

Role Expectations, Constraints, and Strategies: A Case of Departmental Heads in Vhembe West District, Limpopo Province, South Africa



Elizabeth Mudau¹, Ndanganeni Florence Litshani²  &
Takalani Samuel Mashau² 

¹ Masedi Primary School, in Vhembe West District, Limpopo Province, South Africa.

² Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, at the University of Venda, Limpopo Province, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

Departmental heads (DHs) in primary schools have multiple roles and responsibilities to fulfil. They are expected to perform diverse roles that are not only limited to being class teachers but also as supervisors, coordinators, and departmental managers. Most of them do not receive formal training to become DHs, how to perform these roles, or how to respond to the challenges accompanying these roles and responsibilities. This study aims to establish strategies to manage constraints that prevent departmental heads from fulfilling their roles effectively within the Vhembe West District of Limpopo Province. The study employed an interpretive paradigm to understand the social realities that DHs experience at school. The study was conducted within the Theory of Constraints (TOC). The research design of this study was a multiple-qualitative case study. The population of the study was all DHs in Elim, Soutpansberg East, and Vhuronga Two (2) Circuits. Purposeful sampling was employed to draw a sample of 9 DHs. Data was collected through a semi-structured interview schedule and document analysis. The data was analysed thematically. Findings from this study revealed, amongst others, the following: the roles of all participants in monitoring, curriculum management, coordination, and planning activities to enhance the implementation of the curriculum. This study recommended, among others that DHs should be excluded from being full-time classroom teachers, and policymakers should reduce the current teaching load of DHs. The study contributes to the empowerment of DHs in their roles despite the huge workload of teaching and supervising teachers in their departments. This is possible through employing distributive leadership wherein they solicit the skills of senior teachers to assist them, thereby enhancing shared leadership, collective action, and collaborative decision-making.

Correspondence

Ndanganeni Florence Litshani
Email:
Ndanganeni.Litshani@univen.ac.za

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INTRODUCTION

International, regional, and national studies indicate that DHs in schools play crucial roles in leading and coordinating curriculum developments.¹ The flip side of the DHs' expected roles, though enacted by

¹ E. E. Khaeshe et al., "Influence of Departmental Heads Managerial Skills on The Implementation of Secondary School Programmes In Kakamega Central and East Districts," 2016; T. T Tapala et al., "Perceptions of Departmental Heads on Their Curriculum Leadership

policy causes constraints on them. They are rarely trained adequately to perform their roles and responsibilities, hence, constraints as they try to cope with both teaching and administrative work.

DBE-PAM establishes that “the main responsibilities of DHs are to monitor the department's efficient operation and to manage their subjects' co-curricular and curriculum activities.”² This position is referred to as the leader-manager role by Tapala et al. and Nkadimeng and Thaba-Nkadimene.³ Section 3.3 of the Employment of Educators Act, indicates that DHs in primary schools are supposed to teach between 85% and 90% of the allotted time; yet some DHs who are assigned to the Foundation Phase teach 100% of the allotted time.⁴ However, it is anticipated that following promotion, teachers' operational workloads will drop to let them concentrate on their managerial duties; yet, after promotion, DHs' teaching responsibilities in primary schools remain the same as their administrative roles and responsibilities grow.

Following Section 3.3 of the Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998, DH oversees instruction and collaborates with parents and senior school administration.⁵ However, given that DHs have multiple roles that demand them, the current distribution of teaching time could affect their performance, for example, to be class teachers and supervisors of other teachers in the department, simultaneously. Kruger cited in Simpson et al., argues that “DHs have challenges of insufficient time to attend to both teaching and non-teaching issues in executing their roles and responsibilities effectively, leading to the conclusion that the multiple roles of DHs may not be performed effectively if the current time allocation is not attended to.”⁶ It is therefore imperative to explore strategies for managing these constraints as the learning and teaching activities at school are negatively affected.

This study aims to establish strategies to manage constraints that prevent departmental heads from fulfilling their roles effectively within the Vhembe West District, Limpopo Province schools. The aim of this study is imbued in the following study objectives:

- To identify the roles and responsibilities performed by departmental heads.
- To determine factors that cause constraints that hinder departmental heads in performing their roles and responsibilities.
- To explore available strategies for the departmental heads to employ in managing constraints while performing their roles and responsibilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review covered the following key thematic aspects as discussed below.

The Roles and Responsibilities of DHs

The Education Labour Relations Council, explains “the departmental heads' roles and responsibilities as their core duties, which are not only limited to teaching, coaching, and coordinating extracurricular and co-curricular activities; working with personnel; performing administrative work; and communicating with different stakeholders within and outside departments.”⁷ DHs perform other roles that are not organised by the department, in addition to providing coordination for the whole school. Professionalism among teachers gives provisions for principals to delegate some roles and responsibilities to DHs where necessary.⁸ This means that DHs may be delegated to perform other roles that are beyond those that have been enshrined in the Education Labour Relations Council and the Personnel Administrative Measures.

Roles: Voices from South Africa,” *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 21, no. 4 (October 2, 2022): 816–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2020.1854790>; Department of Education, *Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM)* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 2014).

² Department of Education, *Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM)*.

³ Tapala, Fuller, and Mentz, “Perceptions of Departmental Heads on Their Curriculum Leadership Roles: Voices from South Africa”; Kgomotlokoa Linda Thaba-Nkadimene and Mampuru Philemon Nkadimeng, “The Factors That Impede Head of Departments in Committing and Executing Their Instructional Leadership Roles among Selected Limpopo Primary Schools in South Africa,” *Journal of African Education* 1, no. 2 (2020): 39–59.

⁴ Republic of South Africa, *Employment of Educators Act, No 76 of 1998*. (Pretoria: Government Printers, 1998), Section 3.3.

⁵ Republic of South Africa, *Employment of Educators Act, No 76 of 1998*.

⁶ Kweku Bedu Simpson et al., “Assessing the Challenges Heads of Department Encounter in Instructional Supervision in Ghana. A Case of Selected Senior High Schools in Kwabre East District.,” *Journal of Education and Practice* 7, no. 36 (2016): 156–69.

⁷ Republic of South Africa, *Education Labour Relations Council: C66-67* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 2003).

⁸ R.N. Marishane, R.J. Botha, and N.M. Ramodikoe, *The Effective Management of a School: Towards Quality Outcome* (Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers, 2013).

Annexure A.5 in the Government Gazette (GG 39684) as amended in the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) in March 2016, outlines some of the following roles of DHs below.⁹

Role of Teaching and Co-ordinating Extra and Co-curricular

The Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998 indicates that “the scheduled teaching time for DHs in primary school should be between 85% and 90%; however, the teaching time of DHs that are placed in the Foundation Phase is 100%.”¹⁰ DHs should prepare and carry out various forms of assessment after the teaching and learning activities. The teaching roles of DHs are not only confined to teaching learners but also coordinating and conveying their teaching skills to teachers in the department simultaneously.

Tapala et al., assert that “DHs are responsible for coordinating and updating teachers on activities that take place in areas that they supervise”.¹¹ This may include updating educators about dates on which extra and co-curricular activities should occur, availability, and the shortage, of resources that should be used in extra and co-curricular activities. It is for this reason that DHs should perform their roles and responsibilities effectively to improve the standard of extracurricular and co-curricular activities at schools.

Roslyn and Alviz, show that “DHs should organise departmental meetings and set departmental goals.”¹² The coordinating role of DHs may assist in finding shared decision-making on extracurricular and co-curricular activities among themselves and other co-workers. This may strengthen approaches on how to improve the standard of extracurricular and co-curricular activities at schools. DHs should also coordinate meetings between members of their departments and the top management of the school to improve collaboration among them about extracurricular and co-curricular activities. This is because the top management of the school may influence the funding of extracurricular and co-curricular activities by the School Governing Body (SGB).

Administrative and Leading Role of DHs

Administrative work is one of the daily core roles allocated to DHs. The administrative roles of DHs may include writing reports, analysing results, compiling, and signing mark sheets, providing timetables, submission of data, interpreting and drawing conclusions that may inform outcomes, conducting meetings, and safekeeping of minutes and records.¹³ The safekeeping of records should be done to protect the information and to produce it during the reporting period and when necessary.

Okumbes’ report cited by Muriuki et al., indicates that “DHs should maintain learners’ academic records and progress.”¹⁴ This should be done to track the progress of learners throughout their schooling”. Furthermore, track records of DHs can reflect how subjects or phases are performing while strengthening the smooth running of information among the educational hierarchy personnel at school. In addition, DHs should assist in the planning, management, and procurement of learner and teaching support materials (LTSM). This should be done to ensure that the LTSM purchased will add value to the teaching and learning activities at school.

DHs should ensure that the curriculum developments in their departments are planned in such a way that they can function effectively. In South Africa, DHs are responsible for the effective functioning of departments.¹⁵ The effective functioning of the department could depend on how DHs perform the following roles:

- To be in charge and to jointly develop departmental policies;
- To coordinate assessments;
- To advise the principal on matching subjects and teachers;
- To effectively participate in the appraisal process of the school;

⁹ Department of Education, *Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM)*.

¹⁰ Republic of South Africa, *Employment of Educators Act, No 76 of 1998*.

¹¹ Tapala, Fuller, and Mentz, “Perceptions of Departmental Heads on Their Curriculum Leadership Roles: Voices from South Africa.”

¹² R O Alviz, “The Roles of Department Head: Key to School Improvement,” *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 9, no. 3 (2015): 283–96.

¹³ Department of Education, *Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM)*, 28.

¹⁴ Rebecca Wakariti 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): 45–63.

¹⁵ Department of Education, *Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM)*, 27.

- Communicate with stakeholders to ensure that cooperation and collaboration take place in teaching and learning activities.

DHs are expected to monitor the curriculum content coverage to ensure that activities taught to learners are according to the ATP and according to the week in which they should be taught. DHs perform these roles to improve the effectiveness of curriculum standards at school.

Providing Guidance on Teaching Methods to Develop Staff Members

DHs should guide teaching methods to educators to improve their teaching standards. DHs monitor, supervise, and provide guidance on teaching methods, to improve what educators already know and their teaching skills. Considering the above, DHs should be guided so that they can identify the gap that exists in the teaching methods of educators. Okumbes' report, cited in Muriuki et al. recommended that "DHs should facilitate activities that ensure that educators are in line with changes in curriculum and methodology."¹⁶ This may result in a better understanding of the teaching and learning activities offered at schools.

Tapala et al., argue that "DHs are experts in the subjects they supervise and in curriculum-related matters."¹⁷ It is for this reason that DHs should demonstrate the latest teaching approaches and methods to educators under their supervision.¹⁸ DHs should provide learning methods, new information, and new technology to educators. This should be done to ensure that DHs transfer their teaching methods and skills to educators in the department. Furthermore, DHs should convey the multilevel methods of differentiation and adaptation of lessons to educators.¹⁹ This should be done to accommodate learners with different personality levels in one class.

Muriuki et al., and Tapala et al., indicate that "DHs should be involved in the development of educators."²⁰ Roslyn and Alviz, indicate that "DHs should empower educators so that they may provide quality teaching and learning."²¹ Empowering educators through professional development unleashes their strengths and weaknesses in delivering curriculum activities. Furthermore, this may provide the principal with an informed decision on the allocation of subjects according to the expertise and interests of educators. This process matches the needs of individuals and an organisation.

Factors that cause Constraints on DHs

Several factors cause constraints on DHs in their workplace, of which 13 are discussed hereunder because they are most relevant to addressing the third research objective of this study.

Adjusting to the Expectations of the Role

Some newly appointed DHs have difficulties adjusting to the expectations of their role. This is because they have been appointed but not inducted according to what is expected of them. Esohe et al., argue that "educators are not trained or prepared on how to undertake the roles of DHs before their appointments."²² DHs have not been equipped with the necessary skills to handle their added responsibilities. This is because the workshop that they received was insufficient to improve their performance.²³ Insufficient workshops make it difficult for newly appointed DHs to adjust to the expectations of their roles. It is

¹⁶ Muriuki, Onyango, and Kithinji, "Effective Heads of Department Professional Development on Their Role Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Kenya," 153.

¹⁷ Tapala, Fuller, and Mentz, "Perceptions of Departmental Heads on Their Curriculum Leadership Roles: Voices from South Africa," 27.

¹⁸ Department of Education, *Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM)*, 27.

¹⁹ Department of Basic Education Republic of South Africa, *Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 2010).

²⁰ Muriuki, Onyango, and Kithinji, "Effective Heads of Department Professional Development on Their Role Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Kenya"; Tapala, Fuller, and Mentz, "Perceptions of Departmental Heads on Their Curriculum Leadership Roles: Voices from South Africa."

²¹ Alviz, "The Roles of Department Head: Key to School Improvement."

²² Khaeshe et al., "Influence of Departmental Heads Managerial Skills on The Implementation of Secondary School Programmes In Kakamega Central and East Districts."

²³ Simpson et al., "Assessing the Challenges Heads of Department Encounter in Instructional Supervision in Ghana. A Case of Selected Senior High Schools in Kwabre East District."

therefore significant that DHs be empowered with sufficient skills that will enable them to perform their roles and responsibilities effectively.

When educators are promoted to the upper level of the educational hierarchy, their teaching work is expected to decrease while their managerial work and responsibility increase.²⁴ In most cases, when educators are promoted to the DH posts, their teaching work stays the same, especially for those who are placed in the foundation phase. The teaching work of DHs that stays the same when their managerial roles and responsibilities increase makes it difficult for them to focus on their other added roles and responsibilities. This leaves them with quantitative and qualitative overload when there is too much work to be completed at a given time.²⁵ In addition, some DHs who have overcrowded classes find it difficult to manage their class work, provide individual attention, and provide constructive feedback to learners.²⁶ Quantitative and qualitative overload, accompanied by overcrowded classes, hinders DHs from performing their roles and responsibilities effectively. Tapala et al., argue that “conditions of service for DHs in South Africa are the same irrespective of the departments, the weight of responsibilities according to the size, and more than the expected number of subjects and educators to supervise.”²⁷ These make it difficult for DHs with bigger departments and more than the expected number of educators to supervise and perform their other roles according to the expectations of the school and the department.

Because DH posts are in the middle of the educational hierarchy of the school, they are expected to close the gap between SMT members who have left the school through retirement, promotion, or death.²⁸ It is difficult to perform their roles and responsibilities combined with those of SMT colleagues who were not replaced for more than two or more years after retirement, promotion, or death. Ambiguous and clerical or administrative work, in their roles that are associated with monitoring, mentoring, and supervision limit DHs from fulfilling their roles and responsibilities with ease.²⁹ This is because there is too much paperwork to be completed at a given time.

Pressure of Time

DHs are experiencing the pressure of time in performing their roles and responsibilities. Roslyn and Alviz, Simpson et al. indicate that “DHs have challenges of lack of time in performing their roles and responsibilities.”³⁰ Time constraints experienced by DHs result in tension over the tasks that they are expected to complete. This is because DHs are expected to complete multiple roles concurrently.

Kruger, cited in Simpson et al., shows that “DHs lack sufficient time to attend to both instructional and non-instructional issues.”³¹ Lack of sufficient time impedes DHs from executing their roles and responsibilities effectively.

In South Africa, the allocated time for DHs makes it difficult for them to cover all their roles. The roles of DHs combined with those delegated to them by the principal could confuse what is expected of them. This could have a negative effect on their performance because they have multiple roles that require them, for example, to be class educators and supervisors of other educators in the department, simultaneously. The DHs experience the pressure of time in their attempts to get through the pace set by the Department of Education in the crammed curriculum. Seobi and Woods, concur with the above view by maintaining that “the main challenge that DHs experience is sufficient time that allows them to work rationally.”³² This may result in the conclusion that DHs may not be able to complete their multiple roles and responsibilities within the time allocated to them. Consequently, this could result in the late submission of reports from the monitoring processes conducted on educators to the deputy principal or the principal.

²⁴ P.C. Van der Westhuizen, *Effective Educational Management* (Cape Town: Kagiso Tertiary, 1991), 50.

²⁵ P.S. Nel et al., *Human Resource Management* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press (Pty) Ltd, 2008), 157.

²⁶ Alviz, “The Roles of Department Head: Key to School Improvement.”

²⁷ Tapala, Fuller, and Mentz, “Perceptions of Departmental Heads on Their Curriculum Leadership Roles: Voices from South Africa.”

²⁸ Van der Westhuizen, *Effective Educational Management*, 51.

²⁹ Alviz, “The Roles of Department Head: Key to School Improvement”; Simpson et al., “Assessing the Challenges Heads of Department Encounter in Instructional Supervision in Ghana. A Case of Selected Senior High Schools in Kwabre East District.”

³⁰ Alviz, “The Roles of Department Head: Key to School Improvement.”

³¹ Simpson et al., “Assessing the Challenges Heads of Department Encounter in Instructional Supervision in Ghana. A Case of Selected Senior High Schools in Kwabre East District,” 157.

³² B.A. Seobi and L. Wood, “Improving the Instructional Leadership of Heads of Departmental Heads in Under-Resource Schools: A Collaborative Action Learning Approach,” . . *South African Journal of Education* 36, no. 4 (2017): 1–14.

Progressed Learners

The education system of South Africa allows learners to progress to the next grade to prevent them from being retained in one phase for more than five years.³³ Progressed learners make it difficult for DHs to fulfil their roles effectively. This is because they should be profiled and assessed separately from those that have been promoted. DHs should monitor double lessons prepared by educators, which include adapted lessons for progressed learners and lessons prepared for those who are promoted. This is because progressing learners need differentiation and adaptation of lessons planned to accommodate them in classes.³⁴ The intervention strategies and remedial activities to increase the performance of progressed learners increase the administrative duties of DHs. This is because there is a lot of paperwork that needs to be completed to track how these learners are progressing.

Lack of Parental Involvement in School

Chauke et al., encourage parental involvement in the education of their children. This is because parental involvement improves the academic performance of learners.³⁵ Schools and DHs in particular experience challenges in conveying some educational matters without the involvement of parents. An example of this is when learners have learning barriers that hinder their progress and need to be brought to the attention of parents. Lack of cooperation and participation of parents may result in reducing the ability of the school to make some decisions that are not exclusive to tours, choosing the language of teaching and learning, and adopting the school budget.³⁶

Bipath and Nkabinde, indicate that “there is a great value in the skills provided by parents and community-based organisations in the education of children.”³⁷ Parental involvement assists in addressing disruptive behaviour, which, among others, includes school violence, gangsterism, indiscipline, absenteeism, bullying, and bunking of classes by learners, and addressing learning barriers for learners.

Lack of Decision Making

Roslyn and Alviz, highlight that “the roles of DHs are not clearly defined.”³⁸ This is because they should first get permission to implement activities in their department from the top management of the school. Tapala et al. argue that “DHs in South Africa should consult the top management of schools before making decisions in their departments.”³⁹ This is because principals exert too much authority over what DHs do.⁴⁰ Decisions taken in curriculum activities may either be rejected or approved because of policies formulated at the school. These mindsets and policy constraints are informed by processes or cultures that block the implementation of activities required to achieve the goals of the organisation.⁴¹ The curriculum goals set in streams or phases may not be achieved effectively because of the mindset that informs how activities should take place at school. It is frustrating for DHs when decisions taken in their departments are rejected because of the mindset and policies that hinder them from exercising total authority in the departments.

Lack of Resources

Section 6.4 in the prescripts of the Limpopo Department of Basic Education, indicates that “the school governing body should allocate 60% of the total budget to the curriculum needs of the school.⁴² LTSM that are utilized in teaching and learning are not exclusive to books, stationery, charts, audio-visual aids, globes, maps, atlases, and measuring instruments.” Manaseh, cited in Tapala et al., argue “that DHs must

³³ Republic of South Africa, *Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning*, 10, 17.

³⁴ Republic of South Africa, *Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning*, 23.

³⁵ N. D. Chauke et al., “Assessing the Extent to Which the School-Parent Partnership in the Malamulele Northeast Circuit in the Limpopo Province Enhances Effective Teaching and Learning of Learners in Primary Schools,” *Gender and Behaviour* 20, no. 3 (2022): 20327–40.

³⁶ Chauke et al., “Assessing the Extent to Which the School-Parent Partnership in the Malamulele Northeast Circuit in the Limpopo Province Enhances Effective Teaching and Learning of Learners in Primary Schools.”

³⁷ Keshni Bipath and Mfulathelwa M B Nkabinde, “The Motivational Roles of Heads of Department in Learners’ Performance and Quality of Schooling in South Africa,” *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 8, no. 1 (2018): 1–8.

³⁸ Alviz, “The Roles of Department Head: Key to School Improvement.”

³⁹ Tapala, Fuller, and Mentz, “Perceptions of Departmental Heads on Their Curriculum Leadership Roles: Voices from South Africa,” 5.

⁴⁰ Tapala, Fuller, and Mentz, “Perceptions of Departmental Heads on Their Curriculum Leadership Roles: Voices from South Africa,” 7.

⁴¹ Chawla and Kant, “Application of Theory of Constraints in Service Type Organization,” 366.

⁴² Department of Basic Education, *Section 6.4 of the Limpopo Department of Basic Education*, 2011.

source, provide, and distribute LTSM to educators.” This should be done so that they can yield the required results and perform better.⁴³

Resource constraints inhibit the development of the team in producing good results. In this regard, DH should ensure that team members have enough suitable resources that will enable them to perform effectively. In light of the above, the school should provide the necessary resources to DHs so that their departments may function effectively.

DHs will not be able to distribute the required resources to educators if the school or the Department of Basic Education (DBE) does not supply them. In this regard, some educators may blame the lack of resources as an excuse for not doing their operational work effectively. This may ultimately result in the failure of DHs to achieve the expected outcomes. Consequently, the results of the whole school may be negatively affected.

Strategies for managing DHs Constraints

Strategies for managing DH constraints are the main subject of the study. It was crucial to understand what happens with DHs elsewhere in the world, their roles and responsibilities, the causes of constraints, and the impact of constraints. However, DHs need to have the capacity to develop strategies to manage such constraints.

Parental Involvement

The laws of South Africa encourage parents to be involved in the education of their children. Parental involvement activities that enhance the performance of their children include but are not limited to the following: ensuring that their children are at school on time; providing basic needs such as school uniforms to their children; assisting their children with their homework; attending parent meetings; and ensuring that their children adhere to the code of conduct of the school.⁴⁴

Parental involvement, especially for those with low income, may need to be nurtured by giving them personal attention in literature and parental involvement classes.⁴⁵ Providing personal attention to parents with low incomes may provide them with skills that may improve their income in the future. Providing parents with literature classes may assist in providing better skills on how to improve the reading skills of children. In addition, parental involvement may assist in addressing the disruptive behaviour of learners.

Professional Development of Departmental Heads

Training and professional development of DHs may provide them with the appropriate and relevant information to perform their roles and responsibilities effectively. Hargreaves and Fullan cited in Muriuki et al., argue that “DHs acquired the capacity to handle their daily challenges through professional development programmes.”⁴⁶ This may provide them with skills on how to lead the implementation of learning and teaching activities at schools. Furthermore, professional development and leadership training for DHs will assist them in adjusting to the expectations of their roles and responsibilities. In addition, in-service activities could also assist DHs in acquiring skills on how they can support educators.⁴⁷

DHs can develop skills on how to perform their roles and responsibilities by being open to learning from others.⁴⁸ Experienced DHs can assist novice ones by critically evaluating the outcomes of the goals that have been set in regular meetings. The knowledge, skills, and training of experienced DHs could improve the performance of novice DHs. Against this background, it is in the interest of DHs and the school that DHs receive professional developmental training. Skills that DHs receive from professional

⁴³ A.J. Whitaker, *Billion Child Foundation: South African Schools Centre of Excellence Programme Participant Manual* (London: Future Winners International Ltd, 2011).

⁴⁴ Chauke et al., “Assessing the Extent to Which the School-Parent Partnership in the Malamulele Northeast Circuit in the Limpopo Province Enhances Effective Teaching and Learning of Learners in Primary Schools.”

⁴⁵ Coetzee and Van Niekerk, *An Educator's Guide to Effective Classroom Management*, 157.

⁴⁶ Muriuki, Onyango, and Kithinji, “Effective Heads of Department Professional Development on Their Role Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Kenya,” 148.

⁴⁷ C. Day, “The Role of a Head of Department in Staff Development,” *Journal of In-Service Education* 10, no. 2 (1984): 32.

⁴⁸ Seobi and Wood, “Improving the Instructional Leadership of Heads of Departmental Heads in Under-Resource Schools: A Collaborative Action Learning Approach,” 167.

development and from experienced DHs may assist them in performing their managerial work should they be promoted to the upper educational hierarchy.

Departmental Head Management Plan

Planning activities in advance is the starting point of all management tasks.⁴⁹ DHs must draw the management plan, which indicates dates, times, and activities to be done in the departments. The management plan may assist DHs and educators in the department to perform their roles and responsibilities according to the scheduled time.

The Department of Public Service and Administration of 1997, indicates that “managers should have a work plan that covers a specific period and sets out responsibilities and objectives to be achieved.”⁵⁰ It is therefore important for DHs to influence collaborative relationships among themselves and educators so that they put more effort into the implementation of activities drawn from the management plan.

Delegating Powers and teamwork

Esohe et al. suggest that “DHs may delegate some roles to staff members to transfer authority, train, improve their strength, and empower them.”⁵¹ However, the strength, interest, and capacity of staff members should be considered before the delegation process starts. Delegating and sharing their workload with other staff members could provide DHs with the opportunity to focus on other core roles and responsibilities. This may reduce the pressure associated with a lack of sufficient time to attend to other roles. Jaca, cited in Simpson et al., argue that “DHs may delegate power to educators or take their work home.”⁵² However, DHs should remain accountable for all the tasks that they have delegated to staff members. In this respect, they should monitor the way the delegated tasks are performed. This may assist in rectifying mistakes at an early stage before more work has been completed

Teamwork

Curriculum coordinators should encourage educators to share knowledge, experience, and the best methodology of teaching in areas that they coordinate. This will result in strengthening the way educators provide teaching and learning activities to learners. Furthermore, teamwork could encourage the sharing of responsibilities and advice that may affect the total performance of the department. Kervinen *et al.* argue that “teamwork provides advice that may increase the quality of teaching in the department.”⁵³ Educators may learn new approaches of teaching topics in subjects that they find challenging for themselves”. This will encourage them to improve towards the achievements of the collectively planned vision of providing quality education to learners.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework that underpins this study is the Theory of Constraints (TOC). The TOC is a management philosophy that was developed by Goldratt in 1984. Akman and Ozcan, define the TOC as “a management philosophy that focuses on managing constraints to improve production in the system.”⁵⁴ Vargas et al. define TOC as a “management philosophy that provides focus on continuous improvement that results in the advancement of the performance of the organisation.”⁵⁵ Ramasu et al. define TOC as a “multi-faceted system methodology that has been developed to assist people and organisations to think

⁴⁹ Van der Westhuizen, *Effective Educational Management*, 225.

⁵⁰ Department of Public Service and Administration, *Batho Pele - “People First,”* 1997, <https://www.dpsa.gov.za/dpsa2g/documents/acts®ulations/frameworks/white-papers/transform.pdf>.

⁵¹ Khaeshe et al., “Influence of Departmental Heads Managerial Skills on The Implementation of Secondary School Programmes In Kakamega Central and East Districts.”

⁵² Simpson et al., “Assessing the Challenges Heads of Department Encounter in Instructional Supervision in Ghana. A Case of Selected Senior High Schools in Kwabre East District,” 157.

⁵³ Anttoni Kervinen et al., “Developing a Collaborative Model in Teacher Education--An Overview of a Teacher Professional Development Project,” *LUMAT: International Journal on Math, Science and Technology Education* 4, no. 2 (2016): 67–86.

⁵⁴ Gülşen Akman and Burcu Özcan, “Developing Effective Manufacturing Strategies for Product Mix Decisions via Theory of Constraints: A Case Study,” *Journal of Naval Sciences and Engineering* 12, no. 1 (2016): 1–18.

⁵⁵ Paula Vargas et al., “TOC’S Five-Step Cycle: An Approach to Instant Results and Cultural Change,” *International Journal of Engineering Research & Science (IJOER)* 3, no. 10 (2017): 1–9.

about their problems, to develop breakthrough solutions and to implement those solutions, successfully.”⁵⁶ The TOC is relevant to this study since it seeks to expose the constraints in the education system to address them. The TOC was chosen to explore constraints that DHs may be experiencing when performing their roles and responsibilities at school. This theory may assist in shifting the focus of DHs from their constraints to their emphasis on finding ways to eliminate them.

METHODOLOGY

This study was informed by the interpretivism paradigm. The rationale for choosing this paradigm is that its philosophy is appropriate for understanding the social realities that DHs experience at school and how to interpret them.⁵⁷ Denzin, argues that “in the interpretive tradition, there are no ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’ theories.”⁵⁸ Instead, knowledge should be judged according to how ‘interesting’ it is to the researcher as well as those involved in the same areas. A qualitative research design employed used the case study approach to investigate roles and constraints experienced by DHs and strategies on how to manage them.

Out of the numerous circuits in the Vhembe West District, the researchers focused on the DHs from Elim, Soutpansberg East, and Vhuronga II circuits as the targeted population. These circuits are situated in Louis Trichardt, part of the Sinthumule and Vuwani areas of Vhembe West District in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Researchers used purposive sampling to select the DHs who were interviewed. The number of DHs interviewed were three from each circuit. This number brought the total number of sampled and interviewed departmental heads to nine, from nine different schools.

Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used to collect data. Documents entailed curriculum management files, assessment files, co-curricular files, learner performance files, and teachers’ development files were requested from participants to analyse their level of administrative roles. Data was analysed to identify patterns and themes that emerged from the data so that researchers could conclude.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

There were nine participants in the study. Of the 9 participants, one (1) was white and eight (8) were black. In terms of age, two of them ranged from 40 to 49 years, six from 50 to 59 years, and one was above 60 years. So, seven (7) of the participants are more experienced in teaching but would leave the system within five years of early retirement or retirement age. Of the 9 participants, 5 were females and 4 were males. Three participants supervise the Foundation Phase, five (5) supervise the Intermediate Phase, and one (1) supervises all three phases, including the Senior Phase. Nine participants were interviewed individually, as per arrangement. These are DHs from nine schools, one of which was an ex-model C school. Participants were allocated codes. ‘P’ stands for primary school, DH stands for departmental head, and a number was allocated to 9 schools, hence, PDH1 to PDH9.

The following themes emerged from both literature, interviews, and document analysis.

Theme 1: Monitoring and Curriculum Management.

The DHs know that *teaching* is one of their roles; they are class teachers. Added to that, DHs do monitoring and curriculum management by holding subject meetings and class visits, ensuring that teaching resources like the Annual Teaching Plan are available, checking whether the timetable is followed up, moderating assessment tasks, checking whether teachers are giving learners prescribed work - formal and informal (curriculum coverage). All nine PDHs agree on the role. This role is well captured by PDH2 and PDH4. PDH9 reveals that as a DH she also has a class to teach, an aspect which 8 PDHs did not entertain.

⁵⁶ T. Ramasu, K. Sobiyi, and E. Akinlabi, “ Application of Theories of Constraints in South Africa: A Case Study in a Platinum Mine ,” in *Proceedings of the 2017 International Conference on Industrial Engineering and Operations Management (IEOM)* (Bristol, UK , 2017), 98–103.

⁵⁷ J.W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed. (United States of America: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2009).

⁵⁸ N.K. Denzin, *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods* (London: Routledge, 2017).

PDH2:

“To manage the curriculum, to monitor if educators are in classes teaching and to check if educators are following the policies which are regulations that are prescribed by the government. I also convey subject meetings and report back to them. I also have to see that educators have ATPs, that other teaching resources are available and ensure that the timetable is being followed as prescribed by the Department.”

PDH4:

“Okay thank you very much for that question. The roles that I perform as a DH at school are to make sure that I moderate the scripts for teachers, to make sure that the curriculum coverage is covered, I also check that teachers are giving learners enough work to do in the form of formal and informal. I also have a duty and responsibility to make sure that teachers are provided with ATPs so that when they go to classes, they know what to do. I also make sure that I go for class visits once per quarter to see whether they are covering the curriculum or not. I also check learners’ books wherein I request four class works and homework books. When the teacher is presenting, I make sure that I go through the books to check whether the remedial has been done and that the books are marked and controlled and then I complete the class visit tool. I also check the files for the teachers if the documents that are needed are in the file and I record them.”

PDH9:

“I monitor educators’, I am a class teacher teaching Grade 2 all subjects and I support educators.”

All participants agree that their roles are monitoring, curriculum management, coordination, and planning activities to enhance implementation of the curriculum, and the provision of resources. This is what scholars refer to as the coordination of curriculum activities.⁵⁹ Similarly, Roslyn and Alviz, indicate that “DHs should be in charge of the development, management, and implementation of the curriculum.”⁶⁰ The DHs act as middle managers accountable for teaching, learning, and resources.⁶¹ Bush’s, view aligns well with the responses of the participants. He maintains that “the role of DHs is to manage teaching and learning.”⁶²

Theme 2: Hindrances/Constraints of Performance

DHs maintain that many factors like being a class teacher teaching all subjects (PDH9), teachers resisting change of DHs being employed in other schools, teachers not submitting their work on time, learner absenteeism, poor parental involvement, and assisting progressed learners hinder them from adjusting to their expectations. There are unique views and general views in response to this theme. The general view is well captured by PDH 1 and PDH9 as shown below.

PDH1:

“Uhm, there are so many factors that are hindering my performance at school including that I am classroom-based DH in Grade 3. Firstly, when I came to this school it was not easy because the person who got position 1 was coming from that school and I got position 2. So, the District recommended me as a DH. Two educators in this school were part of the panel. So, they became resistant to the change and to accept a new person coming to their school. It became more difficult even during the beginning of this year (2023) when one of the educators attacked and swore at me. This is because she did not want to submit her work. I tried to talk to her about her behaviour,

⁵⁹ Muriuki, Onyango, and Kithinji, “Effective Heads of Department Professional Development on Their Role Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Kenya,” 152.

⁶⁰ Alviz, “The Roles of Department Head: Key to School Improvement.”

⁶¹ Simpson et al., “Assessing the Challenges Heads of Department Encounter in Instructional Supervision in Ghana. A Case of Selected Senior High Schools in Kwabre East District,” 195; Jan Heystek, “School Governing Bodies-the Principal’s Burden or the Light of His/Her Life?,” *South African Journal of Education* 24, no. 4 (2004): 308–12.308.

⁶² Tony Bush, “Educational Leadership and Management: Theory, Policy and Practice,” *South African Journal of Education* 27, no. 3 (2007): 391–406.

but she resisted and insulted me. The principal and the deputy principal talked to her. After a few days, she came back to me and apologised, crying and begging me for forgiveness and promised that she would never do that again. Currently, our relationship is good because she respects me as her senior. She tries to be closer to me though I feel that I have to be extra careful because I cannot read her mind.”

PDH9:

“I am a full-time class teacher, teaching 4 subjects for Grade 2. Monitoring and supporting educators at the same time, cause me to fail to do my work. Sometimes I fail to do class visits or monitor curriculum coverage because of doing both the curriculum coverage and teaching. Sometimes I teach and fail to go to class visits. Or I can go for class visits and fail to teach my learners.”

Six out of nine participants agree that they experience constraints that emanate from the pressure of time, uncooperative teachers, poor parent involvement, teaching load, etc. in effectively performing their roles and responsibilities. Roslyn and Alviz, maintain that “DHs lack sufficient time to complete their own professional standards, which ultimately results in tension over tasks that they are expected to complete.”⁶³ Seobi and Woods, concur with the above statement by indicating that “the challenge of sufficient time experienced by DHs hinders them from working rationally.”⁶⁴ The views of Simpson et al. align with the responses of participants when they maintain that “DHs lack sufficient time to attend to both instructional and non-instructional issues.”⁶⁵

Four out of nine participants have challenges in teaching and covering the same curriculum that they monitor from teachers. The Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998, maintains that “the teaching time allocation of DHs in primary schools is between 85% and 90%; however, the teaching time of the participants who are placed in the Foundation Phase is 100%”.⁶⁶ This results in the pressure of time on DHs in their attempt to get through the pace set by the department in the crammed curriculum.⁶⁷

Four out of nine participants experience constraints that originate from educators who do not comply and cooperate in submitting their work to be moderated by DHs on time. This results in the late submission of DHs’ reports to the top management of the school. This is exacerbated by teachers who are undisciplined and disrespectful.⁶⁸ Scholars like Esohe et al. indicate that “resistant teachers are unwilling to change or open to discussions that involve developments.”⁶⁹ Day’s view aligns well with respondents in this regard. He maintains that rational discussions may not convince educators who are resistant to implementing what the Department of Education expects them to do.⁷⁰

Three out of nine participants experience constraints because of having lots of subjects to teach. This makes it difficult for them to perform their roles effectively. The views of scholars like Nel et al. and Simpson et al. agree with the responses of these participants.⁷¹ They maintain that “managers like DHs have quantitative and qualitative overload when they have too much work to be completed at a given time.”

⁶³ Alviz, “The Roles of Department Head: Key to School Improvement,” 20455.

⁶⁴ Seobi and Wood., “ Improving the Instructional Leadership of Heads of Departmental Heads in Under-Resource Schools: A Collaborative Action Learning Approach,”12.

⁶⁵ Simpson et al., “Assessing the Challenges Heads of Department Encounter in Instructional Supervision in Ghana. A Case of Selected Senior High Schools in Kwabre East District,” 157.

⁶⁶ Republic of South Africa, *Employment of Educators Act, No 76 of 1998*.

⁶⁷ Coetzee and Van Niekerk, *An Educator’s Guide to Effective Classroom Management*, 87; Simpson et al., “Assessing the Challenges Heads of Department Encounter in Instructional Supervision in Ghana. A Case of Selected Senior High Schools in Kwabre East District,”157.

⁶⁸ Simpson et al., “Assessing the Challenges Heads of Department Encounter in Instructional Supervision in Ghana. A Case of Selected Senior High Schools in Kwabre East District,”162.

⁶⁹ Khaeshe et al., “Influence of Departmental Heads Managerial Skills on The Implementation of Secondary School Programmes In Kakamega Central and East Districts.”

⁷⁰ Day, “The Role of a Head of Department in Staff Development.”

⁷¹ Nel et al., *Human Resource Management*; Simpson et al., “Assessing the Challenges Heads of Department Encounter in Instructional Supervision in Ghana. A Case of Selected Senior High Schools in Kwabre East District.”

Participants raise the constraint of a lack of parental involvement. This is a result of child-headed families. These learners are unable to do their work. Bipath and Nkabinde, and Chauke et al.⁷² encourage parental involvement in the education of their children. In addition, there is interference that is a hindrance to DH's roles and responsibilities from parents and communities. Coetzee and Van Niekerk, indicate that "external pressure coming from parents and community members is a hindrance."⁷³

Theme 3: Strategies to Manage Constraints

Participants cite the use of a communication book to execute their roles, involving SGBs, a group chat for communication, a recovery plan, and delegation of work. The literature cites motivation, parental involvement, professional development, DH management plan, delegating powers, and teamwork.

PDH1-:

"The strategy that I use is to write down instructions in the communication book from Term 1-4. The instructions include dates and activities that should be done according to the management plan. I do this because if I don't write and keep the record book they won't comply. A proper example of this is when someone does not want to submit because she or he is behind with written work, or she has less than the expected amount of classwork in DBE and classwork books. Another example is when a teacher is not giving writing tasks or marking learners' books. The only thing that I do is to write the report and submit 1 to the deputy principal and the other copy to the principal and I keep the copy in my file. Ever since I started writing, things have been much better than before. I keep everything in my file and make the educators sign that they acknowledge that they didn't comply. This makes life easier than before because the principal and the deputy principal will talk to them."

PDH2:

"I start by involving members of SGBs to talk about parental involvement and issues of education. During their community meetings, they should discuss and encourage parents to come to school. Here at school, we encourage educators by telling them that we are not fault finders and we also support them when they have challenges or problems in their classrooms. Even if they need resources, I talk to the principal to provide them. We also sit down during subject meetings and discuss their challenges and strategies on how we can overcome them. For example, when we find that the written work policy needs 3 exercises per week, we motivate each other on how we can do that. If educators have challenges with the lesson planning, I motivate them so that they do not feel like they are not getting the support. When coming to the learners' performance, we profile them"

PDH3:

"The DHs sighed and said "Usually with teachers I have a what's-up group with my team wherein I send messages earlier so that they could see or do it verbally so that they know that I have sent them a message. If they forget I remind them by writing the notice emphasizing that this is something that has to be done. With learners, I do extra classes to help learners who have problems and it also helps those that are performing better than others. But I try to concentrate on those that have challenges of learning."

PDH4:

"Thank you very much. As a DH I find that I have lots of programmes lagging to control my work. I delegate some tasks to senior teachers whom I trust. I show the teacher whom I have delegated how to use the tool so that they will go and check the curriculum coverage for the teachers."

⁷² Bipath and Nkabinde, "The Motivational Roles of Heads of Department in Learners' Performance and Quality of Schooling in South Africa,"²; Chauke et al., "Assessing the Extent to Which the School-Parent Partnership in the Malamulele Northeast Circuit in the Limpopo Province Enhances Effective Teaching and Learning of Learners in Primary Schools."

⁷³ Coetzee and Van Niekerk, *An Educator's Guide to Effective Classroom Management*, 160.

PDH5:

“Okay. One of the things that I do during the class visits is to take my children to computer lessons. I asked the computer teacher to take care of my kids for that period then I would go for class visits. It is just unfortunate that class visits take much longer. I can only go for a class visit in my computer period. Sometimes when we have an assembly, I do the class visits in one class. Otherwise, I do some of the book controls in the afternoons.”

PDH6:

“As I have said, we have a recovery plan wherein I cover my work. Sometimes I arrange with learners so that they may come to school on Saturday so that my work is up to date.”

PDH7:

“If teachers are coming to school late, I call them and talk about it. Firstly, I give them a verbal warning and secondly, if there is no improvement, I have to write down and let them sign. Sometimes they deny signing. Then I write again and specify the date which indicates that these teachers were told to do this and that, but they didn’t do it. Then if they repeat the same thing again, I tell the principal. If people from the district or national come, then everything is going to be laid on the table and they will be held accountable.”

PDH8:

“What I do is to call the educators concerned, especially those that are causing constraints and show them that it is not good especially not to submit in time. Another thing is that it makes us submit our work late as well. So, I sit with them and let them write down what they are saying so that next time we can refer to that. This is because sometimes they may just say sorry and promise never to do it again. If they repeat that for the second time, I am forced to give them written warnings. If they do not change, then I can tell the principal that these teachers are not cooperating.”

PDH9:

“The strategy that I use is to do my management work after school. When we attend meetings, we separate learners and send them to other classes. I ask teachers to come so that we can check the curriculum coverage together and support them during the meeting after classes.”

Three out of nine responses from participants agree that they write reports that may inform outcomes about teachers who are not adhering to their operational work.⁷⁴ They do this for the sake of record keeping, which could be used for future reference in case an educator who does not comply repeats the same misconduct.

Three out of nine responses from participants agree that they communicate information about teachers’ misconduct activities in their departments to the principal.⁷⁵ This is because DHs should communicate educational matters to the relevant stakeholders.⁷⁶ Furthermore, DHs are perceived as linking agents between staff members and the principal.⁷⁷ It is for this reason that scholars perceive and regard DHs as representatives of departments; they lead to the senior management of the school.⁷⁸

Three out of nine responses from participants maintain that they give verbal warnings, which could be followed by written warnings to educators who do not comply with instructions. The literature review in this research is silent; however, the participants’ views in this regard are used as strategies for managing constraints that emanate from educators who do not submit their tasks to be moderated in time.

⁷⁴ Department of Education, *Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM)*, 28.

⁷⁵ Poster and Poster, *Teacher Appraisal: A Guide to Training*, 104.

⁷⁶ Khaeshe et al., “Influence of Departmental Heads Managerial Skills on The Implementation of Secondary School Programmes In Kakamega Central and East Districts,” 77.

⁷⁷ C. Day, “The Role of a Head of Department in Staff Development,” 32.

⁷⁸ Khaeshe et al., “Influence of Departmental Heads Managerial Skills on The Implementation of Secondary School Programmes In Kakamega Central and East Districts,” 77.

Three out of nine responses from participants indicate that they work as a team to find strategies to overcome challenges in their departments. Teamwork encourages educators to share knowledge, experience, and the best methodology of teaching.⁷⁹ The views of scholars Kervinen et al. align well with the responses of participants.⁸⁰ They maintain that teamwork increases quality teaching, makes educators reflect on their goals, and helps them learn different approaches and methods of conveying learning and teaching activities to learners.⁸¹

Two out of nine responses from participants indicate that they perform their managerial work in the afternoon when learners have knocked off. The literature review in this research is silent; however, my experience agrees with the participants' views in this regard. This strategy is useful in managing constraints that emanate from pressure encountered by DHs in performing their multiple roles.

Two out of nine responses from participants indicate that they leave their children under the care of other educators when they conduct class visits or attend meetings during school hours. The literature review in this research is silent; however, my experience concurs with the participants' views. This is done to avoid learners being left without an educator in class in case they hurt each other.

Findings from Documents

Findings from documents were based on the availability and non-availability of documents necessary for DHs to keep and use.

Availability of Curriculum Management File

All participants have curriculum management files; however, three of them have no records of subject improvement plans or intervention strategies to improve performance. This could have emanated because training programmes offered by the Department of Education do not focus on such training.⁸²

Availability of Assessment File

All PDHs have assessment files, which include all specified contents. This is because DHs should keep records of assessments of the academic performance of subjects that they supervise.⁸³ This is done to measure academic performance against the identified performance indicators.⁸⁴

Availability of Co-curricular File

All participants do not have co-curricular files; however, seven of them have records of participation in language enrichment programmes filed in curriculum management files. PAM,⁸⁵ indicates that "DHs should coordinate co-curricular activities". The literature review is silent about the types of co-curricular activities; however, participants filled out records of co-curricular competitions, reading, and writing games in the curriculum management files. All participants do not have learner performance files with all the specified contents. This is because the two schools neither enrolled Grades R to 4 learners nor Grades 5 to 7. Learner performance in 4 schools is less than 65% in mathematics and English as the First Additional Language in Grades 3 and 6.

Availability of Educators' Development File

All participants have educator development files, which include records of school-initiated professional development programmes; however, none of them have records of circuit-initiated or district-initiated development programmes attended by educators. This is because DHs should offer feedback to enhance a significant impact on the development of teachers.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ Poster and Poster, *Teacher Appraisal: A Guide to Training*, 104.

⁸⁰ Kervinen et al., "Developing a Collaborative Model in Teacher Education--An Overview of a Teacher Professional Development Project."

⁸¹ Kervinen et al., "Developing a Collaborative Model in Teacher Education--An Overview of a Teacher Professional Development Project."

⁸² Coetzee and Van Niekerk, *An Educator's Guide to Effective Classroom Management*, 170.

⁸³ Department of Education, *Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM)*, 28.

⁸⁴ Alviz, "The Roles of Department Head: Key to School Improvement," 20455.

⁸⁵ Department of Education, *Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM)*, 28.

⁸⁶ Department of Education, *Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM)*, 28.

DISCUSSION

The roles and responsibilities of DHs are outlined in Annexure A.5 in the Government Gazette, (GG 39684) as amended in the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) in March 2016.⁸⁷ However, none of the participants made mention of this important document in their functioning as DHs. Participants are also silent on the role of DHs in developing and implementing policies, the challenges of managing progressed learners, and the lack of training in DHs' leadership skills. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is crucial, but participants did not cite it as one of the hindrances. So crucial is that DHs are curriculum managers for the provision of resources (LDoBE).

Extra-curricular management: The DHs did not mention the aspect of extra-curricular management as one of their roles and responsibilities. Day attaches this role to the DHs, i.e., they are linking agents among staff members, principals, learners, and parents.⁸⁸ Day maintains that “DHs should perform their roles and responsibilities effectively to improve the standard of extracurricular and co-curricular activities at schools.”⁸⁹ In addition, participants were not aware of and did not cite as one of their roles the aspect of formulating and implementing policies.⁹⁰

Constraints: Participants did not cite the *negative behaviour of the principals* as a constraint.⁹¹ These scholars argue that a principal who has never been a DH may not have first-hand experience of challenges encountered in the roles of DHs. Principals delegate more than is expected. Scholars argue that DHs lack decision-making; they operate in top-down decision-making. DHs should first find permission from the principal.⁹²

Progressed learners: Participants are silent on the issue of hindrances because of managing progressed learners. This is because they should be profiled and assessed separately from those that have been promoted.⁹³

DHs are not inducted for the work: The literature above highlights that DHs are not inducted to assume their roles. This is not cited by participants as a hindrance. Roslyn and Alviz, indicate that “DHs lack leadership skills, which will enable them to lead effectively in their added roles.”⁹⁴ COVID-19 in 2019 has resulted in the suspension of classes globally, and learners were taught on a rotational basis.⁹⁵ DHs do not have training in crisis management or how to manage teaching and learning effectively under such unpredictable conditions. The closure of schools and rotational timetabling resulted in the learning gap caused by the rotational timetables; this increased the number of learners who cannot read fluently or with understanding.

SGBs role in the provision of resources: The DHs who participated in the study did not cite their role in the provision of resources to the extent that they mentioned the SGB as having the responsibility to support their role in resource provision. Section 6.4 in the prescripts of the Limpopo Department of Basic Education, indicates that “the school governing body should allocate 60% of the total budget to the curriculum needs of the school.”⁹⁶ LTSM that are utilised in teaching and learning are not exclusive to books, stationery, charts, audio-visual aids, globes, maps, atlases, and measuring instruments.

⁸⁷ Department of Education, *Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM)*, 28.

⁸⁸ Day, “The Role of a Head of Department in Staff Development,”32.

⁸⁹ Day, “The Role of a Head of Department in Staff Development,”32.

⁹⁰ Day, “The Role of a Head of Department in Staff Development,”33;A. Clarke, *The Handbook for School Governors* (Cape Town: Kate McCallum Publishers, 2009), 60.

⁹¹ Alviz, “The Roles of Department Head: Key to School Improvement,”20455.

⁹² Alviz, “The Roles of Department Head: Key to School Improvement,”20455.

⁹³ Republic of South Africa, *Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning*.

⁹⁴ Alviz, “The Roles of Department Head: Key to School Improvement,”20455.

⁹⁵ E.J. Sintema, “Effect of COVID-19 on the Performance of Grade 12 Students: Implications for STEM Education,” *EURASIA Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education* 16, no. 7 (2020): 2.

⁹⁶ Department of Basic Education, *Section 6.4 of the Limpopo Department of Basic Education*.

The impact of constraints is exhaustion, stress, demotivation, boredom, decreased performance, etc. Exhaustion is defined as more than how a person feels after a hard day's work or strenuous exercise.⁹⁷ An exhausted DH could not add value to the department that he or she is leading at school. DHs that are exhausted may not perform their monitoring, supervising, and guiding roles to educators effectively. Van der Westhuizen, explains burnout as "a feeling of emotional exhaustion caused by an unbearable workload."⁹⁸ DHs that are stressed cannot perform well". This is because they may take a leave of absence from work to consult doctors. Severe constraints may interfere with the health and ability of DHs to perform their roles effectively.

Strategies: participants supported by literature cite several strategies of which delegation of work, parent involvement, teamwork, and training DHs are important.⁹⁹

Document analysis reflects that schools keep files; keeping documents is more of a technical exercise for compliance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are proposed:

Exclusion of DHs from Being Class Teachers

It is clear from the findings of this study that the majority of DHs, especially in smaller schools and those that are placed in the Foundation Phase, experience constraints that are associated with being class teachers and supervisors of teachers simultaneously. The mindset constraint, which is informed by processes or culture that are not exclusive to the following: dishing up NSNP food to learners, attending parents, departmental visitors, workshops during the learning and teaching time, DHs to be class teachers, marking class registers, and collecting fund-raising funds from learners blocks them from effectively performing their managerial roles. It is for this reason that the researcher recommends that DHs should be excluded from being class teachers.

Constraints Management Strategies for DHs

The overall study reveals that numerous constraint management strategies could be used by DHs to overcome hindrances they experience at school. It is therefore recommended that DHs should identify their problems, develop or employ suitable solutions, and build action plans that could be used to overcome these problems. Furthermore, constraints management strategies that emerged from this study will benefit other DHs when they perform their roles and responsibilities; hence, findings from this study could be transferred and be useful in other contexts.

Reduction of the Number of Teachers per DH

It is recommended that the Limpopo Department of Education should ensure that the number of teachers per DH is the same across all schools, or that more DHs should be appointed in schools or in the Foundation Phase. This is because DHs in smaller schools and those that are placed in the Foundation Phase have a greater weight of responsibilities with regard to the expected number of teachers and the number of subjects to supervise. Furthermore, they are expected to supervise subjects that they have not done at universities or colleges. This puts more pressure on their roles.

Reduce the Current Teaching Time Allocation of DHs

The researcher recommends that policymakers should reduce the current teaching time allocation of DHs, which is between 85% and 90%. This is because participants indicated that DHs experience constraints that emanate from the pressure of time in effectively performing their roles and responsibilities within the time allocated to them.

⁹⁷ Van der Westhuizen, *Effective Educational Management*, 322.

⁹⁸ Van der Westhuizen, *Effective Educational Management*, 328.

⁹⁹ Chauke et al., "Assessing the Extent to Which the School-Parent Partnership in the Malamulele Northeast Circuit in the Limpopo Province Enhances Effective Teaching and Learning of Learners in Primary Schools," 79.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored strategies to manage constraints that prevent departmental heads from fulfilling their roles effectively within the Vhembe West District, Limpopo Province schools. The study has revealed that the DHs are performing their roles as enshrined in the DBE-PAM and Section 4.4 of the Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998. Findings from this study have further revealed that DHs are faced with numerous obstacles, which emanate from insufficient professional development programmes for DHs. The DHs are leader-managers performing roles of teaching and managing their departments. It is for this reason that the researchers recommend that DHs should be excluded from being class teachers.

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ABOUT AUTHORS

Mrs. Elizabeth Mudau is a Deputy Principal at Masedi Primary School, in Vhembe West District, Limpopo Province, South Africa. Her interest is in leadership and management studies. She completed her Master of Education with a specialisation in Educational Management at the University of Venda.

Ndanganeni Florence Litshani is a Professor with a specialisation in Educational Management, in the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education, at the University of Venda, Limpopo Province, South Africa. Her interest is in educational leadership, educational management, the law in education, and curriculum management.

Takalani Samuel Mashau is a Professor in Comparative Education and Deputy Dean of research and Postgraduate Studies in the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education at the University of Venda, Limpopo Province, South Africa. His interest is in educational comparative studies.