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Exploring Departmental Heads' experiences of Quality Management System as a Professional Development Programme

Bongela Nyandeni[1], Lulama Mdodana-Zide[1] & Michael Moreti Mahome[1]

[1] Department of Education Management, Policy and Comparative Education, University of the Free State, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

Enhancing the skills of Departmental Heads (DHs) is essential to meet the increasing demands of 21st-century education. In South African schools, limited professional development initiatives, such as the Quality Management System Professional Development Programme (QMS PDP), have been introduced to support DHs' growth. However, challenges in implementation persist. This study explored DHs' perspectives on QMS PDP as a professional development tool, addressing a limited knowledge base on its effectiveness. Grounded in adult learning theory, the study adopted an interpretive paradigm and a qualitative phenomenological design. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews with eleven DHs across four purposively selected schools. Findings revealed a strong need for sustained professional development among school managers. Participants acknowledged that the QMS PDP contributed positively to their development as leaders and administrators. The study highlights the importance of QMS PDP in improving educational quality by strengthening school leadership. However, it also found that the programme requires refinement to better address practical challenges faced by DHs, including workload and implementation constraints. The study recommends: (1) strengthening QMS PDP through comprehensive and continuous training, (2) integrating a clear QMS implementation plan into DBE Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs), and (3) prioritising administrative support to reduce DHs workload and enhance their focus on instructional leadership. This study extends the limited empirical literature on QMS PDP in South Africa by foregrounding DHs' lived experiences and demonstrating how structured professional development, grounded in adult learning theory, can enhance middle leadership capacity while identifying critical areas for policy and programme improvement.

Keywords: Departmental Heads, Quality Management System, Professional Development Programme, Professional Development.

INTRODUCTION

The ongoing professional development (PD) of departmental heads (DHs) is vital for their personal and career growth throughout their working lives.[1] Zide and Mokhele note that expert improvement

[1] A. B. Buthelezi, H R Mhlongo, and L Msweli, "Management Roles of Heads of Departments (HODS) Pertaining to Professional Development of Teachers at Female-Dominated Primary Schools in South Africa," *Gender and Behaviour* 19, no.2(2021): 18074–85.

CORRESPONDENCE – Michael Moreti Mahome **Email**: mahomemm@ufs.ac.za
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seeks to equip educators with the essential skills needed to address the demanding situations and needs of a constitutional South Africa, as well as the wider international landscape of the 21st century.[2] Internationally, the advancement of DHs is recognized as a key factor in responding to the increasing requirements of modern education.[3] In the United States, departmental heads, or departmental chairs, voluntarily participate in a structured professional development programme identified as the Functional Innovative Education Programme (FIEP).[4]

The FIEP programme consists of workshops or meetings featuring presentations and discussions led by a programme supervisor. In the United Kingdom, the leadership roles within educational institutions often designate departmental heads serving as programme facilitators or subject overseers. The Leadership Departments Programme was implemented to assist DHs in overcoming the operational challenges within their academic teams.[5] This initiative enables DHs to develop and apply a combination of intellectual, emotional, and political intelligence, helping them effectively navigate everyday leadership challenges.[6]

In Africa, particularly in Uganda, DHs are expected to develop the essential skills needed to perform their roles effectively.[7] The Inspect and Improve Professional Development Programme came into existence to strengthen the standard of leadership and management through the provision of educational opportunities that encompass competencies in leadership and managing personnel, aimed at strengthening the working relationships of DHs.[8] In Nigeria, DHs are empowered through the Head Teacher Leadership Programme, which is delivered via workshops using video clips and handbooks, with participants being encouraged to develop their learning strategies. The job performance of DHs is significantly improved by this approach.[9]

In South Africa, to enhance the quality of the education system, the Education Labour Relations Council amalgamated three established professional development programmes into a unified initiative called the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS), which was later revised and renamed the Quality Management System (QMS).[10] This programme encompasses developmental appraisals, performance evaluations, and comprehensive school assessments. Initially introduced in 2005 by the Centre for Development and Enterprise, the QMS was developed as a professional development framework intended to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the education system.[11] The education system's effectiveness was achieved through defining procedures, processes, and responsibilities to support and promote the continuous improvement of schools.[12]

Nevertheless, research by Du Plessis and Letshwene identifies persistent challenges such as inadequate subject knowledge among DHs, restricted availability of essential resources and inadequate support from school principals, resulting in DHs frequently feeling underprepared to fulfil their roles effectively.[13] The philosophical foundation of this study is rooted in interpretivism, underpinned by a

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[2] Lulama Zide and Matseliso L Mokhele, "Enlisting On Teacher Professional Development: Reflections Of Teachers'experiences," *E-BANGI* 13, no. 4 (2018): 36–47.

[3] B. Segoe, "An Investigation of Integrated Management Qualitative System (IQMS) in South African Primary Schools: The Teacher's Voices," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5, no. 9 (2014): :724-730.

[4] Ludvík Eger, Mária Pisoňová, and Łukasz Tomczyk, "Development Programs for Head Teachers in Four Central European Countries: An International Comparison," *International Journal of Management in Education* 11, no. 1 (2017): 25–45.

[5] J. Stergiou, "Leading Departments," 2020; W Sengai, *Heads of Department's Role in Implementation of History Syllabi at Selected Zimbabwean Secondary Schools: An Instructional Leadership Perspective. (Unpublished Master's Thesis.)* (Lesotho.: National University of Lesotho, 2021).

[6] F. Lennoxsmith, "Tapping into Unique Leadership Styles to Influence, Lead and Navigate, HE Institutions with Confidence and Authenticity," 2023.

[7] K.B Simpson et al., " Assessing the Challenges Heads of Department Encounter in Instructional Supervision in Ghana: A Case of Selected Senior High Schools in Kware East District," *Journal of Education and Practice* 7, no. 36 (2016): 156–69.

[8] J. Chu, M.A. Gavis, and J. Kotonya, *Evaluation of the PEAS-DES Inspect and Improve Project* (United Kingdom: The National Foundation for Educational Research, 2021).

[9] Tola Olujuwon, "The Impact of Teacher Leadership Practices on School Management in Public Secondary Schools in Nigeria," 2015.

[10] Segoe, "An Investigation of Integrated Management Qualitative System (IQMS) in South African Primary Schools: The Teacher's Voices."

[11] The Centre for Development and Enterprise, "Teacher Evaluation in South African Schools," 2015.

[12] Department of Basic Education, *Quality Assurance and Skills Development* (Pretoria: Department of Basic Education, 2021).

[13] Elize C Du Plessis and Mantekana Jacobine Letshwene, "A Reflection on Identified Challenges Facing South African Teachers," *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning* 15, no. 2 (2020): 69–91.

subjectivist ontology. This approach aligns to understand how departmental heads perceive and experience the QMS as a vehicle for professional development.

While numerous preliminary studies have examined professional development and the experiences of school principals and educators, there is a paucity of research focusing specifically on DHs' experiences. This study, therefore, focuses specifically on DHs, thus making it distinct. It aims to investigate the experiences of selected DHs with the QMS as a professional development programme, guided by targeted research questions:

- What are the Departmental heads' views and experiences of the Quality Management System as a Professional Development Programme?
- What challenges do Departmental heads experience with the Quality Management System as a Professional Development Programme?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Quality Management System as a Professional Development Programme in South African Schools

Cruz et al. emphasise that the calibre of education delivered to students is largely contingent upon the proficiency of educators, which in turn is influenced by the efficacy of their professional development (PD). [14] Implementing the QMS facilitates prompt enhancements and adapts to the dynamic requirements of the education sector. Educators are responsible for delivering the curriculum, placing them in direct contact with learners. Prospective educators often view teaching as the transmission of knowledge from instructor to student, while learning is seen as the process of acquiring, retaining, and applying information and skills. Hoare describes learners as passive recipients, likening them to empty containers waiting to be filled by educators.[15] Mizell highlights that the quality of teaching and school leadership significantly impacts learners' achievement levels and asserts that professional development is a key strategy schools use to enhance educators' performance. [16] The QMS was established to enhance accountability and organisational management frameworks to advance the quality of education in South African schools.[17] Functioning as a professional development programme, the QMS aims to enhance the overall efficacy of the education system by systematically documenting procedures, processes, and responsibilities that facilitate school improvement. [18] Heubeck highlights that the effective implementation of the QMS largely relies on the active and committed involvement of education authorities, who have played a pivotal role in promoting and motivating regional schools to embrace and implement effective management strategies by providing necessary resources and essential training for educators and management teams.[19] The objectives of the QMS are outlined as follows: To determine eligibility for salary increases, educators undergo an annual performance review. Those who meet the required standards receive a 1% raise in their salary. To identify the needs and support mechanisms necessary for the development of educators, schools, and district offices.

- To monitor the performance of an institution and its staff.
- To facilitate the ongoing professional growth of employees.[20]

School management teams (SMTs) are essential in cultivating an ongoing enhancement culture within the education process.[21] According to Maphutha, PD is frequently overlooked when formative

[14] Francisco José Fernández Cruz, Inmaculada Egido Gálvez, and Rafael Carballo Santaolalla, "Impact of Quality Management Systems on Teaching-Learning Processes," *Quality Assurance in Education* 24, no. 3 (2016): 394–415.
[15] A. Hoare, *Quality Management System: Best Practice* (Thought leadership, 2022).
[16] Hayes Mizell, *Why Professional Development Matters.* (ERIC, 2010).
[17] Department of Basic Education, *Quality Assurance and Skills Development*.
[18] Department of Basic Education, *Quality Assurance and Skills Development*.
[19] Elizabeth Heubeck, "Professional Development That Matters: What Teachers Say They Want," *Education Week, Education Week* 22 (2023).
[20] Education Labour Relations Council, *Collective Agreement Number 8 of 2003. Integrated Quality Management System* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 2003).
[21] Simon Adjei Tachie and Nandi Carol Mancotywa, "Challenges Faced by the Development Support Group in Implementing the Integrated Quality Management System in Circuit 04 Schools in the Mthatha Education District," *Education Research International* 2021, no. 1 (2021): 8888539.

and summative evaluations are combined.[22] This neglect arises primarily because summative assessments are directly linked to salary progression, whereas performance management is intended to support the ongoing development of educators. As a result, educators often prioritize summative assessments to secure financial advancement, potentially at the expense of their professional growth.[23] Moreover, professional development includes training for leaders and managers to skillfully manage difficult discussions that may arise during evaluation sessions, thereby improving the overall effectiveness of these interactions.[24]Tachie and Mancotywa also highlight the evolving role of school managers, who must transition from merely assessing performance to actively facilitating and supporting the departmental heads.[25]

The Aim of the Quality Management System Development Initiative in School Settings

Performance management plays a vital role in schools by helping SMTs focus on key issues that promote sustainability and enhance the delivery of quality education. The Department of Basic Education emphasizes that assessing the performance standards of Heads of Departments (HoDs) is crucial for enhancing their accountability and promoting professional development.[26] Matorera explains that the QMS focuses on pinpointing areas needing improvement, establishing goals and targets, and carrying out actions to achieve these objectives. Additionally, Matorera notes that the QMS seeks to align educational systems and processes with management standards, primarily focusing on student learning. The QMS also helps schools establish mechanisms for ongoing improvement.[27]

Girmanova et al. explain that the QMS development programme aims to advance educators' professional growth by consistently enhancing learner outcomes and achieving public recognition for educational institutions.[28] The National Development Plan sought to enhance accountability within the education sector by 2030, promoting a collaborative duty among schools and their neighbouring communities to promote and enhance the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning outcomes.[29] In a later study, Girmanova et al. advocate for an updated strategic plan to enhance the quality and operational effectiveness within schools and districts to support and strengthen the teaching and learning processes. They note that school performance management offers an opportunity to support HoDs in consistently delivering high-quality education over time.

Buthelezi et al. contend that the QMS facilitates collaboration among school departments by enabling DHs to exchange this strategy, which highlights best practices and identifies potential areas for improvement across different departments, encouraging cooperative efforts and promoting a sustained culture of continuous professional development, ultimately yielding positive outcomes for both personnel and students.[30] Diez et al. note that the QMS is designed to guarantee the uniform application of information, methodologies, and competencies in the execution of processes.[31]

Moreover, Diez highlights that the QMS aims to establish and maintain ongoing improvements in both administrative and academic domains; by doing so, the overall effectiveness of schools is improved.[32] The system formalizes and standardizes both administrative and instructional processes, encompassing various aspects of the education process. Loeung and Safruddin further stress the pivotal

[22] M. F. Maphutha, " Integrated Quality Management System in Sasolburg Primary Schools," 2016, https://libserv5.tut.ac.za7780/.
[23] Maphutha, " Integrated Quality Management System in Sasolburg Primary Schools."
[24] Tachie and Mancotywa, "Challenges Faced by the Development Support Group in Implementing the Integrated Quality Management System in Circuit 04 Schools in the Mthatha Education District."
[25] Tachie and Mancotywa, "Challenges Faced by the Development Support Group in Implementing the Integrated Quality Management System in Circuit 04 Schools in the Mthatha Education District."
[26] Department of Basic Education, *Quality Assurance and Skills Development*.
[27] Douglas Matorera, "Quality Management Systems in Education," *Quality Management Systems. A Selective Presentation of Case-Studies Showcasing Its Evolution*, 2018, 21–46.
[28] Lenka Girmanová et al., "Application of Six Sigma Using DMAIC Methodology in the Process of Product Quality Control in Metallurgical Operation," *Acta Technologica Agriculturae* 20, no. 4 (2017): 104–9.
[29] Girmanová et al., "Application of Six Sigma Using DMAIC Methodology in the Process of Product Quality Control in Metallurgical Operation."
[30] Buthelezi, Mhlongo, and Msweli, "Management Roles of Heads of Departments (HODS) Pertaining to Professional Development of Teachers at Female-Dominated Primary Schools in South Africa."
[31] Fernando Díez, Ioseba Iraurgi, and Aurelio Villa, "Quality Management in Schools: Analysis of Mediating Factors," *South African Journal of Education* 38, no. 2 (2018): 1–8.
[32] Díez, Iraurgi, and Villa, "Quality Management in Schools: Analysis of Mediating Factors."

role of the QMS in this regard. role of the QMS is in support and monitor organisational activities to increase efficiency and effectiveness.[33]

The Challenges of Quality Management System as a Professional Development Programme in South African Schools

Hammond et al. argue that many PD programmes are ineffective in improving teaching practices and student outcomes.[34] Heubeck found that PD often lacks relevance to the specific professional learning needs of DHs, as district-led PD tends to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach that fails to address individual educators' requirements.[35] However, Heubeck also notes a growing number of schools integrating professional learning into their daily routines, where skilled educators naturally share their expertise.[36] These schools implement mentoring cycles that use experienced educators and leaders to facilitate and enhance PD sessions.

Additionally, Kimeu reported that most educators received above-average ratings through the QMS evaluation, but they also highlighted ongoing challenges in QMS implementation.[37]

1. Limited evaluator time: SMTs often stress the importance of evaluators having sufficient time to carry out comprehensive evaluations. However, increasing reporting requirements have reduced the time available for evaluators to perform these tasks thoroughly.[38]
2. Insufficient evaluator expertise: Many evaluators, particularly in secondary schools, lack deep knowledge of their assessment subjects. Additionally, opportunities for their professional development are infrequent and inadequate.[39]
3. Hesitance toward adapting long-standing educational practices is common among experienced educators, who often prefer to maintain their traditional methods rather than adopt new approaches.[40]
4. Insufficient financial resources: Pose a significant barrier to the successful implementation of the QMS. The process requires considerable time and effort, including investments in infrastructure improvements and the procurement of essential resources. However, limited funding frequently hampers these necessary developments within schools.[41]
5. Lack of standardization among schools: Since each school has distinct needs requiring customized approaches to QMS implementation, this results in inconsistencies across different institutions.[42]

Research by Shongwe and Mutambara revealed that resource shortages greatly hinder the QMS's implementation, as schools often lack the necessary materials, which slows progress.[43] Haubeck also highlights that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) fails to offer sufficient technical support for the QMS, further impeding its effective implementation.[44] Nonetheless, overcoming these obstacles can significantly enhance school performance and educational outcomes.

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[33] Senghong Loeung and Cepi Safruddin, "Implementing Quality Management System in School," in *5th International Conference on Current Issues in Education (ICCIE 2021)* (Atlantis Press, 2022), 1–6.
[34] Linda Darling-Hammond, Maria E Hyler, and Madelyn Gardner, "Effective Teacher Professional Development.," *Learning Policy Institute*, 2017.
[35] Heubeck, "Professional Development That Matters: What Teachers Say They Want."
[36] Heubeck, "Professional Development That Matters: What Teachers Say They Want."
[37] Ruth Kimeu, "Strategy Implementation and Performance of Commercial Banks in Machakos County, Kenya," 2018.
[38] Kimeu, "Strategy Implementation and Performance of Commercial Banks in Machakos County, Kenya."
[39] Barbara Zodwa Madonsela and Cecile Gerwel Proches, "Challenges Faced by Heads of Departments (HODs) in Driving Quality Curriculum Management in a Secondary School in Durban, South Africa," in *Provision of Psychosocial Support and Education of Vulnerable Children* (IGI Global Scientific Publishing, 2022), 185–206.
[40] Heubeck, "Professional Development That Matters: What Teachers Say They Want."
[41] E.M Shongwe and E Mutambara, "The Challenges Experienced by School Principals in the Implementation of QMS Performance Appraisal System in Schools within Mpumalanga Province, South Africa ," *Journal of Service Science and Management* 16, no. 3 (2023): 266–79.
[42] Heubeck, "Professional Development That Matters: What Teachers Say They Want."
[43] Shongwe and Mutambara, "The Challenges Experienced by School Principals in the Implementation of QMS Performance Appraisal System in Schools within Mpumalanga Province, South Africa."
[44] Heubeck, "Professional Development That Matters: What Teachers Say They Want."

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Adult Learning Theory (ALT) is the practice of educating adults in classroom settings or within their professional careers.[45] This theory forms the foundation of the study, which was grounded in an exploration of the overarching experiences of DHs concerning the QMS, positioned as a structured programme for professional development, while examining the challenges they faced and developing recommendations to enhance the programme's effectiveness in supporting their professional growth. Merriam emphasizes that professional development programmes must be designed specifically with adult learners in mind to be successful.[46] Knowles further clarifies that ALT is predicated on the principle that adults act as autonomous agents who actively assume responsibility for their decision-making.[47] Therefore, adult learning programmes should accommodate this characteristic.

Adult learning theory emphasises the distinct ways that adults learn compared to children, focusing on self-directed learning while integrating the adult's life experiences and motivation, therefore making the theory appropriate for this study. The ALT was particularly appropriate for this study as it facilitated an understanding of DHs experiences with the QMS, positioning it as a process that cultivates and advances their growth as adult learners within their professional roles. By applying the ALT, this approach enhanced the engagement with the participants and the overall learning outcome of the study.

METHODOLOGY

In this section, the methodological underpinnings of the study, the paradigm, data collection method, sampling technique, the analysis procedure and compliance with ethics are elucidated.

Study Paradigm and Approach

To achieve the study's objective, the research employed an interpretive paradigm, which views humans as active agents who construct meaning and knowledge shaped by their experiences—factors that differ fundamentally from physical phenomena and thus require distinct methods of study.[48] Accordingly, the study sought to understand and interpret the meanings derived from participants' encounters with the QMS, which is rarely regarded as a framework for professional development. Furthermore, a qualitative research methodology was employed to investigate how participants perceived and experienced the QMS, enabling an in-depth understanding of their subjective perspectives on professional development. This qualitative approach was well-suited to the study because it allowed for exploring real-world contexts while capturing the participants' perspectives and experiences related to the QMS as a PDP.

Study Design

Phenomenology was chosen as the research design because it seeks to understand both what individuals have experienced and how they have experienced it through their first-person perspectives.[49] The descriptive approach of phenomenology allowed the researcher to explore the experiences of DHs with the QMS as a professional development programme from the participants' viewpoints. This method was particularly appropriate for the study since it enabled DHs to construct meaning and share their narratives regarding their engagement with the QMS as a PDP.

Data Collection Method

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews to investigate the participants' experiences with the QMS as a professional development initiative. As noted by Leedy and Ormrod, qualitative research

[45] Banan Abdulrzaq Mukhalalati and Andrea Taylor, "Adult Learning Theories in Context: A Quick Guide for Healthcare Professional Educators," *Journal of Medical Education and Curricular Development* 6 (2019): 2382120519840332.
[46] S.B Merriam, "Adult Learning Theory: Evolution and Future Directions," *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning* , 2017, 21–37.
[47] M. Knowles, "Andragogy," 2018.
[48] R Hepler and D. Cloud, "Interpretivism Definition, History & Approach – Lesson. [Weblog].," 2022.
[49] J. W. Creswell, "Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches (3rd Ed.). SAGE.," 2013.

often utilises semi-structured interviews to obtain new insights and delve into participants' views and experiences regarding a particular topic.[50]

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was employed as the most appropriate method for this study, selecting participants based on their knowledge and experience with the QMS programme in the basic education sector. This approach aligns with Nikolopoulou'sdefinition of purposive sampling as a non-probability sampling technique whereby participants are intentionally selected based on characteristics relevant to the study.[51] Accordingly, eleven DHs were drawn from two primary and two secondary schools in the uThukela District of KwaZulu-Natal province.

Table 1: Profile of the Research Sites

School name	No: of principals	No: of Deputy Principals	No: of DHs	School Type
School A	1	1	3	Public
School AA	1	1	4	Public
School B	1	2	6	Public
School BB	1	2	5	Public

Table 2: Profiles of participants

Participant Name	School	Gender	Phase	Experience as DHs
1	A	F	Foundation Phase	4 years
2	A	F	Intermediate Phase	7 years
3	AA	M	Foundation Phase	5 years
4	AA	F	Intermediate Phase	4 years
5	B	M	Senior Phase	7 years
6	B	F	Senior Phase	9 years
7	B	M	Further Edu. & Training	6 years
8	B	F	Further Edu. & Training	5 years
9	BB	F	Senior Phase	5 years
10	BB	M	Senior Phase	7 years
11	BB	M	Further Edu. & Training	8 years

Analysis Procedure

This study utilized qualitative content analysis to interpret the gathered data. Interview responses were systematically coded and organized into overarching themes and more specific sub-themes, which were then carefully examined, adjusted, and presented in alignment with the study's research questions. The analysis was conducted using QDA Miner Lite, a qualitative data analysis tool, to ensure objectivity. To ensure accuracy and reliability of the study, the two authors reviewed all identified themes and codes throughout the process. Following a thorough and consensual organization of the data, the final stage of analysis was completed. The ensuing results and discussion are presented below.

Compliance with Ethics

All procedures were carried out only after receiving ethical clearance from both the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and the University of the Free State Ethics Committee. In compliance with ethical guidelines, participants received written consent forms outlining the objectives, methodology, and possible risks associated with the study. Furthermore, informed consent was secured to guarantee that participants were thoroughly informed of their autonomy to voluntarily engage in or discontinue participation at any point during the research. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, the

[50] P. Leedy and J. Ormrod, "Practical Research: Planning and Design" (UK: Pearson, 2020).
[51] Kassiani Nikolopoulou, "What Is Purposive Sampling?| Definition & Examples," *Scribbr. Retrieved May* 18 (2022): 2023.

researchers used pseudonyms to safeguard participants' identities and privacy. The actual names of the schools involved in the research were also withheld.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The data revealed three main themes: participants' perceptions and encounters regarding the QMS as a framework for professional development. The obstacles faced during its implementation and approaches to improve the QMS's effectiveness in supporting the development of DHs. The following section presents a detailed discussion of these themes and their related subthemes.

Theme 1: Views and experiences of the Quality Management System as a Professional Development Programme.

Participants recognized the QMS as a professional development initiative designed to enhance instructional methods and learning processes. They regarded the QMS Professional Development Programme (PDP) as a systematic framework designed to support educators, including DHs, in comprehending their managerial responsibilities to improve their professional efficacy. The participants shared the following insights:

As a DH, how do you perceive the QMS development programme? Please provide detailed insights into your experience with the program and whether you feel it has comprehensively supported your growth and development in your role as a DH.

> *Quality Management System is a PDP that focuses on developing educators and management personnel in schools to improve teaching and learning strategies. (P1)*
> *Quality Management System develops HoDs to assist educators in understanding their duties while increasing their level of performance through development. (P11)*
> *The Quality Management System is a PDP that provides a standardised framework for keeping a record of employee performance in education. (P9)*

The data offers a detailed insight into participants' experiences with the QMS programme as a professional development initiative. Participants agreed that the QMS PDP facilitates the advancement of DHs capacities to improve the education process by reinforcing their roles as effective instructional leaders. They noted that the programme equips DHs with the necessary competencies to effectively manage educator performance and improve educational outcomes. The findings also indicate that the professional growth of HoDs contributes positively to the development of educators.

The monitoring and execution procedures of the Quality Management System within the framework of a professional development programme.

To gain insight into the QMS as a professional development programme, DHs were questioned about their schools' monitoring and implementation procedures. Participants characterized these processes involving on-site classroom inspections, teaching appraisals, and peer assessments as the monitoring procedures with which they engaged. They described their experiences related to these processes of the QMS, discussing aspects such as when the QMS was introduced in their schools, how it was carried out, and the usual timing and methods of its implementation.

> *QMS was recognised in 2020 in our school, but the process of implementation began in 2021. This was due to the distraction of COVID-19 restrictions that were in place. We usually conduct the evaluation process twice a year, in June and November. (P1)*
> *QMS started in 2021. It is an evaluation programme that keeps track of the educator's performance standards. It is used as a guide for educators during their teaching. Records of the classroom observations are kept. QMS is conducted twice a year, during the mid-year and at the end of the year. We conduct QMS by having classroom visits and observations where educators are evaluated by their peers and DHs during a lesson. (P4)*
> *QMS is a development programme, implemented in 2021 in my school. During QMS, we usually do class visits where our peers and management go to the educator's class to observe*

their lessons. After the lesson observation has been completed, feedback and compliments are delivered. During QMS, the educators' teaching results are kept for record purposes. (P8)

Upon further inquiry, participants elaborated on how the Quality Management System Professional Development Programme (QMS PDP) is implemented within their respective workplaces:

The QMS involves formalising an educational framework that facilitates systematic evaluation and monitoring of educators and overall school performance. Implementation occurs through classroom visits and observations, during which educators are assessed by their peers and Departmental Heads (DH) in the context of teaching and learning activities. This evaluative process serves as a mechanism for identifying areas of improvement in instructional strategies, ultimately aimed at enhancing learner outcomes. Documentation of performance standards is completed and maintained for record-keeping purposes. (P4)

During the implementation of the QMS, classroom observations are conducted in which educators are monitored while delivering instruction. This process systematically documents the challenges educators face throughout teaching and learning activities. Each educator is evaluated and rated based on established performance standards. Upon completion of observation documentation, individualised feedback is provided to educators, followed by strategic planning to enhance instructional practices and improve learning outcomes. (P7)

The QMS PDP assesses educators' performance by their defined roles and responsibilities. Classroom observations are carried out throughout the implementation process, wherein educators are monitored during the delivery of their lessons. Upon completion of these observations, constructive feedback and commendations are provided to each educator. (P9)

The participants acknowledged the QMS as a structured initiative designed to facilitate professional growth and development among educators. PDP was introduced in schools in 2021. This programme involves systematic monitoring activities, including classroom visits, lesson observations, and peer evaluations. Although its implementation was delayed, owing to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the QMS PDP is scheduled to occur twice yearly, specifically in June and November. Participants reported that these assessments are designed to uphold and improve the quality of teaching. Teachers undergo observation by both their peers and DHs to identify areas of difficulty while informing strategic planning processes. Detailed documentation of these assessments is systematically preserved, accompanied by constructive feedback. Observations are conducted to facilitate ongoing professional development. The DHs emphasized that these processes encourage collaborative development and continuous improvement in teaching standards.

Perspectives on peer assessment throughout the implementation of the Quality Management System

Participants generally viewed peer evaluation positively during the implementation of the QMS, considering it an essential tool for professional growth. The analysis of the data revealed that participants felt this process fostered motivation and a desire for career advancement. One common question posed to participants was:

Personally, how does it feel to be evaluated by your peers during your teaching?

I feel good about being evaluated since QMS is about an individual being able to measure their level of capability. QMS has equipped me with the skills to view the peer evaluation process positively. I learn from my peers, and they can also learn from me. What helps me a lot is that I constructively take the comments and use them to grow professionally. (P3)

Peer evaluations give me positive feelings and motivation to make job-related changes; they have helped me grow and advance my career professionally. It helps me to change and improve my quality of teaching and leadership position. (P5)

Personally, I feel comfortable because during these evaluations, people with different experiences come together and work hand in hand. As a DH, there is a lot that I learn from my junior peers, regardless of my being their leader. (P6)

Being evaluated by my peers is good for me. This is where I am encouraged to put in more effort during my teaching. This is where I uplift my standard. I feel at ease and comfortable as I know that someone will give me constructive feedback to improve where necessary. (P9)

However, the process presents certain challenges, as some participants noted that being assessed by peers can trigger feelings of anxiety, fear of intimidation, concern about making mistakes, and a sense of vulnerability. Participants P2 and P4 shared the following insights:

At first, even the thought of knowing that your peers would be there looking at you while teaching was intimidating. One only thinks about what if they make mistakes or are not good enough during their teaching. Knowing that you will be given feedback regarding how you conducted a lesson was frightening. After a few years of doing QMS, I learned a lot and new strategies that I didn't know before. (P2)

No matter how many years you have as an experienced educator, anxiety always kicks in during QMS. It can be daunting to have the experience of a peer assessing your teaching. One always feels exposed to having someone else in one's personal space. (P4)

Participants P8 and P10 recounted their experiences with peer evaluation processes:

During peer evaluation, you become intimidated simply because you are afraid to make a mistake, or you may think that your peers may view your teaching as not good enough. With all the practice that I gained over the years, being observed has certainly become easier with time. (P8)

Peer evaluation is never easy. In the beginning, it is scary, as you are aware that you have your peers watching you while you teach. (P10)

The participants expressed a nuanced perspective on the peer evaluation component of the QMS implementation. Overall, the process was perceived in a favourable light by the participants, acknowledging its role in supporting professional development, motivation, and career advancement. The data revealed that peer evaluation enables DHs to assess their skills, learn from colleagues, and implement constructive changes in their work, as supported by participant statements. Nonetheless, common emotions such as anxiety, fear, and intimidation were also reported. Despite certain challenges, the long-term advantages, such as the acquisition of new instructional techniques and the enhancement of teaching quality, underscore the overarching beneficial impact of peer evaluations on the advancement of professional development.

Perceptions and experiences related to implementing the Quality Management System as a* structured *framework for professional growth and development

The DHs emphasized that the QMS PDP is vital in advancing their professional growth. Participants reported experiencing positive results derived from the QMS PDP, which contributes to enhancing DHs' managerial competencies by providing consistent performance feedback. According to the participants, the program fosters a positive impact by continuously enhancing DHs' management capabilities. Participant 1 (P1) provided the following insights regarding these management skills:

As a DH, how do you personally perceive the Quality Management System (QMS) development programme? Please elaborate on your experiences with the programme, reflecting on whether it has comprehensively fostered your professional growth and development in your role as a DH?

The QMS programme is very crucial in my department. QMS allows me to keep all my records of meetings, engagements with educators, and everything that involves the curriculum; this is a way of developing myself. I think the main purpose of QMS is to become better daily. (P1)

I have gained tremendously in my ability to be a manager and a leader in my position. As an HoD, I must take accountability for everything that is happening in my department. Through QMS PDP, I have been developing to better my understanding of curriculum management. (P3)
Being exposed to QMS has allowed me to upgrade my leadership and work ethic. QMS has allowed me to keep track of my self-evaluation. It keeps me updated on my capabilities and keeps me informed of areas that need improvement. (P4)

Building upon this, the participants reported that the QMS PDP enhanced their standards of managerial performance within their respective academic institutions:

I have become independent and a productive team player. The QMS PDP has structured me to be open-minded when it comes to understanding the learners and educators I work with. With this knowledge, I have come to realisation that we are all unique and respond to situations uniquely; therefore, as a leader and manager, I need to accommodate everyone's uniqueness in the workplace. (P5)
In my participation in the QMS PDP, I have mastered the use of the learned skills that I have been equipped with, and it has become much easier for me to handle the curriculum wisely. I have learned leadership skills that have guided me in supervising educators in my phase. I have gained the ability to have good working relationships with fellow colleagues. (P9)
On a personal level, the QMS development programme is essential for us as management staff in schools. In my years of experience, QMS has positively influenced my career. It has awakened my teaching philosophy and has upgraded my work ethic. (P10)

The data delivers significant perspectives into DHs perspectives on the QMS PDP. Participants recognized the importance of enhancing their professional development and reported that the QMS PDP positively contributed to their growth as DHs. For example, participation in the QMS PDP has enabled DHs to exercise increased autonomy and authority in fulfilling their managerial duties. According to the participants, the programme has equipped them to effectively oversee curriculum management. The findings also showed that DHs are continuously engaged in developmental activities, such as maintaining self-evaluation records and improving skills in areas needing enhancement.

Theme 2: Challenges experienced during the QMS implementation

During the implementation of the QMS, DHs encountered several challenges. These included problems related to educators' attitudes, the required time, and the excessive paperwork involved. The participants highlighted the following points during their discussion:

What challenges have you experienced as a DH in implementing the QMS programme within your school?

The attitude of educators towards QMS is a very big challenge. Some educators only prepare for lessons when they know it is time for QMS evaluations. Others become lazy when QMS evaluations have been completed and lack enthusiasm for doing their best in the classroom. (P3)
During the self-awarding of scores by educators, the attitude of educators becomes problematic. Some educators give themselves a higher score in the performance standards than they deserve, which contradicts the score they have been awarded by their DHs. (P5)
At times, a DH and an educator may not reach an agreement on the performance standard during classroom observation. This can result in a conflict between the two colleagues. (P7)

The participants additionally noted that the execution of the QMS PDP can be a process that demands considerable time and effort:

The QMS Annual Plan can be impossible to cater for all educators simply because of how often it needs to be conducted, and there is limited time in schools to conduct it thoroughly. (P6)
QMS is very time-consuming for us educators simply because there is no time allocated for it in the curriculum. During evaluations, too much time is consumed by classroom visits. As DHs,

our teaching and learning time is consumed by evaluations. I believe that QMS needs to be time-locked to minimise the lost time in teaching and learning. (P8)
During the period of conducting QMS, there are times when we do not get adequate time to effectively implement the QMS PDP during classroom observation, simply because, as DHs, our job is always to teach, manage educators and be in charge of QMS. (P10)
The documentation process of the QMS PDP can be daunting. Starting from pre-evaluation meeting minutes that need to be conducted, post-evaluation minutes, and finally coming into the QMS appraisal document that records the performance standards that are recorded during lesson observation. (P2)
For QMS to be fully implemented, there is documentation that needs to be completed as a checklist and record-keeping of the process. (P7)
There is too much paperwork that needs to be completed when conducting QMS. The document has about four performance standards, and each has criteria that need to be addressed during lesson observation. (P9)

The findings suggest that the deployment and implementation of the QMS PDP within educational institutions is crucial for enhancing academic quality and advancing leadership competencies. Participants' experiences reveal that, despite the numerous advantages of the QMS PDP, its implementation is hindered by significant challenges, including negative attitudes among educators and the burden of excessive paperwork. Furthermore, the process necessitates a significant allocation of time, which is frequently limited by the constraints of the academic timetable, enabling comprehensive assessments that subsequently influence both teaching responsibilities and administrative functions. The implementation is further complicated by the extensive and complex documentation demands, including records of pre- and post-evaluation discussions, comprehensive appraisal instruments, and numerous performance indicators. These challenges underscore the necessity to revise the QMS implementation strategy to better align with the practical limitations faced by schools.

Theme 3: Approaches to Enhance the Quality Management System as a Professional Development Programme to Promote the Effective Progression of Departmental Heads.
Departmental heads suggested several strategies to boost the effectiveness of the QMS and reinforce it as a professional development programme. Their recommendations included implementing the QMS online, dedicating specific time within the teaching and learning schedule for QMS activities, and extending the length of QMS workshops, as outlined below:
What strategies can be employed to address and mitigate the challenges experienced during the implementation of the QMS PDP?

QMS can have too much paperwork to be completed. Less paperwork can make the implementation more productive. Maybe it could be done electronically; it would be better. (P4)
With the evolving times of technology, the use of paperwork can be exhausting. I would recommend that the record-keeping of QMS PDP be conducted electronically. (P6)
The Department of Education should consider shifting the programme to a digital platform, in place of the current level of paperwork. (P9)
To ensure that the QMS implementation does not disrupt teaching and learning time, the participants suggested the following potential solutions:
Firstly, it is very time-consuming for us educators simply because there is no time allocated for it within the curriculum. I believe that QMS also needs to be given time to minimise the lost time of teaching and learning. (P1)
The QMS PDP is an essential part of our development process. This is because it is conducted during teaching and learning time and takes up too much time during lesson observations. The Department of Education should consider allocating separate implementation time for QMS for teaching and learning so it is not interrupted. (P5)

Being an HoD has too many responsibilities, and QMS PDP implementation, being one of them, takes too much time away from the HoDs. This results in limited time for teaching and learning. (P8)

Following additional deliberation, the participants reached a consensus that professional development is a gradual process. Continuous training is necessary for professionals to develop effectively. Some of the suggestions offered by participants included:

Challenges of QMS can be addressed by the department providing full support to educators through having more time in workshops or having workshops regularly (those that include mentoring and coaching). Circuit managers must ensure that QMS is conducted thoroughly in schools. They need to make school visits during QMS time to give support and ensure quality implementation. (P3)

As leaders and managers, professional training is essential and should be conducted regularly for it to be effective. The QMS PDP should have regular informative workshops to update and reinforce educators' knowledge and skills development. (P7)

We need to be constantly developed, and therefore, the QMS PDP should be conducted at least twice a year in the form of a workshop. (P9)

Participants suggested various important measures to improve the QMSPDP implemented within educational institutions. *They argued that integrating technology within educational institutions could improve QMS data analysis, facilitate online evaluations, and support digital content creation. This technological integration can potentially transform the education system and promote quality improvements.* Furthermore, participants recommended that educators embrace a continuous learning approach, supported by sufficient training and resources, to effectively engage with the QMS. Offering consistent support and materials would help guarantee the successful application of QMS standards. *They also emphasized celebrating successes and learning from challenges during continuous training to foster ongoing improvement of the QMS PDP. Furthermore, participants stressed the importance of schools having sufficient resources and dedicated time for QMS implementation to enhance the programme's effectiveness.* Implementing these strategies enables schools to enhance professional development and foster a culture of ongoing improvement that promotes excellence in education and leadership success.

DISCUSSION

The study found that participants viewed the QMS as a PDP with a central focus on performance assessment and continuous support for professional enhancement. Performance management is recognized as a crucial mechanism within schools, enabling the SMT to address significant issues that ensure and elevate the quality of education delivery.[52] Participants emphasized that the QMS PDP primarily serves as a framework for evaluating performance while facilitating ongoing professional development opportunities. This aligns with Jayaweera et al., who underscore the relationship between instructional leadership practices and professional development components, highlighting the necessity for educational leaders at all levels to possess strong subject expertise and a comprehensive understanding of their roles.[53] Furthermore, Feder notes that ALT encourages adult learners to participate actively in intellectually engaging tasks that enhance learning.[54] Fairbanks further contends that adult learners contribute valuable knowledge and life experiences, which they prefer to apply to

[52]Department of Basic Education, *Quality Assurance and Skills Development*.

[53] S. Jayaweera, K. Karunathilake, and S. Weligamage, "Significance of Professional Development of Education Leaders: Evidence from Literature Review ," 2021, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350200528_Significance_of_professional_development_of_education_leaders_Evidence_from_literature_review.

[54] M. Feder, " Adult Learning Theory: The Principles of Andragogy," Phoenix Connect, 2021, https://www.phoenix.edu/blog/adult-learning-theories-principles.html.

new and practical contexts, thereby achieving more effective learning when instruction is relevant to authentic settings such as their workplace.[55]

Engagement with the Quality Management System as a framework for professional development

The study determined that PDPs are of considerable value and have played a significant role in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. Participants reported that the QMS elevated educators' teaching standards, thereby motivating them to achieve optimal performance. The QMS provides clear guidelines for conducting teaching and learning through well-defined performance standards. Supporting this, Muriuki et al. emphasize the need for highly skilled professional teachers and school leaders in today's education.[56] Participants noted that the QMS implementation gave them detailed directions on effectively managing educational activities. As a PDP, the QMS fostered growth among educators and HoDs, aiming to enhance instructional practices and learning outcomes comprehensively, from learner development to educator advancement. The system further encouraged self-evaluation, enabling individuals to recognize and convert weaknesses into strengths. Additionally, the QMS, as a PDP, specifies the developmental requirements necessary for educators.

The study further highlighted that the PDP enhances teaching quality by promoting reflective self-assessment and motivating educators to recognize and remediate areas for improvement. It was found that the QMS specifies the development levels required for HoDs to fulfil their managerial duties effectively. Performance management is a vital school process, enabling SMTs to concentrate on critical issues that sustain and improve the quality of education.[57]The Department of Basic Education identifies the evaluation of HoDs performance standards as a critical factor in promoting their accountability and facilitating their professional development.[58] Existing research shows that the QMS PDP involves identifying improvement areas, setting objectives, and applying strategies to achieve these goals.[59] Girmanova et al. further argue that implementing school performance management supports HoDs in maintaining high-quality education delivery.[60]

The training and development of DHs through the QMS as a PDP promotes the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, leading to improved performance.[61] Participants indicated that the QMS implementation has supported their teaching and learning activities. The PDP has empowered DHs to enhance their practice and collaborate by exchanging ideas during peer evaluations. Tachie and Mancotywa note that the role of school managers has evolved from merely assessing performance to actively fostering educator development within their departments.[62] Through the QMS, DHs have been empowered to support educators by developing instructional strategies and approaches that facilitate improved comprehension for learners facing difficulties. Moreover, the QMS as a PDP promotes adaptability among educators and DHs, encouraging them to function as flexible practitioners capable of responding effectively to the evolving requirements of their professional roles.

Obstacles encountered in executing the Quality Management System (QMS) within educational settings

During the study, participants indicated they encountered various challenges in implementing the QMS within their schools. Notably, DHs experienced obstacles, including resistance or negative attitudes from educators, constrained time availability, and interpersonal conflicts among staff members

[55] B. Fairbanks, "7 Adult Learning Theories and Principles to Enhance Your Education," accessed August 21, 2021, https://www.phoenix.edu/blog/adult-elearning-theories-principales.html [Accessed 24 August 2021].Fairbanks, B. 2021. 7 adult learning theories and principles to enhance your education. Available from:https://www.phoenix.edu/blog/adult-elearning-theories-principales.html.

[56] R.W. Muriuki, G.O. Onyango, and F. Kithinji, "Effective Heads of Department Professional Development on Their Role Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Kenya," *International Journal of Education and Research* 8, no. 11 (2020): 147–58.

[57] Department of Basic Education, *Quality Assurance and Skills Development*.

[58] Department of Basic Education, *Quality Assurance and Skills Development*.

[59] Department of Basic Education, *Quality Assurance and Skills Development*.

[60] Girmanová et al., "Application of Six Sigma Using DMAIC Methodology in the Process of Product Quality Control in Metallurgical Operation."

[61] Matorera, "Quality Management Systems in Education."

[62] Tachie and Mancotywa, "Challenges Faced by the Development Support Group in Implementing the Integrated Quality Management System in Circuit 04 Schools in the Mthatha Education District."

throughout the QMS implementation process. Kimeu corroborate these findings, highlighting that evaluators often lack adequate time for comprehensive assessments and sometimes have insufficient knowledge of the curriculum areas they evaluate.[63] Although the QMS is designed to function as a developmental programme, the experiences shared by participants indicate that significant challenges persist throughout its implementation. They highlighted that fitting the QMS into already busy schedules is difficult, as the programme is very time-consuming and no specific time is allocated for it within the school curriculum by the DoE.

Participants also pointed out that many performance standards required by the QMS have become difficult to achieve because of resource limitations in their schools, including overcrowded classrooms, inadequate furniture, and a shortage of educational resources. The participants additionally emphasised that the lack of financial backing from the DoE for non-fee-paying schools intensifies these challenges. This aligns with findings by Shongwe and Mutambara, whose participants similarly reported that resource shortages hinder effective QMS implementation.[64] The findings of Haubeck indicate that the education department does not have adequate technical support or financial resources to fully sustain the QMS in schools.[65] Numerous schools are hindered by insufficient technological infrastructure, limited training opportunities, and a lack of specialized expertise, all of which are essential for the effective implementation of the QMS. Shongwe and Mutambara emphasized that these resource deficiencies significantly obstruct the efficient execution of the QMS.[66]

Optimizing the Quality Management System to Facilitate the Effective Professional Development of Departmental Heads

Participants delineated multiple principal strategies to enhance the QMS as a PDP within educational institutions. They proposed that tackling these essential challenges would enable schools to attain lasting improvements in the quality of education. The data indicated that conducting the QMS implementation process online could reduce the extensive paperwork currently involved. Furthermore, participants proposed allocating specific time slots within the teaching and learning schedule exclusively for QMS activities, thereby minimising disruptions to instructional time. Brown noted that virtual workshops with flexible timing offer a practical solution.[67] ALT suggests that adults are motivated when they take on emerging social or life roles.[68]Virtual workshops are integral to adult learning, offering adult learners the opportunity to study independently while managing their work responsibilities.[69] Merriam and Biereman also highlighted that, per ALT, adults seek peer support and mentorship.[70] The importance of a support network is evident, as adult learners benefit from connecting with others facing similar challenges. Gulamhussein argued that one-time workshops operate on the assumption that educators primarily lack knowledge of effective teaching methods and that filling this gap will empower them to adapt to their environments.[71] Participants raised concerns that QMS PDP training is scheduled too tightly, with insufficient time allocated for departmental workshops, suggesting that longer workshops could have a more significant impact. Heubeck further underscored that PDPs and educational initiatives should be ongoing and integrated into a continuous process promoting sustained improvement of instructional practices and learning outcomes.[72]

[63] Kimeu, "Strategy Implementation and Performance of Commercial Banks in Machakos County, Kenya."
[64] Shongwe and Mutambara, "The Challenges Experienced by School Principals in the Implementation of QMS Performance Appraisal System in Schools within Mpumalanga Province, South Africa ."
[65] Heubeck, "Professional Development That Matters: What Teachers Say They Want."
[66] Shongwe and Mutambara, "The Challenges Experienced by School Principals in the Implementation of QMS Performance Appraisal System in Schools within Mpumalanga Province, South Africa ."
[67] D. Brown, " Challenges Adults Face in Their Learning," Edapp, n.d.
[68] Knowles, "Andragogy."
[69] Brown, " Challenges Adults Face in Their Learning."
[70] Sharan B Merriam and Laura L Bierema, *Adult Learning: Linking Theory and Practice* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013).
[71] A. Gulamhussein, "Teaching the Teachers: Effective Professional Development in an Era of High Stakes Accountability," *Center for Public Education*, 2014.
[72] Heubeck, "Professional Development That Matters: What Teachers Say They Want."

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is essential to strengthen the QMS PDP. This can be achieved by providing extensive training to HoDs that is tailored and accommodating to their leadership roles. For the annual teaching plans (ATPs) to continue uninterrupted, time allocation for the QMS should be separated from time allocated for teaching and learning. This can be accomplished by incorporating a QMS PDP implementation plan in the ATPs provided by the DoE, specifying the time and dates that the school will conduct the QMS. The QMS should prioritise administrative support for DHs to help with their workload, since this will allow them to focus more on instructional leadership and empower DHs to drive positive changes within their departments.

CONCLUSION

The QMS has equipped HoDs to assist educators by developing teaching strategies tailored to help struggling learners understand concepts at their level. Performance management is a fundamental aspect within educational institutions, enabling the SMT to concentrate on pivotal matters that underpin the sustainability and advancement of quality education. Participants articulated that the QMS, functioning as a PDP, is enacted and overseen via peer evaluations during classroom observations. The findings indicated that participants frequently regarded peer evaluation as a pragmatic element integral to the QMS PDP, fostering their professional growth. They saw peer evaluation as a motivating factor, encouraging them to enhance their teaching efforts. According to participants, classroom observations help uphold and elevate educators' performance standards while addressing challenges they encounter during lessons. Quality Management System is developed to meet educators' needs through peer evaluation, which participants reported has raised teaching standards and inspired educators to perform at their best. Additionally, *QMS,* as a PDP, has fostered adaptability among educators and HoDs, encouraging them to function as versatile practitioners capable of managing the evolving demands of their roles.

Although the QMS is acknowledged as a development programme, participants reported persistent challenges during its implementation. They stressed the need for QMS training to be ongoing and consistently overseen by the DoE. The QMS PDP ought to prioritise the cultivation of team management, proficient communication, sound decision-making, and problem-solving competencies to augment the overall effectiveness of the programme. The Minister of Basic Education should contemplate allocating designated time for QMSPDP activities within schools to minimize disruptions to teaching and learning. To ensure the smooth execution of ATPs, QMS activities should be scheduled separately from instructional time. This could be facilitated by integrating the PDP implementation schedule into the ATPs issued by the DoE, explicitly indicating the designated periods during which schools are expected to carry out QMS activities. Furthermore, the QMS should prioritize providing administrative support to HoDs to reduce their workload, enabling them to concentrate more effectively on instructional leadership and equipping them to initiate and sustain positive transformations within their departments. This study extends the limited empirical literature on QMS PDP in South Africa by foregrounding DHs' lived experiences and demonstrating how structured professional development, grounded in adult learning theory, can enhance middle leadership capacity while identifying critical areas for policy and programme improvement.

Study Limitations and Future Research

It is crucial to acknowledge the limitations and constraints that may have influenced the outcomes of this study. Firstly, due to time constraints and the scope of the study, a limited number of DHs were interviewed, which may limit the ability to generalise the findings. In addition, the study focused solely on public schools, excluding private and international schools, thus potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives and practices. For future studies, it is suggested that a mixed-methods approach be used, involving various types of schools and an expanded sample for generalisation purposes.

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ABOUT AUTHORS

Bongela S. Nyandeni is a PhD candidate in the Department of Education Management and Leadership at the University of the Free State. She holds a master's degree in education management and leadership from the same institution. Her research focuses on the capacity of educators and the influence of professional development on the leadership and management practices of Heads of Departments in promoting quality teaching and managing learner indiscipline.

Dr. L. Mdodana-Zide is a Senior Lecturer and Head of DEMPCE in the Faculty of Education, UFS, QwaQwa Campus. Her niche area is school leadership professional development through a transformational leadership lens, particularly in rural schools, focusing on how it enables sustainable institutional change, professional cultures, and strengthens inclusive, socially just instructional practices. In short, her scholarly ideology is shaping how South African/African schools are evolving, thriving, and leading their own futures.

Dr. Michael Moreti Mahome is currently a senior lecturer at Northwest University, South Africa, specialising in education leadership and management, with more emphasis on middle leadership and the management of teacher-directed violence. He has published journal articles in the discipline and supervised postgraduate students (M & D) to completion. This includes presentations at numerous local and international conferences