



Challenges experienced by Gauteng Foundation Phase departmental heads in managing teaching and learning



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Background: The quality of teaching and learning depends on the school management team's support and monitoring of teachers and learners to achieve the school's objectives. Poor monitoring and lack of support compromise quality education.

Aim: The study examined the challenges faced by Foundation Phase departmental heads in managing and monitoring teaching and learning processes at six primary schools in the Tshwane region.

Setting: The study employed purposive sampling to select participants from six primary schools in the Tshwane West region, sampling six departmental heads of the Foundation Phase.

Method: A qualitative research design was used to conduct the study. Fayol's administrative management theory underpinned the study as its theoretical framework, and the interpretivist paradigm was used as the lens through which to view the phenomenon under study.

Results: The study revealed that departmental heads are overworked regarding their responsibilities in the Foundation Phase.

Conclusion: It is highly recommended that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) develop guidelines to streamline departmental heads' responsibilities, prioritise core functions, delegate tasks and provide support mechanisms, like regular training, capacity-building programmes, and administrative assistance. Empowering teachers to take leadership roles can foster a culture of distributive leadership.

Contribution: The study's contributions include identifying specific challenges departmental heads encounter, emphasising the need for targeted support and training, and providing insights for education policymakers to improve teaching and learning outcomes and enhance the quality of education in the Foundation Phase.

Keywords: Foundation Phase; departmental heads; management; teaching and learning; school management team; monitoring; support.

Introduction

Departmental heads have a vital role in enhancing learners' performance and carrying out their duties in accordance with the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) document. Their role entails overseeing and managing teachers to guarantee efficient learning and actively engaging in classroom instruction (Bush & Ng 2019; Tapala, Fulley & Mentz 2022). Nevertheless, departmental heads encounter difficulties allocating adequate time to oversee instructors and offering curricular support for classroom teaching (Mampane 2017; Tapala 2023).

Global research has revealed that departmental heads encounter multiple challenges when carrying out their duties and responsibilities. These obstacles include a lack of specialised knowledge, inadequate resources, insufficient support from the school leadership, time limitations, heavy workloads, limited opportunities for training and development, and ineffective communication (Bassett 2016; Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves 2020; Muriuki, Onyango & Kithinji 2020). These issues have resulted in the retirement of multiple leaders and the requirement for more time for classroom teaching (Bipath & Nkabinde 2015).

Furthermore, departmental heads are required to participate in additional extracurricular activities. However, they must also commit time to classroom instruction while ensuring their effectiveness

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in fulfilling their responsibilities. Departmental heads in the Foundation Phase face significant challenges because of inadequate parental involvement and a lack of learning support resources. The objective of this study was to examine the challenges faced by Foundation Phase departmental heads in managing and monitoring teaching and learning.

Background

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa is responsible for the supervision and management of the nation's educational system, which is organised into two main sectors: General Education Training (GET) and Further Education and Training (FET). The GET band comprises three distinct phases: the Foundation Phase, the Intermediate Phase and the Senior Phase, along with additional institutions for further study and training (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2001). The Foundation Phase in public schools is a pivotal stage specifically targeting preschool and Early Childhood Development (ECD).

In South Africa, a 'departmental head' refers to an educator who moved from a permanent teaching role at post-level 1 (PL1) to a leadership role position known as Post-Level 2 (PL2) that oversees a specific subject or department within the school (PAM 2016). As noted by Bush and Ng (2019) and supported by Tapala (2023), departmental heads possess specialised knowledge and expertise. They are responsible for managerial duties, supervising and guiding specific departments through the curriculum to ensure optimal learner achievement.

The study explored the leadership and management responsibilities of departmental heads in the Foundation Phase department, who play a vital role as members of the school management team (SMT). A challenge noted in the literature is that departmental heads often have insufficient time allocated for administrative duties, compromising their capacity to fulfil their obligations competently (Seabi 2019).

Previous research has indicated that departmental heads encounter difficulties in carrying out their job duties, and the primary reason for poor performance and dysfunction in schools is a deficiency of competent leadership (Naicker, Pillay & Grant 2016). Insufficient oversight by department heads is responsible for the shortcomings in curriculum preparation (Dube-Xaba & Makae 2022).

Methods

The study employed a qualitative research methodology to explore the challenges faced by departmental heads in monitoring and managing educators, teaching and learning activities within the Foundation Phase department. This qualitative approach facilitated an in-depth investigation, comprehension and elucidation of the phenomena under examination (Creswell 2013; Strydom & Bezuidenhout 2014). The study employed a

semi-structured interview schedule as a data collection technique. This technique is widely used in the social-constructivist paradigm to explore phenomena and gain insight into participants' lived experiences (McIntosh & Morse 2015).

The study design and phenomenology sought to comprehend individual experiences by scrutinising their perspectives, feelings and actions within a particular context (Strydom & Bezuidenhout 2014). The researcher employed the purposive sampling technique because it allows the researcher to deliberately select information-rich participants who can provide the relevant information required in the study. In this regard, the researcher selected Foundation Phase departmental heads purposively with extensive experience, having served in their current role for more than 3 years and at least 8 years of teaching experience (Berndt 2020).

A sample of six Foundation Phase departmental heads was selected from five schools to delve into their expertise to acquire a more comprehensive picture of their challenges (Berndt 2020). Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the participants using a semi-structured interview schedule, which enabled a comprehensive exploration of their experiences (Adams 2015). The semi-structured interview schedule consisted of 23 open-ended and probing questions exploring departmental heads' experiences, responsibilities and perceptions. The schedule was divided into sections on demographic information, departmental head appointment and training, teaching and administrative responsibilities, and challenges and support.

This interview style allowed for in-depth insights into departmental heads' roles and challenges. Interviews were conducted to gather rich, qualitative data. The researcher recorded the participants using a mobile phone during the data collection process. The audio recording allowed the researcher to capture the participants' verbatim responses during the interview process (Bryman 2012). The audio recordings from each participant were converted into transcripts (Maree 2016), and field observations were documented for subsequent studies.

A thematic approach was employed for data analysis, which was gathered using transcripts produced from the audio recordings (Joffe 2011). Data from the transcripts were read, analysed and categorised carefully into themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clarke 2016). This approach was chosen for its ability to distil complex information into clear, organised and meaningful insights, uncovering underlying patterns and relationships that enable a deeper understanding and informed decision-making (Castleberry & Nolen 2018).

As part of the data analysis process, the researcher manually coded the transcripts using a colour-coding method to identify and distinguish between developing themes. The

themes were derived from an intensive process of data immersion, leading to repeated readings and gaining insight into participants' experiences. The researcher then employed open coding to apply preliminary codes to segments of data that captured meaningful concepts or ideas. The codes were then subsequently classified into a table, which assisted in identifying patterns and connections between them. Themes and sub-themes were developed from the categories. The researcher then coded and analysed the data by assigning specific colours to different themes and sub-themes, exploring insights that informed the conclusions of the study.

Table 1 depicts the colours that were assigned to the themes and sub-themes developed in this study.

By applying this colour-coding method, the researcher could visually represent the various themes and sub-themes present in the data, thus helping to conduct a systematic and comprehensive analysis.

Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in Fayol's administrative theory, which delineates five essential management tasks that leaders should perform to engage with their teams effectively (Fayol 1916) —planning, organising, leading, coordinating and controlling (Fayol 1916). These cyclical management functions are central to the efficiency and functioning of the Foundation Phase departmental heads in monitoring and managing teaching and learning. Planning is an essential administrative task that entails establishing goals, devising strategies and developing comprehensive plans to integrate and synchronise activities (Komalasari, Arafat & Mulyadi 2020). Planning assists educational managers in predicting issues and possibilities, enhancing the efficiency of other managerial tasks (Bush & Glover 2016). However, the research indicated that Foundation Phase departmental heads encountered challenges in the strategic planning process because of their inability to determine the allocation of resources, prioritise tasks and reconcile conflicting demands within the constraints of restricted budgets (Bipath & Nkabinde 2015). Planning aids educational managers by enabling them to anticipate potential challenges and opportunities, enhancing their overall operations' efficiency (Bush & Glover 2016). The management entrusts

departmental heads with running their entire departments, making strategic planning one of their primary responsibilities (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2016).

Organising comprises identification, allocation, categorisation, communication and decision-making (Bush & Glover 2014; Paais & Pattiruhu 2020). The primary purpose of organising is to establish collectivity. It involves arranging individuals into a cohesive team, assigning them various tasks or responsibilities based on their abilities and creating divisions within departments to ensure the fulfilment of the assigned functions (Bush & Glover 2021; Kotter 2019). The researchers found that departmental heads struggled to deal with their workloads, prioritise tasks and delegate responsibilities, leading to inefficiencies in managing teaching and learning.

Coordinating involves identifying, organising and scheduling all the actions performed by their subordinates to foster effective teamwork and accomplish the established vision, mission and objectives (Fayol 1916). In the context of departmental heads in the Foundation Phase, coordinating is crucial in ensuring that teaching and learning are aligned with the school's goals and objectives, and that learners receive a comprehensive and cohesive education. Effective coordination by departmental heads enables teachers to work together as a team, share resources and expertise, and provide learners with a consistent and high-quality learning experience (Ayeni & Akinfolari 2014; Vanblaere & Devos 2018).

Controlling is a critical management task that involves monitoring, evaluating and correcting. The performance of one's subordinates ensures that goals and objectives are achieved (Fayol 1916; Tobin 2014). In the context of departmental heads managing teaching and learning, controlling involves tracking the learner's progress, evaluating the teacher's performance and identifying areas for improvement. According to Fayol (1916), control consists in verifying whether everything occurs according to plan and taking corrective action when necessary. In controlling teaching and learning, departmental heads must verify whether curriculum plans are being implemented effectively and take corrective action when learners' performance is not meeting the expectations. This requires departmental heads to have a clear understanding of what is happening in classrooms, identify areas for improvement and take prompt action to address any issues that arise.

Besides performing the abovementioned tasks, Fayol's 14 management principles are also essential in grasping the roles of Foundation Phase departmental heads. These include division of work, authority and responsibility, discipline, unity of command, unity of direction, scalar chain, order, equity, stability of tenure, initiative, esprit de corps, remuneration, centralisation and subordination of individual interest. The management principles serve as a guideline for managers, and they represent the best practices and are critical for the Foundation Phase departmental heads to manage teaching and learning (Fayol 1916). Of note, the division of work principle stresses the need for specialisation and clarified

TABLE 1: Colour-coding system of themes and sub-themes.

Themes	Sub-themes	Colour coding
Theme 1: Duty and responsibility of heads of the department	• Teaching	Blue
	• Controlling and monitoring	Red
	• Engagement with parents	Green
	• Mentoring	Purple
	• Extramural activities	Orange
Theme 2: Challenges experienced by departmental leaders	• Submission dates	Pink
	• Meetings	Brown
	• Class visits	Grey
	• Workload	Yellow
	• Induction training	Black
	• Work transition	Maroon

responsibilities (Fayol 1916). Foundation Phase departmental heads should be instilled with the practice of delegating tasks to people in all grades, such as teachers and, in some instances, support staff, to avoid redundancy within the system. In addition, this principle is tightly knitted with the notion of teacher workload since it becomes relevant in the domain of educational management (Gul, Tahir & Batool 2021).

The authority and responsibility principle emphasises the need for authority and responsibility to flow through the organisational structure so that the individuals with the most precise lines of authority make decisions (Fayol 1916). This means that departmental heads must ensure that teachers know what is expected of them regarding curriculum delivery and learners' progress assessment. Also, concerning this principle, the concept of accountability is very important in educational management (Bush & Glover 2016).

The discipline principle emphasises the need to standardise rules and regulations and reward those who follow guidelines (Fayol 1916). On this note, department heads are responsible for ensuring that teachers follow school policy and procedures, especially in teaching and learning. In addition, this principle is connected to organisational culture, that is, the values, norms and beliefs that are shared and guide behaviour among members of an organisation (Fitria 2018). Employees should receive orders only from one superior (Fayol 1916), the so-called unity of command principle. Therefore, having a clear structure is all-important, and department heads should ensure all teachers have a focal point for advice and support. Moreover, this principle is also associated with the concept of leadership, which is vital in educational management (Connolly, James & Fertig 2019).

However, a scalar chain principle also exists for communication channels (Fayol 1916). In this role, the head of the department should develop effective lines of communication with teachers, ensuring that information is passed on and that concerns are dealt with on time. This principle is associated with communication, a major idea in educational management (McCaffery 2018). Conversely, the ordering principle emphasises the significance of organisation and structure (Fayol 1916). As such, department heads must ensure that teachers are given access to the relevant resources since this principle relates directly to the management of resources, a key component of any educational management (Robbins et al. 2014).

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval to conduct this study was granted by the Tshwane University of Technology (FCRE/EF/STD/2022/33). The researcher obtained authorisation from the Faculty Research and Innovation Committee of the Tshwane University of Technology, the Gauteng Department of Education and the Tshwane West District professional development committee to gather the data. The researchers adhered to the informed consent procedure, guaranteeing that the participants comprehended their roles and responsibilities (Kang & Hwang 2021). The data collection was restricted to only six departmental

heads from only six chosen schools. Confidentiality and anonymity were protected by implementing a systematic coding system and conducting participant reviews.

The study adhered to the four evaluative criteria described by Lincoln and Guba (1986) to conduct qualitative research, namely, to assess its trustworthiness, comprising credibility, transferability and dependability. Credibility was achieved by employing open-ended questions and transcripts, while transferability was attained by comprehending the research study's objectives and research inquiries (Maree 2016). The objective of the study was to evaluate the dependability and verifiability of a research study by analysing the data obtained from primary schools in the Tshwane West District. Dependability was guaranteed by maintaining thorough records and allowing the participants to verify the data, and confirmability was ensured by maintaining the researcher's neutrality (Bryman 2012; Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout 2014; Maree 2016). The participants were selected based on their extensive teaching and managerial expertise, which facilitated a thorough comprehension of the study. Notably, the study aimed to provide valuable insights into the role of departmental heads in overseeing teaching and learning in schools with varying levels of learner enrolment.

Review findings and discussion

This study analysed the duties and responsibilities of departmental heads in monitoring and managing teaching and learning, focussing on four main themes as detailed in Table 2.

This study discovered two main themes that summarise the experience of the heads of departments. The first theme, entitled 'Duties and responsibilities of departmental heads', consists of five sub-themes: teaching, engagement with parents, controlling and monitoring, mentoring and extramural activities. The last theme relates to the 10 challenges experienced by departmental heads, which include dates of submission, meetings, class visits, workload, induction training and work transition. These themes lay out all aspects of the departmental heads' roles and challenges, more details of which can be found in the following sub-sections.

Theme 1: Duties and responsibilities of departmental heads

The first theme that emerged from the thematic analysis included the duties and responsibilities of the departmental

TABLE 2: Theme and sub-themes.

Research questions	Themes and sub-themes
<i>What are the duties and responsibilities of departmental heads?</i>	Theme 1: Duties and responsibilities of departmental heads: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching • Engagement with parents • Controlling and monitoring • Mentoring • Extramural activities
<i>What are the challenges encountered by departmental heads in managing their departments?</i>	Theme 2: Challenges encountered by departmental heads: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submission dates • Meetings • Class visits • Workload • Induction training • Work transition

head. This theme examined the core duties and responsibilities of departmental heads in monitoring and managing teaching and learning. Teaching was identified as the sub-theme relating to the duties and responsibilities of the departmental head. In this regard, the findings revealed that all the participants occupying a departmental head position are also classroom-based teachers and managers of the Foundation Phase (Departmental head [DH] is used as one of the identifiers for the participants). The abovementioned findings were supported by a comment made by one of the participants:

'[B]ecause I am a class teacher, I also plan the assessment tasks, assessment programmes and lesson plans that I must submit to the deputy principal as she is the one who is monitoring my work as a teacher and as a departmental head ... again I am also part of the health committee.' (DH, female with 6 years of experience)

One participant stated the following:

'... I am a departmental head; however, I also teach Grade 3, and we only have four classes, including mine, so I am the mathematics lead teacher for Grade 3, and it is my duty and responsibility to ensure that all the lesson plans for mathematics are available, I also create mathematics assessment plans and assessment tasks that I must submit to the deputy principal for quality assurance.' (DH, female with 7 years of experience)

The second sub-theme identified in this study regarding the duties and responsibilities of departmental heads included engagement with parents and supporting learners with learning difficulties. The findings outlined that although most departmental heads engaged with teaching and learning in their respective classes, they were also responsible for ensuring that they provided regular reports to parents of learners they teach. In addition, departmental heads are also responsible for identifying and supporting learners who face learning barriers, thereby facilitating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. The following excerpts support the above-stated findings:

'... Let's say my learners are not doing well academically, or they are suffering from self-discipline; what I do is that I call their parents immediately to address these challenges.' (DH, female with 3 years of experience)

Another participant had this to say:

'[W]hen my learners are not performing well, I invite the parents to school and create individual support plans for learners after school. I stay behind with learners with barriers to learning so I can assist them to overcome those challenges.' (DH, male with 15 years of experience)

The third sub-theme that emerged from the thematic analysis included controlling and monitoring. The findings portrayed that regardless of the precedingly outlined duties from the sub-themes, they also had a responsibility to control and monitor the work of teachers. The participants in this study highlighted quality assurance as a process they used to control and monitor the work of teachers. All the participants

in this study reported involvement in both the pre-and post-quality assurance process.

The abovementioned findings are substantiated by the following comment made by one of the participants:

'When I control and monitor the assessment tasks, I use a tool which I have mediated with teachers at the beginning of the year, and I always ask them to pre-quality assure the tasks using the tool before they can submit them to me, and this makes my work to be easy. However, when it comes to learners' informal activities, I go to their classrooms personally to select learners' informal activities randomly so that I can check whether they are controlling learners' activities and to check curriculum coverage.' (DH:F, female with 9 years of experience)

Another participant had the following to say regarding controlling and monitoring:

'... Pre-quality assurance is when I control the assessment tasks of learners to check whether they are in line with what is prescribed in the Revised Annual Teaching Plans [RATP] before they can be administered to learners, and by post-quality assurance this is when I sample learners' written task to check whether teachers marked the tasks accordingly and to check the questions the learners did not understand and they questions they answered correctly.' (DH, female with 3 years of experience)

Another participant shared:

'I always say informal activities inform the formal activities, so I always ensure that when teachers submit a learner's assessment task for pre-quality assurance, I also check the learner's informal activities for correlation, which I do after school as I do not have administrative period to carry out the above duties.' (DH, female with 4 years experience)

The fourth sub-theme that emerged from the semi-structured interviews incorporated mentoring. All the participants who were interviewed indicated that they had to mentor the newly appointed teachers. The following statements by some of the participants corroborate the above-stated findings:

'When we appoint teachers, it is my duty and responsibility to ensure that I guide them and orientate them so that they can know what is expected of them.' (DH, male with 15 years of experience)

'[A]s a departmental head, I must ensure that new teachers are provided with the relevant policies and mediate them so that they can have a better understanding of policies they should adhere to.' (DH, female with 6 years of experience)

The last sub-theme relating to the duties and responsibilities of the departmental heads included managing extra-co-curricular and extramural activities. The findings revealed that the departmental heads are also involved in extramural activities such as netball, football, athletics, volleyball and rugby. They were also part of committees which fall under co-curricular activities, such as school-based support teams and the school assessment team committee. In support of the abovementioned findings, this is what some of the participants had to say:

'I am a departmental head. However, I am also a netball coach, mainly because I really like this sport, and it is part of my duty to oversee it. and we usually host cluster games, and because we do not have netball poles for Foundation Phase learners, I coach the Grade 4 and Grade 5 learners, and I really enjoy it.' (DH, female with 7 years of experience)

'Although I am a departmental head, I also coordinate the SBST [school-based support team], the SAT [school assessment team], and sports and culture. The three committees I have mentioned also go hand-in-hand with their duties and responsibilities of my job- So, in my school, departmental heads are the coordinators of committees, and we share the committees amongst ourselves as a school management team.' (DH, female with 9 years of experience)

Theme 2: Challenges encountered by departmental heads

The major theme that emerged from the thematic analysis highlighted the challenges encountered by the departmental heads in performing these duties.

In this regard, the first sub-theme included submission dates. The findings revealed that the teachers supervised by the departmental heads were not adhering to the submission dates. Furthermore, the departmental heads disclosed that they had management plans that they shared and mediated with teachers each term; however, there were some teachers they constantly had to remind to adhere to submission dates.

In support of the above-stated findings, the following comments were made by some of the participants:

'As a departmental head, I have a challenge with a few of my colleagues who always submit [*work*] late even though the principal is aware of them and every time the principal always intervenes so that they can submit.' (DH, female with 4 years of experience)

'I always ensure that I share the District Action Plan and my curriculum management plans with teachers under my supervision, but when it comes to submitting what they must submit, some don't submit. I even use my communication book to remind them.' (DH, female with 3 years of experience)

The second sub-theme relates to the challenges encountered by the departmental heads concerning the meetings. The participants outlined that some of their meetings are held during teaching and learning time, and therefore they must leave their learners unattended or share their learners among the other classes so that they can attend meetings or when there are matters that need their attention. The above-stated outcome is supported by the following comments from some of the participants:

'[O]ur SMT meetings are held during the day, so I leave learners unattended and ask a teacher from [*the class*] next to me to assist with discipline so I can attend the meetings, and it is very risky to leave learners unattended. On the other hand, I cannot cover the curriculum on time.' (DH, female with 9 years of experience)

'Sometimes we get unexpected visits from the Department of Education, so I must leave learners alone so I can attend to them. I feel our Department of Education does not take us seriously,

but please understand my situation. The Department of Education personnel are the ones who understand that I am a classroom-based teacher, but when they just come in their own time, they expect me to give them my attention while my learners are left all alone.' (DH, male with 15 years of experience)

The third sub-theme explored the challenges encountered by departmental heads, with a focus on class visits. When the departmental heads were asked about their challenges, they all mentioned class visits. All the participants stated that conducting class visits is impractical because they are classroom-based and should be conducted during teaching and learning time.

To corroborate the abovementioned findings, one of the participants shared their experiences in this regard:

'Class visits are a challenge in the Foundation Phase because it is impractical to conduct them; hence, I am classroom-based, so to be honest, I don't visit all the classes I am assigned to because I steal my teaching and learning time to perform my duties of being a DH instead of being in class teaching learners ...' (DH, female with 6 years of experience)

In line with the above-stated participant's experience regarding this concern, this is what another participant added:

'The only time I manage to do class visits is during the Quality Management System [QMS] processes, where I am obliged to do them because we need to send reports to the district; during the QMS lesson observations, I usually take two weeks, and with the help of the assistant teacher I can visit all nine teachers.' (DH, female with 3 years of experience)

Another participant contributed the following concerning the challenge which they face:

'[B]efore the implementation of the Presidential Youth Initiative Programme, I was leaving my learners with the deputy principal, but sometimes I would be called while I was on class visits because the deputy principal also had other duties for me to do, so it was difficult. But now I usually ask my assistant teacher to supervise learners, which is risky because an assistant teacher must always be in class with a qualified teacher.' (DH, female with 7 years of experience)

The workload was identified as the fourth sub-theme concerning the challenges encountered by the departmental heads who participated in this study. They were also part of committees, with the common one being the school-based support team, whose aim was to support learners with learning barriers. Because the departmental heads were coordinating the committee, this resulted in extra duties for them. The participants also complained about the paperwork required, such as writing reports, controlling and monitoring the work of educators, coordinating committees and participating in extramural activities.

These findings are confirmed by the following comments made by some of the participants expressing their anxiety because of the workload:

'I have a lot of work to do; I am coordinating SBST, SAT and sport and culture; on the other hand, I must ensure that there are management plans in place and ensure that teachers who are part of those committees are actively involved. On the other hand, I am also the manager of a phase, and I am required to report on them all, which I cannot manage well.' (DH, female with 9 years of experience)

'[Y]ooh weeh! We are really working very hard. We have too much paperwork; I think they should review our job descriptions and allocate time for us to perform administrative work because whatever is outlined there is difficult to practise. If we are not writing reports, it's monitoring teachers, and we are always held accountable.' (DH, male with 15 years of experience)

The last sub-theme regarding the challenges faced by the departmental heads included the induction process and work transition. Most departmental heads indicated that they had attended induction training upon their appointment. However, the majority averred that these induction processes were not effective. This statement was supported by one of the participants who conceded that:

'[Y]ooh, about a year after I was appointed as a departmental head there was training which was organised by the DCE [*Deputy Chief Educationist*] and SES [*subject education specialists*] ... However, to my surprise, when I got to the training, there was a book publishing company that had invited me to come and advertise the learner and teacher resources. The representative from that publishing company then provided us with pamphlets pertaining to the duties and responsibilities of departmental heads. The SES and DCE who were there did not even conduct the training. In short, I can safely say this induction process was not effective at all.' (DH, female with 4 years of experience)

Another participant had this to say:

'Yes, they normally invite newly appointed departmental heads and acting Departmental Heads every two years, but not every year to come and attend the induction training. I did attend training, but the content of the training was not what I had expected; they were only telling us about assessment and checking tasks for quality assurance.' (DH, female with 3 years of experience)

Moreover, when it came to work transition, most of the departmental heads who took part in the study mentioned that transitioning from being a teacher to becoming a departmental head was extremely difficult. Furthermore, most participants noted that adapting to their new role as departmental heads was extremely difficult because of their workloads. In this regard, the following excerpts support the above-stated outcomes:

'I was not coping at all. Although we were two departmental heads in the phase, the work was too much for me; I was even struggling to balance my role as a class teacher and my new role as a manager as I was trying to be the best in my new role. I could not keep up with submission dates and was always tired. I did not even have time for my family.' (DH, female with 7 years of experience)

'I was appointed as a departmental head at the same school where I started my teaching career. So, after being appointed as a departmental head, some of the colleagues that I had to manage were my friends, so they were taking advantage of that. I had to

draw a line between friendship and work so that they could give me a platform to manage them, and they were other colleagues whom I can say were always criticising me.' (DH, female with 9 years of experience)

'For me, the transition was very difficult because I was appointed in another school, and the majority of teachers with whom I was working closely did not give me support, and the principal and the deputy principal did not mentor me.' (DH, female with 6 years of experience)

'Before I was appointed to be a departmental head, the colleagues who were older than me didn't have any problem when I was helping them, but after my appointment with the very same colleagues I was helping, it changed dramatically. I remember there was once a colleague of mine who told me straight to my face that she was not going to be managed by someone who was younger than her. It was very difficult to manage people who had more teaching experience than me.' (DH, female with 6 years of experience)

Discussion

Monitoring and managing teaching and learning is a critical challenge in the Foundation Phase of the education system because, according to Bush (2019) and Fayol (1916), departmental heads' monitoring and management of teaching and learning are critical functions. These challenges include a lack of dedicated administrative time in the policy, inadequate resources, conflicting priorities and difficulties balancing administrative and instructional leadership roles. This discussion delved deeper into these findings, examining the implications for departmental heads' ability to monitor and manage teaching and learning effectively. By exploring these challenges through the lens of Fayol's management principles, this discussion aims to identify potential strategies for supporting departmental heads in overcoming these challenges and enhancing their effectiveness.

Theme 1: Duties and responsibilities of departmental heads

The study's findings highlight the diverse range of duties and responsibilities of departmental heads, which go beyond traditional notions of instructional leadership. In line with previous research (Bush 2019; Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves 2020), departmental heads were actively involved in teaching, preparing assessments, creating lesson plans, reflecting Fayol's (1916) planning and organising tasks. As discussed in the theoretical framework, Fayol's planning task involves establishing goals, devising strategies and developing comprehensive plans to integrate and synchronise activities (Alkhararbeh 2019; Fayol 1916; Komalasari et al. 2020). In the context of departmental heads, planning involves creating lesson plans, preparing assessments and developing strategies to achieve learning objectives. This planning task is closely related to Fayol's principle of unity of direction, emphasising the need for a single plan and direction to achieve common goals (Fayol 1916).

Departmental heads of the Foundation Phase also oversaw and supervised teachers' tasks, ensuring

effective resource allocation and aligning with Fayol's principle of division of work. This oversight and supervision also reflect Fayol's controlling task, which involves monitoring and regulating the activities of subordinates to ensure that goals and objectives are achieved (Fayol 1916). By providing effective resource allocation, departmental heads demonstrated their ability to divide work into smaller tasks and allocate them to individuals based on their skills and expertise, thereby promoting efficiency and productivity.

Significantly, the departmental heads in this study had the additional responsibility of monitoring the quality assurance of assessment tasks before and after completion. As Fayol (1916) stated, control is the verification that everything occurs in conformity with the standards adopted. The heads of departments are responsible for controlling teaching and learning: They must establish whether plans are developed for the curriculum and whether they are working, and when learners' results are not acceptable, they must step in and take corrective action.

The study's findings revealed that department heads guided and mentored newly employed teachers to ensure that they received policy information, which demonstrates Fayol's principle of authority and responsibility. Department heads, keeping an eye on assessment tasks, made sure that teaching and learning were in line with the school's goals and that students got a good education.

Departmental heads' responsibilities extended to interacting with parents, assisting learners with difficulties, and overseeing and supervising teachers' tasks, demonstrating Fayol's (1916) commanding and coordinating tasks. This commanding task involves giving instructions and directions to subordinates, while coordinating involves aligning efforts towards a common goal (Fayol 1916). The actions of departmental heads in this context exemplify their roles as leaders and managers, strongly aligned with Fayol's principle of unity of command, scalar chain and authority and responsibility (Fayol 1916).

These findings are consistent with earlier research that highlights the significance of departmental heads in advocating for inclusive education (Azorín & Ainscow 2020; Lambrecht et al. 2022).

Moreover, the study's results emphasise the participation of department heads in extracurricular activities, such as coordinating netball, football and athletics, and overseeing school-based support teams. These responsibilities reflect Fayol's controlling role, which entails providing subordinates with instructions and guidance (Fayol 1916). Department heads' involvement in extracurricular activities illustrates their coordinating role, which entails aligning efforts towards a shared goal (Fayol 1916).

These responsibilities go beyond traditional ideas of instructional leadership, emphasising the significance of

departmental heads' roles in fostering learners' holistic growth. This aligns with Fayol's principle of esprit de corps, which emphasises the importance of promoting teamwork and collaboration (Fayol 1916). These findings corroborate the views of Owusu (2016), who asserts that extramural activities are an extremely important and essential part of education as they are part of a holistic education. This study's findings highlight similarities and differences when compared to the current body of research.

The study's findings highlight the need for departmental heads to demonstrate the ability to adapt, resilience and competence in managing various tasks. The finding expands on previous research that has primarily focussed on the teaching and learning roles of departmental heads. In summary, this study's results have important consequences for departmental heads' growth and support. They emphasise the necessity for focussed professional development, clear role definitions and sufficient resources to ensure their effectiveness in promoting learner learning and growth as educators.

Theme 2: Challenges faced by Foundation Phase departmental heads

The study revealed various challenges encountered by Foundation Phase departmental heads in effectively carrying out their responsibilities. A significant challenge is teachers' lack of adherence to submission deadlines, hindering departmental heads' capacity to monitor and evaluate teacher performance, a critical aspect of Fayol's controlling task (Fayol 1916).

Departmental heads struggled to coordinate with other departments, schools and stakeholders, leading to inconsistent teaching and learning practices. This lack of coordination aligns with Fayol's principle of coordination, emphasising the importance of aligning efforts towards a common goal (Fayol 1916). Effective coordination is essential for achieving unity of direction and action.

Departmental heads faced challenges in managing and monitoring teaching and learning, including planning, organising, commanding, coordinating and controlling (Fayol's five management tasks). Specifically, they lacked administrative periods, limiting their ability to plan and organise effectively. This challenge is exacerbated by limited resources, inadequate data and insufficient support from school principals and deputy principals (Bassett 2016; Muriuki et al. 2020; PAM 2016).

Moreover, the results revealed a substantive administrative overload, aligning with concerns expressed by earlier researchers (Dube-Xaba & Makae 2022; Naicker 2016; Seabi 2019). This highlights the need for clear role definitions, focussed professional development and sufficient resources, reiterating Fayol's (1916) principles of scalar chain, training and resources. This challenge reflects Fayol's (1916) controlling task, which involves monitoring and regulating

the activities of subordinates. As discussed in the theoretical framework, departmental heads' workload is also related to Fayol's principle of division of work, which emphasises the importance of dividing work into smaller tasks. However, in this case, departmental heads are overwhelmed with multiple tasks, including coordinating committees, writing reports and monitoring teachers.

Departmental heads also struggled with scheduling meetings during lesson time, leading to unsupervised learning and compromising their instructional leadership roles. Malatji (2018) and Tlali and Matete (2021) also found that departmental heads frequently leave learners unattended to attend meetings and deal with unexpected visitors confirming this finding. This discovery emphasises the need for departmental heads to maintain a balance between their administrative duties and their instructional leadership roles.

As discussed in the theoretical framework, this challenge relates to Fayol's (1916) commanding task, which involves giving instructions and directions to subordinates and coordinating tasks, which involves aligning efforts towards a common goal. Furthermore, this finding highlights the importance of Fayol's principle of order, which emphasises the need for organisation and structure, and the principle of stability of tenure, which underscores the need for job security and stability. They should ensure that meetings are arranged outside instructional time.

Class visits pose a significant issue for departmental heads, as they are crucial for assessing teacher effectiveness and learners' academic progress. However, the study revealed that departmental heads encounter challenges when conducting class visits concurring with Tlali and Matete (2021) who emphasised the necessity for focussed assistance and resources to guarantee their efficacy. In addition, departmental heads have reported the substantial workloads they face, including participation in committees and overseeing the induction processes. The finding confirms the concerns expressed by other scholars (Bassett 2016; Malatji 2018; Tapala et al. (2022) regarding the amount of work-related anxiety experienced by departmental heads, emphasising the necessity for them to receive sufficient resources and support. This challenge reflects Fayol's (1916) controlling task, which involves monitoring and regulating the activities of subordinates.

As revealed in the results, departmental heads of the Foundation Phase encounter difficulties conducting class visits and managing their workload. These findings also relate to Fayol's principle of scalar chain, which emphasises the importance of clear communication channels and the principle of division of work, which stresses the importance of dividing work into smaller tasks. The findings also highlighted departmental heads' challenges in adjusting to their new position, including opposition to change from their colleagues. This finding is consistent with previous research

(Jaca 2021; Seabi 2019) that highlight the need to enhance leadership skills and assist departmental heads, especially during periods of change.

The challenges faced by departmental heads in this study included ineffective induction processes and difficult work transitions. This reflects Fayol's (1916) principle of stability of tenure, which emphasises job security and stability. Effective induction processes are crucial for departmental heads to transition smoothly into their new roles (Mampane 2017). However, the results of the study revealed that the current induction processes are inadequate, consistent with Fayol's (1916) principle of training. Departmental heads also struggled with transitioning from being teachers to becoming departmental heads. This challenge reflects Fayol's (1916) commanding task, which involves giving instructions and directions to subordinates.

Departmental heads' workloads also made it difficult for them to adapt to their new role. This finding is consistent with Fayol's (1916) principle of division of work. Overall, departmental heads need effective support systems and training programmes to transition into their new roles.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to address the challenges experienced by Foundation Phase departmental heads:

- While the findings of the study revealed that departmental heads must conduct class visits and also control and monitor the work of teachers, it is recommended that the DBE allocate administration periods so that they can perform their management tasks.
- It is recommended that the departmental heads of the Foundation Phase should have permanent educator assistants who will assist them in carrying out the duties and responsibilities effectively as stipulated in RSA (2016).
- The DBE should adhere to the stipulation of the appointment policy of department heads with a minimum of 3 years of teaching experience and not be persuaded unnecessarily by trade unions to overlook policies regarding promotional appointments (Matos 2022; RSA 2016) among others. This practice is detrimental as inexperienced teachers are appointed in promotional posts.
- In addition, qualifications in leadership and management should be compulsory for the appointment of departmental heads and the satisfactory performance of teachers when appointing departmental heads.
- It is recommended that the DBE ensures that there are effective orientation programmes, induction training and ongoing training for departmental heads.
- Because of their intensive responsibilities of managing vulnerable pupils, they need teacher assistants to work and support the learners and teachers in their department.

Limitations

This study acknowledges that there were some limitations which had a bearing on how the researcher intended to achieve this study. For instance, some of the limitations include the following:

The scope was restricted to six departmental heads in the Foundation Phase, potentially limiting applicability to other phases or schools. The researcher could have left some of the important aspects during the analysis process. The study also lacked input from different stakeholders, which could have led to biased social desirability by the sampled participants. Conducted in a specific setting, the findings may not be generalisable to other contexts.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into challenges faced by Foundation Phase departmental heads. The findings highlight the need for targeted support and leadership development initiatives to enhance education quality.

Conclusion

This study investigated the challenges faced by Foundation Phase departmental heads in managing and monitoring teaching and learning. The data were gathered using semi-structured interviews, and the results indicated that the departmental heads exhibited a comprehensive understanding of their responsibilities and employed various tactics to supervise the process effectively. Nevertheless, the limited time and a lack of comprehension regarding the Foundation Phase resulted in challenges when it came to the meeting of their obligations by departmental heads. The survey also discovered that administrators faced difficulties conducting regular classroom observations and relied on monitoring learners' classwork books and offering feedback. Despite these problems, the leaders employed many techniques to assist them with executing their duties, including delegating. The study proposes that allocating specific time for departmental heads to execute their administrative duties will improve their capacity to execute their commitments effectively. The participants indicated that they did not find the induction useful as it failed to address the unique requirements of participants adequately. The district should prioritise induction training and orientation programmes that specifically address the responsibilities and duties connected with individuals' roles while also emphasising the cultivation of leadership and management abilities. A future study could look at the best administrative period allocations and time management strategies to support Foundation Phase departmental heads in fulfilling their duties effectively.

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Authors' contributions

A.R.M. is the supervisor and corresponding author, provided critical feedback reviewed the article and provided guidance. T.M.C. was in charge of writing, conceptualisation and data collection.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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