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## Factors Impacting Heads of Department's Management of Teaching and Learning in Primary Schools: A South African Perspective

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this study was to explore factors impacting heads of department's management of teaching and learning at primary schools in South Africa. The study was based on the Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Model. It adopted a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods research design which combined the positivist and interpretivist paradigms. The sample consisted of 60 heads of department, who responded to a questionnaire, and another additional 10 heads of department who were interviewed. Simple random sampling was used to select the respondents to the questionnaire while purposive sampling was used to select the interviewees. The findings revealed factors such as, inter alia, a lack of administrative and financial support, lack of parental involvement, lack of learner academic development, poor working conditions, insufficient supply of learning support materials, and lack of laboratories. Therefore, this study recommends that there should be sufficient time allocation for heads of department to balance the management of teaching and learning with other roles attached to their job description as outlined in the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM). Heads of department should be trained and be developed to support teachers and learners to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. They should share the challenges that are experienced in the classrooms with parents to be in a position that enables parents to help teachers. School-parent collaboration will enhance effective management by heads of department. Moreover, the Department of Basic Education officials should provide sustained administrative and financial support to enhance department heads' management of teaching and learning in primary schools.

**Keywords:** head of department; instructional leadership; management; management of learning; management of teaching; school management team

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## 1. Introduction

A school is a multifaceted, living, growing organisation and its practices and growth need to be managed effectively. In South Africa, the school's management is the responsibility of school management teams (SMTs). At every primary school, SMTs comprise heads of department (HoDs), a deputy principal, and a principal. Each member of the SMT has detailed responsibilities for which they are accountable as outlined in the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2016). The management system encourages schools to decentralise decision-making and increase accountability for curriculum delivery and learners' achievement. The management and leadership of the school are no longer the obligation of the principal alone but the team's responsibility, which is composed predominantly of middle managers who are also HoDs. Most research studies on school management focus on the leadership of school principals (Lumadi, 2017; Chabalala & Naidoo, 2021). Nevertheless, there is a rapidly increasing interest in the management and leadership of other members of the SMTs in schools, highlighting the changes and growing complexity of schools (De Nobile, 2018; Harris & Jones, 2017; Sengai, 2021; Tapala et al., 2020).

Therefore, this empirical research is motivated by factors contributing to HoDs' management of teaching and learning as curriculum managers' instructional leaders. HoDs bridge the gap between SMTs and what goes on in the classrooms in practice. They are the critical agents in the teaching-learning situation and schools' academic performance. Their management and leadership in teaching and learning are fundamental to developing effective primary schools. HoDs are expected to manage comprehensively, control, and monitor teachers' work output to enhance teaching and learning (Bipath & Nkabinde, 2018; Mampane, 2017; Sengai, 2021). In South Africa, some primary schools are regarded as performing schools owing to their successful attainment of the district or provincial academic performance targets. In contrast, other schools are regarded as underperforming because they do not meet the expected district or provincial academic performance targets. DBE officials always enquire about the roles played by HoDs in teaching and learning at underperforming primary schools. HoDs at primary schools are tasked with guaranteeing quality academic performance; therefore it is essential to ask how they do this and what challenges and opportunities exist for them in their respective schools. Hughes et al. (2020) claim that school leaders need to be proactive, courageous, and decisive to improve academic performance. However, Torres (2019) has found that distributed leadership and professional collaboration are more critical to school leadership and teachers' job satisfaction.

There is consensus that HoDs should focus more on curriculum management, and deputies should focus more on operations. In some primary schools, HoDs focus on both the curriculum and operations. HoDs' roles as middle managers are multifaceted which implies that they are teachers, team leaders and team managers as well. HoDs are faced with multi-purpose roles within the primary school. They are expected to organise all educational activities between the top management and the teachers in the classrooms. Their role entails managing their departments within different grades whilst concurrently being class teachers. In most studies in which school leadership is deliberated, the focus tends to be on

principals' roles, duties, and responsibilities as leaders of all school activities, including teaching and learning. The researchers' interest is to determine factors impacting heads of department's management of teaching and learning in primary schools.

In under-resourced schools, HoDs find it difficult to carry out their instructional leadership roles (Tapala et al., 2020). Some HoDs in primary schools head and manage subjects in which they are not specialised, which consequently weakens their ability to manage those subjects to the best of their ability as well as impacting negatively on the learners' academic performance in those subjects. Therefore, it is fundamental that school systems and the DBE consider how HoDs' roles and duties can be developed to ensure that school academic performance continues to grow. As the underpinning for learning successfully is entrenched in early childhood education, Naidoo and Petersen (2015) contend that the basis to enhance the learners' attainment in the extensive education system is improving the quality and excellence of education in primary schools. High-quality education at primary schools, which is the crucial work of the HoDs as curriculum managers, can be determined by the schools' academic performance. Therefore, the best way to examine HoDs' work is to examine factors that impact their instructional leadership. Globally, schools face challenges in achieving high-quality education that improves the learners' overall academic performance (Van den Akker et al., 2015). High-quality education for learners is dependent on the leadership styles of the SMTs. One of the responsibilities of primary schools' SMTs is effective school leadership and management which play a significant role in providing this level of education to learners.

The researchers believe that how HoDs manage teaching and learning in the various subjects influences academic performance in primary schools. The curriculum demands in primary schools lie with the HoDs as they are expected to be in command of the subjects they lead and manage. Therefore, it is increasingly recognised that managing teaching and learning is one of the most critical activities for HoDs. However, HoDs use different leadership strategies owing to lack of homogeneous management training in South Africa (Ogina, 2017). This is likely to impact their management of teaching and learning.

## **2. Literature Review**

Studies in South Africa report that learners' academic achievement is most strongly connected with the nature of the school the learners attend (Marishane, 2011; Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Spaull & Kotze, 2015; Wills & Hofmeyr, 2018). The more constructively the schools are run and managed by HoDs when providing instructional leadership, the better the chances that learners would achieve. Gurr and Drysdale (2013), as quoted by Gurr (2018), have identified that lack of understanding and managerial support by senior leaders, unavailability of professional preparation and leadership improvement by individual middle leaders, and immature professional knowledge and abilities are aspects that militate against the practicability of middle leaders' role. Furthermore, Leithwood (2016) and Tapala et al. (2020) identify that lack of leadership expectations of principals in primary schools constrains HoDs in their leadership. The leadership roles and responsibilities of HoDs, principals and deputy principals are not clearly

understood. Grootenboer et al. (2015) indicate that 'middle leaders' refer to personnel who have an acknowledged leadership position in their educational institution and have a significant teaching role. HoDs can be regarded as middle managers and leaders because they stand between the SMT and the teaching staff; they link the gap between an SMT and what transpires in the classrooms. Lumadi (2017) has found that management provides the drive and direction for increased achievement and creates the best use of the available resources and procedures to make this happen. The basis for better-quality learner attainment in any education system is the progress of education quality in primary schools.

Therefore, it is imperative not to overlook the HoDs' roles, duties and responsibilities, or the challenges they may experience. Indeed, there is a growing belief that individual leadership, such as that of the principal, is inadequate for leading teaching in a multifaceted organisation such as a school (Odhiambo, 2014). Principals alone cannot run a school in addition to being responsible for the teaching in the school. The involvement of HoDs in this sphere is undeniable, as they are the curriculum managers and influence teacher practice in the classroom (Lumadi, 2017; Mestry, 2017, Sengai, 2021; Tapala et al., 2020). Research in the function, rationale, and growth of middle leadership in schools, results from principalship as a unique view of leadership to greater combined accountability for leadership in schools (Odhiambo, 2014). In South Africa, the challenge primary schools face regarding learner academic performance is the potential scarcity of HoDs which unavoidably plays a vital role in dealing with curriculum delivery through effective instructional leadership. Gurr and Drysdale (2013), as quoted by Gurr (2018), indicate that there have been leadership positions in schools for many years in what have been termed middle-level leadership roles, but unfortunately, too often the prospects and support for these roles have been lacking.

Furthermore, Ogina (2017) contends that HoDs' management or leadership at schools has received scant attention from researchers in contrast with that of principals. The duties of teachers in South Africa are categorically outlined in the PAM plan as described by the Employment of Teachers Act (EEA) of 1998 (DBE, 2016). The roles and duties of HoDs that enhance the management of teaching and learning in schools are to evaluate and record learners' achievement; to organise assessment, homework, and written assignments; to control teachers' and learners' work; and to encourage organisational proficiency in the department and the school. These duties imply that HoDs link theory and practice, policy and procedure within the school. An HoD's work is not limited to performing administrative duties but goes beyond that. This means that HoDs must focus their effort on improving teaching and learning and be accountable for the results obtained in their subjects. HoDs are expected to promote quality teaching and meaningful learning in a productive learning environment.

Bipath and Nkabinde (2018) argue that the function of HoDs is the most exciting and influential position in an efficient primary school. Nevertheless, according to Naidoo and Petersen (2015), 21st-century principals are anticipated to become change agents who would be intensely involved in improving teaching and curriculum delivery in schools. The researchers believe that this fundamental role

also involves the HOD more than any other member of the SMT. Therefore, the rationale behind this argument is that HoDs help to transform curriculum delivery in the classroom as managers in both teaching and learning. HoDs also lead in guiding and inspiring teachers within their departments to implement the curriculum effectively. Mthiyane et al. (2019) emphasise that the role of the HoDs entails, *inter alia*, administration, management, supervision, staff development and leadership. HoDs' efficiency in managing teaching and leadership in promoting excellence in learner academic performance should become a deliberate process of design and achievement. HoDs, as curriculum leaders, also act as instructional leaders to bring about changes among teachers' and learners' behaviour and to ensure that all required resources are available for meaningful learning.

HoDs are vital components of the school management teams that provide instructional leadership as change agents in their respective departments (Leithwood, 2016; Mthiyane et al., 2019; Ogina, 2017; Sengai, 2021; Simpson et al., 2016). As instructional leaders, HoDs are the necessary means for encouraging distributed leadership and expanding ideas and goals for the learners' performance beyond the principal to other teachers (Seobi & Wood, 2016). Moreover, HoDs are accountable for guaranteeing that the vision and goals for the school are well established and attainable. Mthiyane et al. (2019) suggest that instructional leaders are significant contributors to success in implementing change in teaching. Mampane (2017) contends that for educators to be able to head a department effectively, they need to be trained as professional developers, managers, overseers and administrators because they create the ideal conditions for change in teaching and learning. Mthiyane et al. (2019) and Seobi and Wood (2016) assert that leaders, such as HoDs, make conscious decisions to be instructional leaders in their departments. HoDs manage and lead curriculum delivery at schools. Bush (2013) confirms that little thought has been given to the processes by which development can be attained in schools, including the need for monitoring, moderating and supervising by HoDs. They are expected to help teachers set and achieve professional and personal goals to improve school academic performance. Mthiyane et al. (2019) contend that an HoD's management is key to improving learner performances at schools. Naidoo and Petersen (2015) indicate that curriculum managers who happen to be HoDs are expected to be highly involved in enhancing instruction and curricula in their respective primary schools.

Therefore, instructional leadership's tasks are more related to the crucial purpose of school which entails teaching and learning and supporting teachers and learners towards educational excellence in a safe, supportive and collaborative work environment that stimulates creativity and innovative teaching strategies (Leithwood, 2016; Mthiyane et al., 2019; Ogina, 2017; Sengai, 2021; Simpson et al., 2016). Corrick and Reed (2019) maintain that a considerable weight of expectation is placed upon HoDs to develop, promote, implement and evaluate quality goals and regulations to attain expected academic performance within their schools. Mthiyane et al. (2019) point out that the way an HoD operates significantly influences the wellbeing of teachers and learners in working toward expected

goals. HoDs are expected to be confident in their skills, knowledge, and competence to execute their roles and responsibilities of managing and leading teaching and learning effectively. According to Ghavifekr and Ibrahim (2014), HoDs mobilise teachers under their management and leadership and create school-based communities of practice. Teacher-leaders must be strongly allied with and connected to the teachers they support to manage teaching and learning successfully. Corrick and Reed (2019) and Heikka et al. (2020) postulate that leadership is not simply a matter of following a prescribed approach intended to promote high-quality educational practices; instead, it requires sensitive interaction with others. Most studies have indicated a substantial relationship between teaching and learning excellence with the educational leadership performed by school leaders such as HoDs (Ahmad & Ghavifekr, 2014). Metcalfe (2018) suggests that HoDs frequently appraise teachers' curriculum coverage and learners' work. Moreover, HoDs assist teachers to resolve challenges associated with curriculum coverage

### 3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is the Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Model (HBSL Model) as this research is about leading and managing teaching and learning by HoDs. This model is based on the principle that there is no single best leadership style and that the best leadership style to be used will depend on the situation (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). This theoretical model posits that the changing levels of a leader's subordinates and circumstances play the most significant role in shaping which leadership style is most suitable. Kenton (2019) argues that this model suggests leaders must be able to alter their styles of leadership to their followers and their abilities and under this model direction is both task-compatible and relationship-relevant. The HBSL Model relates the leadership style to the level of readiness of the followers in stages. A particular circumstance's environment is considered the essential variable in determining how a successful leader operates to respond adequately to the prevailing situation. Leadership practices can diverge and depend much on the contextual factors that surround the HoDs. In the HBSL Model, leaders who may be an HoD should first adapt their leadership style based on the level of maturity of the teachers under their leadership, and the variety of circumstances that exist at the school. HoDs must therefore lead teachers with different maturity levels in terms of their profession at schools and need to use appropriate leadership styles when interacting with teachers with different maturity levels. The HBSL Theory entails leadership style and the maturity level of those being led, as Cherry (2020) asserts that, according to the HBSL Model, the leadership styles originate from four basic behaviours, namely:

- S1: Telling,
- S2: Selling,
- S3: Participating, and
- S4: Delegating.

HoDs according to the telling leadership style give teachers clear directions and supervise them closely. For instance, an HoD gives precise, firm instructions on managing classrooms for effective teaching and meaningful learning and

supervises progress closely. In the selling leadership style, HoDs attempt to convince and sell their ideas to teachers by means of their persuasive ability but are not willing to explain task directions on how to do things in a specific way. For example, an HoD provides formal one-on-one coaching to teachers and communicates and develops a vision aligned with the whole school vision. In the participating leadership style, HoDs, in managing teaching and learning, share thoughts and decisions with teachers who are not only inexperienced but lack the confidence to carry out teaching tasks assigned to them effectively. For instance, the HoD and teachers may set a goal that 60 per cent of learners must obtain above 50 per cent in their subjects and then come up with instructional measures to achieve them. In the delegating leadership style, HoDs allow teachers to take responsibility for teaching task decisions. For instance, an HoD delegates teaching to teachers to carry out the expected levels according to the stipulated curriculum and assessment policy statement (CAPS) guidelines on their own.

#### **4. Methodology**

The research design that was implemented in this research was concurrent triangulation. The logic of this research design is that quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously (Ary et al., 2019; Flick, 2018; Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). Creswell and Creswell (2018) attest that the concurrent triangulation research design is a mixed-methods approach, whereby the researcher concurrently gathers and compares quantitative and qualitative data. The results are then mixed during the interpretation stage, as indicated by Ivankova et al. (2020), to determine whether there was coherence. The researchers gathered data through a questionnaire, conducted semi-structured interviews and then compared data that were gathered by each of the research instruments. One hundred (100) HoDs from 158 South African primary schools were randomly selected. A table of uniform random numbers was utilised to select the hundred HoDs. Li et al. (2018) indicate that in a random number table, there are 10 000 random digits between zero and nine organised in groups of five which are equally likely to be selected and unaffected by the preceding digit. A questionnaire (Appendix 1), with a seven-point semantic differential scale was sent to some 100 selected primary schools. Only sixty (60) responded which represented a 60% response rate. Thirty-five female and 25 male HoDs responded to the questionnaire. The ages of the respondents ranged from 37 to 59 years. The Cronbach's alpha value was .98, suggesting very high internal consistency reliability for the scale with this sample.

Additionally, a purposeful sampling approach was used to select 10 HoDs who were interviewed to identify factors impacting their management of teaching and learning. These selected 10 HoDs did not take part in the completion of the questionnaire. Purposive sampling is a judgmental or expert opinion sample selected based on specific knowledge of the respondents who are or were involved in the phenomenon under investigation (Cohen et al., 2018; Flick, 2018; King et al., 2019). The HoDs were selected based on the knowledge they possess (Etikan et al., 2016; Li et al., 2018; Maree & Pietersen, 2020). Five female and five male HoDs were interviewed; their ages ranged from 41 to 65 years.

The Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26 programme was used to analyse quantitative data. The descriptive statistics used to analyse data in this study were the mean (*M*), median (*MD*), and standard deviation (*SD*). The researchers ensured that the following steps in qualitative data analysis, as outlined by Nieuwenhuis (2020), were observed and executed:

- Preparing the data,
- Describing the sample and participants of the study,
- Organising the data,
- Transcribing the data, and
- Getting to know study data.

An audio recorder was used throughout the interview session. The voice-recorded data were transcribed into written words, listened to repeatedly and then grouped into themes. The data segment was considered against the underlying question of the factors impacting the management of teaching and learning.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Factors impacting department heads' management of teaching and learning

The following table presents factors impacting HoDs' management of teaching and learning.

**Table 1: Factors impacting HoDs' management of teaching and learning N=60**

Factors	Questionnaire Items		Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Administrative and financial support	B11	I receive administrative support from the district.	4.71	5.00	1.50
	B15	I receive support from senior leaders within the school.			
	B20	There is adequate financial support for the departmental operation at my school.			
Teacher attitude to work	B23	Teachers come to work regularly.	5.00	4.83	1.28
	B27	Teachers come to work on time.			
	B12	Teachers have content knowledge of the subjects they teach.			
Teaching time	B25	There is adequate contact teaching time at my school.	5.22	5.33	1.42
	B21	There is time available for teacher development.			



	B13	There is time for monitoring and developing teachers.			
Interpersonal relations	B19	Interpersonal relations among teachers are good.	5.12	5.00	1.01
	B7	The principal recognises the potential that exists in me.			
	B14	Teachers recognise my leadership.			
Parental involvement	B3	Parents support academic needs of the children.	4.19	4.00	1.22
	B10	Parents are involved in school activities.			
	B18	The relationship between the school and parents is positive.			
Learner academic development	B2	There is time to deal with issues and challenges that relate to the learners.	4.80	4.33	1.16
	B22	Learners have capacity and motivation to learn.			
	B9	I can handle the programme of no learner should be left behind.			
Curriculum changes	B1	Teachers are trained to implement curriculum and assessment policy statement.	5.14	5.33	1.33
	B16	There are resources to handle curriculum changes.			
	B4	Teachers are qualified to teach the subjects they teach.			
Working conditions	B24	There is adequate infrastructure for teaching and learning at my school.	4.10	4.17	1.40
	B5	Learner numbers in the classroom are manageable.			
	B26	My school has all the teachers it needs.			

Leadership skills	B6	Members of the school management team receive in-service training in leadership.	5.10	5.33	1.34
	B17	Members of the school management team receive support from circuit managers.			
	B8	I have adequate leadership skills.			

An analysis of data in Table 1 shows that there is modest administrative and financial support for HoDs ( $M = 4.71$ ;  $MD = 5.00$ ;  $SD = 1.50$ ). Data for this factor are negatively skewed since the mean is less than the median. The standard deviation of this factor is far from the mean and shows that there is disagreement among the respondents. Further analysis of data in Table 1 also shows that parental involvement is modest ( $M = 4.19$ ;  $MD = 4.00$ ;  $SD = 1.22$ ). Data for this factor are positively skewed because the mean is more than the median. The standard deviation of this item is far from the mean and shows that there is disagreement among the respondents. The table also indicates that learner academic development is modest ( $M = 4.80$ ;  $MD = 4.33$ ;  $SD = 1.16$ ). However, data for this factor are positively skewed since the mean is more than the median. The standard deviation of this item is far from the mean and shows that there is disagreement among the respondents. Furthermore, analysis of data reveals that working conditions of HoDs are moderate ( $M = 4.10$ ;  $MD = 4.17$ ;  $SD = 1.40$ ). Data for this factor are also negatively skewed since the mean is smaller than the median. Nevertheless, the standard deviation is far from the mean, confirming disagreement among the respondents for this item. This table reveals that, according to the questionnaire, respondents, administrative and financial support, parental involvement, learner academic development and working conditions are the factors impacting HoDs' management of teaching and learning.

### Interview responses

The HoDs believed that they were accountable for all teaching and learning activities which were implemented in schools. Nevertheless, they highlighted that there were several factors which impacted their execution of instructional leadership duties as stipulated in the PAM.

HoD10 had this say:

*No administrative support, I was just told that I must develop teachers within my department without being capacitated on how to do it (HoD10, male).*

HoD7 added the following:

*I need support on how to deal with the demanding HoD's work and how to conduct IQMS even though the principal has done advocacy on it; in my opinion, which was not enough (HoD7, female).*

Most HoDs interviewed mentioned a lack of support for managing teaching and learning from the Circuit Managers and elaborated on this in the following statements:

HoD1 said:

*I did not receive any support from Circuit Manager from Subject Advisor, even when I invited them to assist teachers they do not turn up (HoD1, female).*

HoD3 had this to say:

*No support from Circuit manager, they only come when they are complaining (HoD3, male).*

An interview with HoDs on support further revealed that there was little financial support for HoDs to manage teaching and learning in their departments. HoD7 raised the following concern:

*Allocation of the resources in my school is only focused on the fundamental subjects like language and mathematics and this affects other subjects which affected the school performance in general (HOD7, female).*

Pursuing this further, HoD9 stated:

*In my school principal and the SGB are the only ones who deal with the procurement of the resources and finances, I only receive financial support when I have to attend workshops or conferences (HoD9, male).*

It also emerged during the interviews with the HoDs that another factor contributing to the challenges faced by the HoDs in executing their duties was that there was no time available to develop teachers.

HoD10 had this to say:

*I am the only HoD to manage teaching from Grade R to 7 and also a teacher. This is the challenge that I am having because I do not have time to support individual teachers who need help (HoD10, male).*

HoD6 confirmed what HoD10 has said by stating the following:

*Too much responsibility over my shoulder of being teacher, class teacher and managing many subjects affected time to deal with psycho-social support for both learners and teachers (HoD6, male).*

Similarly, this is what HoD8 added relating to time to develop teachers:

*To tell the truth, I am struggling to manage teaching and learning because of lots of paperwork, pre-moderation, post-moderation, report writing, monitoring attendance of learners and teachers, all of this limit my time to support learners and teachers (HoD8, male).*

HoDs also indicated that there was a lack of parental involvement in their children's education and learners do not get any help with their schoolwork at home. HoD6 had this to say:

*Parents are not monitoring their children's work, and books are not signed (HoD6, male).*

HoD7 also shared the same sentiment:

*As a school, we set high expectations as the baseline to provide quality learning for learners, but parents do not want to be part of their children's learning. This hinders the affluent of learners in their learning and performance (HoD7, female).*

HoDs further indicated that they lack resources such as learning and teaching support material (LTSM). Furthermore, inadequate infrastructure such as a laboratory in most schools hindered effective implementation and management of teaching and learning.

HoD7 mentioned:

*Insufficient resources affect the effectiveness of teaching and learning. There is not enough reading material for Foundation Phase. Foundation Phase learners are struggling when coming to reading and this affects their academic performance. As HoD, I have to ensure that resources are there for teachers to teach and learners to learn, and to be able to manage teaching and learning effectively (HoD7, female).*

HoD10 shared the same sentiment:

*Stationery for learners and teachers are delivered late in the middle of term one, textbooks are not enough for learners since learners are no longer allowed to share books due to Covid 19. It affects teaching and learning and management of teaching and learning (HoD10, male).*

HoD9 added:

*In my school, even lack of human resources is taboo because there is a shortage of skills to teach other subjects. In my school, no teacher is qualified or train to teach technology subjects. My school's lack of a science and math lab results in poor learning and instruction (HoD9, male).*

HoD1 remarked as follows:

*Teachers are not being appointed in accordance with the needs of the school (HoD1, female).*

HoD2 added:

*There is incorrect subject allocation to teachers in primary schools (HoD2, female).*

Furthermore, HoDs stated in the interview that monitoring the delivery of the curriculum in the classroom was difficult.

HoD2 mentioned the following:

*When teachers are required to be monitored or supervised, they make excuses (HoD2, female).*

HoD7 confirmed what HoD2 has said by stating the following:

*Teachers in my department do not want to be observed while teaching and they will come up with excuses when I must observe them. This prevents me from identifying their need of support (HoD7, female).*

HoD4 also shared the same sentiment:

*Teachers are not cooperative enough due to the union stand (HoD4, female).*

Pursuing this further, HoD6 stated the following:

*Union X told teachers that they could only be observed in the classroom during an Integrated Quality Management System process (HoD6, male).*

HoD5 remarked as follows:

*Old teachers are unwilling to learn the new CAPS-compliant teaching methods (HoD5, female)*

During the interviews with the HoDs, it was also found that lack of cooperation, an unstable working relationship among teachers, disruption of learning and teaching, and too much responsibility assigned to the HoDs were all contributing factors to the challenges they faced in managing teaching and learning to improve learner academic performance.

HoD9 commented as follows:

*A few informal tasks provided to learners by teachers make it difficult for me to determine whether or not the learners are being taught and the curriculum is being covered (HoD9, male).*

HoD10 also shared the same sentiment:

*Item and error analysis, according to instructors, is only a document that is there for compliances as required by subject advisers after assessing learners. Teachers believe that providing remedial work is sufficient, and their focus is on the next term's work. Teachers are claiming that it is time-consuming because it has taken up a large portion of their teaching time and has it caused them to fall behind on curriculum coverage. As a result, it has not been implemented and it is difficult to monitor (HoD10, male).*

HoD1 had this to say:

*Teachers prefer one-size-fits-all lesson plans over individualized instruction to accommodate all learners with diverse learning styles (HoD1, female).*

In contrast to HoD1, HoD2 emphasized the following:

*Teachers in my school use a variety of teaching tactics to accommodate all learners, as some are auditory learners while others are visual learners, and they all work together to complete their tasks (HoD2, female).*

HoD6 commented:

*Working hand in hand between the HoD and the teachers is impossible due to an unstable working relationship. There is no collaboration between teachers and Heads of Departments (HoD6, male).*

HoD4 had this to say:

*Learning disruptions caused by departments, union events, and a lack of water in the school were all problems that directly impacted my teaching and learning management (HoD4, female).*

HoD8 further elaborated:

*As an HoD, I am overburdened with too many responsibilities in terms of guaranteeing effective teaching and learning at my school, as well as maintaining high teaching and learning standards, which can only be accomplished by monitoring and controlling teachers' and learners' work. I'm in charge of overseeing the work of teachers and learners in my department, as well as learners' informal and formal activities, teacher files, and reporting to the principal (HoD8, male).*

### **Summary of interview responses**

Analysis of interview data has indicated that all factors identified by the respondents to the questionnaire were confirmed. Furthermore, the participants added that factors such as incorrect subject allocation to teachers, teacher resistance owing to union influence, resistance to curriculum changes, lack of teacher collaboration and high HoDs' workload impacted their management of teaching and learning.

## **6. Discussion**

Heads of department are faced with the challenge in instruction supervision (Simpson et al., 2016). They are impacted by several factors when endorsing and implementing instructions from different sections of the Department of Education (DBE). The DBE (2013) outlines that the task of district offices is to

*“work collaboratively with the school management team to support them to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their schools in order to achieve their goal of ensuring that all learners have access to education of a high value.” (p.11).*

Hargreaves and Ainscow (2015) maintain that collaboration between the district and school leadership can be attained through the sharing of resources, ideas and school visits to improve the performance of the school and the district. Tapala et al. (2020) indicate that the lack of support from school leadership results in issues and challenges for the HoDs. Before and after their entry into the management and leading roles of teaching and learning, HoDs lack critical leadership and management training (Mampane, 2017; Tapala et al., 2020). HoDs use many monitoring tools: they experience challenges when they supervise many teachers and a variety of subjects in their department without receiving any support (Mampane, 2017; Mthiyane et al., 2019). HoDs are assigned much paperwork and are expected to write reports on all kinds of activities, whereas the actual implementation, of teaching and learning does not receive the required emphasis.

The duties of HoDs have become more comprehensive with section and school responsibilities, and there has been a change in emphasis and pressure from policymakers who expect HoDs to be leaders of innovation and improvement in the classrooms. Furthermore, Seobi and Wood (2016) report that most learners in under-resourced schools are performing poorly owing to lack of instructional leadership.

In the long run, lack of support and guidance for HoDs can affect learners' learning, leading to poor school academic performance. Gurr (2018) indicates that HoDs in schools are under constant pressure to improve learner performance outcomes. DBE officials are expected to support learning improvement; therefore, their support should be visible at schools for HoDs to execute the instructional leadership responsibility as expected. In South Africa, districts are essential to support structures to improve teaching and learning; however, some district officials lack the knowledge, capacity and resources to support learning. Hence HoDs are under constant pressure from the district about compliance and results. District capacity and operational skills to support teaching and learning are unevenly distributed within and across provinces, entrenching inequality. Most educational districts prioritise managerial efficiency and political loyalty rather than instructional leadership (Marishane, 2011). Mthiyane et al. (2019) confirm that the DBE in South Africa has paid much attention to the school principals, while less effort has been put into equipping HoDs with the required knowledge and skills in their roles as curriculum managers in their respective departments.

Research has shown that programmes dealing with multiple pathways such as the home environment, parenting and early years' practice can narrow the gap in school readiness and are of paramount importance (Prowle & Musgrave, 2019). Therefore, parental involvement makes the management of teaching and learning easier for the HoDs (Tapala et al., 2020). Ghavifekr et al. (2015) point out that parents are essential stakeholders in the school. Their cooperation is vital in assisting HoDs in managing teaching and learning. Lack of dedication from parents in assisting in the school activities is one of the reasons for unproductive school performance (Smit & Du Toit, 2016). There are sometimes unreasonable demands from parents which disrupt the smooth management of learning and teaching in the school. For instance, parents may encourage their children to be allowed to miss school for many days owing to a family funeral or a family holiday. Demands such as these lead to learners falling behind with schoolwork, dropping out of school, and teachers having to develop a catch-up plan for learners when they return to school. Learners miss a great deal of the content taught and it becomes difficult for the learner to perform well owing to missing so many lessons, resulting in poor academic performance. Parents have become more anxious and less trusting of teachers and this has led to a negative relationship between parents, leaders and teachers. Rusnak (2018) asserts that the problem in the teacher-parent relationship is provoked by growing frustration of both parties involved due to the lack of understanding and dialogue. The division and unsound relationship among HoDs and stakeholders, such as parents and learners, make it impossible for HoDs to manage teaching and learning effectively and this negatively impacts the schools' academic performance. Ghavifekr et al.

(2015) declare that Heads of Department are not only performing management tasks; they also have also to teach. Solving problems of control issues, different values and different perceptions of learners that both HOD and parents have about a child as learners behave differently in different circumstances, is another challenge for HoDs. HoDs, however, have no alternative but to deal with the concerns of parents even when time is limited. HoDs, as teachers, are also responsible for the development of learners. Sears et al. (2014) argue that HoDs need time to understand the behaviour/problems of learners to understand how learners operate and can then create strategies for teaching them the curriculum in ways to help learners comprehend. HoDs need to be allocated more time to teach learners and deal with the issues and challenges experienced by learners.

Ghavifekr et al. (2015) indicate that all learners have uniquely different situations and should be dealt with differently. Mthiyane et al. (2019) indicate that the ability and aspiration of learners to learn are a challenge for HoDs. Van den Berg (2015) establishes that 60 per cent of South African learners have not learned to read with understanding and meaning by the end of Grade 3. As a result, Van den Berg et al. (2016) state they "never fully access the curriculum despite being promoted to higher grades" (p.6). HoDs must ensure no learners are left behind in their department and that every learner understands the concepts they are learning and performs better than expected.

According to Ruto et al. (2016), poor academic performance and discontent may be caused by the working conditions and environment in which HoDs find themselves at schools. Marishane (2011) contends that the main question is "under which school environment condition do Heads of Departments as leaders operate?" (p.28). Importantly, Ruto et al. (2016) highlight that, consequently, the rate at which HoDs leave the profession owing to the working conditions and environment disrupts the quality of school cohesion and performance. Nyagaya (2015) has reported that district education officers (DEOs) in various areas in Kenya indicate that signs of stress displayed by head-teachers (HoDs) and their absenteeism and truancy from work, are factors indicating that teachers feel demoralised. This also affects how they perform their duties and behave professionally. This has a negative impact on the school as HoDs are expected to be good exemplars towards teachers and their juniors. The effectiveness of HoDs is of concern owing to the collective responsibility attached to their job and the numbers as per post provision regarding allocations in each primary school in South Africa. Sengai (2021) indicates that HoDs' collective responsibility involves checking lesson plans, teachers' files, work schedules, and learners' work as well as moderation of all the assessment tasks. This amount of work creates additional tension for HoDs. Therefore, the stress HoDs experience is due to lack of time and too much paperwork, leading to their ineffectiveness in executing their roles and duties of managing teaching and learning. As leaders of teaching and learning, HoDs experience time-deprivation in juggling administrative, managerial, and educational roles (May-Lim & Lipponen, 2019). Therefore, HoDs are continuously frustrated by their working experiences and conditions.



## 7. Conclusion

Despite the inherent factors that impact HoDs when executing their roles as instructional leaders, these factors can still be ameliorated to improve HoDs' management of teaching and learning in primary schools. Therefore, the study recommends that there should be, inter alia, sufficient time allocation for HoDs to balance the management of teaching and learning with other roles attached to their job description. HoDs should also be trained in instructional supervision to support both learners and teachers to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in primary schools. Furthermore, school-parent collaboration will enhance effective management of teaching and learning by HoDs. Moreover, the DBE officials must provide sustained administrative and financial support to enhance HoDs management of teaching and learning to alleviate their stress. Likewise, the officials must work collaboratively with HoDs to support them in enhancing the standard of teaching and learning to attain stipulated performance outcomes. Collaboration between the officials and school leadership can only be attained through the sharing of resources and ideas to improve HoDs' performance. HoDs and teachers must encourage parents to cooperate and share the responsibility of their children's education together with the school. Furthermore, HoDs must share the challenges teachers experience in the classrooms with parents who need to support them in managing teaching and learning effectively. Finally, HoDs need to develop a professional community of teachers through effective instructional leadership.

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## Appendix 1

### QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE FACTORS IMPACTING HEADS OF DEPARTMENT'S MANAGEMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING AT PRIMARY SCHOOLS

#### SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Please indicate your gender, age, experience and school overall results in the respective boxes below

A1. Gender	Male	1
	Female	2
A2. Age	Please write down your age in the box right next	
A3. Experience as HOD	Write the total number of years of your experience as Head of Department in the box on the right	
A4. School overall results	Write your school's overall results in percentage	

#### How to respond to each statement:

Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree as described in the statement. Please respond by making a cross (X) over the number in the appropriate block, with 1 being NOT AT ALL (the lowest rank) and 7 being ALWAYS (the highest rank).

#### SECTION B: FACTORS IMPACTING HEADS OF DEPARTMENT'S MANAGEMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING AT PRIMARY SCHOOLS

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B1	Teachers are trained to implement curriculum and assessment policy statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B2	There is time to deal with issues and challenges that relate to the learners.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B3	Parents support academic needs of the children.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B4	Teachers are qualified to teach the subjects they teach.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B5	Learner numbers in the classroom are manageable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B6	Members of the school management team receive in-service training in leadership.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B7	The principal recognises the potential that exists in me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

B8	I have adequate leadership skills.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B9	I can handle the programme of no learner should be left behind.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B10	Parents are involved in school activities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B11	I receive administrative support from the district.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B12	Teachers have content knowledge of the subjects they teach.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B13	There is time for monitoring and developing teachers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B14	Teachers recognize my leadership.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B15	I receive support from senior leaders within the school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B16	There are resources to handle curriculum changes.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B17	Members of the school management team receive support from circuit managers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B18	The relationship between the school and parents is positive.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B19	Interpersonal relations among teachers are good.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B20	There is adequate financial support for the departmental operation at my school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B21	There is time available for teacher development.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B22	Learners have capacity and motivation to learn.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B23	Teachers come to work regularly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B24	There is adequate infrastructure for teaching and learning at my school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B25	There is adequate contact teaching time at my school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B26	My school has all the teachers it needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B27	Teachers come to work on time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Thank you for your cooperation.**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTION**

Which factors impact your management of teaching and learning?