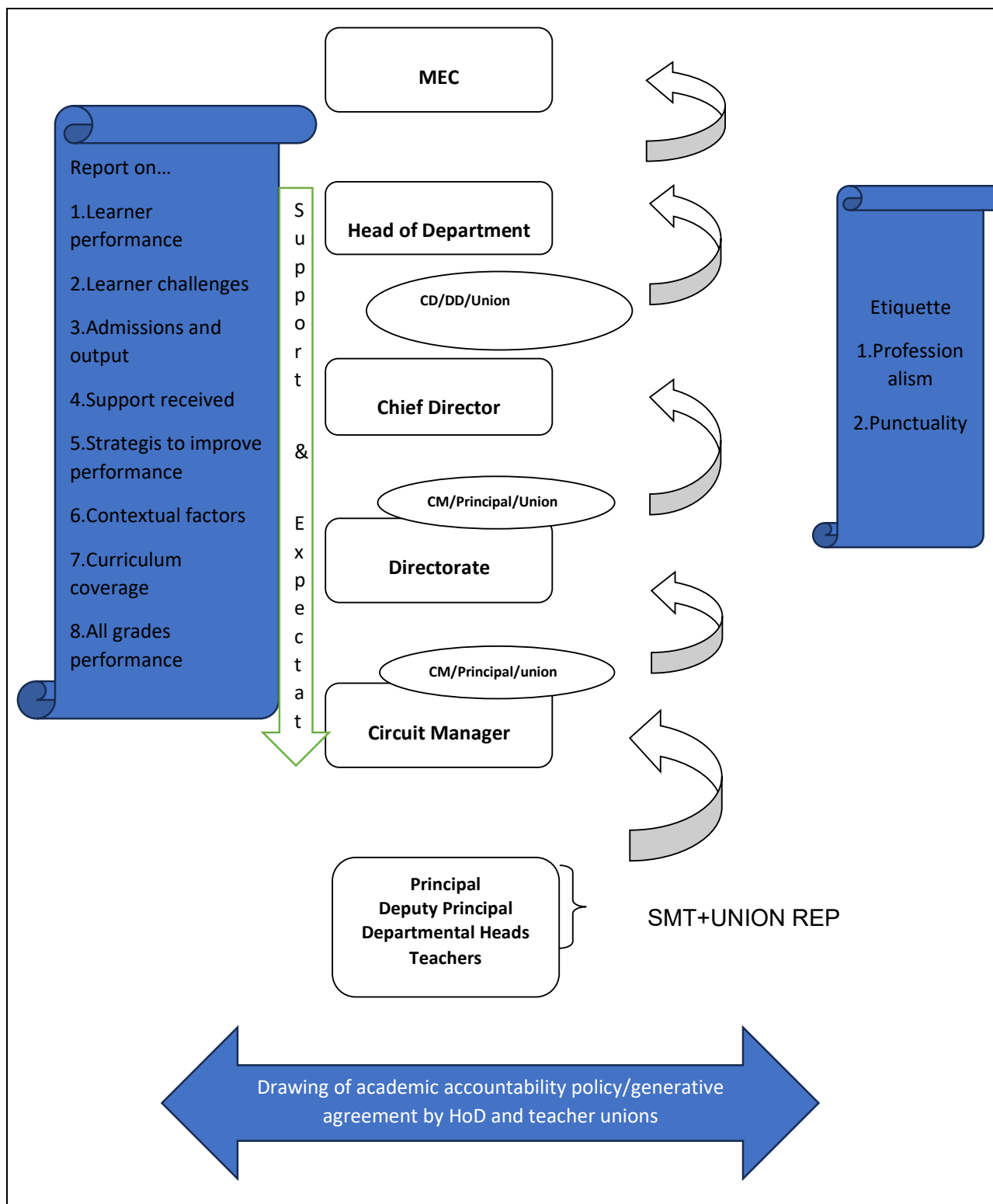


Figure 5.3: Proposed model of accountability: Noogenic-systemic approach to academic accountability

The noogenic-systemic approach to academic accountability was made possible by the two theories that the researcher employed as lenses to examine academic accountability sessions, as held in the Free State Province, particularly in the Motheo Education District. The theory of existentialism helped the researcher view schools, principals, DHs, CMs and teacher unions as entities laden with tasks that make them accountable (Devoe, 2012; Moore *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, education actors are noogenic entities who, through decentralisation, have the latitude to make task-based decisions for which they can be held accountable. On the other hand, systems theory assumes that the contribution of each entity benefits the whole system (Moore *et al.*, 2017). Thus, teacher unions, CMs, principals, DHs, and others are considered contributors to the education system in one way or another. Every education actor is thus accountable. Consequently, the model should comprise a variety of stakeholders.

A noogenic-systemic approach to academic accountability enhances performance accountability. The performance-based or test-based accountability calls teachers to accountability (Amazon, 2020), whilst every other actor is excluded. As a result, teachers often lose their positive morale, and, on the other hand, contextual factors that lead to low performance are often ignored (Mpungose & Ngwenya, 2017). This model does not require support that actors should get from their superiors or immediate supervisors. On the other hand, noogenic-systemic accountability calls for the overhaul of hybrid accountability, which the researcher found to be complex in that it does not detail who should account for what and to whom. Hybrid accountability includes political, marketing and vertical accountability (Reddick, 2020). Hybrid accountability, or any of its forms, does not clarify the issue of mandatory support, and the burden remains on teachers alone. These flaws (Vegner & Skedsmo, 2021) necessitate bringing noogenic-systemic accountability to the fore.

Based on the findings, the researcher suggests that academic accountability should be demanded from all phases of secondary education. In every phase of the accountability process, the researcher observed that the inclusion of teacher unions could benefit the entire education system in the province. Based on the analysis of interviews, documents and observations, and to better understand academic accountability, the researcher deems it wise that teacher unions should also be included at the planning level. This will help teacher unions better understand the plans

of FSDoE regarding mandatory academic accountability. Moreover, the teacher unions could come into agreement with FSDoE to formalise or even develop academic accountability as a policy. They can also decide to develop a generative agreement, which can be enacted as provincial law.

The letter inviting stakeholders to official accountability sessions should include as addressees, district officials, CMs, SMTs, teacher unions and school governing bodies (SGBs). This should be done as an endeavour to involve as many stakeholders as possible. The etiquette expected during the accountability process should be clearly stated and relate to time factors, social conduct, and professional engagement with one another.

The duty of the teacher unions will be solely to observe the whole procedure. However, the system should also require teacher unions to address SMTs on the importance of academic accountability. Thus, the tense environment caused by the use of disparaging words by departmental officials, which the CMs, teacher unions, and SMTs referred to, will subside. It is essential to reiterate that all teacher unions have expressed their support for academic accountability. SGBs, as school governors, should be invited to raise awareness of the reality of accountability. Additionally, since teacher unions have indicated that academic accountability and support are interrelated, SGBs should be invited, as they are responsible for distributing the finances to meet the school's needs. However, the researcher believes that it should not be mandatory for SGBs to attend academic accountability meetings, as principals are *ex officio* members by virtue of their post level.

The model indicates that SMTs should report on learner performance, learner challenges, admissions, and support received. Moreover, the SMTs should further include the following items in the checklist to report on: strategies to improve performance, contextual factors, and curriculum coverage. The researcher observed from the interviews, document analysis, and observations that information regarding learner challenges is limited to an indication of how many learners are progressing, particularly when it comes to issues of learner attendance and learning barriers that need to be reported on. This information will help retain learners during the specific schooling phase. The department should require SMTs to report on the admission rate in relation to the output rate. In a Grade 12 class, SMTs should report on the number

of enrolled learners from the first term to the last. Explanations should be detailed for learners who were unable to continue their Grade 12 journey.

Moreover, the SMTs should report on curriculum coverage. This will help to lessen the temptation to cull learners into writing fewer subjects to improve the pass rate at the learners' expense. It will require teachers to cover all the aspects listed in the annual teaching plan (ATP). In their complaints, SMTs and teacher unions expressed concern about the lack of support from the FSDoE. They were worried about the monetary grants that they usually receive in the next term, since it was an allocation from the previous term. As a result, SMTs should also report on the support received from the FSDoE, learners' parents and NGOs. This would also address the teacher unions' belief that accountability and support should go hand-in-hand. However, schools should also report on their support for learners. This should be based on school quintiles, as it would be necessary to indicate the number of resources in the form of teaching and learning aids, such as textbooks. It should be included if schools have internet access and if learners can utilise the internet as a learning aid. This would directly improve the level of equitable dealing with schools and academic accountability.

SMTs should also report on strategies developed to improve learners' performance, as is currently the case. Strategies should be based on current contextual factors, as alluded to by existential theory, to ensure the entire system functions correctly. It has become evident that some schools, such as School A, School B, and School D, have facilities. Moreover, schools do not offer the same streams of subjects. It would be wise to avoid basing school positioning on performance, as this would compromise the equity-based approach. For schools that offer the same streams of subjects, a single model can be used for academic accountability tailored to such schools.

The research tailored the model so that, just as bottom-up reporting is conducted, the provincial DoE and the education district close the case by providing information on the state of educational support and expectations. Here, a report should be made of the support offered or intended to be offered. Where schools have not performed, the interviewing panel should require from schools the support they would want the FSDoE and the district to provide. Moreover, since schools are evaluated through the Quality Management System (QMS), departmental officials should consider

managerial challenges that emerge during academic accountability sessions as performance standards that must be addressed through the implementation of QMS. Lastly, existential theory states that individuals, such as people or groups of people, should yearn for achievable tasks. Thus, the researcher recommends that the department thoroughly communicate its expectations during accountability sessions. In line with teacher unions' concerns, the district should set achievable goals that are achieved through feasible tasks offered to schools. In a noogenic-systemic approach to academic accountability, all stakeholders should be held accountable for academic performance, including departmental officials, CMs, learning facilitators, SMTs, teachers, and learners, among others.

5.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 5 analyses the data generated within the qualitative study approach. The study employed a multiple case study design with 19 participants. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and synoptically analysed. The key themes were discussed and triangulated with document analysis and observations. The researcher used tables and charts to present the participants' profiles, documents analysed, and the observations. Moreover, the common issues emerging from the data were presented in tables. Chapter 5 culminates in the presentation of the proposed model of accountability, based on the conclusions drawn from the analysis of data generated through interviews, document analysis, and observations of live events.

In Chapter 6, the researcher presents the findings and recommendations pertaining to the study.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 6 presents the study's findings. The researcher also draws conclusions based on the findings, which culminate in the presentation of recommendations to higher education, principals, SMTs, CMs, the education district, and teacher unions. Furthermore, Chapter 6 provides additional recommendations for future research. This chapter builds upon the previous chapter, in which the researcher analysed interviews, documents, and observations. The synoptic view of the data generated led to the development of Chapter 6. The chapter begins by summarising the chapters encompassed in the study and concludes with an overview of the study's limitations. The aim and objectives of the study are reiterated below.

6.2 AIM OF THE STUDY

- To explore stakeholders' perceptions of the Department of Education's academic performance accountability sessions in the Motheo District, Free State Province.

6.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To determine the importance of conducting the Department of Education's academic accountability sessions.
- To identify the roles of education stakeholders in the academic accountability sessions of the Department of Education.
- To determine how stakeholders' perceptions of academic accountability sessions may affect learners' and schools' academic performance.
- To explore the challenges facing stakeholders in the Department of Education's academic accountability sessions.
- To determine how the Department of Education can address the challenges faced by stakeholders during accountability sessions.

6.4 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The study comprised six chapters, which are summarised below.

6.4.1 Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

Chapter 1 provides the blueprint of the study. It presents aspects of the study as they are discussed in other chapters. Chapter 1 presents the problem statement that led to the study. The gap in the literature regarding teacher unions' views on academic accountability is also identified. Furthermore, the researcher presents the rationale for the study, including the research design, research approach, and research paradigms. The study is qualitative in nature, as it involves interviews, document analysis, and observational analysis.

Furthermore, the study is conducted within the framework of a multiple case study design, which requires an interpretivist approach. Thus, the study lends itself to a qualitative study triangulated through observations and document analysis. Chapter 1 introduces the theories underpinning the study, namely, existential and systems theories. This chapter introduced the literature review, laying the foundation for Chapter 3. The sampling method and data generation tools are outlined in Chapter 1. The researcher also discusses the trustworthiness of the study to ensure its reliability. Lastly, the study presents the research ethics clearance granted by the university and the DBE. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the study's limitations and delimitations, highlighting factors that may have influenced the research

6.4.2 Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework underpinning the study. The study is guided by two theories, namely, existential theory and systems theory. Chapter 2 aligns the existential theory with the study, as schools, teachers, learners, parents, NGOs, and departmental officials are assigned specific roles that they must fulfil to enhance the efficiency of the system. Thus, the existential theory highlights the importance of stakeholders in the system. The contributions of stakeholders within the education system are essential for the system in which they occur. The systems theory was developed as a theory involving all the systems and organisations. Thus, the defect of one stakeholder or element in the system negatively affects the whole system. Evidently, all stakeholders in the education sector are accountable for the

academic performance of the learners. Of all the stakeholders in the system, the researcher focused on teacher unions, CMs, principals, and DHs.

6.4.3 Chapter 3: Literature Review

Chapter 3 reviews literature pertaining to this study's topic. The researcher delved into the literature to provide more information on academic accountability, ensuring that the study undertaken was not previously conducted. First, the researcher examined the literature theorising the practice of accountability. It was discovered that academic accountability can take many forms, such as being professional, hierarchical, and vertical, amongst others.

The researcher further established the areas of academic accountability, as depicted in the literature. These areas include, but are not limited to, finances and academic performance. Academic performance is measured by common tests used to assess all learners. The marks are analysed and compared to the performance of schools, as recorded in previous years. The characteristics of academic accountability are also depicted in Chapter 3. Moreover, the researcher investigated the value of academic accountability. Accountability was found to be a principle tantamount to social responsibility. The researcher shifted focus from global accountability to accountability as practised in the RSA. In South Africa, accountability is not fully developed, though monitoring principles exist. Lastly, the researcher further established the various stakeholders of the education sector.

6.4.4 Chapter 4: Research Methodology and Design

Chapter 4 describes the research methodology and design that underpin the study. The study was conducted within the framework of the qualitative approach, employing interviews, document analysis, and observations. A multiple case study design was employed to investigate teacher unions' perceptions of academic accountability. Observations, interviews, and document analysis were interpreted by using the interpretivist paradigm. Chapter 4 further explains the research methodology employed. The study involved teacher unions, CMs, principals, and DHs as participants. The total number of participants was 19. The research further explains the trustworthiness of the study, thereby enhancing its transferability. The research ethics, including the study of possible harm to participants, were explained in Chapter

4. To acquire the ethical clearance to conduct the study, the researcher met all the stated requirements of the university and those of FSDoE. Thus, it was confirmed that the study considered the participants' well-being. Lastly, the researcher established the limitations and delimitations of the study to enhance reliability and understanding.

6.4.5 Chapter 5: Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation of Data

Chapter 5 presents the analysis and interpretation of data generated through qualitative methods, namely, focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews, document analysis, and observations. The researcher first presents the questions posed to various participants and then presents the raw data in the form of responses to the questions. The raw data led to the emergence of themes and sub-themes, which were identified through data coding. The data relating to the research questions were summarised into themes and sub-themes of the study. The data were synoptically compared, and common aspects were both discussed and presented in tables. Where possible, data were quantified and presented in the form of charts. The researcher then triangulated the findings through the employment of document analysis and observations of events as they occurred in the natural settings. Lastly, considering the findings, the researcher designed and formulated a workable model to address the various challenges of academic accountability as it relates to live sessions held by both districts and Free State Province.

6.4.6 Chapter 6: Findings and Recommendations

Chapter 6 is the last chapter of the thesis. It presents the study's findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The researcher firstly reiterates the main aim and the objectives of the study. The second step entailed presenting the overview of all the chapters, thus summarising the study in a few paragraphs. The research findings are briefly presented, and recommendations were made to the DBE, SMTs, and teacher unions. The researcher concludes the recommendations by identifying gaps that emerged in this study, indicating areas for further research. Chapter 5 closes the gap indicated in Chapter. The teacher unions' stance regarding academic accountability and accountability sessions is revealed.

6.5 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The study generated data using qualitative tools, including interviews, document analysis, and observations (Swarooprani, 2022:538), within multiple case studies that explored stakeholders' perceptions of the education department's academic accountability meetings with SMTs. Interview data were generated from teacher unions, CMs, principals, and DHs. The generated data were linked to the research aims and objectives of the study, which involved relevant literature. Thus, this section provides a summary of the research findings derived from the data generated (Anderson *et al.*, 2024). The following themes were developed from the study, presenting the research findings derived from the generated data, supported by relevant literature.

Theme 1: Stakeholders' views on academic accountability

Stakeholders' views regarding academic accountability and academic accountability sessions in the Motheo District and the Free State Province were established, and the gap identified in Chapter 1 was closed. According to focus groups and one-on-one interviews with sampled teacher unions, it is established that academic accountability is a real and necessary requirement (Mokgobo, 2022; Petrilli, 2019). The teacher unions believe that since accountability is demanded of them in their respective offices in the unions, it should be required in every office in the education system. All stakeholders should be responsible for their assigned duties in terms of the existential theory (Moore *et al.*, 2017). They should report on the work done and on failures experienced.

In the education system, contact lessons are offered by teachers to learners in their respective classrooms. Teachers have also signed their respective contracts. Teaching, assessment, and reporting form the bulk of their work. Thus, all teacher unions share the view that teachers should be held accountable for their duties as outlined in their job contracts (South Africa, 2015). They further state that in their duty as protectors of teachers from ill-treatment by the interviewing accountability panel (Wachira & Odhiambo, 2021:593), it is outside their duty to thwart academic accountability in any way whatsoever. This refutes the assertion in the literature that

teacher unions are opposed to any form of academic accountability (Symeonidis & Stromquist, 2020:26).

However, according to the sampled stakeholders, the current academic accountability in the districts and the province is characterised by various flaws. Teacher unions indicate that it lacks a policy to direct it, and it is common knowledge that departmental officials and teacher unions co-sign most policies. They believe that every district in the Free State Province has a way to conduct the accountability process in its respective district. Thus, academic accountability in education in real-world settings lacks proper documentation (Kalu & Okeke, 2020) and a common approach, and is not well-planned. This is realised in two things. Firstly, academic accountability is held within a very short period from the day of notifying schools of the imminent session to the actual day of the event. It is assumed that these processes can be completed in days when they could be planned to take weeks or a month. As a result, stakeholders often find it challenging to be well-versed in the information they gather in a short period.

Secondly, the lack of planning in the academic accountability sessions is realised by direct dealings with the SMTs. Questioning demands immediate responses, which are not always attained. Consequently, the interviewing panel employs informal language to convey their concerns. Stakeholders view the language employed as a threat to the teachers, and it calls for their intervention once reported.

Lastly, stakeholders claim that accountability of any sort in the education system involves schools or SMTs as institution-based entities. As entities based in schools, they are worth the support cascading from the district (Skedsmo & Hubert, 2019:252; Elmore & Mutereko, 2019:85). They argue that support and academic accountability are inextricably linked. Consequently, it is believed that as teachers or SMTs are required to account for academic performance, district officials should also account for the support allocated to schools. Stakeholders believe that monetary support should be treated with the urgency it deserves.

Theme 2: The importance of academic accountability

Theme 2 was developed in response to the research question that sought to investigate the value of academic accountability proceedings in the Motheo District, Free State Province. It was found that academic accountability is indeed essential and of notable value (Mokgobo, 2022; Moloi, 2022). This notion is supported by teacher unions, CMs, and SMTs. Theme 1 explored stakeholders' views on the aspect of academic accountability, specifically the requirement for schools to be accountable. Teacher unions have indicated that academic accountability practices are required and only call for documentation that involves all stakeholders, as supported by David *et al.*, (2021:175). Teacher unions believe they can educate their own members, who are education stakeholders, including CMs, principals, and DHs, on the importance of academic accountability. Lastly, they indicated that union performance is upheld by the accountability of office holders; thus, accountability is valuable in all spheres, including education (Brill *et al.*, 2018).

As previously mentioned, CMs have also become increasingly fond of academic accountability. They indicated that, firstly, academic accountability addresses the diversity aspect of learners and promotes their progress. Progressed learners aim for a pass in their Grade 12 results, while promoted learners can achieve a bachelor's pass with several level sevens. Secondly, CMs believe that academic accountability sessions provide a platform for teachers to learn from one another. Thus, good practices are shared to improve academic performance in all schools. CMs are adamant that although accountability puts teachers under pressure (Moloi, 2022), it is required to improve learners' academic performance. It is stressed that academic accountability is all about learners. Lastly, CMs are of the view that academic accountability provides a joint test, as explained by Rahmatollahi and Zenouzagh (2021:3), and evaluation of the strategies that schools employ to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

Principals also have their own view of academic accountability. With one word, the principals offer one accord to the academic accountability practice. Through time-to-time accountability, it is judged that academic accountability assists principals in tracking and evaluating the academic progress of learners, thus improving school

performance (Amazon, 2020). The responses align with academic accountability, which involves the performance of Grade 12 learners. Moreover, through academic accountability, feedback related to learners' performance and learning programmes becomes possible. Additionally, principals believe that academic accountability reveals challenges, loopholes, and gaps, calling for a positive reaction, thus verifying the views of Baldoni *et al.*, (2017:2).

DHs expressed mixed views regarding academic accountability. It is believed that academic accountability could be more effective if school-based stakeholders practice it among themselves before it is required by the district or province. The other view is that academic accountability is not helpful in any way; it disadvantages learners who are deregistered (Hofflinger & Von Hippel, 2020) or excluded from programmes for failure to adhere to requirements set by the school. It makes schools compromise learners' right to education. However, when academic accountability is conducted for the purpose of sharing information, it becomes useful, as indicated by CMs. Lastly, academic accountability depends on the attitude created to foster teachers' understanding of the concept of accountability, an idea also cherished by teacher unions.

Theme 3: Challenges resulting from academic accountability sessions

As already highlighted in Theme 2, academic accountability depicts various challenges experienced by individual stakeholders in the education system. Challenges were supported by teacher unions, who received grievances relating to the challenges as part of their duties (Wachira & Odhiambo, 2021:593). CMs also alluded to the challenges experienced by principals and DHs. SMTs reported the various challenges experienced in the natural settings where academic accountability sessions occur.

The most common challenge identified by all stakeholders is the attitude reported by SMTs and teacher unions (it is dominant in all the academic accountability sessions). The departmental panel's attitude towards other stakeholders is reflected in the informal language used in formal settings. SMTs and teacher unions believe that threats, as alluded to by Brady (2020:2), are used to convey dissatisfaction experienced by departmental officials. Following this challenge, participants believe it

is challenging to report to the district manager and the HoD when there are offices lower than their level.

The other challenge experienced relates to the nature and process of academic accountability. Academic accountability in formal sessions is not documented to ensure a uniform approach (Shewbridge *et al.*, 2019). Teacher unions and teachers have not co-signed policies and agreements with the department, and believe they were not engaged in any planning leading to the holding of formal accountability sessions, which is deterred by UNESCO (2017c:58). Therefore, lack of planning is believed to be one of the challenges regarding accountability sessions in the Motheo District. Additionally, there is no evidence of sufficient support being offered in a timely manner to the various schools. SMTs and teacher unions believe that the gist of the matter, conduct, and socioeconomic challenges affecting learners are ruled out of the issues calling for attention. Academic accountability leads to the culling of learners to influence the positive pass rate.

Theme 4: Mitigation of challenges relating to academic accountability sessions

It is believed that the Department of Education has a role to play in mitigating challenges related to academic accountability. One way to mitigate these challenges would be to formalise academic accountability. This can be achieved through policy formulation (UNESCO, 2017c:58). This would provide a document that stakeholders, or at least teacher unions, can be invited to sign and endorse. The appropriate etiquette would be explained and implemented during the accountability process. The provision of information needed during the next accountability process must be shared on time. Thorough implementation would then ensue for the benefit of the system (Sawaneh & Fatajo, 2022:112)

Moreover, challenges would be alleviated if all stakeholders were required to account for their duties related to academic success. Departmental officials would be required to state the level of support provided to schools (Skedsmo & Hubert, 2019:252) and the DBE (n.d.). School governing bodies would also be held accountable as officers driving the governance of the school. In addition, learners' psychosocial challenges (Caturianas *et al.*, 2017) should be reported together with their performance. The department should embrace learners' learning challenges as a reality that explains the

challenges teachers face in the classroom. The participants also believe that the line function should be followed when reporting on learners' performance.

Theme 5: The roles of stakeholders in academic accountability sessions

Among all stakeholders in the education system, teacher unions do not currently participate in the accountability process, despite being integral to the system, as evidenced by Msila (2021) and Msila (2022). It has been proven that CMs, principals, and teachers are currently required to account for their varied job descriptions (South Africa, 2015). The system cannot perform well when they are not included in the enactment of the law relating to academic accountability and its implementation. They state that teachers are members of various teacher unions, and these unions should educate teachers on the importance of academic accountability. Ultimately, teacher unions also employ accountability to demand performance from fellow office bearers in their unions. Moreover, stakeholders argue that while other parties influence academic performance, teacher unions should assume the role of observers.

Theme 6: Stakeholders' image of academic accountability can enhance learner performance

Theme 6 examined the perceptions of education stakeholders regarding academic accountability in relation to learner performance. Teacher unions believe that they should be included in academic accountability sessions with the departmental officials. They are best able to inculcate the idea of academic accountability in their members. This supports the claims made by Msila (2021) and Msila (2022) that teacher unions can assist in improving academic performance. Furthermore, this refutes the department's claims that teacher unions resist academic accountability. The teacher unions further believe that their inclusion would necessitate a comprehensive restructuring of the entire system, whereby every stakeholder would be held accountable.

On the other hand, CMs and principals believe that academic accountability can improve learner performance. The researcher could infer that they have and continue to report on the provided platforms to ensure accountability (Motshekga, 2022). Principals also indicated that yearly participation, whether accounting for performance

or sharing good practices, thus attests to the need for existentialism and systems theories (Devoe, 2012) in academic accountability. Thus, the researcher believes that the teacher unions' image of academic accountability can be causatively linked to learners' academic performance.

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.6.1 Recommendations for higher education institutions

- Higher education institutions are responsible for producing graduates who are ready for the workplace. In the field of education, teachers are trained to work in schools where, as teachers, they are required to account for the performance of the learners they teach, in addition to their normal teaching and assessment duties. The researcher recommends that higher education, particularly the education department, consider introducing academic accountability as a separate module or as a section within an existing module. The module or part of the module on academic accountability will help new teachers become accountable for the academic performance of their own learners.

6.6.2 Recommendations for provincial and district education

The researcher recommends employing the noogenic-systemic approach to accountability (refer to Figure 5.3) at all levels, from the provincial level down to the school level, as a microcosm. The model encapsulates solutions to challenges arising from undocumented academic accountability. Aspects of this model are presented below as recommendations for provincial and district education.

- Academic accountability has become a vital requirement for addressing the challenges that hinder academic performance in the province and its districts of education. The FSDoE should establish academic accountability as a policy. The policy should equate academic accountability with support. The policy should clearly indicate the reason for academic accountability as an endeavour to improve academic performance, and highlight the challenges experienced by learners and teachers in schools. The policy should be presented to teacher unions and all education workers. Policies should be signed by education

officials, teacher unions, and provincial SGB structures. SGBs should be included in their capacity as providers of support materials at schools.

- The education department at both the provincial and district levels should require accountability from all educators for all learners in all grades. Academic accountability should not be overstressed in the final grade of schooling. All teachers from Grades 0-12 must be subject to academic accountability. It should be demanded that teachers account for the number of learners with learning challenges and those without them.
- Informed by provincial policy, academic accountability should adhere to the functional line as per the post levels in schools. Teachers should report to DHs alone or with the deputy principals. Due to his post level and job description, the deputy principal should report to the principal and provide parents with regular progress updates. At given times, the deputy principal should also report the general performance to the fellow staff members in the very manner as would be required at academic accountability sessions. It is essential to recognise that the issues of support and challenges experienced should always be considered aspects of accountability in schools. Moreover, academic accountability should indicate the number of learners enrolled in the academic year for the particular subject, along with variance and reasons, for the actual number of learners who were assessed. The deputy principal and the principal should collaborate on accountability presentations to the CM. In turn, the CM, with principals present, should account to the DD, who will be responsible for presenting the information to the offices of the CD and the HoD.
- The researcher recommends that at every step leading to the implementation of academic accountability, teacher unions should be involved. The inclusion of teacher unions should begin at the policy formulation level and cascade down to involvement at the school level. This will maintain good labour relations while eradicating the maltreatment, verbal attacks, and threats that teachers experience. Thus, the etiquette will prevail during the sessions, while the need for academic performance is not compromised in any way.
- The elements of support and learners' unique challenges in the academic accountability process should not be undermined. The panel to which accountability is made should table the support offered to schools, including

moral support, monetary support, referrals, visits, and learning and teaching support materials provided. Moreover, teacher support for learners should feature in the report. It should be indicated in the form of statistics the composition of families to which learners belong, to help illustrate the socioeconomic challenges learners experience. Thus, schools should report on the referrals made and the progress made regarding concessions that have been applied for. Schools should also indicate the acquisition and allocation of teaching and learning support materials in accordance with the SGBs' procurement successes.

- Subjects offering practical subjects should be based on a different platform using a different tool from those used for theory-based subjects. The tool should also include PAT and theory to require performance on both aspects. The profiles of schools sampled for the study show that schools that are required to report on academic performance offer various streams of subjects for reporting. Some streams require practical performance, while learners are scored on the provided rubrics. Currently, such schools are required to report on the same platforms as science and commercial schools. The researcher suggests that commercial schools should be compared to other schools offering the same subjects or closely related subjects. Thus, schools with PAT should be grouped for the academic accountability sitting.
- The district should establish a way of registering learners enrolled against the actual number of learners who sit for assessments. Schools should be able to provide reasons for the variance. Thus, reasons may be reported as abscondment, sickness and death, to name but a few. A pattern should be identified in the quarterly or annual reports. This will discourage institutions from requiring a certain number of learners to write while others are exempted from the assessment.
- The province and the district should eliminate rating schools' academic performance based on their position. This unfairness is realised when schools offering practical subjects are rated on the same scale as schools offering subjects based on theory. Moreover, schools with high enrolment are rated the same as schools with low enrolment.

6.6.3 Recommendations for circuit managers (CMs)

- Circuit managers should ensure that the needs of schools are communicated to the district office.
- In their office of circuit management, circuit managers should facilitate the support offered by the district office to schools. The support provided should be implemented under the overseeing eye of the circuit manager.
- Since schools do not have sufficient time to compile the data required by the district, the circuit manager should ensure that academic accountability is prepared at least three weeks prior to the actual date.
- The circuit office should be responsible for protecting its schools by ensuring that academic accountability is established at the school level first, and then presenting it to the circuit before submitting it to the district.
- Circuit managers should enquire from schools about the number of learners enrolled compared to the number of learners who sit for the formal assessment. This will avoid culling of learners to avoid formal accountability. Schools should monitor and account for the decline in learner numbers throughout the academic year until the final examinations are administered.
- Circuit managers should caution schools on the need to account as entities and as members of the broader system.

6.6.4 Recommendations for school principals

- Principals should hold themselves accountable for the academic performance of their schools.
- SMTs should be supported in the same way that accountability is demanded from them.
- Principals should gradually introduce the principle of accountability to all members based at schools, including both teachers and non-teaching staff.

6.6.5 Recommendations for School Management Teams (SMTs)

- SMTs should uncompromisingly protect teaching and learning time without fear of demands for academic accountability.
- SMTs should introduce academic accountability for their students. Teachers should present the challenges experienced, the support they require from

parents and the SMT. Moreover, teachers should present plans to improve academic performance in their subjects. SMTs should also present their departmental performance to one another or top management in SMT meetings. They should be required to present on the support offered and the strategies adopted to improve performance.

- SMTs should involve teacher union structures based in schools in the planned academic accountability meetings organised at the school level. Teachers should feel free to invite fellow shop stewards to the meetings.
- SMTs should require accountability from other structures, such as the SBST and RCL, to ensure that all learners with challenges are attended to. All structures within the school should operate at an optimal level and be required to report to the SMT or the principal. The researcher urges schools to realise the support that these structures provide for teaching, learning, a conducive environment, and learner support.

6.6.6 Recommendations to teacher unions

- Teacher unions should sign a policy on academic accountability. They should also make contributions to the policy's terms.
- Following the envisioned policy, teacher unions should equip their members with the knowledge of the need for academic accountability as stakeholders in the system. Teacher unions should encourage teachers to work in line with the job descriptions or working contracts signed upon assuming their duties.
- Teacher unions should attend all academic accountability meetings and ensure that labour peace is maintained.

6.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This study investigated the perceptions of academic accountability among teacher unions in formal settings within the Motheo District, Free State Province. This was done through the lenses of existential and systems theories. The researcher also acknowledged the global understanding of the concept of academic accountability. The gap identified in Chapter 1 was addressed and closed as a result of the study. The researchers recommend that further research should be conducted in the following areas:

- Explore ways to engage teacher unions in advancing school performance.
- Effective academic accountability in primary schools.
- The role of the districts of education in supporting schools to perform academically.
- Investigate the possibility of learner academic accountability for the Grade 12 class.

6.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted under possible limitations. Firstly, the study was conducted in the Motheo District in the Free State Province, which is divided into five education districts. Consequently, the study cannot be generalised to the entire province or other provinces in the RSA.

Furthermore, in the district, the study sampled four CMs. This implies that the study only covers a few circuits in a district comprising 12 circuits. This provides a limitation for the study to be generalised to the Motheo District. Four secondary schools were sampled, whose principals and DHs participated in the study. As a result, generalisation of the findings to all the secondary schools in the district is not possible.

With regard to the teacher unions' involvement in the study, the researcher was only able to access the provincial offices of SAOU and NAPTOSA, while the study primarily focused on the Motheo District. Regarding SADTU, given the significant number of membership enrolments, the researcher was able to access branch and regional offices. Moreover, the researcher was able to access documents relating to SADTU, while no documents were accessible for other teacher unions. This is also the case with observations of teacher union meetings. The researcher was unable to access information related to teacher unions' meetings other than those of SADTU. This further provides an unbalanced representation of teacher unions in the study.

Moreover, the academic accountability sessions observed included the selected number of circuits and would subsequently cover the remaining circuits that were not observed. Thus, observant events did not cover every academic accountability meeting in the district. Consequently, the meetings observed could not be generalised to other academic accountability meetings in the same district.

The researcher employed the principle of triangulation to address the limitations explained. The data in the study were generated through qualitative instruments, including one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, document analysis, and observations of live events, such as actual teacher union meetings and academic accountability meetings that were taking place. In this way, the rigour of the study was assured.

6.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 6 presented the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study. The chapter reiterated the study's aims and objectives, providing an overview of all the chapters that comprise the study. Furthermore, the themes covered in Chapter 5 were briefly summarised. Recommendations were put forward pertaining to higher education institutions, provincial and district education offices, SMTs, and teacher unions. The researcher also made recommendations for future research. Lastly, the researcher discussed the limitations affecting the generalisation of the study.

6.10 CONCLUSION

The study was presented in six chapters. Chapter 1 presented the problem statement and the need for undertaking the study. Chapter 2 presented the lenses that provided the basis for the study. While the study was grounded in existential and systems theories, the researcher also drew on a global perspective of the concept of accountability. Following the theories underpinning the study, the researcher examined the involvement of individual stakeholders within the broader education system, thereby situating the role of teacher unions within the academic accountability that already involves SMTs and departmental officials. Consequently, the researcher covered the aspects related to the phenomenon under study and the involvement of stakeholders therein in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 discussed the methodology used for sampling participants and data generation instruments. Chapter 5 presented the data analysis and identification of emergent themes. Finally, Chapter 6 presents the study's recommendations.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Abadzi, H. 2020. Accountability features and their implications for education policies. *Comparative Education Review*, 64(1):66-86.
- Acher, E., Janse Van Vuuren, H.H. & Van der Walt, H.D. 2017. *Basic operations, tips and tricks for coding. Introduction to Atlas.ti*. Pretoria: Research Rescue.
- Ackermann, J.M. 2015. *Parents' perception of parental involvement*. Unpublished dissertation submitted for MEd dissertation. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.
- Acosta, A.M. 2013. *The impact and effectiveness of accountability and transparency initiatives: The governance of natural resources*. Sussex: Institute of Development Studies.
- Agnihotri, A. N. 2017. Quality in primary and secondary education. *Scholarly Research Journal for Humanity Science & English Language*, 4(21):4878-4884.
- Ahmad, M.B. 2019. *Quantitative data generation methods. Research methods in communication & media studies*. New York: Franklin International Publishers.
- Ahmad, N., Alias, F.A. & Razak, N. A. 2023. *Understanding population and sample in research: Key concepts for valid conclusions*. Malaysia: JSKM.
- Ahmed, S.K. 2024. *The pillars of trustworthiness in research*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/journal-of-medicine-surgery-and-public-health>.
- Akaranga, S.H. & Makau, B.K. 2016. Ethical considerations and their applications to research: A case of the University of Nairobi. *Journal of Educational Policy and Entrepreneurial Research*, 3(12):1-9.
- Akinyode, B.F. & Khan, T.H. 2018. Step by step approach for qualitative data analysis. *International Journal of Built Environment and Sustainability*, 5(3):163-174.
- Akwasi, T. 2020. 8 Batho-Pele principles, implementation and impact to the community. *Briefly*. [Online]. Available at: <https://briefly.co.za/32252-8-Batho-Pele-principles-implementation-impact-community.html> (Accessed 18 February 2022).
- Alaoui, A.E. 2022. COVID-19, social justice and education: Case study of Morocco. *Studies of Applied Economics*, 40(1):1-15.

Alharahsheh, H.H. & Pius, A. 2020. A review of key paradigms: positivism vs interpretivism. *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(3):39-43.

Alharahsheh, H.H., Pius, A. & Usmani, M.F. 2021. Reflection on the experiences of adopting qualitative methodology in business management-based research. *Asian Journal of Language, Literature and Culture Studies*, 4(4):8-11.

Allen, R. & Burgess, S. 2020. *The future of competition and accountability in education*. Republic of South Africa: Public Services Trust.

Amazon. 2020. *Accountability in the New Zealand schooling system*. [Online]. Available at: <https://conversation-live-storage-assets-storage3bucket-jsvm6zoesodc.s3ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/public/uploads/TSR-Accountability-paper.pdf> (Accessed 2 November 2022).

Anderson, M., Boateng, K. & Abos, P. 2024. *Validity and reliability: The extent to which your research findings are accurate and consistent*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/384402476>. (Accessed 1 January 2025).

Apuke, O.D. 2017. Quantitative research methods: A synopsis approach. *Journal of Business and Management Review*, 6(10):40-47.

Arafat, Y. 2024. Research ethics: Meaning and principles. *International Journal of Academic Multidisciplinary Research*, 8(1):2643-9670.

Archer, E. 2018. Qualitative data analysis: A primer on core approaches. *Psychological Society of South Africa*. <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.10/BNPFS>

Ardington, C., Kotze, J. & Wills, G. 2021. *COVID-19: The measure of learning losses*. South Africa: Econ.

Armstrong, C. 2021. *Key methods used in qualitative document analysis*. [Online]. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3996213> (Accessed 30 April 2023).

Asmal, K. 2001. *Manifesto on values, education and democracy*. Pretoria: Government Press.

- Auler, I. 2021. What characterises a good school? The false incompatibility between academic excellence and equity. *Academia Letters*, Article 595. <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL595>
- Ayish, N. & Deveci, T. 2019. Peers' learning in a project-based learning environment. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, (2):224-237.
- Baker, L., Barton, P.E., Darling-Hammond, L., Haertel, E., Ladd, H.F., Linn, R.L., Ravitch, D., Rothstein, R., Shavelson, R.J. & Shepard, L. 2010. *Problems with the Use of student test scores to evaluate teachers*. Washington, D.C.: EPI.
- Baldoni, M., Baroglio, C., May, KM., Micalizio, R. & Stefano, R. 2017. *Supporting organizational accountability inside multi-agent systems*. Torino: Universitadegli Studi di Torino.
- Bannigan, K. & Watson, R. 2009. Reliability and validity in a nutshell. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 18:3237-3243.
- Bans-Akutey, A. & Tiimub, B.M. 2021. Triangulation in research. *Academia Letters*. <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL3392>
- Bantwini, B.D. & Moorosi, P. 2018. *The circuit managers as the weakest link in the school district leadership chain! Perspectives from a province in South Africa*. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v38n3a1577>
- Baraka, N. 2020. Accountability in school governance in Egypt. Unpublished Master's thesis.
- Barnett, J. & Amrein-Beardsley, A. 2011. Evaluating teacher education programs in the accountability era. *Teachers College Record*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.tcrecord.org> (Accessed 4 May 2023).
- Bascia, N. & Osmond-Johnson, P. 2012. *Teacher unions and educational reform: A research review*. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association (NEA).
- Bell, M.J. 2018. Define academic performance. *The Classroom*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.theclassroom.com/define-academic-performance-4740750.html> (Accessed 23 December 2021)

Besson, B., Huber, J., Mompoin-Gaillard, P. & Rohmann, S. 2015. Education for change. *Change for Education*. Europe: Council of Europe.

Bhat, M.S. 2016. *Education and social change*. Kashmir: University of Kashmir.

Biddinger, M. n.d. *The importance of accountability. CU lead 301*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.cedarville.edu/-/media/Files/PDF/Student-Life-Programs/CU-Lead-301/CULEAD301TheImportanceofAccountabilityMrMarkBiddinger.pdf?la=en&hash=99E66A316C10B9D3C22757BA2F831462C3BC3B2D> (Accessed 18 February 2022).

Biesta, N. 2004. Education accountability and the ethical demand: can the democratic potential of accountability be regained? *Educational Theory*, 4(3):233-248.

Blackwell, G.R. 2018. Introduction to positivism, interpretivism and critical theory. *Nurse Researcher*, 1-30.

Booth, A., Sutton, A., Clowes, M. & James, M.M. 2021. *Systematic approaches to a successful literature review*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.scirp.org/reference/referencpapers?referenceid=3184402> (Accessed 12 July 2025).

Botha, R. J. 2013. *The effective management of a school. Towards quality outcomes*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Botha, R. J. 2014. *Managing the school as an organisation. Only Study Guide for HBEDMSV*. Pretoria: UNISA.

Bowen, G. A. 2009. Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2):27-40.

Brady, A.M. 2020. Response and responsibility: Rethinking accountability in education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 1-16.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. 2012. Thematic analysis. *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology*, 2:57-71.

Brill, R., Grayson, H., Kuhn, L. & O'Donnel, S. 2018. *What impact does accountability have on curriculum, standards and engagement in education?* Berkshire: NFER.

Budrich, V.B. 2021. *International perspectives on school settings, education policy and digital strategies*. Toronto: Creative Commons.

Buriro, A.G., Awan, J. H. & Lanjwani, A.R. 2017. Interview: A research instrument for social science researchers. *International Journal of Social Sciences, Humanities and Education*, 1(4):1-14.

Busetto, L., Wick, W. & Gumbinger, C. 2020. How to use and assess qualitative research methods. *Neurological Research and Practice*, 2(14).

Buthelezi, A.B., Mhlono, H.R. & Msweli, L. 2020. Management roles of heads of departments (HODs) pertaining to professional development of teaching at female-dominated primary schools in South Africa. *Gender & Behaviour*, 18(3):16016-16026.

Byrne, D. 2021. A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality and Quantity*, 57:1391-1412. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y>.

Caluza. 2022. *From a sinking school to a moving school: A case study of a school. Teacher union partnership to facilitate school improvement*. An unpublished dissertation submitted for MEd degree. Kwazulu-Natal: University of Kwazulu-Natal.

Cantero, C. 2019. *How to write a literature review*. San Jose: San Jose State University writing Center.

Carr, P.R., Thesee, G., Zyngier, D. & Porfilio, B.J. 2018. *Final report of the research project. Democracy, political literacy and transformative education (DPLTE)*. New York: UNESCO.

Castleberry, A. & Nolen, A. 2017. *Thematic analysis of qualitative research data: Is it as easy as it sounds? Currents in pharmacy teaching and learning*. Arkansas: Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2018.03.019>

Caturianas, D., Užpelkienė, L. & Migliarin, V. 2017. *The role of education for social inequality in modern societies*. Lithuania: NESET.

Chakraborty, D. 2018. *Education as an instrument of social change and enhancing teaching-learning process with the help of technological development*. Nilai: Nilai University.

Chikere, C.C. & Nwoka, J. 2015. The systems theory of management in modern day organisations - A study of Aldgate Congress Resort Limited Port Harcourt. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 5(9):1-7.

Cibane, Z. Z. 2020. *The role of district officials in supporting underperforming schools: perspectives of school principals*. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Ciesielska, M., Bostrom, K.W. & Ohlander, M. 2018. Observation methods: Qualitative methodologies in organisation studies. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321806239> (Accessed 15 April 2023).

Coker, D.C. 2022. A thematic analysis of the structure of delimitations in the dissertation. *International Journal of doctoral studies*, 17:141-159.

Coombs, H. 2022. Case study research: Single or multiple?. [Online]. Available at: <https://haydencoombs.files.wordpress.com/2022/09/case-study-research-coombs-2022-3.pdf> (Accessed 12 August 2024).

Coughlan, M. 2009. Interviewing in qualitative research. *International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation*, 16(6):309-314.

Couto, M.C.R. & Ferreira, A.C.S. 2016. *The importance of accountability practices in the public sector: Literature*. Portugal: ICI Global Review.

Cowen, J. & Strunk, K. O. 2014. *How do teachers' union influence education policy? What we know and what we need to learn*. Michigan: Michigan State University.

Creswell, J.W. & Clark, V.L.P. 2018. *Conducting mixed methods approach*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Creswell, J.W. & Creswell, J.D. 2018. *Research design*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Cunningham, J.W. & Fitzgerald, J. 1996. Epistemology and reading. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 31(1):36-60.

Cuthbert, A.S. & Standish, A. 2021. *What should schools teach?* Cambridge: UCL Press.

- Dangara, U.Y. 2016. Accountability in education: An imperative for service delivery in Nigerian school systems. *Akwanga Journal of Education and Research*, 1(1): 264-272.
- David, C.O., Nyereugwu, O.G., Maduabuchi, A.M. & Gwamniru, O.R. 2021. *Government accountability and tax revenue*. Nigeria: University of Nigeria.
- Dawadi, S. 2020. Thematic analysis approach: As step-by-step guide for ELT research practitioners. *NELTA Journal*, 25(1-2):62-71.
- Delpont, A. 2020. *Appendix - Synopsis of the manifesto on values, education and democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Deming, D.J. & Figlio, D. 2017. Accountability in US education: Applying lessons from K–12 experience to higher education. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute.
- Department of Basic Education (DBE). n.d. *A guide for QLTC structures*. Pretoria: DOE.
- Department of Basic Education (DBE). n.d. *Guidelines for auditing in the education sector for improvement of audit outcomes*. Pretoria: Government Press.
- Department of Basic Education (DBE). 2002. *The national policy on Whole School Evaluation*. Pretoria: DBE
- Department of Basic Education (DBE). 2012. *Memorandum of agreement between DBE and teachers' unions*. Pretoria: Government Press.
- Department of Basic Education (DBE). 2013. *Policy on the organisation, roles and responsibilities of education districts*. Government Gazette General Notice No. 36324. Pretoria: Government Press.
- Department of Basic Education (DBE). 2018. *Annual performance plan*. Pretoria: DBE.
- Department of Basic Education (DBE). 2020. *Action plan to 2024: Towards the realisation of schooling 2030*. Pretoria: DBE.
- Department of Basic Education (DBE). 2020. *National policy pertaining to the programme and promotion requirements of the national curriculum statement grades R-12*. Pretoria: DBE.

Department of Basic Education (DBE). 2022. *2022 school report performance*. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.

Department of Education, United Kingdom. 2021. *School and college accountability*. United Kingdom: Crown.

Department of Labour. 2007. Registration of trade union. *Staatskoerant Notice 948 of 2012*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.gov.za> (Accessed 7 April 2023).

Department of National Treasury. n.d. Batho-Pele principles. *National Treasury*. [Online]. Available at: <https://oag.treasury.gov.za/RMF/Pages/s609BathoPelePrinciples.aspx> (Accessed 18 February 2022).

Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA). 1997. *Batho-Pele: People First*. Pretoria: Government Press.

Dev, K. 2024. A study of research ethics and challenges. *Global International Research Thoughts*, 12(2):7-11.

Devoe, D.J. 2012. Viktor Frankl's logo-therapy. The search for purpose and meaning. *Inquiries Journal*, 4(7):1-8.

Dillard, J. & Vinnary, E. 2018. Critical dialogical accountability: From accounting-based accountability to accountability-based accounting. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 62:16-38.

Dizon-Ross, R. 2018. *How does school accountability affect teachers? Evidence from New York*. Cambridge: Becker Friedman Institute.

Dossing, H., Mokeki, L. & Weideman, M. 2011. *Mapping transparency, accountability and integrity in primary education in South Africa*. Germany: Transparency International.

Dwangu, A.M. & Mahlangu, V.P. 2021. Accountability in the financial management practices of school principals. *International Journal of Educational Management*.

Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). 2020. Education accountability relationships between schools, communities and government in India. *Research for Policy and Practice*.

Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC). 2020. Generative agreement number 2 of 2020. *Quality Management System*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.elrc.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Generative-Agreement-N0.-2-of-2020_c0mpressed-1.pdf (Accessed 1 December 2022).

Edwards Jr, D.B. & Means, A. 2019. Globalization, privatization, marginalization: Mapping and assessing connections and consequences in/through Education. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 27(123):1-427.

Ehren, M.C.M., Paterson, A. & Baxter, J. 2020. Accountability, capacity and trust to improve learning outcomes in South Africa. *Economic and Social Research Council*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.jet.org.za/resources/comparative-case-study-report.pdf/download&ved=2ahUKEwjvq-unlryDAxXwWUEAHfBNCWMQFnoECA8QAAQ&usq=AOvVaw1LXWqGVMfMcIn5Ez_g4qMJ (Accessed 20 September 2023).

Ehren, M.C.M., Patterson, A. & Baxter, J. 2020. *Accountability, capacity and trust to improve learning outcomes in South Africa*. United Kingdom: ESRC.

Ekka, P.M. 2021. A review of observation method in data generation process. *International Journal for Research Trends and Innovation*, 6(12):17-19.

Elgart, M.A. n.d. *Designing state accountability systems for continuous school improvement: A call to action*. USA: Advanced.

Elhami, A. & Khoshnevisan, B. 2022. Conducting an interview in qualitative research: The modus operandi. *MEXTESOL Journal*, 46(1):1-7.

Ellis, P. 2024. Research methods: Qualitative observation. *Decoding Science*, 20(1):81-82.

Elsevier, 2020. COVID-19 and globalization. *One Health*. [Online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.onehlt.2020.1001132> (Accessed 14 December 2022).

EMpower. 2024. Advantages/disadvantages of focus-groups, interviews and pre/post-tests. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.empowerweb.org> (Accessed 18 August 2024).

Equal Education Law Centre (EELC). 2022. *A spotlight on underperforming schools*. Cape Town: EELC.

European Commission. 2018. *Quality assurance for school development*. Brussels: European Commission.

European Commission. 2018b. *Study on supporting school innovation across Europe*. Brussels: European Commission.

European Union (EU). 2020. *Quality assurance for school development*. Brussels: European Union.

Evans, C. S. 2018. *Accountability is relational responsibility*. Texas: Baylor University.

Falabella, A. 2014. The performing school: The effect of market and accountability policies. *Education Policy Archives*, 22(70):1-30.

Free State Department of Education (FSDoE). 2021. *Annual report 2020/2021 financial year*. Bloemfontein: Free State Department of Education.

Free State Department of Education (FSDoE). 2022. Motheo address list 8 June 2022. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.fsdoe.fs.gov.za/documents/reports>.

Free Stater, The. 2021. Free State sets pass rate targets for all school grades. *The Free Stater*, 25 March 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://thefreestater.co.za/2021/03/25/freestate-sets-pass-rate-targets-for-all-school-grades/> (Accessed 6 April 2023).

Freeman, J.V., Walters, S.J. & Campbell, M.J. 2008. *How to display data*. Sheffield: Blackwell Publishing.

Gade, F.D. & Mbude, N. 2022. *NSC results 2021*. Eastern Cape: Eastern Cape Department of Education.

Gauteng Department of Education (GDE). 2020. *Whole school improvement framework for public schools*. Gauteng: GDE.

Genkova, A. 2020. *A guide to conducting field observations*. Illinois: Criminal Justice Information Authority.

Gill, B. 2017. *Redefining accountability to treat teachers and leaders like the professionals they are*. United States of America: Brookings.

Gill, B.P., Lerner, J.S. & Meosky, P. 2016. Reimagining accountability in K–12 education. *Behavioral Science & Policy*, 2(1):57-70.

Gottlieb, D. 2020. *A democratic theory of educational accountability. From test-based to interpersonal responsibility*. New York: Routledge.

Green, A.G. Educational accountability and market ideology: Some socio-legal considerations. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 3(2):213-232.

Grimsley, S. 2021. Feedback loop: Definition and examples. *Study.com*, 13 September 2021. [Online]. Available at:

<https://study.com/academy/lesson/feedback-loop-definition-examples-quiz.html#:~:text=A%20feedback%20loop%20is%20a,about%20system%20successes%20and%20problems.&text=By%20monitoring%20for%20feedback%20loops,if%20the%20feedback%20is%20negative> (Accessed 1 January 2022).

Grinstead, D. 1989. *The psychology of Viktor Frankl*. Graham: Atlantic University.

Groeneland, E. & Dana, L.P. 2022. *Qualitative methodology and data generation methods*. London: SAGE.

Groves, R.M., Fowler, F.J., Couper, M.P., Lepkowski, J.M., Singer, E. & Tourangeau, R. 2004. *Survey methodology*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.

Guerin, B., McCrae, J. & Shephard, M. 2018. *Accountability in modern government*. United Kingdom: Institute for Government.

Gwarube, S. 2025. *2024 NSC exam results school performance report*. Pretoria: DBE.

Haag, D. 2020. *The role of social accountability in the education system*. Netherlands. International Institute of Social Studies.

Hafeez-Baig, A., Chakraborty, G. & Raj, S. 2016. *Assuring reliability in qualitative studies: A health informatics perspectives*. Queensland: University of Southern Queensland.

Hamal, H. A. 2015. School performance. *Propósitos y Re Presentaciones*, 3(1):3313-386.

Hampson, T. & McKinley, J. 2023. Problems posing solutions: Criticising pragmatism as a paradigm for mixed methods. *Research in Education*, 116(1):124-138. DOI: 10.1177/00345237231160085

Han, C., Raymond, M. E., Woodworth, J.L., Negassi, Y., Richardson, W.P. & Snow, W. 2017. *Lights off: Practice and impact of closing low-performing schools*. Stanford: Credo.

Han, E.S. & Maloney, T.N. 2021. Teacher unionization and student academic performance: Looking beyond generative bargaining. *Labour Studies Journal*, 46(1):43-74.

Haradhan, M. 2018. Qualitative research methodology in social sciences and related subjects. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People*, 7(1):23-48.

Harrison, K. & Boyd, T. 2018. *Democracy*. Manchester: Manchester Open Hive.

Hay, A.A. 2018. *Quality education: A school perspective*. An unpublished dissertation submitted for MEd degree. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Hayes, A.F. & Rockwood, N.J. 2020. Conditional process analysis: concepts, computation and advances in the modelling of the contingencies of mechanisms. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 64(1):19-54.

Haynes, K. 2012. *Reflexivity in qualitative research*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286352842> (Accessed 13 October 2023).

Henry, G.T., McNeill, S.M. & Harbatkin, E. 2022. Accountability-driven school reform: are there unintended effects on younger children in untested grades? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 61:190-208.

Hess, R. 2021. What do parents look for when choosing a school? *School Choices*, 7 September 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/opinion-what-do-parents-look-for-when-choosing-a-school/2021/09> (Accessed 2 February 2022).

Hevia, F.J. & Vergara-Lope, S. 2019. Educational accountability or social accountability in education? Similarities, tensions and differences. Washington, D.C.: Government Watch.

Hislop, H. 2017. *A co-professional approach to inspection for accountability and improvement: progress and prospects in the Irish context*. Dublin: DCU.

Hofflinger, A. & Von Hippel, P. T. 2020. Missing children: How Chilean schools evaded accountability by having low-performing students miss high-stakes tests. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 32(1):127-152.

Hoffman, P. 2018. The role of accountability in our Constitutional democracy. *Daily Maverick*, 06 August 2018. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2018-08-06-the-role-of-accountability-in-our-Constitutional-democracy/> (Accessed 21 January 2022).

Holloway, J. 2020. Teacher accountability, datafication and evaluation: A case for reimagining schooling. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 28(56):1-12.

Huber, S.G. & Skedsmo, G. 2016. *Teacher evaluation - Accountability and improving teaching practices*. New York: Springer.

Hunter, A. 2017. Bad idea: Focusing on accountability in defense acquisition. [Online]. Available at: <https://defense360.csis.org/focusing-on-accountability-defense-acquisition/> (Accessed 19 October 2022)

Hwa, Y. 2021. *Contrasting approaches, comparable efficacy?: How macro-level trust influences teacher accountability in Finland and Singapore. Trust, accountability and capacity in education system reform*. New York: Routledge.

Hwang, K. 2017. *Bureaucratic accountability and performance*. South Korea: Springer International Publishing.

Hysa, D. & Yunitsyna, A. 2022. *An overview of accountability as a competence in higher education. New perspectives on using accreditation to improve higher education*. United States of America. IGI Global.

Igbokwe-Ibeto, C.J., Osakede, K.O. & Nwobi, F. 2020. Bureaucratic accountability and public sector management in Nigeria: examining the issues, challenges and the way forward. *African Research Review. An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia*, 14(1):166-178.

Igwenagu, C. 2016. *Fundamentals of research methodology and data generation*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303381524> (Accessed 1 April 2023).

International Labour Organisation (ILO). n.d. *Basic principles of monitoring and evaluation*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-ed_emp/ (Accessed 8 December 2022).

Jakubik, M. 2011. *Becoming to know. Essays on extended epistemology of knowledge creation*. Helsinki: Hanken School of Economics.

Janmaat, G., McCowan, T. & Rao, N. 2016. Different stakeholders in education. *Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 46(2):169-171.

Jimenez, L. & Sargrad, S. 2017. *A new vision for school accountability*. Washington, D.C.: American Progress.

Jita, L.C. 2021. *Accountability regimes in teacher education and development in an era of datafication*. Bloemfontein: University of Free State.

Joas, H. & Knobl, W. 2009. *What is theory?* Cambridge: Cambridge University.

Joshi, A., Kale, S., Chandel, S. & Pal, D.K. 2015. Likert scale: Explored and explained. *British Journal of Applied Science & Technology*, 7(4):396-403.

Junjie, M. A. & Yingxin, M. A. 2022. The discussions of positivism and interpretivism. *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(1):10-14.

Kabir, S.M.S. 2016. Methods of data generation. *Basic Guidelines for Research*, 201-276.

Kakar, Z.U.H., Rasheed, R., Rashid, A. & Akhter, S. 2023. *Criteria for assessing and ensuring the trustworthiness in qualitative research*. New York: University of New York.

Kaliyamurthi, B. 2021. Critical comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of positivism and interpretivism as two approaches to the study of politics. *Study of Political Sciences & Public Affairs*, 9(7):1-5.

Kalu, U.C. & Okeke, O.E. 2020. Public accountability in federal states: The gap between Nigeria and the United States. *IRLJ*, 3:36-41.

Karppinen, K. & Moe, H. 2019. *Texts as data 1: Document analysis*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9783030160647> (Accessed 23 April 2023).

Kaushik, V. & Walsh, C.A. 2019. Pragmatism as a research paradigm and its implications for social work research. *Social Sciences*, 4(255):1-17. DOI: 10.3390/sosci8090255

Kawulich, B. 2009. *The role of theory in research*. Georgia: University of Georgia.

Kazeroony, H.H. & du Plessis, Y. 2019. *Diversity and inclusion: a research proposal framework*. New York: Routledge.

Kentab, M.Y. 2016. Barriers to accountability implementation in the education directorates in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(4):129-152.

Kenton, W. 2022. *Accountability: Definition, types, benefits and example*. USA: Investopedia.

Khandpekar, N.M. 2016. The role of NGOs in education system. *Episteme: An Online Interdisciplinary, Multidisciplinary & Multi-Cultural Journal*, 5(3): 30-47.

Khotami, I.P. 2017. The concept of accountability in good governance. *Advances in Social Science Education and Humanities Research*, 163:30-33.

Khumalo, K. 2020. Tension between SADTU and government intensifies. *Sunday World*, 15 July 2020. [Online]. Available at:

<https://sundayworld.co.za/education/tension-between-sadtu-and-government-grows/>
(Accessed 6 December 2022).

Kipkemoi, K.E. & Simon, K.S.C. 2022. Stakeholders participation and academic performance in public secondary schools in Belgut sub-county, Kericho county, Kenya. *Journal of Business and Management*, 24(11):30-37.

Kivunja, C. 2018. Distinguishing between theory, theoretical frame and conceptual framework: A systematic review of lessons from the field. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 7(6):44-53.

Klein, E.D. 2020. School accountability. *Education*, 21 May 2020. [Online]. Available at:
<https://oxfordre.com/education/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264093-e-677> (Accessed 1 February 2022).

Kluge, H. 2020. *Statement – Countries must work together as COVID-19 pandemic accelerates*. Copenhagen: United Nations.

Komba, A.A. 2017. *Educational accountability relationships and students' learning outcomes in Tanzania's public schools*. Tanzania: SAGE.

Kortjens, I. & Moser, A. 2018. Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *European Journal of General Practice*, 24(1):120-124. DOI: 10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092

Kumar, S., Argawal, M. & Argawal, N. 2021. Defining and measuring academic performance of Hei students - A critical review. *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education*, 12(6):3091-3105.

Lai, C. & Lin, S. 2017. Systems theory. *The International Encyclopaedia of Organisational Communication*, 1-19.

Landau, S. & Everitt, B. 2004. *A handbook of statistical analyses using SPSS*. Washington, D.C.: Chapman & Hall.

- Lethole, L.G. 2017. *A distributed leadership communication strategy for improved learner academic performance*. Unpublished education management thesis. Bloemfontein: University of South Africa.
- Levine, T.R. & Markowitz, D.M. 2024. The role of theory in research and understanding human communication. *Human Communication Research*, 50:154-161.
- Lindberg, S.I. 2009. *Accountability: The core concept and its subtypes*. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Luhmann, N. 1995. *Social systems*. California: Stanford University Press.
- Lumivero, 2023. *The basics of document analysis*. Denver: Lumivero.
- Madeson, M. 2020. *Logo therapy: Viktor Frankl's theory of meaning*. Netherlands: Positive Psychology.
- Maydiantoro, A. 2022. Research model development: Brief literature review. [Online]. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359645354_Research_model_development_Brief_Literature_Review (Accessed 12 July 2025).
- Madikida, P.P. 2016. *Challenges in the implementation of Whole School Evaluation at secondary schools in the Libode district, Eastern Cape Province*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Mafisa, L.J. 2017a. The role of teacher unions in education with specific reference to South Africa. *The Online Journal of New Horizons in Education*, 7(4):71-79.
- Mafisa, L.J. 2017b. The role of teacher unions in education with specific reference to South Africa. *Gender and Behaviour*, 15(4).
- Mager, F. 2020. *Research ethics: A practical guide - Why is this guideline important?* [Online]. Available at: <https://www.he.kendallhunt.com> (Accessed 12 July 2025)
- Maharaj, S. & Bascia, N. 2021. Teachers' organisations and educational reform: Resistance and beyond. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 196:34-48.

Mahopo, Z. 2022. CRL probes injuries at Limpopo initiation school. *Sowetan* 19 October 2022. Johannesburg: Sowetan.

Mail & Guardian. 2020. *Weak matric culled for better results*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.google.com/amp/s/mg.co.za/education/2020-01-17-weak-matrics-culled-for-better-results/%3famp> (Accessed 30 January 2022).

Makwana, D., Dabhi, A.M., Engineer, P. & Chudasama, H. 2023. Sampling methods in research: A review. *International Journal of Trend in Science Research and Development*, 7(3):762-768.

Maluleke, M. 2024. SADTU General Secretary. *Presentation* [Education worker's forum]. 20 February, Botshabelo.

Manuel, T. 2011. *National development plan*. Pretoria: National Planning Commission.

Maroy, C. & Voisin, A. 2017. *Think piece on accountability*. New York: UNESCO.

Martin, J., Cormican, K., Sampaio, S.C.B. & Wu, Q. 2018. Shared leadership and team performance: an analysis of moderating factors. *Procedia Computer Science*, 138:671-679.

Matete, R.E. 2021. Teaching profession and educational accountability in Tanzania. *National Library of Medicine*. Heliyon: PMC.

Mbele, N.N. 2021. *Enhancing primary schools' accountability for schools' performance: Perspective of UMgungundlovu district officials*. Unpublished dissertation for MEd degree. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Mbiti, I. M. 2016. The need for accountability in education in developing countries. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 30(3):109-132.

McCollow, J. 2017. Teacher unions. *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia*. Oxford: Oxford University.

McLeod, S. 2024. *Types of interviews in research: Guide and examples*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381954200> (Accessed 12 July 2025).

McLeod, S. 2024b. *Credibility in qualitative research*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/credibility-in-qualitative-research.html>. (Accessed 12 July 2025).

McGrath, S.K. & Whitty, J. 2018. Accountability and responsibility defined. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, 11(3):687-707.

McMillan, J. & Schumacher, S. 2014. *Research in education. Evidence-based Inquiry*. Essex: Pearson.

Meier, C. & Marais, P. 2018. *Management in early childhood education*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2020. S.v. “popular”, s.v. “audit”, s.v. “stakeholder”. Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster.

Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. 2020. Sv “quality”, “perception”. 11th edition. Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster.

Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. 2020. Sv “quality”. 11th edition. Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster.

Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. 2021. S.v “system”, “responsible”, “assist”, “report”, “reliable”. Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster.

Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. 2021. S.v “system”. Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster.

Merten, M. 2013. Accountability, what accountability? Democracy means majority rule, Paul Mashatile tells MPs. *Daily Mavericks*, 23 March 2023. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/author/mariannemerten/> (Accessed 03 April 2023).

Mestry, R. 2006. The functions of school governing bodies in managing school finances. *South African Journal of Education*, 26(1):27-38.

Metu, C. A. 2017. *Whole School Evaluation in primary schools*. Nigeria: University of Nigeria.

Mhaule, M.R. 2025. *Presentation* [Matric results release 2025]. 13 January, Pretoria.

- Miles, D. A. 2019. Let's stop the madness part 2: Understanding the difference between limitations vs. delimitations. [Online]. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334279571_ARTICLE_Research_Methods_and_Strategies_Let's_Stop_the_Madness_Part_2_Understanding_the_Difference_Between_Limitations_vs_Delimitations (Accessed 23 December 2021).
- Mirza, H., Bellalem, F. & Mirza, C. 2023. Ethical considerations in qualitative research: Summary guidelines for novice social science researchers. *Social Studies and Research Journal*, 11(1):441-449.
- Mkhabela, I. 2019. The role of community in education. [Online]. Available at: <https://hsf.org.za/publications/focus-chapters/focus-56-chapters/the-role-of-community-in-education-a-practitioner2019s-reflection> (Accessed 3 February 2022).
- Mnguni, L. 2018. Mixed-method research. [Online]. Available at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1v40XWPfurB5ZaC667k4uvKD_jCjvJKrm/view?usp=drivesdk (Accessed 1 July 2022).
- Mohapatra, H. 2018. *Data generation and sampling*. India: Veer Surendra Sai University of Technology. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.16052.55688
- Mohapi, L. 2025. *SADTU Modise Seshemane Branch chairperson. Presentation* [Work To Rule 2024]. 12 February, Botshabelo.
- Mohlomi, T.H. 2018. *SADTU provincial chairperson. Presentation* [Servicing SADTU members]. 2 April, Botshabelo.
- Mohokare, S.J. 2021. *Principals' influence in learner behaviour in violence-torn areas of Motheo District in Free State province*. Unpublished Med dissertation. Pretoria: South Africa.
- Mokgobo. 2022. *School readiness assessment*. Bloemfontein: FSDoE.
- Moller, J. n.d. *School leadership and accountability: Moving beyond standardization of practice*. Oslo: University of Oslo.
- Moloi, D.S. 2022. *District Director. Presentation* [District Director's engagement with the grade 12 teachers]. 1 February, Botshabelo.

Moloi, S.D. 2020. *District Director. Presentation* [Academic accountability: Motheo District]. 12 March, Bloemfontein.

Moore, C., Viljoen, H.G. & Meyer, W.F. 2017. *Personology. From individual to ecosystem*. Cape Town: Pearson.

Morgan, H. 2022. Conducting a qualitative document analysis. *The Qualitative Research Report*, 27(1):64-77.

Motshekga, M.A. 2021. 2021 *National Senior Certificate. School performance*. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education (DBE).

Motshekga, M.A. 2022. *Keynote address delivered by the Minister of Education, Angie Motshekga, MP, at the SAPA National conference held at Mittah Seperepere Convention Center, Kimberley*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.education.gov.za> (Accessed 02 December 2022).

Motshekga, M.A. 2024. *2023 NSC exam results school performance report*. Pretoria: DEB.

Mpungose, J.E. & Ngwenya, T.H. 2017. School leadership and accountability in managerialist times: Implications for South African public schools. *Education as Change*, 21(3).

Msila, V. 2014. Teacher unionism and school management: a study of Eastern Cape schools in South Africa. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 42(2):259-274.

Msila, V. 2021. Visiting Robert Axelrod: Cooperation, school management and teacher unions. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 20(4):284-301.

Msila, V. 2022. Teacher unions, schools and successes: opportunities and contradictions. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 21(3):263-280.

Mthembu, P., Blose, S. & Mkhize, B.N. 2024. *The influence of circuit managers on learner performance in a thriving rural district*. [Online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.59915/jes.2024.23.3.7>. (Accessed on 12 July 2024).

Mudavanhu, Y. 2017. Quality of literature review and discussion of findings in selected papers on integration of ICT in teaching, role of mentors, and teaching science through science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). *Academic Journal*, 12(4):189-201.

Mukhles, M.A. 2020. Linking ontology, epistemology and research methodology. *Science and philosophy*, 8(1):75-91. DOI: 10.23756/sp.v8i1.500.

Munck, G.L. 2014. What is democracy? A reconceptualization of the quality of democracy. *Democratization*, 23(1).

Mutereko, S. 2019. Accountability through continuous professional development: perceptions of educators in Umgungundlovu district, South Africa. *International Journal of Business and Management Studies*, 11(1):85-100.

Naeem, M.N., Ozuem, W., Ranfagni, S. & Howell, K. 2023. A step-by-step process of thematic analysis to develop a conceptual model in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22:1-18. DOI: 10.1177/16094069231205789

Naidoo, R.R. 2021. *Instructional leadership roles of School Management Teams: An exploratory study of five township secondary schools*. Unpublished Doctor of Philosophy thesis. Bloemfontein: University of Free State.

Nakayasu, C. 2016. School curriculum in Japan. *Curriculum Journal*, 27(1):134–550.

Namey, E.E., Guest, G., Thairu, L. & Johnson, L.A. 2008. Data reduction techniques for large quantitative data sets. *Handbook for Team-based Qualitative Research*, 137–162.

NASBM. 2016. *Engaging parents and other stakeholders to improve your school*. United Kingdom: NASBM.

Naslund-Hadley, E. & Arcia, G. 2021. Improving education finance equity in Belize through formula funding. *Academia Letters*. [Online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL1337> (Accessed 7 November 2022).

National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU). 2013. *NEEDU National Report 2012*. Pretoria: NEEDU.

- National University of New Zealand. 2025. *Trusworthiness of qualitative data*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.resources.nu.edu/c.php?g=1007180&p=7392379>. (Accessed 12 July 2025).
- Ndou, N. 2020. Educators' views on the provision of quality education at selected public schools in Limpopo Province. *Africa education review*, 17(4):3-16.
- Nemoto, T. & Beglar, D. 2014. Developing Likert scale questionnaires. *JALT 2013 conference proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.
- Newsroom. 2016. Teacher banned for submitting false marks. *The Scarborough*, 12 May 2016. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.thescarboroughnews.co.uk/news/lazy-scarborough-teacher-banned-submitting-false-marks-779065%3famp> (Accessed 1 December 2022).
- Ng, D. 2019. *Instructional leadership*. Nanyang: Nanyang Technological University.
- Ngulube, P. 2015. Trends in research methodological mrocedures. *African Journal Library Arch. & Inf. Sc.*, 25(2):125-143.
- Nickerson, C. 2024. *Interpretivism paradigm & research philosophy*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/interpretivism-paradigm.html> (Accessed 27 November 2025).
- Nnadozie, R.C. 2017. *Accountability in the education sector of South Africa*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323868982> (Accessed 27 November 2022).
- Nowell, L.S., Norris, J.M., White, D.E. & Moules, N.J. 2017. Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16:1-13. DOI: 10.1177/1609406917733847
- Ntho, M.A. 2021. 2 sub-district profile report - circuit improvement plan. [Online]. Available at: <https://1drv.ms/p/s!Arl2Y6kYvKPahUolnH7m9Js8kDXH> (Accessed 13 November 2022).

Ntimane, N.P. 2025. *The leadership and management experiences of heads of departments in TVET colleges of the Mpumalanga Province*. Unpublished thesis submitted for a doctoral degree. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Nugraha, M. 2002. Triangulation of instrumentation and data source: A stronger method in assessing English language needs. *Petra: Petra Christian University*.

[Online]. Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/44199972_TRIANGULATION_OF_INSTRUMENTATION_AND_DATA_SOURCE_A_STRONGER_METHOD_IN_ASSESSING_ENGLISH_LANGUAGE_NEEDS.

Nuku, A. S. 2021. *Learner attainment improvement strategy (LAIS)*. Eastern Cape: Eastern Cape Education Department.

Olsen, J.P. 2017. *Democratic accountability, political order and change*. Oxford: Oxford Academic.

Oluwatayo, J.A. 2012. Validity and reliability issues in educational research. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 2(2):391-400.

Onah, P.O., Eteng, M.E. & Adie, R.U. 2021. Education, accountability and transparency: a catalyst for sustainable development in Nigeria. *Global Journal of Educational Research*, 20:127-137.

Onwuegbuzie, A.J. & Combs, J. P. 2011. Data analysis in mixed research: A primer. *International Journal of Education*, 3(1):1-25.

Oxfam. 2019. *The power of education to fight inequality*. Oxford: Oxfam.

Park, Y.S., Artino, A.R. & Konge, L. 2020. The positivism paradigm of research. *Journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges*, 95(5):690-694.

Parliament of the Republic of South Africa. n.d. *Oversight and accountability model*. Pretoria: Government Press.

Parveen, H. & Showkat, N. 2017. *Research ethics*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318912804> (Accessed 8 April 2023).

- Patel, S. 2015. *The research paradigm – methodology, epistemology and ontology – explained in simple language*. [Online]. Available at: <http://salmapatel.co.uk/academia/the-research-paradigm-metHoDology-epistemology-and-ontology-explained-in-simple-language/> (Accessed 15 October 2020).
- Patel, M. & Patel, N. 2019. Exploring research methodology: Review article. *International Journal of Research and Review*, 6(3):48-55.
- Patton, M.Q. & Cochran, M. 2002. *A guide to using qualitative research methodology*. London: Medecins Sans Frontiers.
- Petrilli, M.J. 2019. *A new era of accountability in education has just begun*. Ohio: Fordham Institute.
- Pham, L. 2018. *A review of key paradigms: positivism, interpretivism and critical enquiry*. Adelaide: University of Adelaide.
- Plaatjies, B.O. & Gcelu, N. 2020. *Teaching and learning in an education context*. Bloemfontein: UFS.
- Portela, A. 2012. *Accountability and evaluation: Challenge to democracy*. Zarzadzanie publiczne, 4(20):73-85.
- Presidency, Republic of South Africa. *Policy framework for the Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation System*. Pretoria: Shereno Printers.
- Pual, P. 2010. Basics of Likert. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.hsor.nhg.com.sg/> (Accessed 25 April 2023).
- Pubrica. 2024. *Exploring research boundaries: Delimitations and limitations unveiled*. [Online]. Available at: <https://pubrica.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Exploring-research-boundaries-delimitations-and-limitations-unveiled.pdf> (Accessed 1 January 2024).
- Queensland University of Technology. 2015. The centrality of ethical leadership. *Journal of Education Administration*, 53(2):197-214.

Radebe, L.S. 2019. *Representative council for learners' understanding of the learners' code of conduct*. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.

Rahmatollahi, M. & Zenouzagh, Z.M. 2021. *Designing and validating an evaluation inventory for assessing teachers' professional accountability*. Iran: Islamic Azad University.

Ramdhani, A., Ramdhani, M.A. & Amin, A.S. 2014. Writing a literature review research paper: A step-by-step approach. *International Journal of Basics and Applied Sciences*, 47-56.

Rasmussen, M.L. 2017. *The role of theory in research*. Australia: SAGE.

Rasmussen, P. & Zou, Y. 2014. The development of educational accountability in China and Denmark. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 22(121):1-29.

Reddick, C. Demir, T. & Perlman, B. 2020. Horizontal, vertical and hybrid: an empirical look at the forms of accountability. *Administration and Society*, 1-29.

Rehman, A.A. & Alharthi, K. 2016. An introduction to research paradigms. *International Journal of Educational Investigations*, 3(8):51-59.

Reyneke, M. 2018. Educator accountability in South Africa: Rethinking section 10 of the South African Schools Act. *Journal for Juridical Science*, 43(1):117-144.

Romm, N.R. A. 2018. *Responsible research practice. Revisiting transformative paradigm in social research*. Switzerland: Springer.

Ruslin., Mashuri, S., Rasak, M.S.A., Alhabsyi, F. & Syam. 2022. Semi-structured interview: A mythological reflection on the development of a qualitative research instrument in education studies. *Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 12(1):22-29.

Sage. 2020. *Methods of data generation*. [Online]. Available at: http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pus/technical_reports/2009/RAND_TR718.pdf (Accessed 27 April 2023).

Sage. 2020. Understanding and identifying themes in qualitative case study research. *South African Journal of Business and Management Cases*, 11(3):187-192. DOI: 10.1177/22779779221134659

Sahoo, R.K. 2022. *Interview as a tool for data generation in educational research*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360313105_Interview_as_a_tool_for_data_generation_in_educational_research (Accessed 1 January 2025).

Saldana, J. 2013. *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Washington, D.C: SAGE.

Sawaneh, B. & Fatajo, E. 2022. Assessment of monitoring and evaluation instruments for quality assurance at the Gambia College. *AKSU Journal of Administration and Corporate Governance*, 2(2):101-116.

Sawir, M. 2017. The bureaucracy accountability in implementing free education program in education service department in Makassar. *ILIRIA International Review*, 7(2):9-21.

Schleckser, J. 2018. *The simple tool you can use to keep people accountable*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.inc.com/jim-schleckser/the-secret-tool-you-can-use-to-keep-people-accountable.html> (Accessed 03 February 2023).

Schwandt, T. 1994. *Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry*. Illinois: Department of Illinois.

Seidi, D. 2004. *Luhmann's theory of autopoietic social systems*. Munich: LLMU.

Shabalala, M. 2021. Defence department accused of lack of accountability. *Sowetan*. 25 November 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/amp/news/south-africa/2021-11-25-defence-department-accused-of-lack-of-accountability>. (Accessed 19 October 2022).

Shah, A. 2021. *Balance, accountability and responsiveness. Lessons about decentralisation*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

Shamase, N.P. 2022. *The role of circuit managers in leadership and professional development of principals: Perspectives of six secondary school principals*.

Unpublished dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the Masters degree. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Shenton, A. K. 2004. Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22:63-75.

Shewbridge, C., Fuster, M. & Rouw, R. 2019. *Constructive accountability, transparency and trust between government and highly autonomous schools in Flanders*. Netherlands: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Shrestha, U., Williams, T. P., Al-Samarrai, A., Van Geldermalsen, A. & Zaidi, A. 2019. What is the relationship between politics, education reform and learning? *Evidence from a New Database and Nine Case Studies*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335789809> (Accessed 5 April 2023).

Shukla, S. 2020. *Concept of population and sample*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.researchgat.net/publication/346426707> (Accessed 12 July 2025).

Siakalli, M., Mousoulidou, M., Christodoulou, A., Savvidou, A. & Kouppa, K. 2022. Secondary education and COVID-19. *Encyclopaedia*, 2:409-427.

Sibiya, T. P. 2017. *Key stakeholders' experiences and perspectives on the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU)*. Unpublished dissertation submitted for MEd degree. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Sikhosana, O.T. 2004. *Principals' perceptions of the role of teacher unions in the effective management of schools*. Maphumlo: University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Silver, D. 2019. *Theorizing is a practice, you can teach it*. Toronto: University of Toronto.

Skedsmo, G. & Huber, G.S. 2019. Forms and practices of accountability in education. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 31:251-255.

Skills for Learning. 2018. *Guide to report writing*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.wlv.ac.uk/skills> (Accessed 18 October 2022).

Smart, G. 2020. *The importance of various stakeholders in education*. [Online]. Available at: <https://givingcompass.org/article/the-importance-of-various->

stakeholders-in-

education/#:~:text=1%20Stakeholders%20in%20education%20can%20include%20families%2C%20school,about%20equity%20in%20education%20during%20the%20COVID-19%20pandemic (Accessed 31 January 2023).

Smit, B. 2002. Atlas.ti for qualitative data analysis. *Perspective in Education*, 20(3):65-76.

Smit, L. 2021. *Wanted: Accountable principals*. South Africa: Helen Suzman Foundation.

Smith, W. C. & Benavot, A. 2019. Improving accountability in education: The importance of structured democratic voice. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 20:193-205.

Snyder, H. 2019. Literature review as a research Methodology: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*, 104:333-339.

South Africa (RSA). 1994. *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*. Cape Town: Government Press.

South Africa (RSA). 1996. *South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996*. Cape Town: Government Press.

South Africa (RSA). 1996. *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*. Pretoria: Government Press.

South Africa (RSA). 1996b. *National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996*. Cape Town: Government Press.

South Africa (RSA). 1997. *Batho-Pele- People first*. Pretoria: Government Press.

South Africa (RSA). 1998. *Employment of Educators Act No. 76 of 1998*. Pretoria: Government Press.

South Africa (RSA). 2000. *South African Council of Educators Act No. 31 of 2000*. Pretoria: Government Press.

South Africa (RSA). 2011. *National Education Evaluation and Development Unit Bill, 2011*. Pretoria: Government Press.

South Africa (RSA). 2012. *Oversight and accountability model*. Pretoria: Government press.

South Africa (RSA). 2022. Personnel Administrative Measures. *Government Notices*, 9 September 2022 No. 46879. Pretoria: Government Press.

South Africa (RSA). 2022. Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM). *Staatskoerant*, 9 September 2022 No. 46879. [Online]. Available at: www.gpwonline.co.za. (Accessed 5 March 2023).

South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). 2021. SADTU disagrees with decision for educators to return to work later this month. *SABCNews*, 16 January 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/sadtu-diagrees-with-decision-for-educators-to-return-to-work-later-this-month/> (Accessed 6 December 2022).

South African Council of Educators (SACE). 2020. *Handbook for teachers' rights, responsibilities and safety*. Pretoria: LeadAfrika.

Spaull, N. 2015. Accountability and capacity in South African education. *Education as Change*, 19(3):113-142.

Spurrier, A., Aldeman, C., Schiess, J. O. & Rotheram, A. J. 2020. *The historical roots and theory of change of modern school accountability*. USA: Bellwether Education Partners.

Stahl, N.A. & King, J.R. 2020. Expanding approaches for research: understanding and using trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 44(1):26-28.

Statistics Solutions. 2021. What is credibility in qualitative research and how do we establish it? *Complete Dissertation*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.statisticssolutions.com/what-is-credibility-in-qualitative-research-and-how-do-we-establish-it/> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

Stevenson, H., Milner, A. & Winchip, E. 2018. *Education trade unions for the teaching profession: Strengthening the capacity of education trade unions to represent teachers' professional needs in social dialogue*. Brussels: European Trade Union Committee for Education.

Sumarsonoa, R.B., Triwiyantob, T., Kusumaningrumc, D.E. & Gunawand, J. 2019. Opportunities for the implementation of school-based management in the Eastern Area of Indonesia. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change*, 5(4):180-196.

Sunday, E. n.d. *The role of theories in research*. Western Cape: University of Western Cape.

Swarooprani, K. 2022. A study of research methodology. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Science, Engineering and Technology*, 9(3):537-543.

Symeonidis, V. & Stromquist, N.P. 2020. Teacher status and the role of teacher unions in the context of new professionalism. *Studia Paedagogica*, 25(2):23-45.

Tabrizi, J.S. & Farahsa, S. 2015. How evaluation and audit implemented in educational organisations? A systematic review. *Res Dev Med Educ*, 4(1):3-16.

Taherdoost, H. 2016. Sampling methods in research methodology: How to choose a sampling technique for research. *International Journal of Academic Research in Management*, 5(2):18-27.

Taherdoost, H. 2021. Data generation methods and tools for research: A step-by-step guide to choose data generation technique for academic and business research projects. *International Journal of Academic Research in Management*, 10(1):10-38.

Taherdoost, H. 2022. What are the different research approaches? Comprehensive review of qualitative, quantitative and mixed method research, their applications, types and limitations. *Journal of Management Sciences & Engineering Research*, 5(1):53-63. DOI: 10.30564/jmser.v5i1.4538

Taherdoost, H. 2022b. How to conduct an effective interview; a guide to interview design in research study. *International Journal of Academic Research in Management*, 11(1)39-51.

Terrell, S.R. 2016. *Writing a proposal for your dissertation*. London: The Guilford Press.

Thiel, C., Schweizer, S. & Bellmann, J. 2017. Rethinking side effects of accountability in education: Insights from a multiple methods study in four German school systems. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 25(93):11-30.

Triad3. 2016. An introduction to document analysis. *Research Methodology in Education*. [Online]. Available at: <https://iled500.trubox.ca/2016/244> (Accessed 30 April 2023).

Turner, D.P. 2019. Sampling methods in research design. *The Journal of Head and Face Pain*. [Online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/head.13707>

Tyagi, R., Vishwakarma, S., Alexandrovich & Mohammed, S. 2020. *ICT skills for Sustainable Development Goal 4*. Switzerland: Springer.

Tyner, A. & Petrilli, M. J. 2018. The case for holding students accountable. *Standards, Testing and Accountability, the Journal*, 18(3).

Ugwu, C.N. & Eze, H.U. 2023. Qualitative research. *IDOSR Journal of Computer and Applied Sciences*, 8(1):20-35.

United Nations (UN). 2006. *Social justice in an open world*. New York: UN.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). 2017a. *Accountability in education: Meeting our commitments*. New York: UNESCO.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). 2017b. *Moving forward the 2030 agenda for sustainable development*. New York: UNESCO.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). 2017c. *Teacher support and motivation framework for Africa: Emerging patterns*. New York: UNESCO.

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). 2019. *Every child learns*. New York: UNICEF.

United States Agency for International Development (USAID). 2014. *Accountability systems resource guide*. Washington, D.C.: Futures Group.

University of South Africa. 2016. *Policy on research ethics*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

University of Stellenbosch. 2021. *How satisfied are school principals with support and compliance visits by district officials? Research on Socio-economic Policy*. Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch.

USAID. 2008. *School fees in South Africa. Increasing quality or decreasing equality*. Washington, D.C.: Equip2.

USAID. 2018. *Impact evaluation of USAID/ South Africa story powered school program-baseline*. Washington, D.C.: US Agency for International Development.

Van Dyk, H. & White, C. J. 2019. Theory and practice of the quintile ranking of schools in South Africa: A financial management perspective. *South African Journal of Education*, 39(1):1-11.

Varpio, L., Paradis, E., Uitdehaagte, S. & Young, M. 2019. *The distinctions between theory, theoretical framework and conceptual framework*. [Online]. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31725464/> (Accessed 15 October 2022).

Venter, N. 2018. An examination of the implementation of selected Batho-Pele principles: *A case study of the Western Cape Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFG) and its clients*. Western Cape: Western Cape University.

Verger, A., Novelli, M. & Altinyelken, H.K. 2018. *Global education policy and international development*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Verger, A. & Skedsmo, G. 2021. *Enacting accountabilities in education: exploring new policy contexts and theoretical elaborations*. Norway: Springer.

Vermicelli, S. & Scagnoli, N.I. 2013. Data display in qualitative research. *The International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 359-381.

Vishnoi, P. 2021. *Schools as microcosms of society*. India: Azim Premji University.

Wachira, N. & Odhiambo, D. 2021. The politics of teacher unions: Strategies and effects. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Sciences*, v(i):2454-6186.

Wang, F., Hauseman, C. & Pollock, K. 2021. *"I am here for the students": Principals' perception of accountability amid work intensification*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11092-021-09368-6>

Western Cape Government. 2014. *Provincial Gazette 7317*. Cape Town: Western Cape Government.

Western Cape Government. 2017. *Introduction of the WCED framework for the establishment of forums for Representatives Councils of Learners (RCLs)*. Cape Town: Western Cape Government Education.

Willie, M.M. 2023. Population and target population. *Social Science and Education*, 4(10):75-79. DOI: 10.52970/grsse.v4i1.405

Wilson, S. M. & Peterson, P. L. 2006. *Theories of learning and teaching. What do they mean for educators?* Washington, D.C.: NEA.

Woofolk, A. 2014. *Educational psychology*. Harlow: Pearson.

World Health Organisation (WHO). 2019. *Accountability as a driver of health equity*. Denmark: World Health Organisation.

Wu, Q., Cormican, K. & Chen, G. 2018. A meta-analysis of shared leadership: antecedents, consequences and moderators. *Journal of Leadership & Organisational Studies*, 27(1):49-64.

Yahaya, M.L., Oyediran, O.S. & John, I.B. 2019. Is there any need for theory in research? *International Research Journal of Engineering and Technology*, 6(3):845-854.

Yusuf, S.A., Salako, M.A., Adedina, L. & Ayelotan, O.I. 2015. Implication of academic staff union strike on students' academic performance: Ex-post-facto evidence from the University of Lagos, Akoka, Nigeria. *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Science*, 3(8): 12-24.

Zarei, L., Bagheri, M.S. & Sadighi, F. 2019. Educational accountability in EFL contexts: Providing remedies. *Cogent Education*, 6(1):1-32.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2024/04/10

Ref: **2024/04/10/56956169/15/AM**

Dear Mr SJ Mohokare

Name: Mr SJ Mohokare

Student No.:56956169

Decision: Ethics Approval from
2024/04/10 to 2029/04/10

Researcher(s): Name: Mr SJ Mohokare
E-mail address: 56956169@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0842632857

Supervisor(s): Name: Prof N. Ndou
E-mail address: ndoun@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 012 429 4468

Title of research:

**Teacher unions' perceptions of education department's academic performance
accountability sessions in Motheo district, Free State province.**

Qualification: PhD Education Management

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2024/04/10 to 2029/04/10.

*The **medium risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2024/04/10 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.
2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.



University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

3. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.
4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
5. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
6. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
7. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
8. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2029/04/10**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

*The reference number **2024/04/10/56956169/15/AM** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Kind regards,



Prof AT Motlhabane
CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC
motlhat@unisa.ac.za



Prof Mpine Makoe
EXECUTIVE DEAN
qakisme@unisa.ac.za



Approved - decision template – updated 16 Feb 2017

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

APPENDIX B: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH



17 March 2024

The Manager
ESDoE
BLOEMFONTEIN
FREE STATE

Sir/Madam/D~~r~~

RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Title of research: *Teacher unions' perceptions of education department's academic performance accountability sessions in Motheo District, Free State province.*

I, Jim Mohokare, am doing research towards PhD degree at the University of South Africa under supervision of Professor Ndyamato Ndou who is the lecturer in the Department of Early Childhood Education. I hereby invite you to participate in my study titled: *Teacher unions' perceptions of education department's academic performance accountability sessions in Motheo District, Free State province.*

The aim of the study is to establish a common understanding on the concept of accountability where it relates to academic performance and to propose a framework for academic accountability peculiar to South African schools. Your circuit has been sampled because all the schools in the district are held accountable for their academic performance. The researcher noticed that all stakeholders in the school community are responsible for the school's academic results in one way or another. The study will employ in-depth interviews as a form of data collection. The study will assist stakeholders; parents, teachers, education officials and teacher unions to equally carry the yoke of responsibility towards the results, thus calling everyone to accountability.

The researcher requests to conduct research in the district of Motheo involving circuit managers, principals, departmental heads and members of teacher unions. There will be no reimbursement or incentives for participation in the study. Questions do not require participants' personal information and there is no way that the findings may be linked to participants or schools. Moreover, the participant has the right to quit participating in the study at anytime during the process of data collection.

Yours faithfully
Jim Mohokare
STUDENT NUMBER: 56956169
EMAIL: 56956169@mylfe.unisa.ac.za
Cell: 0842632857



University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

APPENDIX C: APPROVAL LETTER

Enquiries: M.Z. Thango
Ref: Research Permission: S. J. Mohokare
Tel. 051 404 8808
Email: M.Z.Thango@fseducation.gov.za



1926 Section D
Botshabelo
9781

Dear Mr. S. J. Mohokare

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: MOTHEO DISTRICT

This letter serves to inform you that you have been granted permission to conduct research in the Free State Department of Education within the Motheo Education District. The details in relation to your research project with the University of South Africa are as follows:

Topic: Teacher unions' perceptions of education department's academic performance accountability sessions in Motheo district, Free State province.

1. **List of schools involved:** Kgorathuto Secondary School, Strydom Secondary School, Goronyane Secondary School and Leratong Secondary School.
2. **Target Population:** Four principals, four Circuit Managers, four Departmental Heads and twelve Office-based Union members of three different teacher unions.
3. **Period of research:** From the signature of this letter until 30 September 2024. Please note that the department does not allow any research to be conducted during the fourth term (quarter) of the academic year. Should you fall behind your schedule by three months to complete your research project in the approved period, you will need to apply for an extension. The researcher is expected to request permission from the school principals to conduct research at schools.
4. The approval is subject to the following conditions:
 - 4.1 The collection of data should not interfere with the normal tuition time or teaching process.
 - 4.2 A bound copy of the research document should be submitted to the Free State Department of Education, Room 101, 1st Floor, Thuto House, St. Andrew Street, Bloemfontein or can be emailed to the above-mentioned email address.
 - 4.3 You will be expected, on completion of your research study to make a presentation to the relevant stakeholders in the Department.
 - 4.4 The ethics documents must be adhered to in the discourse of your study in our department.
5. Please note that costs relating to all the conditions mentioned above are your own responsibility.

Yours Sincerely,

Mr. MZAMO W. JACOBS
DIRECTOR: QUALITY ASSURANCE, M&E AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

DATE: 09/05/2024

RESEARCH APPLICATION BY S. J. MOHOKARE, PERMISSION LETTER 09 MAY 2024, MOTHEO DISTRICT

QASME, M&E and Strategic Planning Directorate Private Bag X20565, Bloemfontein, 9300 - Thuto House, Room 101, 1st Floor, St Andrew Street, Bloemfontein

www.fsdoe.fs.gov.za

Enquiries: M.Z. Thango
Ref: Notification of research: S. J. Mohokare
Tel. 051 404 8808
Email: MZ.Thango@fseducation.gov.za



District Director
Motho District

Dear Mr. Moloi

NOTIFICATION OF RESEARCH: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH PROJECT IN MOTHEO DISTRICT

This letter serves to inform you that Mr. S. J. Mohokare has been granted permission to conduct research in the Motheo District under the auspices of the University of South Africa. The details in relation to the research project are as follows:

Topic: Teacher unions' perceptions of education department's academic performance accountability sessions in Motheo district, Free State province.

1. **List of schools involved:** Kgorathuto Secondary School, Strydom Secondary School, Goronyane Secondary School and Leratong Secondary School.
2. **Target Population:** Four principals, four Circuit Managers, four Departmental Heads and twelve Office-based Union members of three different teacher unions.
3. **Period of research:** From the signature of this letter until 30 September 2024. Please note the department does not allow any research to be conducted during the fourth term (quarter) of the academic year nor during normal school hours. The researcher is expected to request permission from the school principals to conduct research at schools.
4. **Research benefits:** The study will be conducted through the lenses of Existentialism and Systems theories. Whilst the value of the individual school is valued in accordance with Existentialism theory, all stakeholders together are responsible for academic performance of learners as parts of the broader system in accordance with systems theory. Stakeholders include departmental officials, principals, teachers, learners, parents, teacher unions and members of the community. Consequently, the study will prove that every stakeholder is accountable for learners' academic performance.
5. The Sub-directorate of Research and policy will make the necessary arrangements for the researchers to present the findings and recommendations to the relevant officials in the Department.

Yours Sincerely,

Mr. MZAMANE W. JACOBS
DIRECTOR: QUALITY ASSURANCE, M&E AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

DATE: 09/05/2024

APPENDIX D: LETTER TO CIRCUIT MANAGER



17 March 2024

The Circuit Manager
Circuit 7
Motheo Education District
FREE STATE

Sir/Madam/Dr

RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Title of research: *Teacher unions' perceptions of education department's academic performance accountability sessions in Motheo District, Free State province. Framework for effective accountability sessions.*

I, Jim Mohokare, am doing research towards PhD degree at the University of South Africa under supervision of Professor Ndwamato Ndou who is the lecturer in the Department of Early Childhood Education. I hereby invite you to participate in my study titled: *Teacher unions' perceptions of education department's academic performance accountability sessions in Motheo District, Free State province. Framework for effective accountability sessions.*

The aim of the study is to establish a common understanding on the concept of accountability where it relates to academic performance and to propose a framework for academic accountability peculiar to South African schools. Your circuit has been sampled because all the schools in the district are held accountable for their academic performance. The researcher noticed that all stakeholders in the school community are responsible for the school's academic results in one way or another. The study will employ in-depth interviews as a form of data collection. The study will assist stakeholders; parents, teachers, education officials and teacher unions to equally carry the yoke of responsibility towards the results, thus calling everyone to accountability.

The researcher requests to interview you on matters relating to the phenomenon under study. There will be no reimbursement or incentives for participation in the study. Questions do not require participants' personal information and there is no way that the findings may be linked to the circuit.

Yours faithfully
Jim Mohokare
STUDENT NUMBER: 56956169
EMAIL: 56956169@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Cell: 0842632857



University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

APPENDIX E: LETTER TO PRINCIPALS



21 April 2024

The principal
_____Secondary School
Motheo Education District
FREE STATE

Sir/Madam/Dr

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT _____SCHOOL

Title of research: *Teacher unions' perceptions of education department's academic performance accountability sessions in Motheo District, Free State province.*

I, Sekhuthi Jim Mohokare, am doing research towards PhD degree at the University of South Africa under supervision of Professor Nndwamato Ndou who is the lecturer in the Department of Early Childhood Education. I hereby invite you to participate in my study titled *Teacher unions' perceptions of education department's academic performance accountability sessions in Motheo District, Free State province.*

The aim of the study is to establish a common understanding on the concept of accountability where it relates to academic performance and to propose a framework for academic accountability peculiar to South African schools. Your school has been sampled because all the schools in the district are held accountable for their academic performance. The researcher noticed that all stakeholders in the school community are responsible for the school's academic results in one way or another. The study will employ in-depth interviews as a form of data collection at your school. The study will assist stakeholders; parents, teachers, education officials and teacher unions to equally carry the yoke of responsibility towards the results, thus calling everyone to accountability.

The researcher requests the principal and departmental heads to participate in the study. There will be no reimbursement or incentives for participation in the study. Questions will not require participants' personal information and there is no way that the findings may be linked to your school. Participants may quit participating in the study at anytime during the process of data collection.

Yours faithfully
Jim Mohokare
STUDENT NUMBER: 56956169
EMAIL: 56956169@mylfe.unisa.ac.za
Cell: 0842632857



University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

APPENDIX F: LETTER TO DEPARTMENTAL HEADS



17 March 2024

The Departmental Head

Secondary School
Motheo Education District
FREE STATE

Sir/Madam/Dr

RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT _____ SCHOOL

Title of research: *Teacher unions' perceptions of education department's academic performance accountability sessions in Motheo District, Free State province. Framework for effective accountability sessions.*

I, Jim Mohokare, am doing research towards PhD degree at the University of South Africa under supervision of Professor Nndwamato Ndou who is the lecturer in the Department of Early Childhood Education. I hereby invite you to participate in my study titled *Teacher unions' perceptions of education department's academic performance accountability sessions in Motheo District, Free State province. Framework for effective accountability sessions.*

The aim of the study is to establish a common understanding on the concept of accountability where it relates to academic performance and to propose a framework for academic accountability peculiar to South African schools. Your school has been sampled because all the schools in the district are held accountable for their academic performance. The researcher noticed that all stakeholders in the school community are responsible for the school's academic results in one way or another. The study will employ in-depth interviews as a form of data collection at your school. The study will assist stakeholders; parents, teachers, education officials and teacher unions to equally carry the yoke of responsibility towards the results, thus calling everyone to accountability.

The researcher requests you to participate in the study. There will be no reimbursement or incentives for participating in the study. Questions will not require participants' personal information and there is no way that the findings may be linked to you or your school.

Yours faithfully
Jim Mohokare
STUDENT NUMBER: 56956169
EMAIL: 56956169@mylfe.unisa.ac.za
Cell: 0842632857



University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

APPENDIX G: LETTER TO UNIONS



17 March 2024

The Chairperson
Teacher's union: _____
FREE STATE

Dr/Sir/Madam

RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR PREMISES

Title of research: *Teacher unions' perceptions of education department's academic performance accountability sessions in Motheo District, Free State province. Framework for effective accountability sessions.*

I, Jim Mohokare, am doing research towards PhD degree at the University of South Africa under the supervision of Professor Ndwamato Ndou who is the lecturer in the Department of Early Childhood Education. I hereby invite you to participate in my study titled: *Teacher unions' perceptions of education department's academic performance accountability sessions in Motheo District, Free State province. Framework for effective accountability sessions.*

The aim of the study is to establish a common understanding of the concept of accountability where it relates to academic performance and to propose a framework for academic accountability peculiar to South African schools. Union members are requested to participate in the study because they are normally required to attend to teachers' grievances. The researcher noticed that all stakeholders in the school community are responsible for the school's academic results in one way or another. The study seeks to interview union members at the provincial, regional, branch and site level to determine their expectations on the required procedure relating to accountability sessions. The study will assist stakeholders; parents, teachers, education officials and teacher unions to equally carry the yoke of responsibility towards the results, thus calling everyone to accountability.

The researcher requests permission to collect qualitative data from the members of the union through in-depth interviews. There will be no reimbursement or incentives for participation in the study. Questions will not require participants' personal information and there is no way that the findings may be linked to individual participants.

Yours faithfully
Jim Mohokare
STUDENT NUMBER: 56956169
EMAIL: 56956169@mylfe.unisa.ac.za
Cell: 0842632857



University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR CIRCUIT MANAGERS

CIRCUIT MANAGERS INTERVIEWS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Are you aware of the call to academic accountability sittings directed to school management teams?
2. Have you ever accounted on the academic performance of your circuit?
3. How helpful is the academic accountability with regard to learners' performance?
4. What are the challenges that you noticed teachers experienced when the process of accounting was unfolding?
5. How do you think FSDoE can mitigate challenges faced by stakeholders in academic performance accountability sessions?
6. Have you ever felt you wanted teacher unions should participate in academic accountability sessions?
7. How do you think teacher unions can participate in the process?
8. How do you value the support you receive from immediate superiors with regard to learners' performance?
9. How do you value the support you receive from learners' parents with regard to learners' performance?
10. How do you value the support you receive from FSDoE with regard to learners' performance?
11. How do you value the support you receive from teacher unions with regard to learners' performance?
12. How do you think teacher unions' perceptions on accountability sessions can affect learners' academic and school performance?

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPALS

PRINCIPALS INTERVIEWS

1. Are you aware of the call to academic accountability sittings directed to school management teams?
2. Have you ever accounted on the academic performance of your school?
3. How helpful is the academic accountability with regard to learners' performance?
4. What are the challenges that you experienced when the process of accounting was unfolding?
5. How do you think FSDoE can mitigate challenges faced by stakeholders in academic performance accountability sessions?
6. Have you ever felt you wanted teacher unions should participate in academic accountability sessions?
7. How do you think teacher unions can participate in the process?
8. How do you value the support you receive from immediate superiors with regard to learners' performance?
9. How do you value the support you receive from learners' parents with regard to learners' performance?
10. How do you value the support you receive from FSDoE with regard to learners' performance?
11. How do you value the support you receive from teacher unions with regard to learners' performance?
12. How do you think teacher unions' perceptions on accountability sessions can affect learners' academic and school performance?

APPENDIX J: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR DEPARTMENTAL HEADS

DEPARTMENTAL HEADS' INTERVIEWS

1. Are you aware of the call to academic accountability sittings directed to school management teams?
2. Have you ever accounted on the academic performance of your school?
3. Were you accounting to the immediate supervisor? Please elaborate.
4. Do you find academic accountability helpful?
5. What are the challenges that you experienced when the process of accounting was unfolding?
6. How do you think FSDoE can mitigate challenges faced by teachers in academic performance accountability sessions?
7. Have you ever felt incapable to deliver as a teacher as a result of academic accountability?
8. Have you ever felt you would leave the teaching profession earlier due to departmental expectations as a result of academic accountability?
9. Do you think that teacher unions should be represented during academic accountability sessions?
10. If the answer to number 9 is yes, how do you think teacher unions can participate in the process?
11. How do you value the support you receive from immediate superiors with regard to learners' performance?
12. How do you value the support you receive from learners' parents with regard to learners' performance?
13. How do you value the support you receive from FSDoE with regard to learners' performance?
14. How do you value the support you receive from teacher unions with regard to learners' performance?
15. How do you think teacher unions' perceptions on accountability sessions can affect learners' academic and school performance?

APPENDIX K: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR UNION MEMBERS

TEACHER UNIONS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (FOCUS-GROUP)

1. Are you aware of the call directed to SMTs to account on academic performance during formal sittings organized by FSDoE?
2. How do you value academic accountability?
3. Have you received grievances from your colleagues about the procedures followed during the accountability sittings?
4. If yes, which complaints have you received?
5. How does the union assist the complainants?
6. In addition to complaints, what are the challenges you noticed stakeholders experience during academic accountability?
7. What do you think FSDoE can do to mitigate the challenges faced by stakeholders?
8. Do complainants feel supported by the departmental officials?
9. Do you feel that the support given is adequate?
10. How do you think schools can be supported to make them ready for accountability?
11. How often should support be given?
12. Do you as union members support the need to account on academic performance?
13. Do you think that accountability should start in lower grades?
14. Should all stakeholders account; teachers, principals, parents, learners and teacher unions?
15. How do you value the importance of line function with regard to academic accountability?
16. What is the role of teacher unions in academic accountability?
17. How do you think challenges stakeholders experience with regard to academic accountability can be mitigated?
18. Can you suggest ways in which the FSDoE accountability sessions can be handled?
19. Based on the answers you have provided, how can teacher unions' perceptions on accountability sessions affect learners' academic performance and the school performance?

APPENDIX L: OBSERVATION GRID

OBSERVATION GRID

ACCOUNTABILITY SESSION 2024

SCHOOLS: SECONDARY SCHOOL _____ (Assign a letter to a school, letters should not be in consecutive order of school appearance before the panel)

DISTRICT: MOTHEO

TERM: _____

BASIS OF ACCOUNTABILITY: TEST _____ EXAMINATION _____ SBA _____

A. PARTICIPANTS	
SESSION NUMBER	
MEMBERS OF DISTRICT	
POSITION OF A MEMBER	NUMBER OF MEMBERS
1 _____	
2 _____	
3 _____	
4 _____	
5 _____	
<i>TOTAL NUMBER OF DISTRICT MEMBERS</i>	
SCHOOL MEMBERS	
POSITION OF A SCHOOL	NUMBER OF MEMBERS
1 _____	
2 _____	
3 _____	
4 _____	
5 _____	
<i>TOTAL NUMBER OF SCHOOL MEMBERS</i>	
UNION MEMBERS	
POSITION OF A MEMBER	NUMBER OF MEMBERS
1 _____	
2 _____	
3 _____	
4 _____	
5 _____	
<i>TOTAL NUMBER OF UNION MEMBERS</i>	
TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS ADDED TOGETHER	
B. FACTUAL DATA	
GENERAL SCHOOL PERFORMANCE	PASS % RATE
	EXPECTED PASS RATE
	GENERAL AVERAGE MARK

	GENERAL AVERAGE %
	ACTUAL BASKET OF CRITERIA ATTAINMENT RATE
	BASKET OF CRITERIA EXPECTED RATE
C. PURPOSE OF THE DAY/ PROLOGUE	
IS THE PURPOSE OF THE DAY/ SESSION OUTLINED?	YES _____ NO _____
IS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ACCOUNTABILITY SESSION CLEARLY STATED?	YES _____ NO _____
DOES THE ACCOUNTABILITY IMPORTANCE COVER ALL STAKEHOLDERS?	TEACHERS___SMT___PRINCIPAL___PARENTS___ LEARNERS___TEACHER UNIONS___OTHER___ (Specify) _____
IMPORTANCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY SESSIONS	_____ _____ _____
D. RELEVANCE OF DATA PRESENTED	
SCHOOL DATA PRESENTED BY.....	PRINCIPAL___DEPUTY PRINCIPAL___DEPARTMENTAL HEAD _____
EFFORTS PRESENTED	YES _____ NO _____
STRATEGIES TO BETTER ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE	YES _____ NO _____
FEASIBILITY OF STRATEGIES	YES _____ NO _____ UNSURE _____
DOES DATA PRESENT CHALLENGES STAKEHOLDERS EXPERIENCE?	TEACHERS___SMT___PRINCIPAL___PARENTS___ LEARNERS___TEACHER UNIONS___OTHER___ (Specify) _____
CHALLENGES PRESENTED	_____ _____ _____
E. EVIDENCE OF SUPPORT	
EVIDENCE OF SUPPORT FROM FSDOE	YES _____ NO _____
REALITY (FEASIBILITY) OF SUPPORT	YES _____ NO _____ UNSURE _____
DOES SUPPORT HAVE TIMEFRAMES?	YES _____ NO _____
REACTION OF SUPPORT BY	POSITIVE___NEGATIVE___MIXED FEELINGS___

STAKEHOLDERS	

NOTES

[illegible][illegible]

APPENDIX M: PROOF OF LANGUAGE EDITING

NIM Editorial
Midrand, Gauteng, 1685
Cell: +27 82 587 4489
Email: info@nimeditorial.co.za
www.nimeditorial.co.za

Reg. No. 2016/48859/07



03 August 2025

Editorial Certificate

To Whom It May Concern,

This certificate confirms that the PhD thesis entitled, **STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION DEPARTMENT'S ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY SESSIONS IN MOTHEO DISTRICT, FREE STATE PROVINCE** by **SEKHUTHE JIM MOHOKARE (student number: 56956169)** was edited by an expert English editor with a PhD. The following issues were corrected: grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, phrasing, and formatting.

Signed on behalf of NIM Editorial by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'N.I. Mabidi', with a stylized flourish at the end.

.....
Dr N.I. Mabidi
Founder & Chief Editor

APPENDIX N: TURNITIN REPORT

PAPER NAME

AUTHOR

Stakeholders perceptions of education d SEKHUTHE JIM MOHOKARE
epartments academic accountability ses sions in motheo district%2C
Free State.d
OCX

WORD COUNT

CHARACTER COUNT

95134 Words

551166 Characters

PAGE COUNT

FILE SIZE

322 Pages

5.9MB

SUBMISSION DATE

REPORT DATE

Aug 3, 2025 4:17 PM GMT+2

Aug 3, 2025 4:22 PM GMT+2

14% Overall Similarity

The combined total of all matches, including overlapping sources, for each database.

-  9% Internet database
-  Crossref database
-  8% Submitted Works database
- 12% Publications database
- Crossref Posted Content database

O Excluded from Similarity Report

- Manually excluded sources