

ABSTRACT

As the quality of leadership makes an outstanding difference to school and learner outcomes, the purpose of this study is to explore the roles and responsibilities of the Foundation Phase (F.P.) Head of Department (HoD) as instructional leader and show how their leadership practices shape effective teaching and learning in three primary schools in Gauteng. Research has shown that schools require effective leaders and managers to provide the best possible education for learners and staff but this is clearly lacking in many schools today. Much research done on this topic has mainly focussed on the principal as instructional leader rather than the HoD who forms the main rationale for the study.

This research explores the F. P. HoD (middle manager) and the roles they play as instructional leaders in promoting successful learner achievement in primary schools. A qualitative research method was employed to assess the perceptions of principals, HoDs and teachers in three schools in Johannesburg, South Africa. This study reports on the understanding and views of the participants as they perceive the role of the HoD as instructional leader and the implications of this for teaching and learning in the F.P.

The study is positioned within a qualitative research approach. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with principals and HoDs in the schools. The Atlas. ti software programme was used to analyse the data extracted using codes and themes. Open-ended questionnaires were administered to teachers in the schools and the data was first transcribed and then analysed using Thematic Analysis. This involved identifying common themes, codes and patterns within the data. The study uses the perceptions of the participants to draw conclusions to the research questions. In the findings, the participants' responses demonstrated that when HoDs are directly involved with leading and managing the instructional programme in the F. P. it led to the improvement of learner performance and school results. The key questions are answered in the analysis and findings of the report. The participants in the study highlighted the challenges HoDs faced which hindered their roles as instructional leaders. Some of the challenges encountered by HoDs were the heavy workload, class teaching and lack of support from the District Office regarding curriculum delivery. Findings from the data analysed, show that HoDs play a crucial role in leading and managing the instructional programme to affect improved learner performance. This study shows that the success of schools is based on the effective instructional role of the HoD and how this leads to improved learner achievement and school performance.

Keywords: Instructional leadership, teaching and learning, middle managers, role, principal, responsibilities, effective, monitoring and evaluation, shared, distributed, leadership, head of department, implications