School Accountability Within the Dominican Republic: A Qualitative Study of School Principals’ Beliefs and Knowledge

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The school accountability system in the Dominican Republic (DR) involves the use of several national assessments, the reporting of such data, and the training of principals on how to use such data as part of school improvement efforts. While this type of indicator accountability system does not include specific consequences, there is still significant measuring and reporting of student achievement data, with the implied connotation of teacher and principal responsibility for specific school outcomes. The problem addressed in this study was the lack of research on what school principals know about such school accountability in the DR, and how they might use any aspect of the indicator system to improve school performance. The purpose of this qualitative study, therefore, was to capture the voices of school principals in the DR regarding what they know about the system, and how they see their role as leaders in using data from it to improve student achievement. There was also interest in whether there were any thematic differences between higher and lower performing schools.

Using a basic qualitative design with an interpretative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 principals in urban Santo Domingo. Analysis of the data revealed three major themes and 12 sub-themes. Findings reveal that all principals know something about school accountability, but with different meanings. Most participants acknowledged some elements of a school accountability system (e.g., standards, goals, performance, measurements, reporting, improvement plans), and indicated they analyze, use, and share the information produced by assessment and evaluation, acknowledging it as an important
source of feedback to teachers, students, parents, and schools, considering it a powerful tool for school quality management and improvement. However, their level of knowledge and their articulation of data usage differed.

Similar to literature on leadership, findings show that all participants declared themselves as leaders and claim the capacity to balance pedagogical tasks, operational factors and motivation for others. All acknowledged duality in their functions as principals, being both managers and leaders, and most believe their primary role is as a leader within the pedagogical process. However, and contrary to the literature related to the role of principals, none articulated the concept of instructional leadership, one of the primary roles of the school principal. Finally, the study showed a glance at a possible larger research: there seems to be different characteristics between those principals working in higher and lower achieving schools, related to their knowledge and understanding of school accountability.

Recommendations go toward additional research on the knowledge (or lack thereof) of instructional leadership in school principals in the DR, and on leadership in general related to principals’ use of it to improve their school outcomes. To leaders, it recommends revising the current DR school accountability system to further clarify key concepts and data usage for principals, and to offer further training in this regard. The last recommendation is for higher education providers in the DR to revise their education programs, to include a stronger conceptualization and practice of school accountability.

These results contribute to the literature on school accountability and leadership in the DR, characterizing principals’ knowledge and their use of the current system. It also adds to the knowledge based regarding principals leadership for improving student performance in their schools.
SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY WITHIN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS’ BELIEFS AND KNOWLEDGE

by

Massiel Cohen Camacho

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology Western Michigan University August 2023

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Patricia Reeves, Ed.D.
Ancell Scheker Mendoza, Ph.D.
Zadkiel and Amina, my children, this is for you in hopes that those who choose to serve people like you, do so with great understanding and wholeheartedly. You have given me strengths I never thought I had, and thanks to you, I know what unconditional love and effort are. I want to acknowledge my husband, Luis; none of this would have been possible without you. Your strength, love, and devotion to our family inspire me to become a better person and professional every day, give my best, and be the best I can be. You are my rock, my partner, my life. To Leonardo and Reyna, my parents, who gave me all and made me who I am today. To my sister Michelle, my friend, who believes in me no matter the circumstances, and shows me what bravery is, pushing me to strive for better and higher. Dhymar, my brother, you have been with me all along, reminding me what hard work and fighting for loved ones is. Glenys, Enmanuel, your support was essential to me.

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This accomplishment is not just mine but of so many people that supported and carried me along the way: family, classmates, and friends. But above and beyond, my Creator. I kneel in my heart before Thee.

Massiel Cohen Camacho
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Historically, Latin America faces disadvantages in comparison with other regions and countries, having noticeable levels of heterogeneity in terms of development and wellbeing. Nonetheless, by 2010 after the creation of public policies majorly related to investment in infrastructure, basic health, and education services, thus elevating the population’s well-being indicators, there has been some level of improvement in living conditions (OEI, et al. 2010). Despite the progress, there are still many challenges for the education system, both in access and quality. According to the Organization of Iberoamerican States, educational coverage or access is defined as the guarantee of availability of a seat for every school-age child, which represents the quota that the public sector can commit to as a basic offer (OEI, 2010).

The global movement “Education for All” marked the beginning, however small, of improvements in the education system in the country. The initial focus of the movement at its birth in 1990, was on basic learning needs, access to education, equity, and quality. Later in 2000, the Dominican Republic (DR) and 164 other countries formally reaffirmed their commitment to the movement, as most of the original issues were still pending, including low levels of student learning, lack of teacher training, and insufficient and inefficient education services (UNESCO, 2000). DR interest on facing these issues pushed it to consider other international key projects such as the Educational Goals 2021, proposed by the OEI, and the Global Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015 with an international agenda.

In the year 2011 a national movement called “Coalition for a Dignified Education” emerged, as a unified civil society pressure group to demand the enactment of Article 197 of the General Education Law (i.e., Ley General de Educación 66-97, 1997), which mandates that 4%
of the gross domestic product be annually assigned to the education system. The intense activism led to a historical agreement between 10 competing presidential candidates for the 2012 national election, who signed the promise to allocate a lawful percentage of resources to national education; to comply with the agreements, the new budget began in 2013, increasing by 70% (Caraballo, 2016). Following this, new schools were built, the school day was expanded from four to eight hours for all students in most schools, and teacher and principal training and professionalization were heavily promoted.

Despite several decades of focus on education reforms and funding, international assessments still consistently place the DR in the lowest rank of various educational measurements (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement [IEA], 2010; UNESCO, 2000, 2008, 2014; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2016). The DR has participated in some of the most trusted international assessments, obtaining similarly low rankings in all studies. These studies measure students’ knowledge and skills, their goal being to measure educational quality, efficiency, and equality at a large scale (OECD, 2016). These facts suggest that there is a gap between educational attainment, meaning, how far a student may go in their educational career according to availabilities, and educational achievement, which is the measure of how much a student has learned according to educational goals and standards; this is what makes educational equity and quality difficult goals to meet (Marope, 2014).

It is interesting to note, as a measure, that during 2018 (which is the most recent public data available), the Ministry of Education of the Dominican Republics’ (MINERD) budget was 3.1 billion dollars, of which 51% was dedicated to K-12 education services, 9% to building and repairing schools, and 3% to teacher training (MINERD, 2018). Of this budget, over 10.3 million
dollars was dedicated to standardized assessments, research, and evaluation. This is equivalent to 0.35% of the overall budget of the MINERD. This budget overview has been placed here as an illustration of the Dominican reality, but it is important to know that updated information on expenditures was not publicly available, likely due to the recent changing scenarios, like the SARS COVID 19 pandemic when schools shut down and so did research, as well as a change in administration after the 2020 election.

Even though learning cannot be easily measured directly due to its complex nature, standardized assessments are used as a proxy to measure learning, and evidence has long revealed a statistical relation between test scores and gross domestic product (Hanushek & Wößmann, 2007). Such assessments are commonly part of a school accountability system, and if we assume these measurements as a base, then the DR still has a long way to go. Yet, few studies exist on the DR’s school accountability initiatives and whether or how any efforts are being used to improve educational quality, efficiency, and equality.

**Background**

The term “accountability” involves a specific connotation of holding others accountable for specific school outcomes (Hamilton et al., 2013). Hanushek and Raymond (2001) stated that over the past decades, researchers have identified different definitions of school accountability systems; however, the common denominator is always measuring and reporting student achievement with the purpose of improving student performance by improving the performance of various actors (e.g., teachers, students, principals). A common assumption of accountability systems is that either incentives, sanctions, or both will influence such individuals to change their behaviors in order to follow prescribed educational processes and achieve performance goals established by policymakers. A comprehensive accountability system typically involves: (1)
goals for performance; (2) measurements of the goals, which tend to consist of standardized tests; (3) reporting of performance on those measures, which is made available to the public; and (4) consequences tied to the performance measures, which may include a combination of monitoring activities, rewards, sanctions, and technical assistance for teachers, students, and schools. This complete set of actions and strategies is what is often called a *performance-based school accountability system*, knowing that the heart of it is the alignment between standards, educational processes, and student achievement (Hanushek & Raymond, 2001; Hamilton et al., 2013).

The ultimate goal of a performance-based accountability system that includes monitoring and consequences is to increase student learning via a mechanism that assigns a set of intervention measures (O’Day, 2002). Such accountability systems are considered a basic component of educational quality; they are meant to exercise pressure on governments and school leaders to take the necessary steps to ensure effective school function. In addition, emphasizing accountability practices in schools brings awareness about student learning and effective instruction (Cates et al., 2010).

In contrast with comprehensive performance-based accountability systems, there are *indicator accountability systems*, the type currently in place in the DR. Such indicator accountability systems often miss the setting of specific goals for a given specific school, and consequences tied to meeting, or not, such goals. Instead, they typically consist only of public reports on student outcomes of standardized tests in every school, and do not involve explicit consequences tied to these outcomes for schools (Hamilton et al., 2013), nor ongoing monitoring. Indeed, in the Dominican context, MINERDs’ Ordinance No. 1-2016 only requires every school to implement compulsory external assessments of students’ learning, in both public
and private schools. External means that the assessment is not elaborated nor administered by the school, but by an agency from the Ministry of Education.

There are three types of standardized external assessments currently used in the DR. The first is the National Tests (Pruebas Nacionales), a curriculum-based assessment developed by the Ministry of Education, and implemented in 12th grade every school year, in part to certify the finalization of secondary education, which enables students to go on to tertiary education. There is a no-passing consequence for students, although students have the right to repeat the test until passing. These National Tests, as a high school graduation requirement, serve both as a certification system and as an information system on students’ performance. The student score is a combined grade, composed by the sum of 70% of the student achievement as measured by teachers according to the school’s standards, while the National test is worth the remaining 30% of the final passing grade.

The second type is the Diagnostics Assessment, a set of census assessments in reading, math, for all students in third, sixth and ninth grades. The results are supposed to be used by school staff to create a tailored improvement plan for each school, although there is no formal monitoring regarding the creation of such a plan, or improvements in results.

The third type are the international assessments in which the country participates, such as the Program for International Students Assessment from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (PISA/OECD), the International Civics and Citizen Study from the (ICCS/IEA), and the Comparative and Explanatory Regional Study from the United Nations Education and Scientific and Cultural Organization at its Latin American Laboratory for Educational Quality Assessment (ERCE/LLECE) [Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo del Laboratorio de Evaluación de la Calidad Educativa]. These country-comparative assessments
are developed by international organizations and administered locally to a national representative sample, with the permitted national adaptation of instruments. The product of these assessments is usually a national report intended to impact policies at a national level.

We may interpret these three types of standardized student assessments as a Dominican school indicator accountability system, because they only comprise some elements of a more comprehensive accountability system. This system of mandatory assessments does not establish specific goals for school performance, other than the curriculum standards for grades and cycles, nor does it contain positive or negative consequences for schools based on results. Indeed, the Program for the Promotion of Educational Reform in Latin America and the Caribbean (PREAL), in its 2010 review, reports that there are no general policies regarding serious accountability in the DR, beyond the autonomous management of finances in schools. This report suggested that the National Test should be used as an accountability system to measure student progress and questioned the absence of consequences.

One important component of a school accountability system, whether it be a comprehensive system with all the elements, or a partial indicator system like the one in DR, is the school principal. In a meta-analysis of over 5,000 studies published since the 1970s, Waters et al. (2003) found that principal leadership is positively correlated to student achievement and identified 66 leadership practices with a statistically significant relationship to student achievement. The authors organized those 66 leadership practices into 21 principal leadership responsibilities and identified seven of those responsibilities, most associated with second order change (i.e. the type of change that accomplishes significant positive change in student outcomes through fundamental changes in school systems, processes, and practices). More recently, in 2021, the Wallace Foundation published an updated synthesis of studies on principal leadership
emphasizing four classes of leadership behavior and three areas of skill and expertise positively associated with student achievement (Grissom et al., 2021). In the DR a school principal has the responsibility of monitoring and evaluating school processes, curriculum effectiveness, instruction and assessment, and their impact on student learning.

**Problem Statement**

Despite the availability of several types of national assessments that report on student academic outcomes, it was unclear if and how DR principals use the results of these assessments. It was also unclear if Dominican principals understand the value and potential use of the data from the indicator school accountability system in DR. Overall, scarce evidence could be found about the specific use of the accountability system data in the DR. Therefore, the problem addressed in this study was the lack of research on what school principals know about school accountability in the DR, and if they use any aspect of the national accountability indicator system to improve school performance.

Theorists and scholars who study school accountability merge in the idea that the topic is complex. Research and discussions revolve around different issues, such as the use and validity of testing, how accountability impacts policy-making, and diverse effects such as curriculum narrowing and instruction alterations or teaching to the test (Gunzenhauser & Hyde, 2007). While researchers have found mixed effects of performance-based accountability on student achievement, some findings reveal that teachers and administrators change their behavior in order to respond to the incentives provided by the system (Hamilton et al., 2013). Several studies have also found that the impact of expenditure, parental education, and family circumstances on student achievement were statistically insignificant when contrasted to the impact of accountability measures (Hanushek, 2005; OECD, 2015). However, research is still mixed on
whether all types of accountability systems lead to changes in schools that could result in improved student academic outcomes. Some evidence of research identified an increase in student achievement within accountability systems with consequences (Hanushek, 2005), while others find little evidence of such gain (Rothstein, 2005).

There has been extremely limited research in the Dominican system related to these issues. In a mixed methods study about effective schools in the DR, Valeiron et al. (1988) found evidence that some of the basic components of school accountability, such as principal leadership, evaluating teachers and study plans, and frequent student progress monitoring, were strongly related to more effective schools when compared to less effective ones. It is interesting to notice that there is no account of any conversations about school accountability in political or academic spheres around those years. In fact, even today, this conversation is not common.

In another study, Morales et al. (2014) surveyed 353 school principals in DR schools, where they self-reported their abilities related to organization, administration, teaching, internal relations, and external relations. These researchers found that accountability-related aspects, such as using student data and statistics to improve teaching and analyzing test results to assess student progress, were not predictors of student performance on the National Test. This raises many kinds of questions about the different processes to achieve student performance in Dominican schools.

Another interesting data set is the one collected via the school questionnaire as part of the Program for International Students Assessment (PISA). The DR participated for the first time in PISA in 2015. This involves measuring students’ skills and the learning context data collected via several types of questionnaires. One such questionnaire is completed by the school principal, thus named “the School Questionnaire.” After reviewing the public data set for the DR from this
instrument, specifically, the section on *Assessment and Evaluation*, the volume of missing data was noteworthy, meaning that the majority of the school principals in the sample did not answer this set of questions. This section collected data regarding school accountability, such as teacher monitoring practices, student assessment methods and purposes, and the use of achievement data and evaluation results for improvement (OECD, 2017). Therefore, questions emerged about whether DR school principals even know what school accountability is about, if they understand the concept, what they know about the DR’s set of national assessments, whether or not they understand those assessments as part of the DR national accountability system, and if or how they are using any aspects of those assessments to improve students results in their schools. Likewise, there is scarce data on principals using their leadership to implement needed changes indicated by the results of national assessments.

**Purpose Statement & Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to capture the voices of school principals in the DR as to what they know about the country’s school accountability system, and how they see their role as leaders in using data from this system to improve student academic achievement. Specific research questions for this study were:

1) How do Dominican school principals describe their knowledge of school accountability in the DR’s education system and the elements that comprise it?

2) What experience have principals had analyzing, interpreting, and making decisions based on data from the DR accountability system assessments?

3) How do principals understand and experience their role as leaders, both in general and as it relates to the DR accountability system?
4) What thematic differences might exist between principals working in lower-performing schools and principals working in higher-performing schools?

**Significance of the Study**

The results of this study may be relevant for future policymaking, regarding the potential reformulation of the current accountability system, and the assignment of clear standards, goals and of responsibilities for the outcomes to the relevant actors. It also may be pertinent for training and revision of leadership development programs at the university level, not just for principals, but for teachers and other staff as well.

**Conceptual Framework & Narrative**

The ultimate goal of assessment and evaluation in education is to gather evidence on the basis of which to improve the quality of educational outcomes. In most countries, this translates to expectations for raising student educational achievement as measured by assessments that can be used to compare results between and within countries and between and within the educational institutions of those countries (OECD, 2013). Holding schools and teachers accountable for student educational achievement can be a powerful tool for changing teacher and school behavior; moreover, a system that does not employ an accountability system that measures student achievement may not respond to organizational and political demands nor to the needs of the users (Rosenkvist, 2010).

In line with this idea, it was important to bring to our conversation an aspect of human behavior: mental models. Human beings create representations of reality and the world they inhabit in their minds. To make sense of how they experience the world, people create *mental models*, based on current and previous experiences to assist in understanding reality. These mental models are useful to humans because they become trusted means for making sense of the
world and a person’s experience in that world (Senge, 2006). Thus, they tend to dictate our actions and define our performance (Wilson & Rutherford, 1989). According to Senge (2006), our mental models also inform the way we act toward a certain task. To apply this construct in behavior interpretation is crucial to understand that mental models are active agents, in the sense that they shape our actions.

Johnson-Laird (2010) explains mental models as the product of a vision of how we perceive the world. Also, when an individual understands a description of the world, like a certain situation, object, task, etc., individuals are able to construct a representation of the world based on the meanings assigned to it and on the knowledge they already possess. For Johnson-Laird, key aspects of cognition are based on the construction and manipulation of mental models, which can always be modified with new information (Johnson-Laird, 1981, 2010).

Considering the previously defined construct of mental models, it is possible to assume that these models can shape all actions and attitudes taken by school principals, revealing how they see themselves as leaders, how they conceive, and act toward the DR’s accountability elements. Thus, my study sought to understand the experiences of Dominican principals within the dynamic of the country’s current school accountability system, and how they use data from this system and their leadership for improvement; this dynamic is viewed through the lens of mental models, to understand how one shapes the other (see Figure 1).

The first box in Figure 1 reveals two different aspects of school management in which the principal functions: a dynamic between the principals’ leadership and their possible use and knowledge of the accountability elements in DR. In reference to the principals as leaders, it is important to learn about their experience in (a) using the accountability elements available, (b) the meaning they assign to their role as leaders, and (c) how or what they do to improve student
learning and performance. In their 2021 meta-analysis, Grissom et al. summarized the magnitude of principals’ effects on student achievement gains, and other outcomes. They found strong evidence that effective principals drive student success. Across the studies they analyzed, the average estimated impact of increasing principal effectiveness by 1 standard deviation is 0.13 standard deviations in math and 0.09 standard deviations in reading. As well as identifying three areas of skill and expertise, and four categories of principal behavior that affect student achievement.

**Figure 1**

*Dominican Principals Using Aspects of an Accountability System (Cohen, 2023)*

In reference to knowledge of the accountability elements in the Dominican education system available today, it is important to understand principals’ knowledge regarding the (a) assessment data of the students, (b) public reports of the National Test and the Diagnostic
Assessment, and (c) the school improvement plan that is required as a result of the Diagnostic Assessment.

Accountability systems based on assessment and evaluation results produce an important source of feedback to students, parents, teachers, and schools and are one of the most powerful tools for school quality management and improvement (OECD, 2016). This feedback comes in the shape of the above-mentioned elements. Testing students’ performance informs how well the student is doing, but also provides a view about school and teacher performance. The premise is that by focusing on student outcomes and behavioral changes in students, teachers and schools will respond with change strategies. Some accountability policy advocates believe that reporting on students’ outcomes alone will drive all agents to change their behavior in order to produce the desired outcome (Hanushek & Raymond, 2001).

This leads to the last aspect of my conceptual frame model, whereby any differences in principals’ roles for improvement and their knowledge about the DR accountability elements may be visible between (1) lower achieving schools, and (2) higher achieving schools regarding student academic outcomes, as interpreted through the Diagnostic Assessment from 2019.

Methods Overview

This study uses an emergent qualitative design, with a basic interpretative approach, since I am interested in capturing the experiences of school principals related to the current Dominican school accountability system, including how they see their role as leaders using aspects of the country’s accountability system to improve student academic achievement (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data are collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 in-service principals from secondary public schools in DR, with four coming from schools identified as higher performing,
three from schools viewed as average performing, and three from schools considered lower performing via the country’s Diagnostic Assessment results.

**Chapter I Closure**

In this chapter, I have reviewed the meaning of the concept accountability, as well as the state of educational accountability in the DR, noting the middle ground where it stands: there is the standardized and centralized curriculum, standardized assessments and their corresponding reports, but there is no consequences for achieving educational goals, or lack thereof, nor how these consequences should be or look like beyond the student responsibility. Amidst all there is the school principal, whose leadership is the focus of attention when situations call for change and improvement. Chapter 2 will visit in more detail all these ideas and how they work interactively.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I focus on the existing academic literature regarding school accountability as a system. In an attempt at deconstructing the concept, I begin by taking a look at the theories that brought into existence such controversial and complex actions, for which arguments pro and con are very much disputed. To understand an accountability system, one must be clear about the components: mechanisms, actors, processes and tools. But also, there should be a clear understanding of the dimensions from which it can be discussed.

Evidence found for this chapter shows that principals’ leadership, as well as core values and beliefs are the real factor changing the results of the equation.

School Accountability: Theory

Accountability matters. According to UNESCO’s Global Education Monitoring, accountability is esteemed to be a key instrument for a quality education system, and its issues have been part of major educational reforms for many decades (Carnoy et al., 2003; Grindle, 2004; UNESCO, 2017).

One could say that people who fund and benefit from educational services, namely, students, teachers, parents, and the community would want to know what knowledge students have achieved through schooling. Throughout almost two centuries, the chosen method has been standardized achievement tests to hold teachers, schools and districts accountable; but also, to examine the extent to which these tests are able to support valid inferences about the quality of educational services (William, 2010).

The idea that results of simple testing could be used to hold students and teachers accountable is not new. In the 1830s in England and Wales, there were two types of funding for
public schools: voluntary organizations, and the state. The first were essentially religious
organizations, while the latter was funding used to expand the building of new infrastructure,
teacher training, and to foster attendance through grants, mostly in rural areas. By then, official
reports, recommended several requisites for public money to be paid to elementary schools, such
as the condition of the school buildings, student attendance, and the performance of students in
an oral examination of every child in every school receiving grants. This system came to be
known as “payment by results,” and had its share of criticism, since researchers have pointed
towards counterproductive results of linking assessment results, including curriculum narrowing,
cheating and manipulation by schoolteachers and managers, and uncertainty in the teaching
profession (Jabbar, 2013; Rapple, 1994; William, 2010).

One of the main ideas behind high-stakes accountability testing is that the differences in
test scores demonstrate a difference in the quality of education (William, 2010), and some
evidence shows it is so. For PISA 2003, in the United States, it was found that about 8% of the
variation in students’ performance in Mathematics and Science, was related to school difference,
after controlling for socio-economic status and other variables. Similar results were obtained in
England, with students taking the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in 2007,
when around 7% of the variance in student outcomes could be attributed to school effect
(William, 2010).

Cross-country comparisons are often used as tools for development in Latin America,
mostly by international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and its agencies, the
Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, and the
Interamerican Development Bank, to name a few. In general, in Latin America, during the 1950s
through the 1970s, policy reforms in education aimed at access-enhancing reforms. Such reforms
sought to increase access to schools, like in rural areas and distant suburbs, resulting in a budget increase, teacher payroll increase, building of more schools, confection and distribution of more textbooks, to mention a few (Grindle, 2004). From the 1980s and 1990s, a different kind of reform started to emerge: the quality-enhancing reforms, which is contentious with the first kind, since this second kind is difficult to implement because it requires a longer chain of actions and decisions.

Access-enhancing reforms were usually politically popular, since they produced visible results in a short amount of time; whereas quality-enhancing reforms were difficult and take longer to implement, oftentimes meaning a loss of control over budgets (decentralization), and an increase in pressures, responsibilities and expectations for principals, students, teachers and parents (Grindle, 2004). This kind also implies that all agents have to adopt new ways of thinking and behaving, and also learn to be accountable for their doings. Specifically, in the DR, the most substantial quality-enhancing reform of the education system happened in 1997, with the proclamation of the National Education Law, as a result of the first ten-year education plan 1992-2002, which brought a new model of community participation, a curriculum reform, trainings for principals, and national testing of students, called Pruebas Nacionales (National Tests, in English).

It should be noted that in the U.S., these types of quality-enhancing reforms started to emerge much earlier (Benveniste, 1985). Carnoy et al. (2003) assert that the 1982 report, A Nation at Risk, marked the start of the documentation of poor school performance, and after this, the No Child Left Behind act formally inaugurated the era of performance-based school accountability. These provisions made it clear that increased state funding for public education would demand calls for enhanced accountability, using standardized student tests as the preferred
tool for measuring success and failure (Carnoy et al., 2003). Much of the existing research available on such systems come from U.S. research and literature; however, the application of accountability systems in developing countries, like the DR, might look different.

**Dominican Republic K-12 School System and Context**

The Dominican education system is centralized, characterized by a central government agency exercising control, and a hierarchical structure. Public education, both primary and secondary, including all resources and school personnel, is funded by the government. Decisions cascade down from the Ministry of Education and through the different levels: Central, Regional, and District, relying on technicians to guarantee the implementation of central norms and regulations. It is mandatory for schools to implement the national curriculum, which specifies the objectives to follow in all subjects and grades. Textbooks used in public schools are to be approved and provided by the Ministry.

Improving educational quality and equity in the DR is one of the most daunting tasks today, hence, the relevance evaluations get in the country. The Pact for Dominican Educational Reform 2014-2030 [Pacto por la Reforma para la Educación Dominicana 2014-2030] (MINERD, 2014), establishes amongst its goals to promote a culture of evaluation and the use of its results for school improvement. Therefore, an important agreement is to continue the application of national and international evaluations with the purpose of getting appropriate feedback on student performance and therefore, guide national policies, plans and programs.

As for principals in the DR, Flores (2012) highlights the historical fact that the Dominican education system has been subject to the ups and downs of political and union interests, rather than the focus of public policies intended to improve learning in schools. Hiring principals and teachers has not been an exception to this rule. Until the early 2000s, teachers from within the
schools were chosen by the MINERD to become principals, without proper leadership training. Even when proper training started to emerge in 1997, the trained principals would often leave the schools to become District Technicians, thus elevating their professional position and salary (Flores, 2012). After the year 2000, a job application process for the principalship started to be implemented, but specialized training was not a requirement. Indeed, a recent thorough review of the national laws and norms on education revealed no specific requirements to become a principal in the DR, other than having been an in-service teacher.

However, as part of somewhat recent efforts to improve the education system, the Dominican Institute for Evaluation and Research on Quality of Education (IDEICE, Acronym in Spanish) issued a document in 2009 that contained performance standards for teachers and principals which were to be used as a guide. It is the first document containing explicit reference to the term accountability, which in Spanish is considered to report back (‘rendición de cuentas,’ in Spanish). In this regard, it should be noted that the term accountability is a poorly translated and difficult term in Spanish, since it fails to convey the responsibility connotation, as does the English word.

Following this, MINERD created the School for Principals (SFP) in 2011. Its purpose is to offer training for in-service principals from public schools nationwide, with a special focus on administration and leadership (Valeiron, 2014). Admission to the program is restricted to principals having at least three years in the position, administering a medium or large school, no older than 45 years of age, and whose schools are at the opposite ends of school performance, as measured by the National Tests: high and low. After a thorough review of the literature, I could not find the criteria for the age limitation and the requirement for principals to come from schools that are either the low or the high end of performance on the national assessments. One
of the central concepts taught in one particular module of this program is the use of information for decision making, as well as the need to reflect on monitoring, supervision, accompaniment, and evaluation of planning for the improvement of institutional administration (Valeiron, 2014). Yet, in reviewing the fundamental curriculum within the SFP, there is no clear instruction on the use of the data available to schools via the nation’s testing system. This program was discontinued and restructured to become a master’s degree program; however, due to the SARS-COV 2 pandemic, it never came into fruition.

Performance-Based School Accountability Systems

Core Components

Why were performance-based accountability systems (PBAS) created? Not only do such systems exist in education, but they are found in many other public service providers. Stecher (2010) briefly traced the history of accountability, in a range of public service areas, explaining that its origin goes back as far as the second half of the 1800s in the private sector industries. Later, around the beginning of the 1900s, performance measurement began in American government activities, as part of the Progressive Reform Movement. This is when a shift occurred, going from money managing emphasis to a focus on measuring the cost versus the results of municipal functions and activities. Stecher based these conclusions on their examination of childcare, education, health care, public health emergency preparedness, and transportation through a broad review of literature on the topic, and internal discussions and workshops about research evidence in the five sectors, with other experts, to examine the features of PBAS approaches.

PBAS was created to influence behaviors within service activities. According to Camm and Stecher (2010), it is possible to target different elements of the service-delivery activity; this
is, the organization that controls the activity may influence some of the element within the activity, such as individuals (managers or other employees) who carry out specific tasks within the PBAS. Since the systems often involve many different agents, it can be difficult to assign responsibility for specific outputs to specific individuals, units, or teams. Also, the authority granted to individuals within a service provider system is limited; therefore, a PBAS should not request individuals or organizations to change things they cannot influence.

The birth, process, and structure of a PBAS work as follows: a service-delivery agent (i.e., a school or hospital), transforms inputs or resources (money or labor hours), into outputs (high-school graduates, surgeries). Sustained in time, the outputs and the way they are produced may be long termed affected (an educated and healthy citizen). Outcomes are then contrasted to some desired goals (Camm & Stecher, 2010). By having information on how the service-delivery agent operates and what it produces, both users and service providers may express their demands for quality and quantity of outcomes. With their encouragement, traditional government management and policymakers might create, and update repeatedly, a PBAS that improves outcomes associated with such services. Presumably, the deliberations and decisions policymakers exercise can produce both high-level PBAS goals and structures (Camm & Stecher, 2010). This can be related to what Senge (2006) calls creative tension, which happens when, within an organization, the current reality does not match the held vision; this incongruence of the vision and the reality exercises a force that generates changes.

A PBAS is composed of three interrelated elements: goals, which are defined as long term outcome, that which is supposed to be achieved; incentives, or a structure that assigns rewards, sanctions, or a combination of both, not exclusively financial, and may include increased autonomy, loss of autonomy, and public reporting, to motivate behavior changes; and
performance measurements (Hanushek & Raymond, 2001; Stecher, 2010; Hamilton, 2013). See Figure 2 for a visual of such a system.

**Figure 2**

*Birth, Process, and Structure of Performance-Based Accountability System (Cohen, 2023, as adapted from Camm and Stecher, 2010)*

It is safe to argue that accountability helps secure transparency (Stecher, 2010); that it offers openness and clarity about what government instances do for citizens, considering that after a measurement, the results are reported and made public. Following, citizens should be free to do as they deem necessary. Indeed, a stricter definition of accountability implies consequences for performance. The defenders of this definition believe that an activity provider, such as an instance, agency, or service provider, can only be held accountable for its performance if it faces consequences. These consequences are to be faced by its administrators, employees, and the
service or activity itself. However, it should be a means to an end in education, but not an end in itself (Stecher, 2010; UNESCO, 2017). Nevertheless, according to UNESCO (2017), for a performance-based accountability system to be effective in improving public services, some circumstances must be present: (1) a shared goal, (2) robust measurements that are easy to observe, (3) meaningful incentives for individuals or organizations that control inputs and processes, (4) few to no competing requirements, and (5) sufficient resources for the system to operate.

Sadly, these conditions are seldom fully achieved; therefore, it is difficult to design and implement a uniformly effective system (Stecher, 2010). Moreover, to achieve shared aims of education, policy-makers must acknowledge actors’ interdependence; in return actors are obliged to provide an account of how they met their clearly defined responsibilities, based on a legal, political, social or moral justification. If people are held accountable for outcomes beyond their control, they are more likely to minimize their role or adjust their behavior in order to protect themselves (UNESCO, 2017). Also, the approach used for accountability implementation must be contextualized, since what is effective in one context, may be detrimental in another. Lastly, in this prescription, for the approach to accountability to be successful, a strong enabling environment is a must; one that provides actors with the necessary information, resources, capacity, and motivation to meet their responsibilities (UNESCO, 2017).

The assumption behind the implementation of a system of accountability for educators is that they have the power to affect student outcomes. And this is not recent, neither a new idea. Since the late 1800’s the principal is seen as the success factor in schools, to whom was given responsibility, authority, and autonomy (Kafka, 2009). Today, evidence supports that school principals play a central role in students' learning, affecting student achievement by choosing
curricula, evaluating teachers, and appropriately allocating teachers' time, and potentially affecting test scores by hiring good teachers and setting academic goals (Billger, 2007; Grissom et al., 2021; Kafka, 2009). Therefore accountability, measured as performance, is a relevant indicator, since the percentage of students who go to college after high school, or even apply to enter college, as well as school's dropout rate, seems to be an indicator of a school's success (Billger, 2007). Consequently, it seems possible that the implementation of accountability standards has heterogeneous effects on educational outcomes. Thus, it seems relevant to understand the inner relationship with the concept and process involved in accountability systems.

In his study, Billger (2007) applied regression models using national data sets from the large-scale study 2000 School and Staffing Survey (SASS) on secondary schools in the United States, to find out if the intention of accountability is to reward the best principals and punish the worst, and therefore induce better outcomes. He found contradictory results. Indeed, lower salaries go to the worst principals and higher salaries to the best, which suggest that sanctions may be an effective reward-punishment system. However, not all best principals receive higher salaries. For some schools, the outcome seems to be explained by a principal's particular managerial skill, as well as an ability to influence teachers and students. Results relating accountability with strong principalship with low salaries are a conundrum. The researcher argues it is likely that the best principals are motivated by their ability to affect students in positive ways, instead of money.

In the face of stress for external accountability policy, prioritizing educational goals proves to be challenging for public school principals. Looking at this problem, Lee and Lee (2020) also used the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) data sets to examine the changes in
principals’ educational goal priorities in the era of accountability. The researchers used the quasi-experimental method *difference-in-differences* to compare national trends of educational goal priorities by type of school funding and period of time. What they found was that, while academic goals grew stronger in the 1991-2012 period, other educational goals lost momentousness, like personal growth and vocational skills. Another finding was that public schools’ changes in goals priority were substantial in relation to private schools’ changes.

Also, at the school level, they used logistic regression looking out for effects of NCLB Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status controlling by principals’ educational priorities. In this regard, Lee and Lee’s (2020) study showed that schools that made more emphasis on basic skills and less on academic excellence and personal growth, were related to the ones failing to meet the NCLB AYP. This study concludes that public school principal’s academic goals have been prioritized due to test-driven accountability measures, at the expense of other equally important goals, advocating for opportunities for educational leaders to redesign accountability systems and integrate nonacademic goals for a more wholesome education.

**A Mental Construction**

Carnoy et al. (2003) sustain the theory that schools must manage a sense of accountability as an intrinsic part of its functioning, since it is rooted in its day-to-day operations, directly affecting how educators deliver their educational services. To these authors, not only do schools assume accountability, but they do so to function and solve their problems, which is reflected in how students, teachers, parents, and staff get involved in the school’s most important issues. External accountability systems, like formal national exams, are only some of the components influencing schools’ function and operations, as previously explained in this chapter.
School accountability implies finding ways to make students, teachers, and the community responsible and more committed to the task of education; it conveys a sense of concern as it is used as a tool to increase the value of a school diploma (Benveniste, 1985). In previous decades, assessment and accountability were loosely connected, and schools built their conceptions of accountability from many sources, including principals’ and teachers’ personal beliefs about the teaching and learning process, the way they develop their work, and what they think about students (Carnoy et al., 2003); but also, there are external pressing factors, like the expectations from parents, communities, and governmental agencies who fund them.

In this regard, Carnoy et al. (2003) established a scheme of three interrelated tiers to explain how the sense of accountability is built: (1) responsibility, (2) expectations, and (3) formal accountability. These mechanisms may present themselves in a formal or informal way. And finally, the consequences might be high stakes or low stakes. Details about this scheme are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

_Construction of a Sense of Accountability (Cohen, 2023, adapted from Carnoy et al., 2003)_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanism</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibility:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Informal:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Low stakes:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct at an individual level</td>
<td>Set of mechanisms in which schools respond, regardless of bureaucratic rules and regulations.</td>
<td>Results are approved or disapproved by the school principal or school board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expectations:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Formal:</strong></td>
<td><strong>High stakes:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents, teachers, administrators, principals, students: a collective sense of accountability.</td>
<td>Recorded in a policy handbook (like standardized curriculum, standardized external assessment, and public reporting)</td>
<td>Involves public disclosure or financial sanctions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal accountability:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementational rules (standards and norms), implementation mechanism (assessments, exams), incentives.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Implementing school accountability implies the use of talking, as a method and process for local and personal logic shift, according to Lowenhaupt et al. (2016). An effective channel to implement accountability measures is rhetoric in the form of speech or talk, appealing to the ethos of responsibility. In a study using secondary analysis of recorded interviews, capturing a total of 650 instances of speech, collected in 1999-2001 in the United States, to interpret accountability talk in the United States, these authors found that while reorganizing administrative structures in schools, the use of rhetoric to argue for a restructure that would allow better supervision for accountability facilitated a more effective monitoring of teachers. The principal would use persuasion to motivate teachers for them to make decisions based on ethical responsibility towards the students. Therefore, according to their findings, principals would appeal to the moral component of accountability to effectively implement it.

Although from a different professional area, another example is the study conducted by Mansouri and Rowney (2014) with medical professionals to assess the utility of financial incentives and external control methods to secure accountability in health care delivery. For this, they interviewed a sample of 20 medical professionals working in publicly funded services in Alberta, Canada, using semi-structured in-depth interviews, embedded in a grounded theory approach. Findings revealed that accountability was not one of the main concerns for medical professionals as the word “accountability” was not mentioned; instead, the word “responsibility” was used. Physicians were more interested in their autonomy than accountability. Participants believed using too much control meant they were seen as untrustworthy; however, this did not mean that they should not be subject to any control mechanism. They also believed their goal as medical doctors is not just about economic interest, but personal and social values, including humanity and dignity, and that adding new control methods to the ones in place may result in an
overlap. Moreover, concentrating extensively on external control leads to demoralization of professionals, and creates a feeling of disrespect and intrusion, which hinders the development of accountability relationships.

Mansouri and Rowney’s (2014) study concluded there is no perfect model of accountability. Control and rational monitoring can involve proactive means of directing peoples’ conduct through orders, laws, and regulations, but that these mechanisms are not accountability per se. Instead, it refers to the sense of individual responsibility, and concern for the public interest, which includes personal and professional accountability, concepts that go beyond external control and economic incentives. The researchers reached the conclusion that, although rational calculation and monetary motives may be valid, they do not explain the complex human behavior. Other constructs need to be considered into this equation, such as confidence, altruism, ethics, dignity, and respect. For the authors, there is no all-encompassing accountability theory that can help academics understand the complex relationship among the diverse range of accountability promises and pressures. Such a theory is difficult to construct because of the multifunctional and contingent nature of accountability. Nevertheless, when a principal and an agent share the same core values, or work in a rich social environment, an internal sense of responsibility is created, and accountable behavior can result.

Further, depending on the stakeholder, different types of accountabilities are rendered. They may coexist, and ideally, several types would be combined for better school effectiveness, since each form has its own strengths and weaknesses (Darling-Hammond, 1991; Maroy & Pons, 2019). These are:

- **Bureaucratic (administrative, managerial) accountability** can be understood as top-down accountability established by formal organizational structures that schools must comply
with. It holds teachers responsible for following standard procedures. Also understood as when accounts are rendered to senior managers. It is about the achievement of measurable objectives set in prior agreements.

- **Market-oriented accountability** requires schools to deliver the products and services that consumers expect on the basis of previous declarations; customers being parents and students. It makes the school accountable to their “customers”.

- **Political accountability** is when accounts are rendered to the citizens via their elected officials; meaning that the local community assesses if the school performs according to political promises.

- **Professional accountability** refers to meeting and upholding the professional standards as defined by the teaching profession. In other words, it is focused on teachers, to emphasize their preparation, certification, selection, and evaluation.

- **Moral accountability** implies the correctness or morality of individuals’ or organizations’ actions.

**School Principal’s Beliefs, Role and Leadership Related to Accountability**

For my study, it is important to know what the existing literature say about what school principals believe and understand regarding school accountability, and accountability in general. The pending question is whether Dominican principals have been instructed on the topic of accountability, and if so, is it a construct they have internalized as a core value? Also, we need to better understand what role(s) they see themselves playing within the accountability world.

**Principals’ and Teachers’ Beliefs About Accountability**

There is evidence of the benefits of using school accountability related to the working environment and climate. This means trust, peace, democracy, motivation, improvement, quality,
and transparency. However, to understand these benefits, it is important to understand what principals, teachers and school staff believe about it, in order to understand the conception from which their actions part.

For example, Argon (2015) conducted a case study in Turkey with a sample of 56 subjects, including principals, assistant principals, and teachers from primary schools. Some findings were that principals understand their accountability as undertaking tasks correctly, the ability to explain and or defend their decisions, as well as carrying out their actions in accordance with the laws and regulations, being responsible and transparent, undertaking tasks correctly, being open to supervision, providing information, and being ethical. Argon concluded that principals, teachers and school staff believe everyone should be accountable, from the janitor to the principal, but also that personnel should have clear accountability towards one another, including students and parents. Another conclusion was that factors such as incompetent administration, traditional management approach, personal relationships and politics, and classical inspection approach were found to be limitations for upholding accountability as a practice.

As another example, the study conducted by Amdur and Mero-Jaffe (2017), with the purpose to examine the interrelations between policymakers’ intentions for test-based accountability policy, and the perceptions and actions of school principals and teachers. The researcher found that the interrelations between intentions, perceptions and actions are tightly coupled. For this study, the researchers used a mixed methods approach, on a sample of 24 policymakers, 80 school principals, and 168 teachers, who were interviewed and surveyed during the years of 2005-2006, in Israeli public schools.
Specifically, Amdur and Mero-Jaffe (2017) found that policymakers assign different intentions to test-based accountability as a policy. There are intentions relevant to the school level; meaning that there must be accountability toward the provider of the resources, which is the Ministry. In tandem, another intention is to collect data that could contribute to a better allocation of resources. Other intentions are relevant to the state level, which means that policymakers believe there needs to be minimum standards and common goals for all. Regarding principals and teachers, it was found that they had the perception that the policy was intended to improve achievement, having international tests as an indicator, to procure a minimum standard for all students. Moreover, school agents were aware of what was expected of them in the light of standard based testing. Principals and teachers took necessary actions in terms of test preparation, in a synchronized and well-orchestrated way to ensure students success, even when not all teachers were as enthusiastic about testing as were the principals. However, according to the researcher, school principals and teachers were less in tune regarding the use of test results. Principals, analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of their school and made the necessary changes, accompanied by an action plan designed based on the data. Also, they provided teachers with guidance in instructional planning and in identifying areas in need of improvement. Some school principals shared the results with parents, and some met with colleagues to compare results and discuss cooperative action.

Overall, Amdur and Mero-Jaffe (2017) concluded that principals and teachers assume policymakers’ intentions regarding test-based accountability policies and transform them into actions that match the expectations. Also, principals believe that the test, its report, and the school action plan unify their actions, therefore making it a tightly coupled system. Some of the positive aspects include staff cooperation, improved budget allocation, and more teacher
professional training. Yet one more positive outcome was the apparent effect on principals’
distributed leadership, since they became aware of the need to dedicate time and energy to
preparing and implementing the test, which allowed them to become responsible for all aspects
related to the standardized tests in Israel.

Alignment between goals and practices is also important. In a final research example,
Paufler and Sloat (2020), examined the ways that school administrators and teachers defined and
measured the effectiveness of a teacher evaluation system in South Carolina, which is part of the
larger encompassing accountability system. The researchers sought to understand ‘participants’
perceptions of alignment between their district’s teacher evaluation system and the states’
teacher evaluation framework. For this, researchers applied a conceptual framework based on
five standards (1) effectiveness, (2) popularity, (3) fidelity of implementation, (4) adaptiveness,
and (5) longevity. For the purposes, they conducted a sequential mixed-methods study using data
from a comprehensive district program evaluation, but also collected data via interviews,
surveys, and a focus group, during the 2012–2013 school year. The sample for the study included
25 principals, 28 assistant principals, and 13 district administrators who serve as evaluators, as
well as 1444 Pre-K to 12 teachers. Researchers administered two survey questionnaires for
administrators and teachers, respectively. For the focus group, they shared the findings to a
group of elementary and high school teachers to review the findings and conclusions.

In this case, Paufler and Sloat (2020) found that school administrators and teachers seem
to define, measure, and perceive the value of their district’s teacher evaluation system somewhat
differently. On one hand, administrators valued the standards of effectiveness and fidelity of
implementation more as having an actual or potential positive impact on teachers and students.
On the other hand, teachers highly valued the adaptiveness of reforms to meet local needs in
practice. Teachers believed that evaluation should provide critical feedback to them to improve their professional practice, based on the information from the evaluation. However, the state policy-directed framework, which is implemented by administrators, visualizes accountability itself as a way to improve practice. The most important finding was that there is a misalignment of purposes and goals, or a lack of fidelity of implementation within and across schools.

**School Principals: Managers or Leaders?**

Everything that happens or does not happen in schools shapes the organization: students’ and teachers’ behaviors, interaction among the school community members, expectations, and the type of leadership that exhibits the principal (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). The school principal is the officer, most times one may say the main officer, in charge of administering all aspects of the operations. But not only this, he or she also assumes a leadership role, thus is vital in shaping the school culture, with their values, attitudes, expectations and behaviors.

Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004) differentiate two types of roles of the principal: managerial and leadership. The principal leader, the effective one, exhibits the capacity to balance his personality with daily tasks and operational factors, but at the same time works as a source of motivation for others. For Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004), the manager role is one aspect of the leadership role.

For the purposes of this study, is important to define the difference between management and leadership regarding the principalship, even when these strands of activities are disputed in the school environment. Therefore, for a better understanding, I used using Bush (2011) formal leadership models, assuming that a school is an organization with a hierarchical system in which:
…. managers use rational means to pursue agreed goals. Heads and principals possess authority legitimized by their formal position within the organization and are accountable to sponsoring bodies for the activities of their institutions. (p. 40)

Thus, it is safe to assume that educational management and leadership appear juxtaposed. As any other enterprise, tying schools’ objectives, aims and tasks with management fundamentals are essential. Educational management is concerned with aims and purposes in education. It does not have goals in itself with a ranking order; instead, it is a group of activities used to effectively achieve a pre-established goal. Moreover, the pursuit of efficiency should be the mission statement of management; however, these goals are defined by other actors. Goals and purposes produce a sense of direction (Bush, 2011).

Meanwhile, leadership is of a different nature. It involves intentional influence over others, a set of values, and a clear vision. According to Bush (2011), the term ‘educational management’ began back in 1985, when Hughes (1985), Bush (1999), Bolam (2004), and others, started using it inspired mainly by Taylorism with its ‘scientific management.’ In the United Kingdom, it was already a trend by the 1960s, and around 1980 the Department of Education Created the National Development for School Management Training. Such programs later became popular in universities and colleges (Bush, 2011). Nevertheless, the peak of these types of programs was reached by 2000, when the National College for School Leadership was created.

Focusing on educational leadership, Bush (2011) proposes a classification of school leadership into 10 models:

(1) Managerial: this type of leadership is parallel to management models. It is limited to technicism, ensuring the implementation of the school vision and strategy.
(2) Instructional: it stresses the need to focus on teaching and learning as the prime purpose of educational institutions. Its downside is that it underestimates the other purposes of education.

(3) Transformational: in this type, the leader is expected to engage with others in a vision, in order to produce higher commitment towards achieving organizational goals.

(4) Participative: it promotes teachers and stakeholders participating in decision making processes. It's also known as shared, collaborative, or collegial.

(5) Distributed: it focuses on collective leadership, rather than singular.

(6) Transactional: it is based on the exchange process with teachers and other stakeholders. It has been criticized for not producing long-term commitment to the vision and values of the organization.

(7) Postmodern: it focuses on the different individual perceptions within the organization. It highlights the need to deal with individuals instead of an undifferentiated group.

(8) Emotional: it is a subjective model, concerned with individual motivations and interpretations of events. Its most interesting contribution is that, since it is occupied with feelings rather than facts, it calls out the attention that rational approaches do not fully explain the intangibles, like how exactly principals enact their leadership role.

(9) Contingent: this type acknowledges the leverage of adapting the leadership style to the situation at hand. It requires the leader to be in a constant ‘responsiveness mode’, where there is a diagnosis of the situation and a choice of a leadership style for a specific course of action.
Moral: it focuses on values, beliefs, and the ethics of the leader, with a moral purpose.

Even though instructional leadership became the go-to model for principals as it became more popular, I must call the attention about the fact that there is an ongoing discussion on whether the principal should be inclined to instructional leadership, or if this is a task for teachers amongst teachers, the legitimate instructional leaders (Bush, 2011; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). Moreover, it would be unrealistic to find an educational institution conducting daily activities under one model, theory or approach to management and leadership. Complex organizations demand their managers and leaders to be able to shift from one model to another according to the moment and situation.

There is little doubt that exhibiting leadership skills and behaviors is important when it comes to school management, especially around the implementation of accountability systems. One might ask: how do school leaders behave under the accountability pressure? For this, Mitani (2018) systematically examined the relationship between NCLB, its sanctions and the effects on school principals. To understand this, the study investigated the association between NCLB sanctions and (1) principals’ working conditions, (2) job stress level, and (3) turnover behaviors. Working with 45 states and using data from (1) the Schools and Staffing Survey data, (2) the Principal Follow-up Survey data, and (3) school-level adequate yearly progress (AYP) and assessment data to estimate this association using a propensity score.

Evidence of associations were found in Mitani’s (2018) study. NCLB sanctions are related with higher levels of principals’ job stress and also higher turnover rate, but no evidence was found that these associations were moderated by principal or school characteristics. Also, job stress does not seem to be a mediator of the relationship between NCLB sanctions and
principal turnover. In other words, it appears that sanction-based accountability pressure makes the principalship more stressful, therefore, might lead to turnover. The study invites policy makers who design accountability systems to include support programs for school leaders to reduce their job stress level, and to find ways to retain them for a longer period of time.

**School Principals as Leaders within a School Accountability System**

Principals are crucial for school improvement and student success in school. Their role and functions are complex, being of mixed nature. On one hand, there is the managerial aspect of the role, such as serving as a linkage between the school and the district by managing material resources and supervising the school's overall functioning. On the other hand, the effective school principal is a leader for teaching, instruction, and student learning, who procures a vision for the school and strengthens collaborative capacity and leadership within the school.

Such is the case of China. In 2019, Qian researched the role primary school principals play in managing overlapping functions of external and internal accountability systems. Using data from a large-scale qualitative study that interviewed 101 subjects from six locations in China, the researcher sought to understand the perception principals have of top-down accountability demands, and the strategies they assume to acquire strong internal accountability while complying with external accountability. The finding was twofold: first, their work environment is highly political as they are state employees; second, there was no shortage of professional expectation, as their legitimacy is earned by demonstrating expertise and knowledge in curricula and instruction, but also it is important for them to show teachers sincerity and benevolence.

Another example is the qualitative study by Brinia et al. (2014) in Greece, who surveyed 36 school principals in primary schools, aiming at elaborating a profile from a leadership
perspective. They found that emotional intelligence is related to leadership factors; they also found that developing emotional intelligence might be a challenge, but it could become fulfilling for the principal at a personal and professional level. Researchers found that the effective leaders’ profile is characterized by the following qualities: (a) managing interpersonal relationships, (b) innovating in management, (c) activation of teachers, (d) management of planning control, (e) managing ongoing improvement, (f) team management, (g) managing personal development, (h) managing involvement, (k) competitiveness and effectiveness management.

Meanwhile, the personal profile of the emotional intelligent leader is characterized by (a) intrapersonal skills (self-esteem, emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, dependency and self-fulfillment), (b) interpersonal skills (empathy, social responsibility and interpersonal relationships, (c) adaptability and versatility (reality control, flexibility and problem solving), (d) stress management (self-control and endurance to stress), (f) mental mood (optimism and happiness) (Brinia et al., 2014).

Brinia et al. (2014) also found that from a leadership perspective, emotional intelligence is related to leadership factors. For this author, underlying the school principals’ leadership are personal qualities, beliefs and values that guide their practices, which should be guided by emotional intelligence, adaptive, flexible, moderate, self-conscious, honest, transparent, and ethical. The researchers conclude that developing emotional intelligence might be a challenge, but that despite this challenge, it could become fulfilling for the principal at a personal and professional level.

Other research has found that principals’ personal qualities underpinned their leadership, and their beliefs and values guided their practices. Specifically, Gurr and Drysdale (2016)
conducted a study in Singapore using multiple perspective case studies to explore the characteristics and practices of principals in four successful primary schools. While interviewing the principals, teachers and staff, students, parents and school board members, the researchers found that the principals improved the school capacity by redesigning the school structures, especially teachers’ improvement, enhancing their professional capacity through professional development programs and future leaders’ development. They also found that systemic leadership training programs explained to a high degree, the uniformity in leadership styles.

Carless and Dimmock (2001) conducted an exploratory case study in Hong Kong, also finding that instructional leadership is one of the main roles of the school principal. Moreover, developing a clear vision for the school, providing professional development, and introducing innovative learning practices in the school are also responsibilities of the principal. All this takes place in a context of a collaborative culture that includes parents.

Similarly, in Italy, Paletta et al. (2020) set out to explore how a new leadership approach of school principals in the context of the introduction of a new accountability system affected teachers’ practices. This recently established accountability is the National Evaluation System (NES), which is a set of standardized tests of student learning and information on the school context. It requires schools to initiate and manage a formal process of self-evaluation, and the use of the reported results for a strategic improvement plan.

Paletta et al., (2020) study had the intention to examine two premises, that (1) the principal leadership approach in the new accountability system increases the school’s organizational capacity for improvement, intended as instructional leadership, self-efficacy of teachers, collaborative culture and learning climate, and that (2) the school capacity building contributes to stimulate teachers to rethink their professional practices and teaching methods. For
this they used data from a quantitative study about the primary and secondary schools involved in an official pilot project called “School Evaluation and Development,” employing a multilevel structural equation modelling to test the relationships among principal leadership, school capacity building (teacher self-efficacy, instructional leadership of teachers, collaborative culture and supportive learning climate) and change in teachers’ professional practices and teaching methods.

Paletta et al. (2020), found a positive but indirect relationship between principal leadership and change in teachers’ practices and teaching methods, but the indirect effects are mostly the result of increased teachers’ instructional leadership. They concluded that principals have a primary role in building organizational capacity for school improvement by using self-evaluation and improvement processes. Also, the sharing of leadership with teachers appears to be crucial in promoting change in teaching and teacher commitment to improving professional practices. Implications of the study suggest the importance of promoting principals’ leadership for learning development, adoption of a balanced approach to principals’ performance evaluation, and fostering the distribution of leadership in schools.

**Principals Cannot Work Alone: Teachers and other Allies of the School Community**

To contribute to the success of the school, principals establish meaningful partnerships with stakeholders, from inside the school community and also from outside. Some principals rely not only on their actual collaborators, but they support their own leadership on the legacy of their predecessors (Gurr & Drysdale, 2016). In fact, Hoppey and McLeskey (2013) found that principals with a leadership that focuses on creating nurturing relationships based on personal connections with people internally and externally related to the school, seem to have better success while implementing change processes. They examined the role of the principal in school
change during an era of high-stakes accountability. Using a case study of a successful implementation of an inclusive program, Hoppey and McLeskey’s findings revealed the most important role of a principal was to provide support for the teachers, by shielding them from external pressures imposed by high-stakes accountability. The study also mentions that another form of support was providing professional development and giving others opportunities to assume leadership roles.

Undoubtedly, principals and teachers need each other’s cooperation in order to promote change. According to Carless and Dimmock (2001), they can do so by supporting and fostering a climate for innovation initiatives, which includes embracing a deep moral conviction in relation to school improvement that helps teachers and students reach their potential. By engaging in participant observation, Carless and Dimmock conducted a case study with a principal and teachers in a school in Hong Kong, discovering that change may come from different sources, whether it is internal, like strategies introduced by the principal, or external, like in a merge with other academics; but also, initiatives or projects from teachers, since the climate of innovation is supported and fostered. In this regard, the researchers found that the principal needs the cooperation from teachers for all initiatives. They concluded that instructional leadership is one of the main roles of the school principal, as well as developing a clear vision for the school, providing professional development, and introducing innovative learning practices in the school, in a context of a collaborative culture that includes parents.

In relation to student achievement, Anderson (2008) found that beyond the school grounds, promoting relationships with the community, parents, and teachers has great effect. This researcher also found that this relationship proved to be positive especially when it comes to respect and trust. These findings came from a large-scale study in math and language arts in four
Latin-American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico), that examined the relationship between student achievement and school principals’ characteristics. The findings of this study supported that the principals’ instructional leadership is relevant in relation to student achievement, as well as the availability of resources and materials. However, Anderson’s conclusions included a noteworthy statement: that the contrary was established, meaning that, a lack of parent participation and lack of teaching resources was linked to lower student achievement; moreover, emphasizing on student discipline was negatively associated with student achievement.

Furthermore, Gumus et al. (2013) carried out a study in Turkish primary schools, to discover the relationship between principals’ specific leadership behaviors and teacher collaboration. They conducted a multilevel analysis using data from the 2008 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) sponsored by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). In their study, they discovered a positive relation between the instructional leadership approach assumed by principals, with teacher collaboration. On the opposite hand, and similar to other studies, the administrative leadership attitude was related negatively with teacher collaboration.

But principals not only ask for collaboration from others; they also attend to the needs of others. So, adding on to collaborative relationships between principals and other agents, Iachini et al. (2016) found that principals identified and described a range of academic, and nonacademic needs faced by their students, teachers, and school staff. In particular, mental health was identified by principals as one of the greatest students, teachers, and school staff needs. These findings suggest that principals’ perspectives broadened their priorities within school improvement models. These findings emerged from both a survey and a phone interview with
principals from 21 schools were asked to participate in both the online survey and follow-up phone interview.

Further, in Iachini et al.’s (2016) study, all principals scaled the importance of each potential need to a great need for students at their school. Overall, the greatest needs reported by principals about their students were (1) behavioral and mental health, (2) social support and mentoring, (3) extracurricular opportunities, and (4) academics. An emergent theme about social support and mentoring needs was rooted in the need for more support from stakeholders outside the school community. In conclusion, not only do principals manage and lead the school, but they attend to specific needs within the school community, such as mental health. The researchers reached the conclusion that school improvement and school mental healthcare are particularly related.

The Relationship Between Principal Practice and Student Achievement

In a meta-analysis, Grissom et al. (2021) quantified how much principals matter for student outcomes. The analysis included studies using different methodological approaches, all of which collected data in the United States and were published in English. It turned out to be a difficult empirical problem for three main reasons: (1) principals’ effects on students are mostly indirect, unlike teachers, (2) the timing of principal effects is difficult to identify because some changes a principal might drive in a school affect students quickly (implementing a new curriculum, increasing instructional time), while others may be more gradual, (3) many factors that affect student outcomes are beyond the principal’s control (availability of resources, state policies shaping school functions).

They found strong evidence that effective principals drive student success. It was their discussion that if a school district could invest in just one adult in a school building to improve
his or her performance, investing in the principal is the most efficient way to affect student achievement.

As they synthesized the literature, Grissom et al. (2021) identified evidence of three categories of skills and expertise that leaders need for success, as well as four interrelated domains of behaviors and practices. The set of skills are (1) skills and expertise to support instruction, (1) skills to manage and develop people, and (3) skills related to organizational management. These domains interact and overlap, increasing student achievement. But skills and expertise alone are not enough to affect schools. The four behaviors integrate instruction, people, and organizational skills: (1) engaging in instructionally focused interactions with teachers, (2) building a productive climate, (3) facilitating collaboration and professional learning communities, and (4) managing personnel and resources strategically.

According to the researchers, expertise in all three of the skills underly engagement in the four leadership behaviors, and are required to see improvements in school and student outcomes. A leader may be more proficient in one skill area or another and may need to build proficiency in other areas to assume more effective practices that will benefit students and the school.

**Chapter II Closure**

In this chapter I have presented a literature review, some of the theory that sustains school accountability systems, principalship, Dominican principals, and what evidence shows about how they respond to accountability measures when imposed by authorities in top-down policies. Leadership, however, becomes paramount to the task of implementing and promoting such a system.

School principals are the archetypal figure related to responsibility and efficiency in the school. What they do, what they believe, and how they relate to every actor in the community
makes a difference in the culture, thus in the overall performance of the school. Even though there is varying evidence about the benefits of a school accountability system, findings about positive effects abound, greater than negative. Leadership, without a doubt is an essential component for any enterprise. School accountability is not the exception.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to capture the voices of school principals in DR as to what they believe and know about the country’s school accountability elements in place, and how they see their role as leaders using data within this system. Specific research questions include:

1) How do Dominican school principals describe their knowledge of school accountability in the DR’s education system and the elements that comprise it?

2) What experience have principals had in analyzing, interpreting, and making decisions based on data from the DR accountability system assessments?

3) How do principals understand and experience their role as leaders, both in general and as it relates to the DR accountability system?

4) What thematic differences might exist between principals working in higher-performing schools and principals working in lower-performing schools?

In this chapter, I present the study’s selected research methods, methodology, and design. I also describe the population and sample selection and the context in which it will occur. I also describe the proposed data analysis in detail. One very important segment in this chapter is the trustworthiness of the study, which I explained the extent to which my study reaches this.

Research Design, Approach & Rationale

Considering that I was interested in understanding how Dominican school principals make sense of the DR accountability elements and make meaning of their leadership role in using aspects of an accountability system, I used a basic qualitative design with an interpretative approach. According to Prasad (2005), basic qualitative research is a kind of low-inference
interpretation that is likely to result in an easier consensus among researchers. It is about presenting facts in everyday language. Basic interpretative research is a descriptive method. It is the simplest and most commonly employed methodologic approach (Ary et al., 2018; Sandelowsky, 2000). After researching this methodology, I learned that it is relatively unacknowledged because it has different names. It is a descriptive account of a phenomenon using data collected to understand another person's world or experience. The idea is to learn and describe the participant’s sense-making (The Research Methods for the Social Sciences, n.d.). A basic interpretive study is a descriptive account of a phenomenon using data collected to understand another person's world or experience; the idea is to learn the sense-making of the participant and describe it (The Research Methods for the Social Sciences, n.d.).

I was interested in knowing if school principals know and use the various accountability mechanisms with a clear purpose, if they feel responsible for students' learning and achievement, and if they have used the resulting data of the assessments. I wanted to describe what all that looks like in the Dominican Republic. Basic interpretive research can include both qualitative and quantitative information. For my study, I gathered information such as gender, education degree of the participant, time in position, time in other positions, number of students in the school, and school type (grades). This is why a basic interpretive approach seemed to be the correct methodology for my study.

Population, Sample & Site

The population for this study was composed of all school principals working in secondary public schools in the educational Region 10 of Santo Domingo. Regional 10 and 15 is composed of approximately 750 schools, and Regional 15, which gathers around 680 schools. According to the last curricular reform (Ordenanza 02-2017 for secondary) refers to the
nomenclature given to first, second, and third grade within secondary education’s first cycle and fourth, fifth, and sixth grade within the second cycle. Table 2 shows the equivalence for the American system. This relatively new nomenclature reflects the latest International Standard Classification of Education or ISCED 2011, including requirements such as period duration and other specifications for each grade and cycle (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012). I selected secondary schools because this is where the Diagnostic Test (DT) for the third grade of secondary school takes place in 2019. This is a census assessment intended to measure students’ academic achievement in math, reading, social studies and science at the end of the primary and secondary cycle.

**Table 2**

*Grade Equivalence DR to American Education System (Cohen, 2023).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Age</th>
<th>Grades in DR</th>
<th>US Name</th>
<th>Grades in US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>First</td>
<td>First</td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>Second</td>
<td>SECOND CYCLE</td>
<td>Second</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-9</td>
<td>Third</td>
<td>ELEMENTARY SCHOOL</td>
<td>Third</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>FIRST CYCLE</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-11</td>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>SECOND CYCLE</td>
<td>Fifth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-12</td>
<td>Sixth</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sixth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-13</td>
<td>First</td>
<td>JUNIOR SCHOOL</td>
<td>Seventh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-14</td>
<td>Second</td>
<td>FIRST CYCLE</td>
<td>Eighth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-15</td>
<td>Third</td>
<td>HIGH SCHOOL</td>
<td>Nineth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>HIGH SCHOOL</td>
<td>Tenth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-17</td>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>SECOND CYCLE</td>
<td>Eleventh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-18</td>
<td>Sixth</td>
<td></td>
<td>Twelfth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the last curricular reform, the nomenclature for school grades changed to primary and secondary, each having six grades, divided into two cycles. The implementation lasted
several years but was completed in 2016. First, second, and third grade are in the primary’s first cycle; while fourth, fifth, and sixth grade are in the primary’s second cycle; this is equivalent to first through sixth grade in the American education system. Then we have the first, second, and third grades within secondary education’s first cycle; and the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades within the secondary’s cycle (Ordenanza 02-2015, and Ordenanza 1-2017).

As I planned the study, and given its nature, it was my intention to use a unique, purposeful sampling strategy, which is a unique sample chosen because it has certain characteristics related to the focus of the study (Merriam & Tisdel, 2016). The sample should have been divided into two different groups of schools: (1) schools in which students achieved overall higher scores on the Diagnostic Assessment of 2019, and (2) schools in which students obtained overall lower scores on these assessments. The purpose of selecting two different groups of schools was to see if there were any thematic differences between principals in higher and lower-achieving schools in the Diagnostic Assessment 2019. However, recruiting participants became difficult, and therefore participants were selected overlooking this specific criterion. Nevertheless, after interviews were completed, my data analysis was able to still consider the students' average performance in each principal’s school, and to draw some thematic conclusions.

The universe from which I drew the sample included all public schools in Santo Domingo, Regionals 10 and 15, that participated in the DT 2019. To harmonize the pool of potential participants, I considered the following strata: the school’s geographic location (Regionals 10 and 15, urban Santo Domingo), and school funding (public schools). Regarding participants’ recruitment, school principals in these lists who satisfy the inclusionary criteria were contacted via telephone, following a previously established script (see Appendix A), and
the first ten who agree to participate became part of the sample. I avoided contacting via email as a first step since, in my experience, it is not as efficient as contacting via telephone. I recruited my participants via telephone, explaining the purpose of the study and explicitly stating that there are no direct benefits nor consequences for the participant, but rather they would be collaborating just by participating in the study. When the potential participant agreed to the interview, a consent form was emailed prior to the interview. Once I explained what the consent form is and cleared out any doubt, when the participant agreed, a time and date were set.

Data saturation is important; it is the criterion for deciding when to stop sampling the subjects in the different categories. This means that the researcher is not finding new data to develop a category or theme, and the data collected is repeated again and again from subject to subject (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I felt comfortable that I reached saturation with the 10 participating principals in my study.

School-related exclusionary criteria included any special education schools, schools in which the test was not administered, and any school outside of Regional 10 and 15. Other exclusionary criteria were rural and private schools. Also, elements such as the socio-economic status of the population, or others, were not considered for the selection of the school.

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures

Data Collection Processes

The data collection method for this study involved the use of a semi-structured interview with each principal (see Appendix C for the interview protocol in both English and Spanish). For Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a semi-structured interview is the middle between a highly structured or standardized interview and an unstructured or informal interview. The more open-ended the question is, the more freedom the participant gets to explain their reality in their own
personal way. According to these authors, when specific information is needed, a more structured section is added to the interview, but usually, the questions are flexibly worded, or they are a mixture of both more and less structured questions. It becomes a conducted conversation with the participant that answers questions with open responses and follow-up questions of the ‘why’ and ‘how’ types (Adams, 2015). This type of data collection allows the researcher to engage in the emerging view of the participant and allows for openness to new ideas on the studied topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For my study, the interview questions were created, and pilot tested with five principals, and later refined.

All data collection protocols were conducted and recorded in Spanish as both the participants and I are native Spanish speakers. I asked for Human Subject Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) approval before recruiting and sampling the participants, who were informed about their rights, the risks and benefits of participating in this study.

Through the pilot test, I learned that conducting good qualitative interviews and building a good instrument takes practice. I also learned that a study truly comes alive when you go out in the field, because all the theories become either realities or fallacies. Furthermore, I learned that as a researcher, I must have respect and gratitude for the participants, who took their time to collaborate with me, without getting any benefit for themselves. Nonetheless, I also learned that some people like or need to be listened to. Many people want to tell their stories, and in many ways, that is some sort of reward for granting the interview.

After the pilot, I modified and deleted questions that were difficult to understand for the participant, and also reviewed the questions in contrast to the proposed literature review and the conceptual framework. In order to make sure the study is intentional and focused, I aligned the
research question with the questions in the interview. Table 3 shows this alignment. Note that the order in this pairing is not the same as in the final instrument.

**Table 3**

*Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions (Cohen, 2023)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCH QUESTION</th>
<th>INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| How do Dominican school principals describe their knowledge of school accountability in the DR’s education system and the elements that comprise that it? | 1. What is the first thing that comes to your mind when I say *school accountability*?  
   a. How would you define it?  
   b. Where did you learn about school accountability? (academic program, special instruction for principals, professional training, Regional or District common jargon, other place)  
   c. Do you feel accountable for anything in your school?  
   d. To whom do you feel accountable?  
|                                                                                  | 2. Do you know what is expected of you as a principal?  
   a. By the Ministry  
   b. By teachers and staff  
   c. By students  
   d. By parents  
|                                                                                  | 3. Do your teachers and staff know what you expect from them?  
|                                                                                  | 4. Do your teachers and staff know what other people within their education community expect from them? |
| What experience have principals had analyzing, interpreting, and making decisions based on data from the DR accountability system assessments? | 1. What are your thoughts about the National Diagnostic Test?  
   a. Do you think about the use of this test results?  
   b. How do you use the reports that come from the test?  
   c. Have you received training to analyze and/or interpret the data?  
   d. Do you share the results or reports with teachers, parents, students? How?  
   e. What happens when results of the test are low?  
   f. What do you think is your responsibility in this process?  
   g. In your opinion, what is the value of the results/reports of the test?  
|                                                                                  | 2. Regarding the academic area, could you describe the process for decision making in your school? |
### Table 3 - Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCH QUESTION</th>
<th>INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do principals experience their role as leaders within this accountability system?</td>
<td>1. Please start out by describing your role as principal. In your own words, tell me:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. What are the most important activities you carry out in a typical school day?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. What would you say is your primary focus each day?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. What determines which activities you prioritize as a principal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. In what ways do you interact with teachers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. What do understand is a “leader”?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. What does a leader do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Do you see yourself as one? Why? Why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. How do you make change happen in your school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. As a school principal, what helps you focus on students’ academic achievements?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. What drives your attention away?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. How would you describe your relationship with your teachers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. How would you describe your relationship with other members of the education community (staff, students, parents, etc.)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. What do you value the most in your job?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What thematic differences might exist for principals working in lower performing schools compared to those principals working in higher performing schools, both with similar types of student characteristics?

### Data Collection Trustworthiness

To ensure the process of data collection is fully trustworthy, I collected data through one-to-one interviews with school principals who voluntarily decided to participate. Working on the
basis of voluntary participation implies the freedom to withdraw at any moment, but it also means engagement.

Besides the recordings of the interviews, I also relied on memos, notes, records, and member checking to guarantee trustworthiness. I used researcher memos during data collection to record my own experience in this study, which I later integrated into the data analysis process. Through these memos and notes, I documented my reflection on the data collection process as I progress in the interviews. As for member checking, I kept a record of field contacts and shared with participants the interview transcriptions in Spanish for them to check that what is written is what they intended to say during the interview and to solve any possible doubt or detail that would allow me to get a greater depth of understanding and thus increase the likelihood of saturation. After interviewing 10 participants, information saturation was reached, and there was no need for more participants.

**Data Analysis & Trustworthiness**

**Data Analysis Processes**

I analyzed the data collected through interviews by looking at how principals describe their knowledge of elements within the DR’s school accountability system and the assessments that comprise that system. In other words, by looking at their understanding of the meaning of accountability and its implication with their role. This data allowed for the elaboration of thematic differences among principals from higher-performing and lower-performing schools with similar types of students. Taking from Hamilton (2013), and Hanushek and Raymond (2001), for the purposes of this study, school accountability is defined as measuring and reporting student achievement with the purpose of improving student performance by improving
the performance of teachers, students and principals, having a particular connotation of responsibility for specific school outcomes.

To reach the objectives of my study, it was important to explore data without the influence of my own biases. One of the ways in which I addressed the bias of trustworthiness was by repeating the analysis several times to ensure that I am noticing direct and indirect key features. Although I was mainly interested in the differences between high-performing and low-schools’ principals, I also looked at all 10 of my participants.

As established earlier, the general approach for this study is interpretative. This means that the data was closely examined, described, and connected to the existing literature. I started the data analysis of this study simultaneously with the data collection, as it is the most difficult part of the process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The process of data analysis included (a) coding data (b) narrating each case (c) categorizing (d) finding commonalities (e) ensuring categories were described, and (f) comparing and contrasting findings. This allowed my cross-analysis in order to find the themes and sub-themes. I analyzed the principals from high-performing schools together with the principals from low-performing schools. Some differences and similarities emerged.

From my transcribed interviews, I coded segments of information, arranging the information from the interviews in a systematic order, using the participants’ words, thus allowing me to capture the emerging patterns (Saldana, 2013). The codes were drawn by making notations next to relevant data that might potentially answer my research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This coding process was repeated several times, including a first cycle that flows free as I identified the salient points in the segments of data, observed expressions and words, and wrote memos of overall impressions, and a second cycle where I observed any patterns in
the emergent codes to identify themes or categories (Saldana, 2013) that allowed me to focus on
content and research questions. I conducted this part of the analysis with extreme attention to
detail to ensure that data is appropriately coded. It helped me better understand data meaning.

Coding, or code writing, is a method that enables the researcher to organize coded data
that is similar into categories because they share some characteristics; this is the beginning of a
pattern (Saldana, 2013). To get this going, classification reasoning was applied, adding intuitive
senses to build the code groups (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, the codes were grouped into
categories that reflect repeated patterns. Categories that are responsive to the purpose of the
research were named either by me, using both words the participants use, and based on the
literature that supports this study. The categories created were interpreted in order to build a
Throughout this process, I used analytic memos to deeply reflect on the meanings that words,
codes, and themes evoke during the coding process, or as Saldana (2013) puts it: “thinking and
thus thinking even more” about the data.

In order to answer the last research question, I completed first and second-cycle coding
for all participants to capture the nuances of the emerged thematic elements in order to articulate
those nuances in the proposed thematic statements. The sub-themes elaborated on, illustrated,
and provided varying iterations for the major themes.

**Trustworthiness during Data Analysis**

Here I present other strategies I used to ensure trustworthiness in my study, focusing on
the four components of trustworthiness discussed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). I also established
the approach I am assuming regarding the concepts of validity and reliability in relation to
qualitative research, as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). The purpose of this qualitative
study was to capture the voices of school principals in the DR as to what they know about and understand the country’s school accountability system, what they know and have experienced with data collection, analysis, interpretation, and uses of the results for data-informed decision making to support continuous improvement in their school. Also, how they see their role as leaders using data from this system to improve student academic achievement. Also, to know if thematic differences might exist for principals working in lower performing schools compared to those principals working in higher performing schools, both with similar types of student characteristics. In order to achieve this, I used semi-structured interviews, after which I transcribed verbatim, coded and grouped into themes as I analyze the resulting data.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), trustworthiness in interpretive qualitative research is about producing knowledge that is valid and reliable, in an ethical manner. In other words, conducting research that is ethical implies demonstrating validity, and reliability or “the extent to which there is consistency in the findings” (Merriam et al., 2016, p. 265). The applicability of these terms acquires a different dimension in a qualitative study.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness involves establishing the researcher’s credibility, or confidence in the 'truth' of the findings; dependability or showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated; and confirmability, which means the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher’s biases, motivations, or interests. To demonstrate credibility, dependability and confirmability, I revisited and reviewed, and reflected upon the coded material during data analysis phase, after it was classified into categories (Richards, 2015).

Credibility is also referred to as validity, defined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) as the extent to which the findings of the research are credible. By using member checking addressed
validity, and reliability. This is a method in which the researcher returns the transcribed interview or the analyzed data to the participant for him or her to confirm and validate it (Birt et al., 2016). Another way to add to member checking is consulting the participants while transcribing the interviews, to check information in case where doubt may raise (Richards, 2015). All this was done in the process of transcription and data analysis. One more way to establish credibility, which I used was memoing during data collection to capture insights that emerge as I read and re-read transcripts. These were useful to determine if I needed to have a follow-up conversation with participants. Finally, I enhanced credibility during an interview by asking participants to share examples, of their typical day or week, keeping mind that I needed a full and deep understanding of how the participant experiences and makes sense of their entire role as a principal before you can reliably get to an understanding of how they experience and make sense of their accountability role.

As for transferability or external validity, Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that it refers to the extent to which a study can be replicated, and the prescribed technique is thick description. In order to do this, I will describe the findings in detail, as well as the context and settings, which will allow a possible transfer of my findings to other times, settings, situations, and people.

Lastly, there is confirmability, which is the neutrality shown in the analysis of the data. To achieve this, I relied on reflexivity. To aid in this, some of the record types I used were: raw data, including written field notes, resulting structure of categories (themes, definitions, and relationships), findings and conclusions, a report that includes connections to existing literatures, and an audit trail. Specifically, I considered the personal notes (reflexive notes and motivations) and expectations (predictions and intentions), in order to record methodological decisions and
the reasons for making them, and my reflection of what is happening in terms of my own values and interests.

**Reflexivity**

International large-scale comparative assessments in education was my field of work for 15 years, leading the implementation of some of the world's most rigorous large-scale international, standardized quantitative studies. I was responsible for managing research projects that provide national system-level evidence to policymakers and international reference. These are major, complex, and challenging projects, which I enjoyed very much at a personal level, and being in this role has greatly influenced my identity as a professional and how I assume responsibility in my country’s educational system. Some of the things that I enjoyed the most in this work were how standardization guides the actions and decisions to take and how steps and guidelines are orderly and accessible. Standardization in the form of manuals, written standards, deadlines, and forms, it all shaped me and my professional style.

I chose to study school principals because I believe that this is one of the key agents in students learning. But the word that singles out a difference here is responsibility, which, in my experience is not always fully tangible in our public schools. It is my assumption that school principals should understand their role and assume responsibility over students’ academic achievement and understand and employ effective accountability. But in my view, principals in DR are ill equipped and trained, and not much is asked in terms of accountability for students’ learning. Historically, union fights and struggles to improve teachers’ salaries and work conditions have been very clear; however, the linkage between their demands and the product of their services seems week in my perception. I think students and their families deserve better, not just as citizens and as taxpayers, but most importantly as human beings. I want to delve in the
human part of the matter and see which mental models govern principals’ actions. I think it could be possible that principals and teachers do not know the extent to which they impact their student’s life, and the potential to make a difference through their role. We need to go back to humanizing teaching and learning in this country. Responsibility is important to me.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

The data collected for this study was embedded in the DR context, therefore it only represents the experiences and realities of a group of Dominican school principals within the Dominican school system. Findings and results are delimited to this population. My findings are also limited by the fact that data were collected via a one-time interview, and the amount of information that can be acquired via that setting.

**Chapter III Closure**

In this chapter, I have presented the methods to use in this study, which were instrumental to its purpose and aid in answering the questions considered here. I have defined the research design: basic qualitative design, with an interpretative approach, also known as basic interpretative research. It has the intention to understand the world or experience of a person. The population and sample selected are principals from secondary schools in Santo Domingo, who were interviewed using a semi-structured instrument to allow them to express their experiences, feelings, and beliefs.

As shown in this chapter, data was recorded, transcribed, and coded to form categories that might reflect a pattern. However, this being a qualitative study, the data was inevitably filtered by me, the researcher. This is why I used several trustworthiness methods to guarantee credibility and reliability. Finally, it is important to know that the findings of this study cannot be
generalizable, since it reflects the experiences of a small group of school principals of Santo Domingo.
CHAPTER IV
PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES

Chapter IV presents individual profiles of the participants in this research. This chapter is intended to explain respective school principals' knowledge about school accountability and describe their experiences in their day-to-day reality. Participants describe their convictions about how accountability should be rendered, how they learned about it, and their many experiences working with teachers.

As a reminder, the purpose of this qualitative study was to capture the voices of school principals in Dominican public schools as to what they know about and understand the country’s school accountability system and what they have experienced with data collection, analysis, interpretation, and uses of the results for decision making for the improvement of their students and their school. A second aspect of interest was to explore how they see themselves as leaders using the available system elements to improve student academic achievement. So, aspect number one is how much they know about school accountability; aspect number two is, since their professional position is inherently managerial, how they implement this knowledge, if they have any, in any methodic manner; and aspect number three is, since leadership is inherent to their professional position how they use it if they acknowledge their capability to be one.

Prior to looking at each participant narrative, it is important to revisit the definition of school accountability used in this study. This is, measuring and reporting student achievement to improve student performance by improving the performance of teachers, students, and principals, having a particular connotation of responsibility for specific school outcomes. This was taken from definitions by Hamilton (2013), and Hanushek and Raymond (2001).
As mentioned in previous chapters, access to the principalship in DR had not been clearly defined until a few years ago. Therefore, many principals today started by first becoming teachers and climbing up hierarchically in their schools. Today they must compete for the school principal position, filtered by a written test. It is also worth mentioning that many well-respected national universities offer post-graduate studies in school management, school leadership, and other such studies, in which in-service principals have been enrolling for the past two decades. Many of these study programs were financially supported by funding from the DR government.

I have divided each narrative into three main parts: (1) principals’ description of the Dominican school accountability system and the elements that comprise it; (2) principals’ experiences analyzing and interpreting data from the system, and decision-making parting from their interpretation of the data; and (3) the principals’ descriptions of their action and influence as leaders for the school in general, and for accountability in particular. These three parts align with my first three research questions (see Figure 3). Overall, these participant narratives are offered to help the reader understand a more comprehensive picture of each participant’s story and its meaning, allowing a better understanding of the analysis processes detailed later on.

**Figure 3**

*Alignment of Research Questions and Participant Narrative Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principals’ knowledge of school accountability</th>
<th>Using the accountability elements available to improve student learning and performance</th>
<th>Meaning principals assign to their role as leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do Dominican school principals describe their knowledge of school accountability in the DR’s education system and the elements that comprise it?</td>
<td>What experience have principals had analyzing, interpreting, and making decisions based on data from the DR accountability system assessments?</td>
<td>How do principals understand and experience their role as leaders, both in general and as it relates to the DR accountability system?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My sample includes 10 principals working in schools in urban Santo Domingo within the public system; this means private schools were not included in the selection pool. Table 3 summarizes some demographic aspects of my 10 participants, using pseudonyms assigned to each to protect their identities. In this table, the participants are placed in descending order according to the average performance score for their school in the Diagnostic Assessment of 2019.

I constructed the average performance score for each school by averaging the scores from the four different averages for domains covered in the assessment (Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science). The Diagnostic Assessment was conducted in 2019 to measure students’ assessment in ninth grade nationwide, and the national mean was 300 points, and a standard deviation of 50 points. Data was obtained from the Quality Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Education.

For the purposes of the analysis, my first four participants are considered as coming from higher-performing schools, while the last three are deemed from lower-performing schools. The remaining three schools in the middle are considered average-performing schools. Following table 4, which shows the participants demographics, are the individual participant narratives for each one to help tell their stories.

It is important to note that I, as the researcher, did not know the average performance score for each principal’s school until after I had completed all of my interviews and wrote up each participant’s narrative. Only then, did I look up their performance data regarding each school, and then arrange my narratives in the order of highest to lowest average scores. This was done to assist in my analysis of my fourth research question, which relates to possible thematic
differences between principals in higher and lower-performing schools (with this analysis
offered in later chapters).

Table 4

Participants’ Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years teaching</th>
<th>Years as Principal</th>
<th>Years in other positions</th>
<th>School average test score</th>
<th>Last academic degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elisabeth</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwin</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rylee</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elijah</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reign</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanna</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolanda</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elisabeth

Elisabeth is a 56-year-old female with two years in her position as principal. Before this,
she was the academic coordinator for 10 years in this same school, preceded by 13 years of
teaching experience in this school. She has a master’s degree in school administration and a
bachelor’s degree in education. It is an urban school offering services to students from
kindergarten through high school. As we started our conversation, I perceived her as calm,
collected, and shy. Or perhaps she felt as if she was being assessed. Following her interview and
my writing of her narrative, I determined that her school is a higher-performing school, with an
average score of 355 points.

Elisabeth’s Knowledge of School Accountability
As per her knowledge of school accountability, Elisabeth is quick to define it as:
The level of internal efficiency of the school. This is regarding student repetition, drop-outs, and student promotions. And I am responsible for sharing this information with the Ministry, the school board, teachers and staff, families, and the community.
She says she learned about school accountability through information and training imparted by the Ministry. Also, even though she offered no details, she stated that teachers and staff know very well what is expected of them:
We have talked about this specifically, at the beginning of the school year, about their role as teachers. Also, with the staff. If they don’t know, it’s because they don’t want to know, but they are very well informed about what the community expects of them and the families.

Using Accountability Elements to Improve Student Learning and Performance
Around the topic of students’ assessments and performance, Elisabeth told me how their students traditionally have achieved high scores and mentioned this happening since years before when they were a private institution, and still today. Elisabeth explained:
This school has some of the best scores nationally, on the National Test, and in Diagnostic Assessments. But recently, in the Diagnostic Assessment for 6th grade, specifically in Math, we didn’t get good results, and we know why: teachers are not very good at Math. This affects us because students move up to the next grade with deficiencies. We use the assessment reports to analyze the situation, to know where we have to improve, and which content was the most deficient, so we analyze this and work to solve this weakness.
Elizabeth tells me how primary grades (from first to sixth grades) are essential as a base for learning in secondary grades and how they intervene as necessary, especially with the teachers that need the most help. This comes from their analysis of the assessment reports, which they share with teachers, and everyone required to make a change. She states:

We share the results with parents in meetings and the School for Parents; we tell them how the school is doing. We have “pedagogical spaces” with the teachers where we work on our deficiencies and weaknesses. We work harder when the scores are lower; we accompany teachers to see what is happening.

As a teacher of many years, Elisabeth views assessment reports as having the highest value for them and claims to share them with teachers, students, and parents. One of the reasons she finds them valuable is that they provide hard evidence that teachers cannot avoid responsibility for the students learning, mainly when one is failing. Elisabeth shares:

They are incalculable because you don’t leave students ‘hanging.’ I was a teacher, and we would hand in the logs to the principal, and there was no follow-up. But now, as assessment results are presented, teachers are supervised on what is happening with students that fail and what is done to level those students. Now we can see the results and see what happened to that student last year so that we can correct it.

With little detail, Elisabeth claims that the Ministry provides a space for analyzing the reports. She said: The District summons us. They advise us on what to do with the reports.

**Meaning Elizabeth Assigns to Her Role as Leader**

For Elisabeth, her role as a principal is managing the school as a whole. That is the school schedule, teachers and staff, the building, and dealing with all the required documents.
However, the most important task she has is to watch out for the quality of students learning. She makes sure this happens by:

Communicating with teachers and area coordinators, meeting with them for about one-half hour daily to socialize on the day’s activities, what is to be done, and what has been done. I have to be aware all the time.

When I asked about leadership, she said:

A leader is looking out for the process of what is being carried out in an open and motivating manner, always working on the weaknesses and knowing the team’s strengths. A leader has to consider everything: people, processes, and things that might affect the ones involved. And the leader must be very involved with people and the process.

However, she does not consider herself to be a leader. At least not now, because the school’s administration is transitioning from the previous principal. Nevertheless, when change is needed, her resource is meetings with teachers:

I meet with teachers, and I ask them how they’re feeling. We are always socializing with them so they can say everything they need to, what they have been working on, and what has been satisfactory for them. And from what they tell in these meetings, we improve.

As with the other participants, Elisabeth seems to have some knowledge of what this study defines as school accountability; but these concepts, processes, and elements involved in it are loose, and some are unknown. In this case, the person who is meant to lead the process does not consider herself one, which makes me wonder if she fully understands a school principal's complexity and potential influence on the educational process.
Jack

Jack is a 51-year-old male principal at a large religious urban school in close proximity to the city center. The school offers all grades, from kindergarten to twelfth. He has a bachelor's degree in education with a concentration in mathematics, a master's degree in school administration, and is a doctoral candidate. He was a teacher at the same school for 12 years, later he became the academic coordinator for five years, and finally, he became the principal, being there for the last five years. Following his interview and my writing of his narrative, I determined that his school is a higher-performing one, with an average score of 344 points.

Jack’s Knowledge of School Accountability

I asked him what comes to mind when I say, “school accountability.” Jack revealed:

I think about the administrative aspect. But I also think about the pedagogical aspect because student efficiency indices are a type of accountability regarding the academic part. We have a constant following of students’ performance. When their grade is lower than expected, we work with the student and the families, and when necessary other outside support.

As he elaborated on the idea, he expressed the feeling that he was responsible for rendering accounts for the school. He said that he did not learn this at a university, but neither at the Ministry; however, he acknowledges that the latter tries to promote it. His definition was:

At the end of a school year, the student has a mark comparable to earlier years, by student and by grade. So I use this to compare myself to myself as an institution.

Also, he stated that there is a collaborative relationship between him and the teachers, who, to his knowledge, are aware of what is expected of them.
Using Accountability Elements to Improve Student Learning and Performance

Jack refers to the Diagnostic Assessments as necessary because every State must have a diagnostic of their processes to determine how to improve or correct any adverse situation.

Regarding the reports coming from these assessments, he said:

The District prepares a workshop for us on how to interpret the data. They even upload the information to their webpage for us to see it directly. You can see all the means, district, regional, and national. We use this to compare our school to other schools in the area, but also with ourselves. We compare ourselves with the standards we have set for ourselves.

He tells me he shares the results with teachers, students, coordinators, and parents. When student performance is low, the first thing they do is to reflect on the issue with the teachers to motivate them to create a plan and implement it. Together they find alternatives for students’ improvement. For him, the results reports are valuable as a tool they can use guide student performance.

Meaning Jack Assigns to His Role as Leader

Just like all the other participants, Jack described his activities in the school from the beginning of the day; that is: getting to school early, raising the flag, a prayer, taking a walk around the classrooms to check everything is in order, meet with parents or people from the District. But when it comes to his role as a school principal, his answer was clear:

The principal has three roles: administrative, pedagogical, and socio-community relations. All three of them happen every day. I do round through the building to see everything is in place in terms of the pedagogical process; I check the agenda to make
sure I do the administrative work, like budgeting, material purchasing, and financial
statements that need to be transparent; and the socio-community aspect as to do with the
school-community relationship like parents coming in to see any situation with their
child, or other people in the community who want to school space for other activities.

He tells me he tries to focus on all three aspects of the job, but the main one is
pedagogical, and the other two support the first. The curriculum is at the center of the process,
and the teachers are how the learning is achieved. He claims to have a positive relationship with
them based on communication:

Our policy is assertive communication, always positively looking at things, checking,
evaluating, and assessing everything that happens with the purpose of improving, and
always putting the students first.

On the topic of being a leader, he tells me that a leader is:

A person who inspires his or her followers, the people under his responsibility; whether it
be to instruct the person, like what happens in the relationship between teacher and
students; or to supervise or guide, like in the case of a boss. A leader must guide, but this
implies that the followers are motivated to do so. Therefore, for me, it is definitely about
inspiring others. If there is no inspiration, there is no motivation. I try to be a leader and a
role model, but before calling myself one, I prefer others to have their opinion. That is
something else about leadership: you need to share, not centralize, and be open to
suggestions and what others say.

He says he uses the curriculum and standards to focus on students’ achievements,
ensuring they are followed and reached. On the other hand, what takes his focus away is when
they get top-down orders from the Ministry and have to change what they have planned because some priorities have changed.

When it comes to making change happen at the school, Jack comments that he relies significantly on improvement plans:

Every year we assess, we diagnose our needs here in every aspect, pedagogical, administrative, social-community, teacher training, learning resources, etc.; everything we understand is a necessity goes into that improvement plan. The program is defined as short, medium, or long-term, depending on how complex it is to satisfy the need.

Jack was different from most previous subjects I interviewed. He was much clearer on the concepts we discussed. His answers were clear and direct, without too much adornment or straying away from the topic. He was one of the few whose answers coincided with the proposed literature in this study.

Edwin

Edwin is a 44-year-old male who is the principal at a public religious, secondary education school (middle and high school) that offers technical education, providing students with an outlet to the labor market for those who wish to do so. This kind of school is a type of collaboration where a religious order governs the school, and the Ministry of Education financially supports it. In this case, the school is one big umbrella that accommodates primary education grades from First to Sixth, a separate building but one big campus. Following his interview and my writing of his narrative, I determined that his school is a higher-performing school, with an average score of 337 points.

He has a master’s degree in teaching and school administration and has been working in this school for the past 21 years, 19 of which he has had the position of school principal, and two
as a teacher. He highlights that there is a group of nuns that regents three other schools, as well as his school, meaning that he is under the supervision of these nuns and the supervision of the district and other public officials.

**Edwin’s Knowledge of School Accountability**

When I asked about what he knows about school accountability, he answered:

It’s reuniting people to tell them what we are doing for improvement. One could say that it’s the act of conceptualizing, of presenting what was made over a period of time at school, both administrative and pedagogical. Managerial actions are supposed to improve the pedagogical process. When I think about accountability, I think about the quality of learning. But I will present what I’ve done to improve those learnings, not just in terms of money, because there are investments that are not just economic.

He remarks that giving accounts about public money is crucial, marking a difference between public and personal or private money. He expresses an obligation to do so with public money. He acknowledges that he does so, not because he was told to, but because he prefers to be transparent about public money. Such accounts will be rendered to the authorities, the entire educational community, and students.

In our interview, while talking about his tasks and responsibilities, comes a reflection on a recent experience with what he called “knowledge auditing.” This lets me know he has to implement a process of questioning what is going on with the learnings. This was the first indication of a rudimentary conscience of accounts giving, but also the fact that reports giving is done in other places, situations which are possible to learn from; he notes:

I’m speaking about, for example, education and auditing knowledge. How do we know? Nurses and doctors do it; why not educators? We don’t. We do not Audit knowledge. If
there is a student at 60 points, how do we know he went up to 90? Who measures that?

Who reports it?

When listening to Edwin tell me about what he knows and does, he seems to be comfortable in his position as a principal and fairly self-confident; however, what I hear is that for him, the concept of school accountability appears to have two entangled aspects: academic and economical, with particular stress on the economic part of it. Accounts should be rendered to teachers, parents, and students with a certain frequency.

**Using Accountability Elements to Improve Student Learning and Performance**

On knowing, identifying and using accountability elements available in the system, he finds evaluations, in general, to be helpful; but the Diagnostic test, specifically, is necessary. From this, I can deduce that Edwin finds this system valuable. He shares:

It is necessary. But they should send them in a timelier manner, so you would have more time. You compare yourself, and that is what evaluation does; you compare yourself with yourself but also with other schools in the District, in the Regional, and other centers like mine at a national level. In terms of numbers, we are not where we want to be, but we are better than others, so we celebrate that. And when we are not so good, we question ourselves.

He states that his responsibility in the evaluation process is to manage and accompany others in it. He mentions the international assessments and the National Evaluation and their adherence to curriculum and standards:

National Assessments, we have a plan for all of it. Why? Because you teach not only what you want, but what you are asked to. In this regard, we verify what the Ministry and
the congregation want. The curriculum is given. You can’t get too creative there. What we can do is, if we find any weakness, we correct it.

Edwin stated that they only receive assessment reports and, specifically, that they do not get training from the Ministry of Education. Nevertheless, he clarified:

We gather here by ourselves, by domain area, every so often, and we self-critique.

Also, regarding sharing information with others, Edwin claims to meet with parents every two to three months.

**Meaning Edwin Assigns to His Role as Leader**

When asked about his role as a principal, and the critical activities he carries out in the day, Edwin explains:

There are two separate parts, the managerial part and the pedagogical part. I deal with all personnel working in the school. I also deal with the students learning. In schools, the primary focus of the principal is more managerial than pedagogical because the former is more the responsibility of the area coordinator. Because we have a large management team here, and everyone does their thing.

Nonetheless, he refers to administrative duties carried out by the principal as competing with the pedagogical aspect, becoming an obstacle, or interfering with the pedagogical purposes:

There are many distractors. The biggest distraction comes from the same system. Why? Because they send someone from the District or the Regional to accompany you, but they know less than you, and they come here to tell you what you must do. So, I tell them we are not laborers. Education convinces; it doesn’t impose.
While describing himself as a leader, Edwin mentions the ethical person, relying heavily on dialog with teachers and school staff to make change happen and wanting to involve everyone in decision-making. In his words:

Leadership is to unify criteria and actions for the common good. Someone marks the path and encourages leadership. [A leader] promotes good actions for the common good and makes others involved. The leader must encourage leadership; otherwise, he is not a leader. But also, I must constantly negotiate with others and tell them where to walk because the ‘school educational project’ lets you know where you have to walk.

Regarding change, he says:

First, you project them, discuss them, then implement them. I like talking to people. First, I say it to myself, then I meet with the coordinators and tell them, “Let’s measure what we are doing, let’s tell others what we are doing. If ten students failed last year, and you cannot say why, then next year, you have to learn and be able to say why those students failed. That’s how changes are brought up.

From my observations, many times, Edwin’s thoughts could have come through more clearly in our conversation. He cares about accountability, student achievement, leadership, and change, but his explanation of the processes involved was unclear. How he expressed his experience, accountability concept, elements, and process seem scattered and loose.

Rylee

Rylee is a 38-year-old female principal in an urban school serving middle to low-socioeconomic populations for the past three years. This school is located close to the metropolitan area of Santo Domingo. She has a bachelor’s and a master’s degree in education and is currently a doctoral student. Before becoming a principal, she was a teacher for 12 years.
Following her interview and my writing of her narrative, I determined that her school is higher-performing, with an average score of 324 points.

**Rylee’s Knowledge of School Accountability**

On the topic of school accountability, the conversation unfolded in two directions. Rylee’s default definition of the concept was explicit regarding financial resources. But as I probed, she realized there is another side to it. First, it was:

> Every few months, we report on the incoming resources, what has been spent for the school, and what we have invested in it. We do this for the teachers and the whole community. We report on teaching materials and resources, repairs, and any other work needed around the school. In sum, school accountability is the timely report to teachers and staff so they know and have evidence of what is being spent.

Only after I questioned her directly if their accountability was only related to money did something in her face light up, like a discovery of something she already knew. There is more than one kind of accountability:

> Aside from the money, at the beginning of the year, we do a diagnostic assessment, where all teachers must say how their students are, so they report on that. Also, when the technicians from the District visit us, we give them this report. So, we have the administrative part but also the pedagogical aspect. For instance, soon, we will have a parent-teacher conference where we let them know, in general terms, what we are doing, and teachers meet with every parent to talk about how students are doing, about the discipline, and the processes. So, teachers also do their accountability.

As we continue our conversation, Rylee tells me she learned about it while studying for her master’s degree and in meetings and trainings with the District, both in the economic and
pedagogical aspects. She mentions the internal efficiency index, which they must report to the District at the end of the year and make public for teachers.

She stated that she has to give accounts and her responsibility to guide others in this process. She mentions feeling accountable to the school community: teachers, students, parents, society, staff, and the whole school. In her opinion, these processes should be open to the educational community. As per what is expected of her, she says people expect continuous improvement:

Every assessment we do is for continuous improvement, to know what we are doing and what we should be doing differently. We schedule meetings with teachers and parents to share the assessment reports and listen to their opinions. We take this into account for improvement plans.

Using Accountability Elements to Improve Student Learning and Performance

Rylee mentions the National Test reports regarding her experience using elements in the accountability system. The district gathered the school principals to give them the results, and so they gathered their teachers to discuss them:

We gathered with our teachers to see the graphics, let them know our indexes, and see what we could do regarding classes, programming, class review, and what to improve. The idea is how we can help as a school. If resources are needed, which ones do they need? That’s how we make continuous improvements. If we don’t know how we are doing, we will not know how to reach our goal. We set goals and measure learnings; this tells us what to improve this year. It’s essential to make the necessary adjustments and elaborate improvement plans.
She stated they received the reports from the District, where they analyzed the graphics and percentages in a workshop type of training in detail. Following, she shares the information and analysis with the teachers, which she believes is her responsibility:

I must gather the teachers and see our results to find our deficiencies and search for solutions and improvement plans so the results can change. If we have better results, this means that there is better learning. And this is what we all want, to raise our results each year. Reporting is valuable because this is how we improve our process.

Other tools she mentions to be in use are the curriculum for standards and the school year schedule. The curriculum is adjusted as the populations’ needs dictate, but always within the legal boundaries. Decisions are taken as a group in a collegiate manner.

**Meaning Rylee Assigns to Her Role as Leader**

Rylee sees herself as a leader. In her words, a leader is:

Someone who has followers. They know how to work, but a leader helps them grow by delegating activities. But the leader must educate others so they will be self-reliant. For example, I may have a situation, not be present at school or have a meeting at the District, but things here should keep running as usual. The leader is the trailblazer who guides and helps others develop, but they must follow their process. I believe I’m a leader because I follow up on the details and recommend the strategies, but I let them perform their responsibilities. We have meetings, see our weaknesses, and work on our growth.

She says she relies significantly on periodic meetings with teachers and staff and the school calendar to keep everyone on track. Other methods for maintaining group cohesion include a bulletin board, memos, and a WhatsApp group. However, to focus on students’ performance, her preferred method is accompanying teachers in their classroom practices. This is
carried out with academic coordinators, and together they supervise activities. These activities also serve as a way to get to know what people expect of her.

This is how she makes change happen at her school:

When the change concerns students, we work through projects to have that interactive experience, using visual resources and many other elements. This is how we motivate them because it’s not a matter of one day; we have to enroll them in the idea and educate them about it to get them to change their behavior. When it’s about teachers, we have formal meetings and memos. When it concerns someone specifically, we meet privately and reach agreements.

In relation to other participants in this study, Rylee seems to understand better what school accountability is. Nonetheless, her ideas are still to be structured. She appeared to have clear ideas about the education process, yet some elements could have more solid knowledge.

Elijah

Elijah is a 47-year-old male principal at a secondary technical school near the city center. The school serves a large population of middle to low-SES students. He has a bachelor's degree in education with a concentration in mathematics and a master's in school management and leadership. He has been the school principal for seven years, 19 years as a teacher, two years as an academic coordinator, and one year as a registrar. Following his interview and my writing of this narrative, I determined that his school is average-performing, with an average score of 309 points.
Elijah’s Knowledge of School Accountability

We had an interesting conversation in general terms, but especially about school accountability. This participant was different. As soon as I asked what comes to mind when I say “school accountability,” Elijah responded:

It is about the students learning. Sometimes, when people talk about it, they think about the money, but it’s not about that. Student learning is the first thing that pops up because it’s measurable, and I have to measure how much students learn. If we don’t devise quantifiable goals, we will fail. We measure several indicators, and the first is learning. He told me he learned this at his master’s, but he really learned it in daily practice. In his understanding, money-wise accountability is of first concern of the authorities, but at school, learning and achievement should get the most attention:

It’s a mistake for schools to focus on money. And it’s the authorities’ fault for being unable to explain this. School accountability is a tool that gives me a series of indicators that show me what I need to change, what improvements to plan for, and what to reinforce. And this needs to be shown in numbers because when they are low, it creates an alarm.

Elijah remembers that before 2015 there was no accountability in the terms referred to. He affirms feeling responsible for sharing the results with teachers, families, students, and the community. Also, he tells me how he is close to students and families; and with teachers, he claims to have an assertive, simple, open, and humane relationship.

Using Accountability Elements to Improve Student Learning and Performance

About his experience using student assessment reports, Elijah tells me:
After receiving the Diagnostic Test results and looking at them carefully, we developed a systematic improvement plan focused on the students with difficulties. For the National Test, what we do is reinforce weakness, but we do this integral and systematically all year round.

He shares the reports with teachers in meetings using graphics and by topics or academic areas. With families, they focus primarily on low-performing students, for which he also meets with teachers to formulate plans, monitor changes, and guide and follow up on them, which he assumes as part of his responsibilities. He stressed the value of the reports as part of the accountability process because they are the tool that allows feedback. Elijah mentioned participating in the presentation of results the District does, but was unspecific about receiving training.

**Meaning Elijah Assigns to His Role as Leader**

Regarding the role of the school principal, Elijah defines it as a manager overseeing the fulfillment of academic activities that are typical in a school calendar. Also shares:

I focus on teachers fulfilling their duties. I like them to be where they should be. My main interest is students learning and achievement so they would walk away with something of value. They all come from different backgrounds, so I also try to get teachers to focus on the human part of this, not just the blackboard and chalk. I like them to learn things that will be useful to them once they go out there.

About leadership, he tells me:

For me, a leader is an example or a reference of action for others. It’s someone that inspires others to do things without me telling them to. I try to be a leader every day; it’s something you perfect every day. I believe I’m a leader because I don’t impose; I let
people find alternatives for things to happen. I make suggestions and try to support others.

For him, what helps him focus on students’ achievement is teamwork, but that is a result of getting to know each other and understanding their strengths and shortcomings:

It’s about allowing the team to develop their leadership, not dependent nor centered on me, with a vision for the future.

On the other hand, a poorly done job takes his focus away from student achievement. He calls himself a perfectionist and an early riser who arrives at school before everyone else.

**Paula**

Paula is a 51-year-old female who has been a small urban school principal for two years. Previously, she was the academic coordinator in this same school in the public sector. Also, she was a teacher for another 10 years before this. Before entering the public sector, she was a teacher at two other schools, which summed up eight years. She has a bachelor's degree in education with a concentration in social sciences and a master's degree in school supervision. Following her interview and my writing of this narrative, I determined that hers is an average-performing school, with an average score of 309 points.

**Paula’s Knowledge of School Accountability**

We began our conversation on the topic of accountability. Paula’s comments referred to the money assigned to the school, saying it was about telling others what they have spent and what they have available to cover their needs. She tells me to have studied it while in her master’s. She goes on to say to me the ways they are democratic about this and how it is a participative process:
I tell my teachers: “Everything you need in your classroom, make a list and tell the coordinator, but remember it is only for things you need. We have to control spending because people always speculate.”

I asked further about the relationship between accountability and student achievement. She claimed to have understood my questions and answered regarding the purchase of materials for the students and the teacher to teach their lessons. Soon into the conversation, she goes in many directions, except for the ones I’m asking. I find no evidence of knowledge of student assessment results related to school accountability. She claims to have an empathic and collaborative relationship with teachers and staff.

**Using Accountability Elements to Improve Student Learning and Performance**

About student assessment, she admits they are doing, in her words, terribly. Her definition of a student assessment report is related to its function of student promotion, and she adds that it *should* be used as a measure of improvement as if it is someone else’s job to do this. Our conversation seemed rich in words but poor in meaning. Nevertheless, something interesting came up:

The authorities that carried out those assessments should come here and tell us what they found and tell teachers what they are doing wrong. But also, there should be some consequences for those results. There should be a technical accompaniment that teachers notice that there is some follow-up and some consequence; for instance, if they are still not doing well, they should send them to study more.

Paula did not mention receiving training from the Ministry to analyze data and information from the reports. Also, she did mention the details of how nor with whom she shares the information coming from the assessments, but she did state that the reports are valuable:
Those reports are valuable because they show teachers where they failed.

**Meaning Paula Assigns to Her Role as Leader**

Talking about her role as a principal, Paula expands on her planning and supervising of the day-to-day activities, with a particular focus on her relationship with students:

Most important is communication with teachers, guiding them, and observing the process. I always ensure that everything is working correctly, that students are in their classrooms, and that teachers come to school. I go to their classrooms and take books to them. My job is to make sure everything is working and delegate.

We talked about leadership. In her opinion, a leader delegates, guides, and is humane. She adds:

I am a leader. But some people confuse humility with foolishness. I’m grateful that I’m a leader, and one characteristic I have is humility. My mother taught me that. Humanism first.

She claims that she focuses on student achievements by asking teachers to report those with low performance while working with them and helping them with their lesson plans. However, she does not get involved directly with the teacher’s planning and organization; she delegates this to the coordinator.

Regarding changes, she describes a top-down model:

First, the district instructs me, then they prepare the coordinators and other team members, then the teachers get their instructions, and then they apply them in the classrooms. This is done considering the academic areas. And whenever we need support, the District comes over and helps us.
Paula’s answers denoted a simple thought. There was no complexity in her thinking nor in expressing her ideas. My experience of her was of a lovely lady, very agreeable, concerned about her school and caring for her students, but no evidence of an orderly deep train of thought, knowledge, or skills beyond the basics, as if she had no power to steer the school because it should come from others above her.

Reign

Reign is a 54-year-old female. She has a master’s degree in school administration and a bachelor’s degree in education. She has been the principal at this school for the past eight years, and previously she was a teacher for ten years in the public sector and three more in the private sector. The school serves a middle to low-income population in an urban area. The school has 45 teachers in service, plus staff. Following her interview and my writing of this narrative, I determined that her school is average-performing, with an average score of 302 points.

Reign’s Knowledge of School Accountability

As we went into the conversation, I asked her what she knew about school accountability, and Reign referred to the Operations Manual for Public Schools (Ministry of Education, 2013). This manual features all the duties and responsibilities of the school principal, among which is giving accounts. Under the name “accountability,” this account-giving is related to reporting on the use of the financial resources distributed through the school board. However, it is noticeable how in that manual, in the same chapter, immediately after bullet 5.1.11 about accountability (p. 69), bullet 5.1.12 tells about students’ learning evaluation, where it is stated that learning evaluations are compulsory and must be made known to students and parents and public to the whole community through the publication of grade averages. She says:
School accountability is to provide evidence for what was done and how it was done, and not just regarding economic resources, as many may think, it's also about the learning achievement of the students, which is the essential part, because those resources that get to schools are precisely to deliver quality education. So they are articulated.

Reign told me that she learned about school accountability in most of the education programs she attended offered by the Ministry, Regional, and District. Still, those learning mainly focused on the economic side of it. In her case, she learned about the link between accountability and student achievement through reading official documents. She says:

I’ve also learned about school accountability by reading legal documents related to education. A type of account is associated with the level of students’ learning. I learned that if they are economic resources coming into the school, they are meant to impact the students learning qualitatively. So, it is a given that I give out information about financial spending, but the question is, how has that affected the students?

She also admits feeling responsible for these “accounts-giving” to the community, society, and the country. She even mentions the transparency law, under which all public institutions and servants must give all information to any civil citizen except for confidential information.

**Using Accountability Elements to Improve Student Learning and Performance**

Regarding the use of accountability elements, like other participants in this study, Reign’s preferred method for disclosing assessment results with teachers is meetings where, after presenting the information, follows a process of reflection and awareness:

When the results arrive at school, we gather the teachers and the management team to show them where we are as a school and team. Then we reflect on what we can do to
improve those results, and we reach agreements and commitments, which are put into an action plan that should last two to three months, and when this is done, we assess again. It’s a tough job.

She mentions receiving training for the improvement plan from a local university, for which they were the first school to have an improvement plan. Also, they meet with the parents and teachers’ association to show them the results, stating that this is especially important with those grades that do not do as well as others because they see better results with the families, with whom they can reach agreements during the meetings.

On the other hand, regarding students, they focus more on the ones getting lower achievements, with the help of the Psychology Department. Finally, in her opinion, using the assessment results is valuable because it shows them how they are doing and allows them to improve their results.

About the value of the reports, Reign stated:

They are important because they show us how we are and where we are, and from there we can make our improvement plans.

**Meaning Reign Assigns to Her Role as Leader**

Concerning principals and their role as leaders, Reign sees herself as one. For her, the most critical aspect of her job is the pedagogical aspect of the school’s functioning. She says a school may be well managed, but it is a failed school if the pedagogical part is not working as it should. Simply put, the most important part is that students learn; in her view, that is the essence of the school’s existence.

As she was speaking about her understanding of leadership, she mentioned:
One of my roles is supervising classroom work and interacting with teachers. It’s my duty as a principal. We talk about their strength, reach agreements and commitments, congratulate them, motivate them to continue the good work, and point out the opportunities for improvement. So, this is how I interact with my teachers.

Hearing her talk, I cannot help thinking about instructional leadership. So, I ask if she has heard about the term before, to which she answers positively. She adds:

The educational community, teachers, and specifically principals are leaders who can influence other teachers for better practice, serving as a model. There is also distributed leadership. We must delegate instead of concentrating everything on one person, as it used to be years ago. The idea is that a person is a leader that creates other leaders. My understanding of a leader is a person that influences others, creates opportunities for improvement, turns those opportunities into strengths, serving as a model and a mentor.

Related to promoting change, she claims to, before anything, sit back and observe and evaluate the situation considering the different aspects of the education process: pedagogical, social, community, institutional, and administrative. Afterward, she meets with teachers and staff to design an improvement plan. She also told me that something that helps her do her job better and focus on student achievement is being clear about her role and responsibilities, her teachers and staff working as a team, and the guiding work of the Ministry, which articulates theirs.

**Joanna**

Joanna is a 51-year-old female principal at a large secondary urban school serving a low-SES population. She was a teacher for nine years and later became the registrar, a position she held for another nine years before becoming the school principal via contest, and she has kept it for the past 12 years. She has a bachelor’s degree in school management and supervision and a
master’s in management. Following her interview and my writing of this narrative, I determined that her school is lower-performing, with an average score of 297 points.

**Joanna’s Knowledge of School Accountability**

For Johanna, school accountability is about informing on the administrative and financial aspects of the school as much as it is about the internal indicators of the school:

If you ask me about school accountability, I will relate it to financial resources. But it could also be about finishing the school year, the deficit indicators, and others internally to the school community. Meaning: what did we do? What did we achieve? It’s about the goals.

She expresses having learned this in her experience, from trial and error. But he does confer a great deal of meaning to the financial aspects of it, explaining how they need to elaborate statements every three months. She tells me how the District does not prepare them and how they need to approach the accounting department in the District for help.

She claims to know what the educational community, including herself, expects from her as a principal: student learning. To achieve this, they focus on the School Education Project (SEP), which contains the school’s pedagogy, methods, mission, and vision statement. This is compulsory for every public and private school in the Dominican education system. Regarding the SEP, she adds:

We need to plan according to what is envisioned and expected. If the teacher is unclear, they will work on whatever they want to or sit down and expect a salary raise. Not only should they be clear on what is expected of them, but they must know how to reach it and give an individual student report at the end of the school year.
Using Accountability Elements to Improve Student Learning and Performance

In our conversation about test results reporting, Joanna believed those results do not reflect reality. She did not offer me any other evidence for this assertion. However, she also understands that a learning problem needs to be more detailed and reported in depth.

She does not explain her experience in using the test reports, but she tells me:

Those reports are valuable if you use them. It’s a diagnostic to be used for improvement that allows me to work for change. It should be a motivation or push and the input for me to improve.

Her experience with test results consists mainly of sharing them in workshops with teachers, where they verify the results carefully and create an improvement plan for the students with lower achievement in specific content areas.

Meaning Joanna Assigns to Her Role as Leader

In terms of the meaning she assigns to her role as a principal, it spread in two directions: administrative and supervision and pedagogical. Joanna described herself as a diligent person, and her day-to-day activities to be mainly of the sort of the physical conditions of the school, checking that students and teachers are on time, that everyone carries their uniform correctly, that everyone follows the rules, and, of course, the budget and accounting books.

On the other hand, she expressed that the focus of her day is:

My focus of the day is that students and teachers are present. That they arrive on time; if the teacher is not here, the pedagogical process in the classroom cannot take place. The most important thing is that the students are in their pedagogical process. If this does not take place, then there is nothing. Also, discipline and observing the school calendar; teachers must comply with the school calendar.
As she speaks about her relationship with her teachers, she says she tries to be professional and to separate what’s personal from work. She considers them in favorable terms, calling them reliable and acknowledging that they do their job. But they are also human; therefore, she always pays attention to supervising them. For this activity, she trusts the coordinator, who works closely with her.

When speaking about leaders, she tells her definition of one:

A leader has the power to make others do what needs to be done, and makes it in the best way possible. For instance, serving as an example. There has to be a balance between the boss and the leader; sometimes, you need to be the leader, but sometimes you need to be the boss.

She considers herself to be a leader. In her words:

I believe I’m a leader because I have convincing power. I can make people change and learn. Recently I’ve been considering the possibility of transferring to a different school because I live far away from this one, and some people have come to me telling me that if I go, they will go with me. So, I think there has to be something there.

Johanna tells me that what helps her keep the focus on the student’s achievement is the student's achievement itself, but she does not tell me how exactly this works for her. Opposed to this, what drives her attention away are the administrative tasks and the many meetings, internally in the school, but especially outside, such as at the District. Also, she claims to have a close relationship with students and feels responsible for looking after their emotional well-being and instructing teachers to do so as well.
Grace

Grace is a 38-year-old principal working at a school offering grades from seventh to twelfth, serving a middle to low SES population in an urban area near the city center. She has a bachelor's degree in education and a master's degree in school administration. She has been the principal at this school for the past four years, before which she was the principal of an elementary school for five years. Before becoming a principal, she was a teacher for five years, and during this period, she was simultaneously the academic coordinator for two years on a different shift. Following her interview and my writing of this narrative, I determined that hers is a lower-performing school, with an average score of 296 points.

Grace’s Knowledge of School Accountability

As we started our conversation and got to the school accountability topic, I asked Grace what she knew about it, to which her answer was clear and succinct:

The first thing that comes to mind is the economic part. It’s what you present to the families, the community, and teachers about what happens with the funds the school receives.

This is her definition of school accountability. She is clear that it’s about information that people running the school must make public and available to others participating in the school process. And fitting with the literature proposed in this study, this envelops only parts of this process; however, at this point in the conversation, there is no connection in her mind between school funds and student academic achievement.

She tells me how this needs to be taught in higher education degrees. Still, she remembers laws and documents created years before to overcome the obstacle of administrative process centralization. This is a relatively new practice, put into place by Ordinance 02-2008
from the Ministry of Education, which installs Decentralized Boards, commonly referred to today simply as ‘school boards.’ On paper, these boards aim to guarantee the democratic participation of different agents making up school communities. In practice, this board guards administrative procedures for purchases and repairs. She says:

Universities do not teach this topic as they should. Both my bachelor's degree and my master’s degree focused on the laws, and back then, they would talk about it as a utopia because funds didn’t come directly into schools but through official channels. So, account giving was not as important as it is today.

We were talking about two different concepts, both enmeshed in the same process but intentionally distinct. Yes, information should be given about what goes on with the school finances, but this theme repeats throughout all the interviews. Still, as I probed into the topic, I asked if she could see a relation between school accountability and assessment results, to which she responded:

This [school accountability] is being presented to us like this now. It wasn’t shown in those terms before. One of the problems is that the funds arrive irregularly. I can’t even plan a parent meeting because we could go on for six months without receiving any funds. It’s a bit complex, but we don’t see the funds related to students’ achievements; it’s something more operational, you know, to keep the school clean, make repairs and supplies. Student leading was never the meaning of the funds. Culturally, when we speak about school accountability, we mean money. It has never been taught that student assessments are accountability. But it should be. It should be taught and demanded because what we learn at the university is that the goal of education is students learning.
Using Accountability Elements to Improve Student Learning and Performance

Regarding assessment results, Grace says she follows assessments very closely because they allow her to see what students are learning, what’s working, and what’s not. As for the results, she adds:

We elaborate improvement plans according to the results we get. For example, we had much variability in language and math for the last one, so the teachers are using this information to improve the teaching process where there are weaknesses. We looked at the lower percentages and met specifically with those teachers to find strategies to overcome the problem.

Regarding the communication with parents, she admits it to be fragile:

I’m unsure if it is because this is a secondary school, but it is challenging to meet with the parents unless it is a dire situation. Many of the kids here don’t have a functional home, or they support themselves [financially]. Some even have a defiant attitude, such as: “Whom will you call? I take care of myself.” And I must address them as adults, even when they are not. Kids with families that care for them are few.

However, she says that she feels responsible for getting the best out of her students:

It is my responsibility to change that, to take them where they need to be. Maybe not be a giant projection, and maybe we’re not able to achieve much in the short term, but perhaps we can raise that achievement by 5% this year, a 10% next year because we know we want that 100%. But it’s a process.

Grace stated that she did not receive training from the ministry to analyze assessment data and information. Also, she believes reports are very valuable, are not prioritized how they should be, and arrive late to school. She said:
When the reports reach the school, other processes are already running ahead, and
sometimes going back to those results is not useful.

**Meaning Grace Assigns to Her Role as Leader**

When assigning meaning to the concept of leadership, Grace tells me:

A leader is a person who is alert and looks after everyone, every detail. Who is
participating in the [education] process, not only giving orders but is part of what’s going
on at school. It’s not my position as a principal that makes me a leader. It’s how I act
toward my personnel. It’s someone who cares if the playground is safe, the bathrooms are
clean, if things are in their place, and if we have the necessary resources. A leader
ensures teachers and staff are where they should be and makes herself available to
everyone. It’s a big responsibility because I must be on top of everything.

But as she tells me this, I think she is speaking about a manager, so I ask about the
difference between a leader and an administrator. She tells me they share some characteristics,
but others accept a leader because they understand him. The leader entails a sense of belonging.

My experience of Grace was that her responsibilities were more of a burden for her. From
what I could understand, the population attending her school is vulnerable and challenging; this
makes her job harder, but it does not come through as a well-accepted challenge. Nevertheless,
she hasn't given up, whether due to her sense of responsibility or something else. As with other
participants, I do not perceive her as being clear regarding school accountability and leadership.
She seems to know, but her thoughts and knowledge are not articulated in a way that would be
useful to her.
Yolanda

Yolanda is a 55-year-old female who has been a secondary school principal for the past 15 years. Before her principalship, she was a teacher at the same school for 15 years. The school is located in an urban area with a low-income population. She is deeply involved in this community due to her many years of serving there. She has a bachelor’s degree in school management and supervision and a master’s degree in school management. Following her interview and my writing of this narrative, I determined that her school is a lower-performing one, with an average score of 295 points.

She has a vibrant, charismatic personality. As she walks into the school early in the morning, she is greeted by students and teachers with much enthusiasm. As we sat down for the interview and I introduced my research topic, she was quick to talk confidently about leadership.

**Yolanda’s Knowledge of School Accountability**

About her knowledge of school accountability, Yolanda is quick to link the concept to the funds given to the schools:

Based on the 4% [from the national budget] that we have as the Ministry of Education, every school has a committee that determines the priorities for the school. It’s the opportunity and ‘light’ schools lacked because having funds available is marvelous! We always have teaching resources, and we can solve any situation. But it’s not just about that; it’s also about knowing how to manage the funds, and I spend them as I see necessary. We decide how to spend the money with the teachers, staff, parents, and the school committee.

Here is where she understands she is effectively complying with school accountability:
For example, I just had the parents’ conference for this year. In that meeting, I have to tell parents how much money we have to solve our problems because that money is not the principals’, teachers’, or management team. That money is for the students, so parents and the community must know how we use it.

Yolanda tells me she collected her knowledge on school accountability throughout her learnings at graduate and undergraduate studies and the School for Principals. Also, the District orients them on administering the funds and giving accounts about it. She states she has a strong sense of responsibility toward rendering this information:

The principal is who benefits the most from giving accounts, letting others know what was done, and what the result is. I work for a community, District, Regional, and the Ministry. If I don’t give this information, what am I hiding? I am working transparently, as it is asked, as it should be.

It is important to mention that during our conversation, as Yolanda speaks about what I call school accountability, she talks about rendering accounts about finance. This is where she feels her responsibility lies. This responsibility is towards the District, parents, management team, teachers, community, and anyone who wants to know.

However, when referring to the teachers and their role, she expects them to be effective:

I expect them to be good and responsible teachers, not just standing in the classroom but teaching. They should have strategies, but you change them when a particular strategy or method doesn’t work.

**Using Accountability Elements to Improve Student Learning and Performance**

When discussing some of the elements of school accountability regarding diagnostic tests, Yolanda believes that its utility is to tell teachers if students are at the required standard of
achievement. She says that if there is no evaluation, there is no way to know where you are or where you will start:

The results will let me know where we are going. We're good if everyone has more than 90% of content knowledge. But if that evaluation throws the opposite, I must change everything planned. I must find strategies to level those kids and take them to where they must be academically speaking. It is necessary. Diagnostic evaluations are what, at the beginning of the year, determine where we are going. And the Ministry, with its external evaluation, is looking for the same thing we are with our internal assessment. But they are evaluating the education system and if the contents and indicators are being taught.

Talking about what to do with the reporting of the results, she says that one strategy they use is to look at them with each teacher separately, then by areas, and later with the other actors in meetings with each group:

First, we share the report with the teachers, who are responsible for assessing, then with the parents and the students; if we share it only with the teachers, will we be able to raise awareness of what we need to improve? No, right? So, we have to do it with all those involved in the education system.

Yolanda told me she had attended meetings at the District where they presented the results and give the principals the reports. She did not express herself clearly, but by what is exposed in previous paragraphs, it was my perception that she values and uses the assessment reports.

**Meaning Yolanda Assigns to Her Role as Leader**

Yolanda sees herself as a leader. She is quick to say:
You didn’t find me here, and was the school not working because I was not here? No. Every process continues; it flows because the leader orients. I delegate the responsibility to you, guide you, and monitor you. If any of the assignments are not well, then we will talk. A leader respects and inspires trust.

When describing her role as a principal, she refers to students’ learning improvements:

Students’ learning is what is fundamental in a school. There has to be a good organization for there to be good learning. After organizing comes the process with students, teachers monitoring, face to face interactions with teachers and parents to see what we can do with and for the students.

Regarding her interactions with teachers, she likes to make sure they know and conform to the norms of the school, but also to keep the conversation channels open to working cooperatively because this is what avails her to cause change when needed:

Creating conscience. We raise awareness [that change is needed], analyze, evaluate why we need this change and how it will benefit us, and what I need from you [teachers] to get that change. I can’t do it alone, so I raise awareness so it can happen.

Even though Yolanda understands the term “school accountability” very differently from the definition given in this study’s literature, she seems to value elements of accountability, like assessment reports. She claims to use them for student academic improvement. Her method of choice is raising awareness amongst the school community, teachers, students, and parents, working collaboratively to raise student scores, and generating change.
Chapter IV Closure

In this chapter, I presented the subjects that participated in this research. All of them were open and welcoming when receiving me for the interview, even when some were unsure of my questions. Almost all knew about the topic, but most were in a haze with unclear thoughts and concepts. In the following chapter, I analyze their knowledge and experiences on school accountability in the Dominican education system, looking for and presenting common themes to help address my research questions.
CHAPTER V
DATA ANALYSIS RESULTS

This qualitative study aimed to discover what a group of school principals in the Dominican Republic’s public schools know about and understand the school accountability system. By capturing their voices, I learned about their experiences with data collection, analysis, and interpretation and how they use the results for decision-making to improve their students, schools, and the community. I also learned how they see themselves as leaders using the available system elements to improve student academic achievement. The data presented here was collected via in-depth interviews with 10 school principals in urban Santo Domingo. The analysis presented here tells how school accountability is experienced and constructed by the participants and how their conceptualization of leadership shapes their actions and results.

**Presentation of Themes and Sub-themes**

The approach used to analyze the data from this study is basic interpretative, which allowed for the description of the experiences and knowledge of the participants through their own words. Other sources of information were used, such as databases from national student assessments, to compare schools, as presented in the methods section. Thematic analysis was used to identify units of meaning, which were later grouped into themes according to emerging patterns. This data analysis resulted in three major themes and 12 sub-themes. Table 4 summarizes the first three major themes indicating the direction of the conversations of each of the participants assigned to the resulting sub-themes. Thematic differences between higher and lower achieving schools will be presented in the conclusions and discussion.
### Table 5

**Major Themes and Sub-themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes and Sub-themes</th>
<th>Elisabeth</th>
<th>Jack</th>
<th>Edwin</th>
<th>Rylee</th>
<th>Elijah</th>
<th>Paula</th>
<th>Reign</th>
<th>Joanna</th>
<th>Grace</th>
<th>Yolanda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. All school principals have some knowledge about school accountability, but this knowledge varies greatly.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Some felt school accountability concerns student performance and achievement; financial resources are the support.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2 Some felt school accountability is primarily related to reporting financial management.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Some felt school accountability involves both financial management and student performance (in order of precedence).</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. All principals use the available accountability elements to improve student learning and performance.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Most principals work with the information from assessment reports.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Most principals share information with teachers, students, families, and communities.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Half of the principals received training from the Ministry to analyze information from assessments.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 All principals create an improvement plan and/or intervention following the reporting.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 All principals felt assessment reporting is valuable.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 - continued

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Themes and Sub-themes</th>
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<th>Yolanda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. All principals accept their role as leaders.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1. Most principals declare themselves as Leaders.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.2. Most Principals’ Main Focus is the Pedagogical Process.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3. All principals believe that everyone must be on board for change.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4. Most principals view the school system as a distraction.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>
Major Theme 1: All Principals Know Something about School Accountability, but This Knowledge Varies Greatly

As exposed in Chapter III, this study defines school accountability as measuring and reporting student achievement to improve student performance by enhancing the performance of teachers, students and principals, having a particular connotation of responsibility for specific school outcomes (Hamilton, 2013; Hanushek & Raymond, 2001). This is also known as performance-based accountability. In this first theme, I share what meaning these Dominican principals assign to the concept of “school accountability.”

At this point, it is important to recall that this term does not translate well into Spanish because it does not convey the underlying tones of responsibility as it does in English. As my analysis shows, it means different things to the participants. Nevertheless, all participants in my study showed some knowledge of school accountability. It was found in the interviews that all school principals admit feeling responsible for the school’s functioning, both in the academic and administrative areas. However, precedence or place of importance of one aspect over the other was also seen as the data was collected.

This section includes three sub-themes: (1.1) Some felt school accountability is mainly related to reporting financial management, (1.2) Some felt school accountability is primarily related to reporting financial management, and (1.3) Some felt school accountability involves both reporting financial management and student performance (in order of precedence). It is important to mention that the following sub-themes are mutually exclusive; therefore, for this theme, each principal appears only once according to their expressed knowledge and experience.

Sub-theme 1.1: Some felt that School Accountability Concerns Student Performance and Achievement. Financial Resources Are the Support

Four out of 10 participants fit into this sub-theme. For these school principals, it is clear that their most important task is to guarantee students’ learning, with financial resources being
essential to support this effort. For example, it was very straightforward for Elisabeth: “For me, school accountability is about the school’s internal efficiency. Meaning, promotion, repetition, and dropouts.” In a similar position, Reign shares her thoughts about the concept, taking from the School Principal’s Manual but putting it in her own words. She emphasizes that contrary to what many believe, it is not about the money:

School accountability is about giving evidence of what has been done and not just about the finances. Most people hear the term and think about the economic aspect. But it is about the student’s level of achievement; that is what’s most important. The financial resources sent to schools are there to elevate the quality of learning.

Likewise, Elijah refers to school accountability as a process and a tool to measure student performance, represented by indicators that are produced daily:

The first thing that comes to mind is students learning because sometimes we think that when we speak about school accountability is about money, but no. The first thing I think about is learning because it is measurable, and I am responsible for measuring it. We will fail if we don’t devise measurable, obtainable goals.

Lastly, there is Jack. As he was my last interviewed participant, it became more apparent that words were a probable cause for me to find different conceptualizations of the term:

When you say school accountability, I think about the administrative aspect, but also efficiency indicators because those are accountability as well, but for the academic part. It is about tracking students’ performance and presenting their grades (achievements) at the end of the year. This is comparable from year to year, at the individual level (student), and in a general view as a cohort or the whole school.
**Sub-theme 1.2: Some Felt School Accountability is Primarily Related to Reporting Financial Management**

As I created this sub-theme, it seemed important to clarify that the participants allocated within this sub-theme only partially disregard the link between student achievement and school accountability. For these three of the 10 participants, their words related to accountability signify something different from the definition commonly used in the literature, as I had described in this study. For the two participants in this sub-theme, accountability is specifically related mainly to the financial aspects of the school’s functioning.

For example, for Yolanda, informing others about what is being spent in school is in the principal's best interest. She mentions the school board in charge of supervising the management of the expenditures, expressing satisfaction with the availability of teaching materials and other resources. Yolanda says:

…it is about managing the money for the school. I have to make decisions together with teachers, staff, parents, and the board, but I also must inform the parents and invite them to see what we have done with the decentralization money because you have to be open.

Our interview made it clear that Paula assumes a top-down model for taking on her responsibilities. When I asked what school accountability means to her, she answered: “The first thing that comes to mind is our many problems here. For me, school accountability is showing all the expenditures made from the money assigned to us. So, we have to tell how much we have left and how much is available for other needs we might have.” Even after probing into the question and asking specifically about its’ link to students’ achievement, Paula says: “…because we need to buy things for the students. I always say: buy the teachers everything they need for their classes to improve their learning.”
The second participant in this category is Grace. In her view, the fact that we can even refer to money expenditure is an overdue conquest and refers to the decentralization process that took place over a decade ago. Grace said:

The first thing I think about is the financial aspect. It’s what you present to the families, the community, and the teachers about what happens with the funds the school receives. We used to talk about decentralization as a utopia because we were not used to getting funds directly at schools. School accountability is necessary now more than ever.

Sub-theme 1.3: Some Felt School Accountability is Both Reporting Financial Management and Student Performance (in order of precedence)

This sub-theme includes three principals out of the 10 that were interviewed. It presents evidence that, for some, the concept of school accountability is of mixed ideas. There are two aspects to consider: the financial aspect with which their schools function, and the resulting student achievements. Viewed from their perspective, it is understood that the principal’s responsibility in informing the public is mainly related to expenditure, which takes precedence over academic tasks.

For Edwin, it is about gathering people to present what was done in a period of time. He focuses on explaining how the term refers to investments in school. Preferring the word investment over expenditure lets me know he is also focused on the student’s performance. In his words:

It is about reuniting people to tell them what we are doing here at school for improvement. If I install a fan in a classroom because it is hot, I’m trying to make the students more comfortable so they can learn better. If I invest, it’s thinking about the students, about the quality of their learning. Administrative actions are supposed to support the pedagogical process.
Rylee explains that her school carries out an accountability process every two months approximately. She says further:

We do a report every other month or so. We report expenditures and incomes to the teachers and the whole community. We tell them how much we spent on expendable materials, repairs, etc. At the end of the school year, we make a presentation to the parents’ association to explain what we did. And also about all the projects we developed with the teachers because it’s not just about money; there is the academic part as well. At the beginning of the year, we do a diagnostic assessment, where every teacher must report how their students are.

Johanna also recalls the funds from the decentralization and ties it to the annual plan referencing specifically student indicators:

If you ask me about school accountability, I will focus on decentralization and financial resources. We do accountability every three months; the budget has four parts per year, so we show what we accomplished in the annual memoir. If I planned four goals for that year and wrote them on the strategic plan, in the end, I would show what was done and how many students were promoted, dropped out, or pending.

To dig deeper into this major theme of their knowledge of school accountability, I probed where each participant had learned about this concept. Three origins of their understanding of school accountability were found. These categories overlap for some participants, reflecting (1) a natural lifelong learning process, (2) as part of a higher education program and (3) the various in-service trainings.

Elisabeth said to have learned about school accountability in training by the Ministry, while Jack, Edwin, and Johanna told me they learned in the day-to-day practice over the years. Paula, Grace and Yolanda claimed to have learned about school accountability at the university.
Rylee said to have learned about it at the university and in-service training by the Ministry, but Reign stated that she did not learn about it at the university, received training from the Ministry and truly learned about school accountability in day-to-day practice. On the other hand, Elijah claimed he did learn at the university while doing his graduate studies, not receiving training from the Ministry, and reinforced his knowledge in daily practice.

**Major Theme 2: All Principals Use the Available Accountability Elements to Improve Student Learning and Performance**

One of the purposes of this study was to know if principals in Dominican schools use the available accountability system elements. In this section, I present the analysis regarding the usage of assessments and their reports: what they do with them and whom they share them with. The subthemes that emerged are: (2.1) Most principals work with the information from assessment reports; (2.2) All principals share information with teachers, students, families, and communities; (2.3) Most Principals Received Training from the Ministry to Analyze Information from Assessments; (2.4) All Principals Create an Improvement Plan and/or Intervention Follows the Reporting; and (2.5) All Principals Report Assessment is Valuable. Evidence was found that elements such as standards, the curriculum, assessment, reporting, indicators, interventions, and improvement plans are all part of the vocabulary commonly used at school.

**Sub-theme 2.1: Most Principals Work with the Information from Assessment Reports**

The analysis shows evidence that all the participants spent some time working with the information in their assessment reports. The conversations mainly revolved around sharing the numbers and graphics with teachers and parents, and a few participants alleged looking deeper into the data to compare students’ performance between cohorts and other schools.

For example, Elisabeth said: “We use the reports to analyze the situations to see what we need to improve,” and Rylee shared that they received the reports but did not do any analysis by
noting: “The results were given to us, and we just interpreted those graphics and percentages together with teachers.” Edwin told me: “The District sends reports. We gather by area and self-critique,”

Jack and Elijah’s background is in math said. Jack said: “Luckily, my background area is math. The District prepares the workshop for us on how to interpret that data. There is a District and a Regional mean. They give us all the information; they even upload it so we can access it directly and compare ourselves with other schools. While Elijah told me: “The District calls us to present the reports. For me, it’s easier because my background is in math, so I can explain those results and find solutions.

Johanna shares: “According to the reports of every assessment, the students have a learning problem. We must verify the problem and locate the student and the family.” Grace shared her experience: “We make improvement plans according to the weaknesses we find. For example, we had many language arts and math weaknesses, so teachers are working on them.” While Yolanda said: “We were given the report, and from there, we had to emphasize the results.”

Reign said: “We pick up the reports at the District. Later, with the management team and staff, we decide how to present it to the teachers. Afterward, we reflect on the information and what we need to improve together.” But Paula seemed to take a different perspective from the question and referred to the promotion test: “Reports should be used to determine if students are ready to go to the next grade. They were weak in math and language arts, and that’s a situation...”

Sub-theme 2.2: All Principals feel accountable toward Teachers, Students, Families, and Communities
On feeling accountable and sharing information about the school, whether from the assessment reports or the finances, it was found that school principals share widely with the school community: teachers, staff, students, parents, and others. This is true for all the subjects that participated in this study. Not all claimed to feel accountable or to share information with all the groups mentioned, but all reported doing so with at least one of these groups, especially with teachers.

Elisabeth said to feel accountable toward: “The Ministry of Education, the religious order to which we belong, our personnel, the families, the community.” Jack said: “We are constantly talking to parents about their child’s grades,” and also, “[we share results] with the entire team, management team, coordinators, teachers, and parents individually.” Edwin said to feel accountable toward: “Parents. We have to inform parents, and students, and the whole educational community”. Rylee said: “We are accountable to the whole educational community, teachers, students, parents, civil society, management team, the school as a whole.”

Elijah told me: “the family is the first element to which I am accountable.” While Paula said to be accountable to: “teachers, the District, students, everybody.” And Reign said: “I am accountable to the community, the civil society, the country. Every civil servant is accountable.”

Johanna feels she is accountable to: “Parents and everybody that is involved with the school.” Grace said: [I am accountable to] families, teachers, even students; they should know what is happening. Lastly, Yolanda claimed to feel accountable to: “the District, parents, the management team, teachers, students, and everybody involved in the education system.”

Sub-theme 2.3 Half of the Principals Received Training from the Ministry to Analyze Information from Assessments.

For this segment, dissecting what the participants said about the “training” the Ministry of Education offered to analyze the assessment reports is necessary. Two participants claimed to
have received such instruction. Jack stated that the District prepares workshops on interpreting the data presented in the reports. While Reign, as I asked if she received training, mentioned her school was part of a special improvement program from the Ministry and a university, where they taught her and her team how to elaborate improvement plans. She said: “Yes. As I told you, we were part of a school-centered program.” She was unspecific about the details of the training. Jack was specific about my question and answered: “Yes. The District gathers us for workshops on how to interpret that data.”

Three participants, Elisabeth, Rylee, and Elijah, reported having been summoned by the District to witness the presentation of the assessment reports, where they collect them. Elisabeth said: “The District gathers us.” Rylee told me: “The ‘training consisted of describing the graphics and percentages but not going deep; everything was already there.” For Elijah, it was: “The District gathers us to present the report.”

The remaining five participants, Edwin, Paula, Johanna, Grace, and Yolanda, claimed to receive the reports because they were sent to them or collected at the District. Still, they did not admit receiving training for such purposes.

**Sub-theme 2.4: All Principals Create an Improvement Plan and/or Intervention Following the Reporting**

One of the purposes established for the Diagnostic Assessment of 2019 and similar programs is to create an improvement plan. These plans typically include interventions in many directions, such as teacher training and extra student teaching time. All participants claim to follow the reception of the reports with an improvement plan or intervention as needed. Here are the participants’ statements as evidence.

Elisabeth referred to the teachers when she said: “Last year, we had a diagnostic assessment from the Ministry, specifically in sixth grade. We got the results, and they were low
in math. So we made some arrangements for those grades. We saw that the teachers did not handle that domain.” Jack told me: “When the scores are low, we gather with the teachers and the management team to elaborate an action and improvement plan.” While Edwin was not very specific, he did tell me: “Last year, after the covid-19 pandemic, we had to level the students.” Rylee explained: “After we share the reports with the teachers, we see the deficient areas. We find a solution with the coordinators and elaborate improvement plans to change those results.”

Elijah was precise: “When we implement a diagnostic assessment, we see the results, and later we elaborate plans for systematic improvement, focusing on the students with greater difficulties.” Paula shared her thoughts in a way that seems to relegate the responsibility to teachers:

Well, after the test, they should use it for improvement. I think the authorities should come here and tell us what they found and re-train the teachers, not just leave those results ‘hanging.’ And there should be a consequence for those results, like an accompaniment from the District. You know… they should send those teachers to be re-trained.

Reign, also referring to teachers, said: “[after we get the results] we reflect on what we have to do to improve those results. We make new agreements and compromises and an action plan. Action plans may last from two to three months. Afterward, we assess again.”

Johanna reflected: “We get the diagnostic, which is the input for us to work, to improve. If I don’t master a certain content, I need to change. I need to study. I need to get trained.” Grace, for her part, told me: “It depends on the percentage each domain area got. On which did we get the lower percentage? So, we meet with those teachers and find strategies to overcome those weaknesses.” Also, Yolanda said: “As we share and interact with the students, we realize what
they did not know. We cannot just leave this as it is. Now we need to devise an action plan to solve the student’s difficulty as presented in the assessment.”

**Subtheme 2.5: All Principals Noted Assessment Reporting is Valuable**

All the participants spoke positively relative to the assessment and reporting process. It is valuable to all participants. The evidence presented in the previous category, together with the evidence below, allowed the creation of the following groups of meaning as to what the value of the assessment reports is to the principals that participated in this study, whereby these principals, as a whole, voiced that they use their assessment reports to: (1) Track their students’ performance to fine-tune their learning plans and goals; (2) Work with teachers to improve the teaching and learning process; and/or (3) Compare within and between schools with similar situations, confirming their standards and expectations according to the institutional strategic plan.

In this regard, I recall some of the participant’s words. Elisabeth said: “[the value] is incalculable because we don’t leave them hanging.” Jack shared: “We compare ourselves with ourselves and contrast with the standards that we established as an institution, and we always try to reach a better position than the one we have.” Edwin said: “You compare yourself. That’s what an assessment does. You compare your school at the district level and the regional level. And we have plans for it because you cannot teach anything you want; you need to teach what’s required.” While Rylee told me: “They have enormous value because, from those results, we know where we are and how we can improve the process.”

Elijah shared his on-point thought: “Those results allow me to elaborate on the accountability report. We reinforce and correct things along the way, but those indicators are used for accountability and change.” Paula simply said: “They are very valuable.” And Reign
said: “They are important because they show us how and where we are; we design improvement plans according to that.”

Johanna said: “They are valuable because they give a result, a diagnostic.” But Grace shared her experience more like a complaint: “They [the results] are extremely important, but they don’t get the relevance they have. We get them way too late. By the time they get here, the process is well underway.” Lastly, Yolanda shared: “You have to assess the learning, the students, and the process. I have to know where we are and where we are going,”

**Major Theme 3: All Principals Accept Their Role as Leaders**

This major theme area presents the leadership role that is embedded in the function of being a principal at any school. Most of the participants in this study take this aspect of their work very seriously; some have a humble approach, while others acknowledge this more openly. This theme includes the following four sub-themes: (3.1) Most principals declare themselves as leaders; (3.2) Most principals’ main focus is the pedagogical process; (3.3) Most principals believe that everyone must be on board for change; and (3.4) Most principals view the system as a distraction.

**Sub-theme 3.1: Most Principals Declare Themselves as Leaders**

Nine out of 10 participants consider themselves leaders. Some of the definitions and reasons for this, given by the participants, follow here.

Jack thought: “For me, a leader inspires his followers. He supervises them and accompanies them. But if he does not inspire, he is not a leader. Also guides and motivates.”

Edwin believes he is a leader because, otherwise, he would not be in his position. He said: “But also, [being a leader] means I must constantly negotiate with people and guide them.”

Rylee referred to the school functioning as always when she is out as proof of her leadership. She told
me: “A leader is a person who has followers, delegates tasks, and knows how to work. It’s someone who helps you grow. The leader educates others so they will be self-motivated.”

Elijah assumes a humble position, as he told me: “I try to be [a leader]. Leadership is something you perfect every day. [I believe I’m a leader] because I provide alternatives for things to happen, I guide, and I don’t impose my ideas.” Paula stands from a humanistic perspective. She told me: “A leader delegates, a guide, someone humane, completely humane. I am a leader because I’m there if you need my support.” While Reign defines a leader eloquently: “The leader influences others, facilitating those opportunities for improvement become strengths, serving as a model and a mentor.”

Johanna declares a perspective based on influencing others: “I think I can consider myself a leader because I have convincing power. I can make people change. I can make them learn.” Grace is more focused on the minor aspects of the job:

Well, a leader is vigilant to every detail without exception. School a complex because we need to prioritize the learning process, but the responsibility is larger because I have to be alert about everyone doing what they should.

While Yolanda, similar to Rylee, pointed out that I witnessed firsthand how the school was running as usual without her presence since I arrived for our interview before she did. She told me: “As the school leader, you first need teamwork. A leader guides, observes, sees the skills in others, and assigns functions. I delegate responsibilities, and I guide. I will tell you what you need to do and monitor you.”

**Subtheme 3.2: Most Principals’ Main Focus is the Pedagogical Process**

Eight participants out of ten claim to put their focus and most efforts on the pedagogical aspect, as they consider this the reason for being of the school. They understand that the administrative aspect comes second as a means to an end. It is important to understand the
semantic difference between the use of the word *pedagogy* in English and Spanish, as in the latter has a broader sense beyond instruction and classroom management practices.

Elisabeth shared: “Amongst [the activities where I focus the most], the most important is looking after the quality of students’ learning so that it would be the most effective and significant.” In an interesting turn, Jack talked about the three aspects of a school principal job: pedagogical, administrative, and social. He said: “[my focus] is all three aspects, but the pedagogical must be the main one. The others are there to support the pedagogical aspect. What prevails in school is the academic part.” Rylee stated that the students and teacher are her focus of attention: “…that students are in their classroom with their teachers; that there isn’t a situation to solve. I mean, the priority is students receiving their teaching. The main focus is the classroom.”

Elijah also expressed concern for the students: “I focus especially on teachers fulfilling their duty. My primary interest is the student’s learning. That they would leave with something at the end of the day.” Paula said: “My focus is on the students. That everything is working in the classroom. That the teachers are present.” Reign told me: “The pedagogical aspect is most important in an educational institution.”

Along the other participants’ lines, Johanna stated: “My main focus daily is that the students are present; that the teachers are on time in their classrooms.” And Grace affirmed that “school is where the children learn, and the classroom is where the learning is verified. The educational part is what’s most important, the pedagogical part.” Lastly, regarding where she puts the focus, Yolanda expressed: “The students’ learning is fundamental in a school.”

Only one participant in this category, Edwin, stated that his most important task is the administrative part. He said: “In schools, the main focus of the principal is more administrative
than pedagogical because the coordinators cover the pedagogical aspect. We have a large staff, and everyone takes care of their job. But the principal is here to solve administrative situations.”

Subtheme 3.3: Most Principals Believe that Everyone Must Be On Board for Change

In my interviews, we discussed change as part of the school’s dynamic. Evidence showed that all 10 participants relied heavily on teachers, staff, and also students getting involved when change is needed. They said to do so mainly through speech as a means of awareness. They described their relationship with teachers and staff as positive and collaborative. Some words used were collaboration, empathy, openness, assertiveness, and communication and dialog.

In this regard, Elisabeth said: “We have meetings and conduct surveys to know how people are feeling. We socialize and discuss our problems to find ways to solve or improve them.” And Jack said: “The first thing I do is motivate, then guide the elaboration of the plan. I try to inspire. I often turn to awareness, trying to persuade, sensitize, and never impose.” Edwin said: “You first project [the change], then we have a dialog, and later you implement it. I like to talk with people.”

On the topic of change, Rylee shared her experience:

When it’s regarding students, we work by projects. When it’s related to teachers, we hold meetings and hand out memos. We meet and reach agreements if it concerns someone or something specific. We also meet with parents and listen to their opinions. We also listen to students, most times anonymously. We also meet with staff and support personnel.

Elijah is along the lines of setting the example: “The change needs to start with oneself. Normally, I consult the teams: management, academic coordinators, strategic coordinators, Psychology and Orientation department, registration, and deputy managers. We discuss the issues and trace a line of action to favor the changes.” In a different direction, Paula offered her
perspective on producing changes; noticeably, it is a top-down action model: “First, the District gives us the instructions, prepares the staff, and later we implement the change in the classroom.”

Reign was insistent on awareness as her most important tool. She shared:

I always rely a lot on raising awareness among the staff and personnel. If people are unaware of the importance and the impact, there isn’t much to do. I also try to get them involved; as you become more sensitive to the problem, the more responsible you are for it. It has always worked for me: awareness and integration.

Johanna told me: “I try to be as explicit as possible. I try to communicate.” While Yolanda said: “I raise awareness.” lastly, Grace deserves a special mention now for being the only participant ever to mention the concept of consequences. She said: “What has worked for me is perseverance and setting an example. But changes here cannot be demanded because the teacher knows there are no consequences.”

**Sub-theme 3.4: Most Principals View the System as a Distraction**

In this sub-theme, I present the participants’ significant distractions, those activities or issues that take away their focus on student achievement. As an interesting observation, for many of them, the biggest distractor is the system itself.

Elisabeth told me: “Sometimes it’s teachers’ apathy because of the salary, so I have to talk to them, which takes away my attention a little.” Jack’s experience is: “Sometimes, we can perceive the Ministry as not very organized.” Edwin said: There are many distractors. But what generates the most distractions is the education system itself because sometimes they send you someone to supervise you who know less than you do.”

Paula told me: “[I get distracted] when we have many situations, like when I have to travel or leave school. I have to leave school often. That can really distract you.” Similarly,
Joanna said: “[I get distracted by] our multiple meetings outside the school. Sometimes we have something scheduled and get called for a meeting today or tomorrow.”

Reign shares her experience along the same lines:

Pitifully, what takes my focus away is that the Ministry, Regional, and District always ask us to be at different activities. Sometimes we are working with a program, and we don’t even conclude before we get changed to a different one. Also, the continuous meetings in the District take away a lot from us.

Grace shares a comparable experience: “Well, sometimes some unexpected administrative event. We receive visits from national or district technicians without prior notice. So we may have our plan, but when the technician comes, we have to change everything.”

To sum up this sub-theme, it is possible to classify the distractions as administrative issues (teachers’ salaries and financial tasks); abrupt changes in the principal’s agenda by supervising school visits by personnel unrelated to the school’s reality and many meetings outside the school; and changes in programs before their closure.

**Chapter V Closure**

This chapter presented the data analysis, which produced three main themes and 12 subthemes. In the next chapter, I will use these themes to answer my research questions, as well as discuss differences between some of the leaders in higher and lower-achieving schools. I will also connect my findings to some existing literature and offer recommendations for leaders and researchers.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter addresses the research questions of my study using the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data collected for this research. As I interpret the findings, I offer connections to the literature exposed in Chapter II. In addition, I provide recommendations for leaders to improve the DR’s school accountability system and future research on the school principals’ knowledge and beliefs about school accountability, as well as their training.

The theories supporting the conceptual framework of this study were: (a) Hanushek and Raymond’s (2001) definition of a performance-based school accountability system, (b) Bush’s (2011) formal leadership models, mediated by the law of (c) Johnson-Laird’s (2010) construct of mental models. The formal leadership models proposed by Bush assume that educational management and leadership appear juxtaposed; leadership involves intentional influence over others, a set of values, and a clear vision, while educational management is concerned with aims and purposes, not having goals in itself but instead, a group of activities used to achieve a pre-established goal effectively (Bush, 2011). The definition of a school accountability system implies measuring and reporting student achievement with the purpose of improving student performance by improving the performance of teachers, students and principals, having a particular connotation of responsibility for specific school outcomes. A comprehensive accountability system typically involves elements such as goals for performance and its measurements (standardized tests), the public reporting of the school or student performance, and consequences for those performance measures (rewards, sanctions, technical assistance for teachers, students, and schools (Mitani, 2018; Hanushek & Raymond, 2001). Lastly, mental models are the products of a vision of how we perceive the world and how we understand situations, objects, and tasks; essential aspects of human cognition are based on the construction
and manipulation of mental models, which can always be modified with new information (Johnson-Laird, 1981, 2010).

As a reminder, the purpose of this qualitative study was to capture the voices of school principals in the DR as to what they know about the country’s school accountability system and how they see themselves as leaders in their role while using data from this system to improve student academic achievement.

By listening to their experiences, I learned how these principals use or analyze data, interpret it, and use it for decision-making to improve their students, schools, and community. Also, I learned how they see themselves as leaders who use the available accountability elements to improve their student’s academic achievement. To collect the data, individual in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 school principals in urban Santo Domingo. Cross participant analysis revealed three major themes and 12 sub-themes on how school accountability is experienced and constructed by the participants and how their conceptualization of leadership shapes their actions and results.

In addition, after carrying out the interviews and writing my individual participant narratives, I ordered my narratives by the scores each principal’s school obtained in the Diagnostic Assessment of 2019, from higher-performing school to lower-performing. This helped me look for possible thematic differences as per principals’ knowledge of school accountability, usage of its elements and their views on leadership.

**Research Questions Analysis**

This section will now use my findings to address each of my research questions, and to also make some connections to previous research related to these issues.
Research Question 1

My first research question focused on how Dominican school principals describe their knowledge of school accountability in the DR’s education system and the elements that comprise it. In general, all participants in this study know something about school accountability (Theme 1). These statements align with the theory that sustains school leaders manage a sense of accountability as an intrinsic part of their functioning because it is rooted in their day-to-day operations, directly affecting how educators deliver their educational services (Carnoy et al., 2003). However, the participants defined school accountability in three different ways.

What my findings show is that there is a difference between seeing accountability through a fiscal lens, and also through a student learning lens. Some participants believe school accountability concerns student performance and achievement, and financial resources are there to support the academic process, in congruence with the underlying idea of the definition assumed in this study, where school accountability is a means to an end in education (Hanushek & Raymond, 2001; UNESCO, 2017; Stecher, 2010). Others believes school accountability is primarily related to reporting financial management, which aligns with practices reported in studies where accountability toward the provider of the resources is due, arguing that accountability helps secure transparency (Amdur & Mero-Jaffe, 2017; Stecher, 2010). A third way that some viewed accountability are those who believe that school accountability involves financial management and student performance, where the first takes precedence over the latter. This view relates to studies that trace the historical practice of public services providers measuring the cost versus the results of functions and activities (Camm & Stecher, 2010; Stecher, 2010). 2. However, all participants were consistent in using the data for improving student performance regardless which version of accountability they referenced: financial, student achievement, or a blend of both.
It is possible to conclude that, in general, principals know something about school accountability, but their knowledge varies from one principal to another. It is also possible to consider this positively since some knowledge is better than none. As per the literature supporting mental models, it is possible to transform existing knowledge into something that can further benefit the system as a whole (Johnson-Laird, 2010).

**Research Question 2**

My second question centers on the experiences principals have in analyzing, interpreting, and making decisions based on data from the DR accountability system assessments. In this regard, I found that, while there was no evidence of a profound data analysis process by the principals, all principals, in fact, work in different ways with the information from assessment reports (Sub-theme 2.1). Only two participants admitted to looking deeper into the results, but only because both have an academic background in math. Then arises the question of why the remaining eight do not take a closer look into the results of the assessments, even when half of the participants admit receiving training from their Districts to analyze the reports (Sub-theme 2.3).

Nevertheless, all participants claim to share such information with their teachers, students, families, and/or communities (Sub-theme 2.2), and in all cases, said to follow this process by creating an intervention or improvement plan for all cases (Sub-theme 2.4). This is consistent with the accountability model proposed in various literature (Hanushek & Raymond, 2001; Stecher, 2010). However, this study did not delve deeper to see if these intervention plans are consistent with accountability models presented in the literature here.

Given the evidence, it is possible to conclude that the process of implementing a school accountability system is accomplished partially in this country, as per the sample of this study, given that there are no general goals set by the system nor consequences for achieving those
goals. Adding to this, there is the finding is that all participants claim to value the assessment and reporting process because they see this as essential feedback for their school, for the attainment of the pre-set goals, and their improvement (Sub-theme 2.5). This may have positive implications for improving the Dominican school accountability system.

**Research Question 3**

My third question focuses on knowing how principals understand and experience their role as leaders, both in general and as it relates to the DR accountability system. All participating principals acknowledge and accept their role as leaders (Theme 3), and except for one participant, they declare themselves as leaders (Sub-theme 3.1). This relates to studies showing that in the light of standard-based testing, school principals and teachers have become aware of what is expected of them and take actions to prepare students in a well-orchestrated way to ensure their success (Amdur & Mero-Jaffe, 2017; Paletta et al., 2020; Quian, 2019).

Nine out of 10 participants admitted that as leaders and principals, their main focus is the pedagogical process (Sub-theme 3.2). Even though they did not use the term “instructional leadership,” all of them claim to have close and collaborative relationships with their teachers and personnel, and at least one claimed to engage in the teaching process with the teacher in ways that resemble instructional leadership.

Most principals believe everyone must be on board for change (Sub-theme 3.3). Most of them use awareness as a tool to get others to collaborate, as well as build leadership in others; this is consistent with literature that demonstrates that an effective way to implement school accountability implies the use of rhetoric in the form of speech as a method and process for a personal logic shift, appealing to the moral component or ethos of responsibility, where the principal uses persuasion to motivate teachers so they would make ethically responsible decisions towards the students (Lowenhaupt et al., 2016; Paletta et al., 2020; Quian, 2019).
However, one interesting finding is that most principals view the bureaucratic and administrative system as a distraction (Sub-theme 3.4). Most of them lamented having to leave school for numerous meetings, sometimes with short notice; but also the load of paperwork that needs to be done, taking away their attention from what they believe is more critical: the pedagogical process. This may be taken as a precautionary sign.

**Research Question 4**

My fourth question asks about the possible thematic differences that might exist between principals working in higher-performing schools and principals working in lower-performing schools. Since the metric used for the comparisons is the Diagnostic Assessment from 2019 for these conclusions, I will consider only the principals working in their school at the time of the assessment. This means that only two participants, Elisabeth (355 points average, considered a higher performing school) and Paula (309 points average, consider an average performing school), were not principals at the time of the assessment; however, they were the academic coordinators for the same school at that time. This left me with three principals in higher performing schools (Jack, 344; Edwin, 337; Rylee, 324), two in average performing schools (Elijah, 309; Reign, 302), and three principals in the lower performing (Johanna, 297; Grace, 296; Yolanda, 295).

As a reminder, I constructed the average performance score for each school by averaging the scores from the four different averages for domains covered in the assessment (Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies). The Diagnostic Assessment was conducted in 2019 to measure students’ assessment in ninth grade nationwide, and the national mean was 300 points, and a standard deviation of 50 points. Data was obtained from the Quality Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Education. Table 6 show the characteristics of each school.
considered in this analysis. For further or deeper analysis, seeing the socio-economic status of the schools is suggested.

Table 6

Characterization of Participating Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Domain Averages in DA</th>
<th>Calculated Average</th>
<th>Performance Type of School</th>
<th>9th grade Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language Math Social Studies Science</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>344 338 349 344</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>High Religious</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwin</td>
<td>339 329 339 339</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>High Religious</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rylee</td>
<td>327 323 320 327</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>High General</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elijah</td>
<td>307 311 309 308</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>Average Technical</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reign</td>
<td>304 303 294 305</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>Average General</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johanna</td>
<td>299 295 293 299</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>Low General</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>301 290 292 301</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>Low General</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolanda</td>
<td>296 295 294 296</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>Low General</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the purposes of the analysis, my first four participants are considered as coming from higher-performing schools, while the last three are deemed from lower-performing schools. The remaining three schools in the middle are considered average-performing schools. Following this table are the individual participant narratives for each one to help tell their stories.

It is important to note that I, as the researcher, did not know the average performance score for each principal’s school until after I had completed all of my interviews and wrote up each participant’s narrative. Only then, did I look up their performance data regarding each school, and then arrange my narratives in the order of highest to lowest average scores. This was done to assist in my analysis of my fourth research question, which relates to possible thematic differences between principals in higher and lower-performing schools (with this analysis offered in later chapters).

In looking at the interview results from principals working in schools with a higher average score, I did find some similarities. For example, when looking at comments from Jack
and Rylee, some of the common characteristics are (1) understanding that accountability is a process related primarily to students’ achievement, (2) analyzing and using assessment reports for the improvement of the students, (3) receiving training from the Ministry of Education for better use and understanding of the assessment reports. Edwin is the third person in this category, but turned out to be a surprise, since he was the only participant to declare the administrative aspect as his most important role; however, he also acknowledged the importance of the pedagogical aspect of his role.

In opposition to this, principals on the lower end of achievement in the Diagnostic Assessment, Johanna, Grace, and Yolanda, share other commonalities; this include (1) believing that school accountability is related to mainly financial resources, and (2) not receiving training from the Ministry of Education to analyze data coming from the assessments. What is striking about this finding is that both Grace and Yolanda claimed to have received instruction about school accountability at the university while obtaining their higher education degrees, while Johanna declared not receiving formal training about it.

It should be noted that my original goal was to have at least five principals each in higher and lower performing schools, but due to difficulties in recruitment, this was not possible. Thus my resulting number is too small to dig much deeper into thematic differences beyond these observations offered. At one point, I considered completely dropping this research question, but decided that these initial observations were important enough to offer, with the idea that future research could potentially build upon them. It is essential to mind that these results should not be taken as correlational, nor as a robust quantitative result, due to the size of the sample.
Summary of Findings and Connections to Previous Literature

The goal of this study was to learn if and what principals in the DR know about school accountability, and how they see and manage themselves as leaders using the elements of accountability available to them. It also aimed to discover characteristics that might differentiate
principals working in higher and lower performing schools, using the measure of one national diagnostic assessment.

This study revealed that all principals know something about school accountability, but with different meanings. Most of the participants acknowledged some elements of a school accountability system, involving standards, goals for performance, measurements, public reporting on student or school performance, and improvement plans (e.g., technical assistance for teachers, students, and schools). None of the participants referred to consequences for those performance measures, such as rewards or sanctions as a possibility.

Per the literature, several types of accountability may coexist and can be combined for better school effectiveness because each form has strengths and weaknesses (Darling-Hammond, 1991; Maroy & Pons, 2019). Three types were found in this study; the first is bureaucratic, administrative, or managerial accountability, which is top-down accountability established by formal organizational structures that schools must comply with, holding teachers responsible for following standard procedures, or when accounts are rendered to senior managers. It is about the achievement of measurable objectives set in prior agreements. A second type found is market-oriented accountability, with which most participants concur by feeling responsible for the outcomes to parents and the community; this requires schools to deliver the products and services that consumers expect based on previous declarations and agreements (customers being parents and students). A third type of accountability that emerged was moral accountability, which implies the correctness or morality of individuals’ or organizations’ actions. It is perceived when principals refer to their teachers and staff as aware of their responsibilities.

Although many common accountability system elements were mentioned, and three types were visible, most participants were not well articulated in their ideas about school accountability; it is as if they somewhat knew in their minds, but could not put the words
together coherently. It was only toward the end of my interviews that I realized the limitations of
the semantics involved. It became apparent to me that most principals, at first, understand school
accountability about the financial aspect that supports the educational process, while if I asked
about “academic” accountability, then they would immediately understand it in reference to
students’ achievements, as it is commonly referred to in the literature (e.g., Mansouri & Rowney,
2014; Lowenhaupt et al., 2016). Given the richness of the Spanish Language, I wonder if our
principals should be educated or re-educated using a more specific language in relation to school
(or academic) accountability. This finding also confirms the inherent nature of accountability in
the education process as a function to solve the school’s problems, as it happens in any other
professional activity, in the form of the sense of responsibility for your work (Carnoy et al.,

In this study, all participants analyze, use, and share the information produced by
assessment and evaluation, acknowledging it as an important source of feedback to teachers,
students, parents, and schools, and that it is a powerful tool for school quality management and
improvement, as commonly noted in the literature (e.g., OECD, 2016; Hanushek & Raymond,
2001). Most of the participants rely greatly on using awareness in the form of speech to motivate
agents to change their behavior in order to produce the desired outcome.

Principals in my study voiced that they analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of their
schools and made the necessary changes, accompanied by an action plan designed based on the
data. Also, they provided teachers with guidance in instructional planning and identifying areas
needing improvement. Some school principals shared the results with parents, and some met with
colleagues to compare results and discuss cooperative action. All these actions are in accordance
with the literature on accountability actions (e.g., Amdur & Mero-Jaffe, 2017; Hanushek &
Raymond, 2001). All participating principals also value assessing students’ progress,
performance, and achievement because it provides critical information and feedback that guides their actions; this is also in accordance with previous literature (e.g., Paufler & Sloat, 2020; OECD, 2016; Hanushek & Raymond, 2001).

Similar to much literature on leadership (e.g., Argon, 2015; Bush, 2011; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004; Mitani, 2018; Qian, 2019), except for one, all my participants declared themselves as leaders, claiming the capacity to balance daily tasks and operational factors and, at the same be a source of motivation for others. All acknowledged the duality of their functions as principals: managers, and leaders, but only one admitted that the most important role is that of the manager. Most stated functions, like managing interpersonal relationships, activation of teachers, planning and control, managing ongoing improvement, team management, managing personal development, and managing involvement; on the leadership front, some stated values such as humane, adaptive, flexible, moderate, honest, transparent, and ethical. All these behaviors align with previous literature (e.g., Brinia et al., 2014; Gurr & Drysdale, 2016; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004; Qian, 2019).

Most participants believe their primary role is as a leader within the pedagogical process. However, it is relevant to note that none of the participants specifically mentioned the concept of instructional leadership, which is known to be one of the primary roles of the school principal (e.g., Carless & Dimmock, 2001; Grissom et al., 2021; Paletta et al., 2020). Thus, this finding for these DR principals is contrary to such previous literature.

Another finding of this study is that most principals believe everyone in the school community must be involved for change to happen; most noted that this was needed for awareness and collaboration, but also essential for attending to the needs of others and students’ well-being. This too aligns with previous literature (e.g., Anderson, 2008; Carless & Dimmock, 2001; Gurr & Drysdale, 2016; Gumus et al., 2013; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013).
The last finding of my study is that there are different characteristics between those principals working in higher-achieving schools and those working in lower performing ones, mainly related to their knowledge and understanding of the concept of school accountability in line with the definition given in this study. In addition, there were differences in their focus on analyzing reports, sharing them with others to improve student performance, and having their focus of attention and action in the pedagogical aspect of the educational process, while involving everyone for change. Previous literature has supported the importance of such activities (e.g., Camm & Stecher, 2010; Carnoy et al., 2003; Lee & Lee, 2020; Qian, 2019).

Overall, while all participants revealed some knowledge and uses of the accountability system in place in the DR, there are still many obstacles to aligning their actions with the proper knowledge. However, their sense of responsibility for their work and the outcome of their students and school represents a beacon of hope for the students in attaining their education and the teachers in developing their profession.

Table 7 offers a summary of my findings and the literature related to it.

Table 7

Summary of Overarching Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohen (2023) Major Findings</th>
<th>Related Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All principals know something about school accountability, but with different meanings (Theme 1; Sub-themes 1, 2, 3).</td>
<td>Similar to Carnoy et al. (2003); Hanushek &amp; Raymond (2001); UNESCO (2017); OECD (2016); Stecher, 2010.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several types of accountability coexist and are combined for school effectiveness (Sub-theme 2.3).</td>
<td>Similar to Maroy and Pons (2019); Darling-Hammond (1991).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals use and share the information produced by assessment and evaluation, acknowledging it as an important source of feedback (Theme 2; Sub-themes 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5).</td>
<td>Similar to Paufler and Sloat (2020); OECD (2016); Hanushek and Raymond (2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most principals received training from the Ministry to analyze information from assessments (Sub-theme 2.3)</td>
<td>Not found in the literature.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7 - Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohen (2023) Major Findings</th>
<th>Related Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All participants declare themselves as leaders, acknowledging the dual function of the principal: manager and leaders (Theme 3; Sub-theme 3.1)</td>
<td>Similar to Argon (2015); Brinia et al. (2014); Bush; 2011; Gurr and Drysdale (2016); Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004); Qian (2019); Mitani (2018).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals believe their primary role as leaders is within the pedagogical process, even when they do not articulate the concept of instructional leadership (Sub-theme 3.2)</td>
<td>Contrary to Anderson, 2008; Carless and Dimmock (2001); Gumus et al., 2013; Grissom et al. (2021); Paletta et al. (2020).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals believe that everyone must be on board for change and improvement (Sub-theme 3.3)</td>
<td>Similar to Brinia et al. (2014); Qian (2019); Paletta et al. (2020).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals view the system as a distraction (Sub-theme 3.4)</td>
<td>Similar to Qian (2019).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendations**

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This qualitative study sought to understand what 10 Dominican school principals from urban Santo Domingo know about school accountability and if they use any of its composing elements while being the leader their school needs for change and improvement. The research findings contribute to the existing literature about implementing school accountability systems in different contexts. However, more research related to the school structures and administrative responsibilities of the principals might be helpful for the system.

Additional research regarding the knowledge (or lack thereof) of instructional leadership in school principals and teachers would be very beneficial; I might even dare say necessary, because, as established in the literature, metal models drive our actions and can steer principals and teachers in the wright direction by having the right information. My presumption is that, the clearer principals are regarding complex constructs such as school accountability and instructional leadership, their practice might improve. Also, there is room for more research on
leadership in general and how teachers and principals use it to improve their students and schools. Another possibility for research is about the potential differences between higher and lower performing schools, including a bigger sample to reach more definite conclusions in this regard. Another recommendation for further research is to explore the relationship between student achievement and how principals prioritize their time and attention as the school leader in the DR. My last recommendation for research is to learn about the life and profession of school principals. I base this on my experience during this study, that principals want to be heard; they want to be listened to.

**Recommendation for Leaders**

All participants in this study were very critical of the current educational system in their country, albeit respectful of the authorities. My recommendation for the Ministry of Education is consider some revisions to the current school accountability system in place, such as the formalization of its structure, assigning proper names to the different processes, making expectations clear in the existing documents, and in general, presenting the system as a clear and articulated structure for the users. Assigning clear goals for schools to reach in certain assessments would lay the grounds for an approximation of incentives or sanctions. This may help clear the concepts for an easier understanding for principals and teachers, students and parents. This may be included in future training specifically dedicated to the topic.

Also, I recommend that higher education providers revise their education programs, both graduate and undergraduate, to include the conceptualization of school accountability and not leave it to the moral responsibility of each aspiring and current educator.

**Chapter VI Closure**
This final chapter presented the findings of this study, which sought to understand what school principals in DR know about school accountability and how they use their leadership to improve their schools. I found that principals do know about school accountability; I also found that some do not immediately relate it to the academic performance of the students. Other findings were that principals make use of some of the elements of the school accountability system, like standards, goals, assessments, reports, and actions plans for improvement, and that they exercise their leadership for the improvement of their students and their school community. Findings revealed that, in general, principals find assessments to be a valuable tool for the school function.

It is my recommendation that more research be carried out about principals and teachers’ leadership for improvement, and to learn in depth about the relationship between school accountability in the DR and the possible influence on students’ performance. My recommendations for leaders are directed toward creating a formal and clearer structure of the school accountability system and to make it public knowledge. The results of my study may be relevant for leadership development programs at the university level and at the Ministry or District level, not only for principals, but also for teachers and staff. It may also be significant for future policymaking, for the potential reformulation of the current accountability system, the assignment of clear standards, goals, procedures and responsibilities for students’ outcomes to the appropriate actors.
REFERENCES


Ministerio de Educación República Dominicana [MINERD] (2014). Bases de la revisión y actualización curricular [Basis for the curriculum revisión and update].


Appendix A

Recruitment phone script (English and Spanish version)
Recruitment phone script in English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study introduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hello, my name is Massiel Cohen, I am a Ph.D. student at Western Michigan University. I am calling because I am conducting a research with school principals. I have selected your school from a list of secondary schools that participated in the Diagnostic Evaluation 2019. I would like to know if you would allow me an interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With my research I intend to understand what you know about our country’s school accountability system how you perceive yourself in your role as leaders using data from this system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in conducting a 30 to 40 minutes interview, virtually or at your school, at a time of your convenience. Your participation will be completely confidential, so neither your name, nor your school name will be revealed. This interview will not affect you job position in any way and it is not any sort of evaluation nor assessment of the work you do. It neither conveys any payment or reward for your participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>If not interested:</strong> Thank very much you for your time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>[call ends]</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential participant is interested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for your interest and willingness to participate in my study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This study does not represent any known risks. Your participation is voluntary, and there will not be any kind of economic compensation, nor of any other nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In order to carry out the interview, I will be visiting your school. We may also conduct the interview via Zoom Meetings or another virtual meeting tool. Please tell me when a good time for us is to meet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>[arrange time for the interview]</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once again, thank you for your cooperation. We will meet on _________________. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me by phone at 809-802-1218, or by email at <a href="mailto:massiel.cohencamacho@wmich.edu">massiel.cohencamacho@wmich.edu</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>[call ends]</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recruitment phone script in Spanish

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introducción al estudio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hola, mi nombre es Massiel Cohen, soy estudiante de Doctorado en la Universidad Western Michigan. Le estoy llamando porque estoy condicionando un estudio sobre los directores de centros educativos de Secundaria. He seleccionado su centro de un listado de centros participantes en la Evaluación Diagnóstica de Tercero de Secundaria 2019. Me gustaría saber si me permite entrevistarlo(a).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con mi estudio, tengo la intención de conocer lo que usted comprende sobre el Sistema de Rendición de Cuentas Escolar de nuestro país, y cómo usted se percibe a sí mismo en su rol como líder utilizando la data que brinda este sistema.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estoy interesada en conducir la entrevista de unos 30 a 40 minutos, en su centro, o virtualmente, en el momento de su conveniencia. Su participación será completamente confidencial, con lo que ni su nombre ni el nombre de su centro educativo serán revelados. Esta entrevista no afecta su posición de trabajo de ninguna manera, ni tampoco es ningún tipo de evaluación de su trabajo. Tampoco conlleva pago o remuneración alguna por su participación.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Si no esta interesado</strong>: Muchas gracias por su tiempo. Pase buen resto del día.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[la llamada termina]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El potencial participante está interesado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gracias por su interés y disposición de participar en mi estudio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Este estudio no representa ningún riesgo conocido. Su participación es voluntaria, y no habrá ninguna compensación económica ni de ninguna otra naturaleza.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Para llevar a cabo la entrevista, yo visitaría su centro. También podríamos conducir la entrevista vía Zoom Meetings, u otra herramienta de encuentro virtual, por favor, dígame cuando es un buen momento para reunirnos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[agendar entrevista]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Una vez más, gracias por su cooperación. No veremos el __________________. Si usted tiene cualquier pregunta o preocupación, por favor contácteme al celular número 809-802-1218, o vía correo electrónico a <a href="mailto:massiel.cohencamacho@wmich.edu">massiel.cohencamacho@wmich.edu</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[fin de la llamada]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Consent form for participants (English and Spanish Version)
Western Michigan University
Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Technology

Principal Investigator: Louann Bierlein Palmer, Ed.D.
Student Investigator: Massiel Cohen Camacho
Title of Study: SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY WITHIN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS’ BELIEFS AND KNOWLEDGE

You are invited to participate in this research project titled "School Accountability within the Dominican Republic: a qualitative study of school principals’ beliefs and knowledge"

STUDY SUMMARY: This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide information that will help you decide whether you want to take part in this study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. The purpose of the research is to: capture the voices of school principals in the DR as to what they know about the country’s school accountability system, and how they see their role as leaders in using data from this system to improve student academic achievement and will serve as Massiel Cohen Camacho’s dissertation for the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It may also be used in future policy making. If you take part in the research, you will be asked to take part in an interview to share your experience and knowledge about the Dominican accountability system. Your time in the study will take around 30 minutes. Possible risk and costs to you for taking part in the study may be time to complete the interview, and there are no potential benefits of taking part. An interview is the only way to participate in this research. You may also choose o to participate in this study. The following information in this consent form will provide more detail about the research study. Please ask any questions if you need more clarification and to assist you in deciding if you wish to participate in the research study. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by agreeing to take part in this research or by signing this consent form. After all of your questions have been answered and the consent document reviewed, if you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign this consent form.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
The purpose of this qualitative study is to capture the voices of school principals in the Dominican Republic as to what they know about the country’s school accountability system, and how they see their role as leaders in using data from this system to improve student academic achievement.

Who can participate in this study?
Participants may come from any public schools in Santo Domingo, Regional 10 and 15, that participated in the Diagnostic Test 2019. Schools that did not participated in the Diagnostic Test are excluded from the sample. Also, school outside of Regional 10 and 15, special education schools, rural and private schools are excluded from the sample. Once given their consent, in order to participate, principals will take part in a virtual interview.

Where will this study take place?
This interview will take place virtually, from wherever you feel comfortable. An alternative is to
not take part in this study.

**What is the time commitment for participating in this study?**
The virtual interview should take between 30 to 40 minutes.

**What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?**
You will be asked to take part in an interview where you will talk about your knowledge about
school accountability experiences as a principal using data to improve students school
achievements.

**What information is being measured during the study?**
In this interview, the researcher will be asking questions to collect information regarding your
experience and knowledge on school accountability systems in the Dominican Republic, as well
as your experience as a school principal and a leader.

**What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?**
The interview will be confidential, however, there is the risk of losing this confidentiality. In
order to minimize this risk, researcher will use a code to identify you and your school, instead of
your name and the name of your school.

**What are the benefits of participating in this study?**
There are no benefits to you aside from sharing the results of this study with you. A general
benefit of this study is the availability of evidence that could potentially serve in improving
school assessments policies, principal’s education policies.

**Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?**
There are no costs associated with participating in this study.

**Is there any compensation for participating in this study?**
There is no compensation for participating, nor any kind of economic compensation.

**Who will have access to the information collected during this study?**
To ensure that collected data is safe, the following will be done:
1) The researcher will use high-quality tools for audio-recording during interviews and will
keep hard copies and electronic copies for all data.
2) To protect the confidentiality of participants, the researcher will use codes. Therefore, school
names and personal names will not be used in any publication.
3) All the data will be kept in a safe locked place that no one other than the student investigator
can have access to. All electronic data will be kept in a password protected and encrypted
electronic storage device that the student will keep in a locked file whenever she is not
actively using the material.

**What will happen to my data after the study is complete?**
After the study is concluded, we will package up the data and any hard copies and submit it to
the university archive to be kept for three years, after which it can be destroyed.
The information collected about you for this research will not be used by or distributed to investigators for any other research.

**What if you want to stop participating in this study?**
You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. There are no consequences if you decide to stop your participation. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Louann Bierlein Palmer at +7269-387-3596 or l.bierleinpalmer@wmich.edu, or the student investigator, Massiel Cohen at 809-802-1218 or massiel.cohencamacho@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research and Innovation at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This study was approved by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (WMU IRB) on (approval date).

Participating in this survey online indicates your consent for use of the answers you supply.
Usted está invitado a participar en este Proyecto de investigación titulada "Rendición de cuentas escolar en la República Dominicana: un estudio cualitativo de las creencias y conocimientos de los directores de centros educativos."

RESUMEN DEL ESTUDIO: Este formulario de consentimiento es parte de un proceso de consentimiento informado para un estudio de investigación, y le proveerá información que le ayudará a decidir si quiere formar parte de este estudio. Su participación en este estudio es completamente voluntaria. El propósito de la investigación es: captar las voces de los directores de centro en la República Dominicana en torno a lo que saben sobre el sistema de rendición de cuentas escolar del país, y cómo asumen su rol como líderes utilizando data de este Sistema para la mejora del desempeño académico, y servirá como tesis doctoral para Massiel Cohen Camacho, dentro de los requerimientos para obtener el grado de Doctora en Filosofía. También podrá ser utilizada en la futura elaboración de políticas públicas. Si usted participa en el estudio, se le pedirá hace una entrevista en la que compartirá su experiencia y conocimiento sobre el sistema de rendición de cuentas escolar de la República Dominicana. El tiempo que tomará será alrededor de 30 minutos. Los posibles riesgos y costos asociados con su participación son tiempo para completar la entrevista, y no hay beneficios para usted al participar. Una entrevista es la única forma de participar en esta investigación. Usted también puede escoger no participar en este estudio.

La siguiente información contenida en este formulario de consentimiento, le dará más detalles sobre el estudio. Si necesita cualquier aclaración, por favor pregunte, para asistirle en decidir si participa en este estudio. Usted no está cediendo ningún derecho legal al consentir formar parte del estudio, ni por firmar este consentimiento informado. Después de que sus preguntas hayan sido satisfechas y el documento de consentimiento haya sido revisado, si usted decide participar en este estudio, se le pedirá que firme este consentimiento informado.

¿Qué intentamos descubrir con este estudio?
El propósito de este estudio cualitativo es captar las voces de los directores de centros educativos en la República Dominicana, en cuanto a qué ellos saben sobre el sistema de rendición de cuentas escolar del país, y cómo ellos ven su rol como líderes utilizando datos de este sistema para la mejora del rendimiento estudiantil.

¿Quién puede participar en este estudio?
Los participantes pueden pertenecer a cualquier centro educativo público en Santo Domingo, Regional 10 y 15, que participaron en la Prueba Diagnóstica 2019. Los centros educativos que no
participaron en la Prueba Diagnóstica están excluidos de la muestra. También, centros fuera de la Regional 10 y 15, centros de educación especial, rurales y privados, están excluidos. Una vez obtenido su consentimiento, los directores de centro participarán en una entrevista virtual.

¿Dónde tendrá lugar este estudio?
La entrevista para este estudio tendrá lugar de forma virtual, desde donde usted se sienta cómodo. También puede realizarse de forma presencial. Usted también tiene la alternativa de no participar en este estudio.

¿Cuál es el tiempo comprometido para este estudio?
La entrevista virtual debería tomar de 30 a 40 minutos.

¿Qué se le pedirá hacer si escoge participar en este estudio?
Se le pedirá que participe en una entrevista en la que usted hablará sobre su conocimiento el sistema de rendición de cuentas escolar, y su experiencia como director de centro utilizando datos de este sistema para la mejora del rendimiento de los estudiantes.

¿Qué información mide este estudio?
En esta entrevista, la investigadora hará preguntas para recolectar información respecto a su experiencia y conocimiento sobre el sistema de rendición de cuentas de la República Dominicana, así como sobre su experiencia como director de centro y como líder.

¿Cuáles son los riesgos de participar en este estudio y cómo éstos serán minimizados?
La entrevista será confidencial, sin embargo, existe el riesgo de perder esta confidencialidad. Para minimizar este riesgo, la investigadora usará un Código para identificarlo a usted y a su centro educativo, en vez de su nombre o el de su centro.

¿Cuáles son los beneficios de participar en este estudio?
No hay beneficios para usted más allá de compartirle los resultados de este. Un beneficio general de este estudio será la disponibilidad de evidencia que potencialmente ayude a mejorar las políticas públicas en cuanto a las evaluaciones en los centros educativos.

¿Hay algún costo asociado con la participación en este estudio?
No hay ningún costo asociado con la participación en este estudio.

¿Habrá alguna compensación por participar en este estudio?
No habrá ninguna compensación económica ni de otro tipo por participar.

¿Quién tendrá acceso a la información recolectada en este estudio?
Para asegurar que los datos recolectados se mantengan a salvo, se hará lo siguiente:
4) Durante la entrevista, la investigadora utilizará herramientas de alta calidad para las grabaciones de audio, y mantendrá copias físicas de toda la data.
5) Para proteger la confidencialidad de los participantes, la investigadora utilizará códigos. Por lo tanto, los nombres de los centros educativos y nombres personales no será usados en ninguna publicación.
6) Todos los datos se guardarán en un lugar seguro y bajo llave, al cual solo la estudiante investigadora tenga acceso. Todos los datos electrónicos se mantendrán en un dispositivo electrónico encriptado y protegido por una clave que el estudiante mantendrá en un archivo seguro mientras no esté utilizando el material activamente.

¿Qué pasará con mis datos después de completado el estudio?
Después de concluido el estudio, empaquemos los datos y toda copia física y lo enviaremos a la Universidad para ser archivada durante tres años, luego será destruido. La información recolectada sobre usted para esta investigación no será utilizada ni distribuida a otros investigadores para otra investigación.

¿Qué pasa si quiero detener mi participación en este estudio?
Usted puede decidir detener su participación en el estudio en cualquier momento por cualquier razón. No hay consecuencias si usted decide detener su participación. La investigadora también puede decidir detener su participación en el estudio sin su consentimiento.

Si tiene dudas o preguntas antes o durante el estudio, usted puede contactar a la investigadora primaria, Louann Bierlein Palmer al +7269-387-3596 o l.bierleinpalmer@wmich.edu, o a la investigadora estudiante, Massiel Cohen al 809-802-1218 o massiel.cohencamacho@wmich.edu. Usted también puede contactar al Jefe del Comité Institucional de Revisión al 269-387-8293 o al Vicepresidente de Investigación e Innovación al 269-387-8298 en caso de que surjan preguntas en el curso del estudio.

Este estudio fue aprobado por el Comité Institucional de Revisión de la Universidad de Western Michigan (WMU IRB) en fecha 15 de marzo de 2022.

Participar en esta entrevista virtual indica su consentimiento para el uso de las respuestas que usted provea.
Appendix C

Interview script (English and Spanish Version)
## Interview Protocol

**SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY WITHIN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS’ BELIEVES AND KNOWLEDGE**

### Interviewee Code

**Hello. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study about what school principals in the Dominican Republic know about school accountability, and how they experience their role as leaders. This study is an effort to obtain information about which are principals believes and knowledges regarding school accountability and students’ achievement.**

### Please provide some general information about yourself:

- **Highest academic grade achieved:**
- **Time in the current position:**
- **Time as a teacher:**
- **Time as another academic position:**

### Questions:

1. Please start out by describing your role as principal. In your own words, tell me:
   - a. What are the most important activities you carry out in a typical school day?
   - b. What would you say is your primary focus each day?
   - c. What determines which activities you prioritize as a principal?
   - d. In what ways do you interact with teachers?

2. What do you understand is a “leader”?
   - a. What does a leader do?
   - b. Do you see yourself as one? Why? Why not?

3. As a school principal, what helps you focus on students’ academic achievements?
   - a. What drives your attention away?

4. How do you make change happen in your school?

5. Do you know what is expected of you as a principal?
   - a. By the Ministry
b. By teachers and staff

c. By students

d. By parents

6. What is the first thing that comes to your mind when I say school accountability?
   a. How would you define it?
   b. Where did you learn about school accountability? (academic program, special instruction for principals, professional training, Regional or District common jargon, another place)
   c. Do you feel accountable for anything in your school?
   d. To whom do you feel accountable?

7. Do your teachers and staff know what you expect from them?

8. Do your teachers and staff know what other people within their education community expect from them?

9. How would you describe your relationship with your teachers?

10. How would you describe your relationship with other members of the education community (staff, students, parents, etc.)?

11. What are your thoughts about the National Diagnostic Test?
   a. Do you think about the use of this tests results?
   b. How do you use the reports that come from the test?
   c. Have you received training to analyze and/or interpret the data?
   d. Do you share the results or reports with teachers, parents, students? How?
   e. What happens when results of the test are low?
   f. What do you think is your responsibility in this process?
   g. In your opinion, what is the value of the results/reports of the test?

12. Regarding the academic area, could you describe the process for decision making in your school?

13. What do you value the most in your job?

   Thank you very much for your time!
**Interview script in Spanish**

**RENDICION DE CUENTAS ESCOLAR EN LA REPÚBLICA DOMINICANA: UN ESTUDIO CUALITATIVO DE LAS CREENCIAS Y CONOCIMIENTOS DE DIRECTORES DE CENTROS EDUCATIVOS**

**Protocolo de Entrevista**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Hora de la entrevista:</th>
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<td>Fecha:</td>
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<td>Código de entrevistado:</td>
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**Hola. Gracias por concederme esta entrevista para participar en este estudio sobre lo que los directores de centros educativos dominicano saben sobre la Rendición de Cuentas escolar, y cómo éstos experimentan su rol como líderes. Este estudio es un esfuerzo para obtener información sobre cuáles son las principales concepciones con relación a la rendición de cuentas escolar y el desempeño de los estudiantes.**

Le preguntaré sobre su información general:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Último grado académico alcanzado:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tiempo en la posición actual:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tiempo como docente:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tiempo en otra posición:</td>
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**Pregunta:**

1. Por favor, empiece por describir su rol como director de centro. En sus propias palabras, dígame:
   a. ¿Cuáles son las actividades más importantes que realiza en un día típico en su centro?
   b. ¿Cuál diría usted que es su principal foco cada día?
   c. ¿Qué determina cuáles actividades usted prioriza como director de centro?
   d. ¿De qué formas usted interactúa con sus docentes?

2. ¿Qué entiende usted que es un “líder”?
   a. ¿Qué hace un líder?
   b. ¿Se ve a sí mismo como líder? ¿por qué sí? ¿por qué no?

3. Como director de centro, ¿qué le ayuda a enfocarse en los logros académicos de sus estudiantes?
   a. ¿Qué le quita su atención?

4. ¿Qué hace para que los cambios sucedan en su centro?

5. ¿Sabe usted lo que se espera de usted como director de centro?
a. El Ministerio  
b. Los profesores y personal  
c. Los estudiantes  
d. Los padres  

6. ¿Qué es lo primero que viene a su mente cuando digo rendición de cuentas escolar?  
   a. ¿Cómo lo definiría?  
   b. ¿Dónde aprendió sobre rendición de cuentas escolar? (programa académico, curso para directores, formación continua, jerga cotidiana en el Distrito o Regional, otro lugar)  
   c. ¿Usted siente que debe dar cuenta por lo que pase en su centro?  
   d. ¿A quién debe dar cuentas?  

7. ¿Saben sus docentes y personal lo que usted espera de ellos?  

8. ¿Saben sus docentes y personal lo que otras personas en su comunidad educativa espera de ellos (personal, estudiantes, padres, etc.)?  

9. ¿Cómo describiría su relación con sus docentes?  

10. ¿Cómo describiría su relación con otros miembros de su comunidad educativa? (personal, estudiantes, padres, etc.)?  

11. ¿Qué piensa usted sobre la Evaluación Diagnóstica?  
   a. ¿Qué piensa sobre los usos de los resultados de esta prueba?  
   b. ¿Cómo utiliza usted los informes que provienen de esa prueba?  
   c. ¿Ha recibido usted entrenamiento para analizar y/o interpretar la data?  
   d. ¿Comparte usted los resultados o informes con los docentes, padres, estudiantes? ¿De qué forma?  
   e. ¿Qué sucede cuando los resultados del desempeño de los estudiantes en la prueba son bajos?  
   f. ¿Cuál piensa usted que es su responsabilidad en este proceso?  
   g. ¿En su opinión, cuál es el valor de los resultados/informes de la evaluación?  

12. En cuanto a área académica, ¿podría describir el proceso de toma de decisiones en su centro?  

13. ¿Qué es lo que más valora en su trabajo?  

¡Muchas gracias por su tiempo!
Appendix D

HSIRB Approval Letter
Date: March 15, 2022

To: Louann Bierlein Palmer, Principal Investigator

Re: Modification - IRB-2021-61
SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY WITHIN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' BELIEFS AND KNOWLEDGE

This letter will serve as confirmation that the change(s) requested to your research project titled SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY WITHIN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' BELIEFS AND KNOWLEDGE has been approved by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (WMU IRB).

The conditions and the duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below.

In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions, unanticipated events, or expected problems associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Associate Director Research Compliance for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: March 3, 2023