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# THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSITIONING FROM TEACHER TO DEPARTMENTAL HEAD IN SEVEN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

ABSTRACT

*The aim of this study was to identify key challenges of practice that departmental heads (DHs) face during their transition from a teacher to their DH role. The study was based on Bridges' transition theory. The researcher employed a qualitative research methodology and interviewed 15 DHs working in the Department of Basic Education's Tshwane South district. A thematic analysis of the collected data showed that the DHs experienced four main challenges during the transition process: negative change in teachers' attitudes and behaviours, a lack of management/ leadership skills, a lack of subject knowledge and heavy workloads and time constraints. Based on the above findings, the researcher concluded that transitioning from teacher to DH is more difficult than meets the eye. These findings imply that policymakers, researchers, school principals and teachers should work together to minimise challenges and ensure a smooth transition to the DH role for newly appointed DHs.*

**Keywords**: *Departmental head; primary schools; transition, Bridges' transition theory; departmental chairs; subject heads.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The government and society in general place schools under huge pressure to deliver excellent results by producing fully equipped and well-rounded learners. In order to meet these expectations, schools not only need effective school principals, but also effective departmental heads (DHs). DHs are teachers who have been promoted to the middle level of the school hierarchy; in other words, between senior management and teachers in traditional bureaucratic structures (Chetty, 2007). DHs are known by different names in different countries. For example, in the United Kingdom (UK), DHs are called subject leaders, middle leaders or middle managers, while in the United States they are called departmental chairs (Busher, 2005; Turner, 2006; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007). In Kenya and Tanzania, they are called heads of department (HODs) (Atebe, 2009; Urio, 2012). In this study, the term DH is used to refer to those teachers

promoted to the level above other teachers but below senior management in schools, and are responsible for the management of various departments or phases (PAM, 2016).

The role of DHs in today's world of education has become crucial and increasing demands are made on DHs to lead and manage performance in their departments. According to Beam, Claxton and Smit (2016), they are expected to be superheroes in their departments or phases. Various researchers have conducted studies on DHs and their role. For instance, Yong (2006) found that DHs in Singapore performed their roles in four contexts: classrooms, departments, whole schools and clusters. The classroom role involved teaching only, while the departmental role was concerned with leading teams, planning, monitoring, evaluation, developing staff, administrative affairs and advising principals on professional matters. The latter role linked school and departmental goals to ensure the integration of departmental and whole-school beliefs, values and priorities. The DHs' whole-school role involved working with senior management on decision-making matters such as developing the school's vision, setting the school's tone and direction, strategic planning, implementation of school policies as well as performance appraisal and grading. The cluster role involved collaborating with DHs from other cluster schools in respect of subject support groups and cluster committees to raise the standard of performance in their schools through professional sharing and training activities (Yong, 2006).

Ghavifekr and Ibrahim (2014) reported that DHs in Malaysia were expected to improve teachers' job performance by developing their teaching practice and providing increased motivation. DHs were also made responsible for enhancing the professional competency of teachers. When reporting on the roles and responsibilities of school management teams (SMTs) – which included DHs, deputy principals and principals – Nigerian researchers Nwangwa and Ometere (2013) discovered that DHs were expected to monitor the performance of teachers and learners in schools. Their role furthermore involved providing continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers and non-teaching staff, as well as implementing the curriculum in a manner that met the goals of the Nigerian Ministry of Education. In South Africa the core duties and responsibilities of DHs are regulated in the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) document and involve teaching (extracurricular and co-curricular), personnel matters, general/administrative duties and communication (PAM, 2016). South African researchers have also conducted studies on the role of DHs. The common challenges that emerged from these studies were the DHs' heavy workload and their struggle to strike a balance between teaching duties and management duties (Borole, 2010; Nkabinde, 2012; Du Plessis, 2014; Malloy, 2017; Tapala, van Niekerk & Mentz, 2020). Malloy (2017) also found that all the DHs lacked relevant expertise in the subject. Consequently, teachers were not developed effectively in those schools for positive learner performance. They also struggled to balance their own teaching and management duties. Malinga (2016) found that the district was supportive to DHs however, the benefits of such support related more to their teaching role rather than the DH duties. Malloy (2017) discovered that school-based support was minimal.

Numerous studies (Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007; Bennet, 2008; Stephenson, 2010; Nkabinde, 2012; Du Plessis, 2014) suggest that DHs are not properly prepared for the tasks they are expected to carry out. Although many researchers around the world have acknowledged the importance of DHs in the success of schools, there is still a dearth of research into the challenges that DHs face during their transition from teacher to the DH role in South African schools. Further research is essential to determine the challenges that DHs experience – from their own perspective – in a South African context. As a result, the current

paper deals with the challenges that DHs in seven primary schools in South Africa faced during their transition from the teacher role to the DH role. It is hoped that the results of this study will serve as a guide to policymakers, researchers, school principals and teachers in South Africa. They may inform the development of preparation and support programmes that will help newly appointed DHs to make a smooth transition into their new role. The findings should be of interest to prospective and current DHs, school principals and subject advisors.

The main research question that was asked in this study was: What types of challenges do DHs experience during their transition from teacher to the position of a DH?

## 2. AN EMPIRICAL VIEW OF THE CHALLENGES FACED WHEN TRANSITIONING FROM SUBJECT TEACHER TO DEPARTMENTAL HEAD

Literature on transitioning to the DH role is limited. However, the different challenges that people face during their transition to a leadership role seemed relevant for this study. One of these challenges was changes in relationships. Various New Zealand studies, such as those by Bennet (2008) on first-time subject leaders in secondary schools and by Hesketh (2014) on the continuous professional development (CPD) of middle leaders in primary schools, revealed that DHs experienced a change in their relationships with teaching colleagues. Stephenson (2010) found that some DHs who were promoted internally had to change the way in which they interacted with fellow teachers who had been their peers prior to their appointment to the DH role. Furthermore, Beam *et al.* (2016) conducted a study that focused on the perceptions of novice and experienced school administrators during their first three years in school leadership positions and how pre-service programmes better prepared them for the challenges they might face in such positions. The study also revealed that the novice leaders had trouble navigating their relationships with colleagues, parents and students. In fact, they felt that their colleagues did not perceive them as credible. Novice leaders also felt that their qualifications, background and ability to lead were questioned by fellow teachers. This suggests that when teachers are promoted to the DH role, their relationships with former colleagues are affected negatively.

The lack of role clarity emerged as another challenge during transition to the leadership position. In New Zealand, a study of the issues facing first-time DHs discovered that, after their appointment, DHs started to realise that the role they were expected to play was bigger than what they had anticipated. Similar findings emerged from a study by Armstrong (2012) who focused on transition from vice-principalship in North America and found that, despite the vice-principals taking a principal's training course and having experience as curriculum leaders, they still experienced surprises during the first year in their management role. The vice-principals only became aware of the differences between teaching and administration in terms of their responsibilities as teachers and as upper-level administrators once they were already in the role.

Davidson (2016) conducted a study in Australia on the early experiences of 12 South Australian novice primary school principals and found that these new principals were overwhelmed when they realised the extent of their new responsibilities. All of the new principals agreed that even though they had been deputy principals and acting principals in other schools before they were appointed as principals, being in a principal position was not what they had anticipated.

Another challenge involved heavy workloads and time constraints. Studies conducted in Singapore and New Zealand suggested that the additional responsibilities of a teacher moving to the DH role caused an increase in their workloads (Yong, 2006; Chetty, 2007; Bennet, 2008). A study by Nwangwa and Ometere (2013) in Nigeria reported that school managers, including DHs, found it difficult to meet their new managerial expectations. Yong (2006) reported that time constraints had an impact on other functions of DHs, as they were still allocated the same amount of time for their teaching, management and leadership duties as teachers whose main task is only to teach. This implies that during transition, DHs found it difficult to assume responsibility for a dual role, as they were given no extra time to allow them to fulfil both roles effectively.

A lack of management and leadership skills was found in studies by other researchers. In the US, Zepeda and Kruskamp (2007) explored the perspectives of high school departmental chairs concerning their task as instructional supervisors for teachers. They discovered that departmental chairs were not well prepared for instructional supervision. An Australian study by Rosenfeld, Ehrich and Cranston (2008) that examined the changing nature of the DHs and the skills they required in their new role, found that the development of those skills did not take place in a formalised manner. According to this study, some DHs were learning on the job and they basically used what they had learnt from DHs who were their role models and mentors. Others simply developed an understanding of the role through personal experience. Shun-wing and Tsan-ming (2014) examined the situation of middle managers in schools in Hong Kong, their CPD needs and the requirements for quality school management. They observed that there were insufficient training opportunities for middle leaders in primary schools and concluded that owing to restricted training opportunities, there was a strong demand for training on interpersonal skills, crisis and resource management, and an understanding of education rules in the CPD curriculum for middle leaders.

In Tanzania, Urio (2012) investigated how DHs performed their task of enhancing the quality of education and found that they not only lacked the ability to influence the CPD of teachers, but also were unable to conduct classroom observations and motivate teachers. This could have been because of a lack of preparation for the DH role. On the other hand, a Kenyan study by Atebe (2009) found that DHs were only inducted in information and communication technology skills. He also found that professional training was offered through consultative meetings when the need arose. Additionally, various South African studies conducted on the role of DHs revealed little or no induction for newly appointed DHs (Ali & Botha, 2006; Nkabinde, 2012; Du Plessis, 2014). In another South African study, Malinga (2016) found that some DHs did not have the subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge or the credibility to lead subjects under their supervision. All these studies provided evidence of challenges, yet very few (if any) South African studies examined challenges experienced by DHs in their transitioning to the DH role. The current study therefore focused specifically on the transitioning of primary school teachers to the DH role.

## 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bridges' (1991) transition theory, which had been developed to assist organisations in supporting people who are going through a transition of any kind, was used in this study. Bridges' theory describes the stages that people go through when they experience change. It also suggests strategies for helping people move through each stage. DHs, for instance,

must come to terms with and adjust to the changes that are associated with promotion, such as being responsible for managing other teachers.

Bridges' theory seemed appropriate for understanding how DHs deal with all the changes they experience as they transition to middle management, as it suggests support strategies that may apply in the transition from teacher to middle management. The theory states that transition occurs in three stages – the ending state, neutral zone and new beginning. In the ending state, people must leave behind their old identities and create new ones. During this stage, they experience disorientation, confusion, frustration, uncertainty, a sense of loss and anxiety, and they require role clarity. In the context of the current study, DHs who are promoted are expected to leave behind the teacher identity and create a manager identity. In preparing the interview guide, the ending stage of the theory was used to determine whether the DHs were able to leave behind their teacher identity and create a new one. The interview questions were framed to find out what DHs used to do in their previous role and if there was a difference between their old and new roles.

According to Bridges' theory, the second stage of transition is a neutral zone in which transitioning people face new responsibilities and new relationships. Having experienced confusion, uncertainty, loneliness and isolation, they now require reorientation, support and encouragement. This neutral zone could also be seen as a period of learning opportunities, but when the necessary support, encouragement and reorientation do not materialise, transitioning people start embracing their previous role. Bridges' theory states that people should spend more time in the neutral zone to learn about new responsibilities; it is only then that they can move on to the third stage of transition, the new beginning. The current study examined this second stage to find out what DHs experience once they have left behind their teacher identity and whether they were receiving the necessary support (e.g. induction, mentorship and/or any other developmental activities) to settle successfully into the new middle management position.

The third and last stage of transition, according to Bridges' theory, is the new beginning. In the new beginning, people start realising that their old identity has ended; some start doubting their competence, their old anxieties resurface and they even freeze. Others, however, accept their new responsibilities and eventually succeed. In the new beginning stage, people need guidance so as not to regress. DHs in this study were almost new in the DH position and therefore it was assumed that they still needed time to learn about the role. Therefore, the interview questions focused on the two stages of transition from classroom teaching to the DH position (ending and the neutral zone).

## 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Approach

This study, which employed a qualitative approach grounded in the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm (Creswell, 2012), was conducted in seven public primary schools in the Tshwane South District. A qualitative approach seemed appropriate for collecting rich data in the form of words about the challenges that DHs faced during their transition from teacher to their new role as DHs (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This approach also made it possible for the researcher to interact with participants in their natural setting – that is, in the selected seven primary schools – during the data collection process (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

## 4.2 Research design

A qualitative case study design was adopted for this study because it enabled the researcher to explore the challenges that DHs faced during their transition from teacher to DH in their natural settings which were schools (Creswell, 2012). A case study seemed appropriate because it requires that a study be conducted in a bounded context (Creswell, 2012). In the present study, the researcher was able to focus on DHs in seven primary schools in the Tshwane South District. This design posed limitations regarding the number of people to be interviewed, but also provided the researcher with rich and reliable data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

## 4.3 Sampling

The sites and participants were sampled using a non-probability purposive approach. Only participants who were perceived to be knowledgeable about and experienced in the phenomenon under study, namely DHs, were sampled (Creswell, 2012). The selected participants were also those who were willing to provide information about their experiences. The sampled DHs came from seven public primary schools – six from a township and one from an urban area. It was the researcher's intention to involve three township and three urban schools in order to study the experiences from different socio-economic environments. However, access was granted in only one school in an urban area. Others were not interested, and since participation had to be voluntary, schools were not obligated to participate. Six township schools granted the researcher access before the urban area school did.

South African primary schools are divided into Foundation, Intermediate and Senior phases. However, in small schools, some DHs are simultaneously responsible for two phases, for instance, Intermediate and Senior Phase (INTERSEN). The selected DHs in this study were those responsible for the Foundation and Intermediate-Senior (INTERSEN) phase in seven schools. The school in the urban area had two Foundation phase DHs and both volunteered to participate in the study. Eight Foundation phase DHs (two from the school in the urban area and one per school in the township), as well as seven INTERSEN phase DHs (one DH per school) participated in the study. The experience in a DH position of the fifteen selected DHs ranged from one to five years. The researcher assumed that the selected participants would still be able to remember their experiences of transitioning from teacher to leader.

## 4.4 Data collection

One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data from the fifteen participants at a time convenient for each. The researcher's reason for using one-on-one interviews was that these enabled her to establish a relationship with the participants through interaction (Maree, 2012; Thomas, 2011). By using semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to collect data directly from the participating DHs on their thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations and feelings about the challenges they experienced during their transition (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). The interviews also made it possible for the researcher to ask probing questions as the need arose. Permission was sought to audio record all interviews. The researcher used an interview protocol for guidance during the interviews. The questions in the interview protocol were generated based on the research question, which involved the first two stages of Bridges' transition theory (ending and neutral zone). The reason for this was that the DHs in the study were almost new in the DH position and therefore it was assumed that they still needed time to learn about the role. Examples

of interview questions were: *How would you describe your experiences when you started in this DH role? How would you describe your current experiences in this position?* On average, each interview took approximately 45 minutes to complete.

### 4.5 Data analysis

Data were analysed according to the thematic analysis technique because it was compatible with the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm within which this study was conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data analysis continued throughout the collection process and hence the researcher was able to make follow-ups wherever this seemed necessary. The steps followed were those proposed by Braun and Clark (2006). As stated earlier, the researcher was guided by the research question that focused on the ending and neutral zone. The DHs were new in their position and were assumed to be still navigating through the transition process. The researcher transcribed all verbal data herself and immersed herself in the written data until she was familiar with the depth and breadth of its content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher subsequently broke down and coded the data according to the interview questions. She then sorted the different codes into potential themes and assembled all related codes within identified themes. Afterwards, the researcher went back to the assembled data extracts for each theme and organised them into a clear and consistent interpretation accompanied by quotations.

## 5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical approval to conduct research was obtained from the University of Pretoria. Permission to conduct research in the seven public primary schools was obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education. The researcher requested potential participants at the selected schools in writing to participate in the study. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study and what was expected of them. They were asked to sign a consent form to confirm that they were voluntarily participating in the study but were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were assured of confidentiality and their identities as well as those of the schools in the study were protected by using pseudonyms.

## 6. TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE FINDINGS

Trustworthiness was enhanced by adhering to four criteria as advised by Lincoln and Guba (1989). To enhance credibility, a detailed account of the research design, methodology and theoretical framework for the study was provided. Data source triangulation was employed to develop themes based on the various perspectives of participants (Creswell, 2012). Dependability of the findings was enhanced through using the interview schedule to ensure that all participants were asked the same questions. The perspectives of the participants were equally presented to enable readers of the study report to develop a thorough understanding of the methods used and their effectiveness (Creswell, 2012). To ensure transferability of the findings, details of all the processes followed in the investigation and the context of the fieldwork were recorded to facilitate the possibility of replication of the study (Shenton, 2004; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

## 7. FINDINGS

Participants were asked how they experienced the move from their role as teacher to that of manager, which according to the transition theory constituted the ending of the old identity.

The themes that emerged from their responses were as follows: negative change in teachers' attitudes and behaviours, lack of leadership and management skills, lack of subject knowledge as well as heavy workload and time constraints.

## 7.1 Negative change in teachers' attitudes and behaviours

The researcher discovered that DHs who had been internally promoted – whether to a vacant or temporarily occupied position – were deeply affected by the negative attitudes of former peers (teachers) who seemed to question their credibility. It seems that the ending stage does not affect only those promoted, but also former peers. This was evident in what some of the DHs who were appointed internally had to say (quoted verbatim):

> There were other people who applied but I got the post. Other people apply for the post not because they know the job but they want the money. If you get the job, they start to hate you… You can see that people hate you because of the job (DH 6).

> When the post was advertised, many of us applied but during the interviews, I was the only one shortlisted from my school. All of a sudden, there was tension, particularly with those who thought they were more qualified than me and maybe they were better than me in terms of speaking and presentation (DH 14).

The following verbatim quote shows the words of a participant who was internally appointed to the post where there had been an acting DH:

> When I was promoted, it was tough, more especially because the position I am in, one of my colleagues was acting. She was an acting HOD but looking at the advertisement, I also thought I was a suitable candidate. Oh! It was not easy; there was that negative influence; hence, she was somehow cross with me but ultimately at times there were some delays with submissions.

In contrast, the perspective of a DH who had been externally appointed revealed feelings of isolation that frustrated her. The participant seemed to be struggling with the ending stage of transition where she had to leave behind her previous life of being in the staffroom with teachers. She remarked:

> I just wanted to be HOD; it's not as nice as I thought. My biggest challenge is I am now isolated from others. I have my own office. It's not as nice as I thought.

## 7.2 Lack of management and leadership skills

Most participants indicated that they had not been prepared for and equipped with leadership and management skills. They seemed to be in the neutral zone and uncertain about how to perform leadership and management duties. They also required support in the form of mentorship.

The verbatim comments from some participants are quoted below:

> As DHs, we need thorough training in terms of time management and management skills (DH 2).

> Becoming the DH is a challenge if, like myself, you are not trained. I was just taken because of my long service as a teacher. If you have not been trained it is very tough and stressful to manage people. What can I tell them? (DH 5).

## 7.3 Lack of subject knowledge

Some DHs also indicated that they sometimes lacked the necessary subject knowledge, which made it difficult for them to monitor the teaching and learning of other subjects under their supervision. These participants seemed to be in the neutral zone where they were expected to monitor the teaching of other teachers, yet they did not always have the required content knowledge. They also required subject-related support.

This was what some participants said:

> When it comes to problems of learners' performance, the DH cannot even confront the educator because the DH has more knowledge in other subjects but in others he is lacking. There is a gap which makes it difficult to assist the educator (DH 14).

> What is happening to the DHs is not fair. We are assigned to supervise even the subjects we have no knowledge of. I say it is not fair because you cannot develop a teacher on something that you yourself do not know. Every DH should be a specialist in subjects that s/he is supposed to supervise in order to be able to help teachers; it is very frustrating to lead what you don't know because it takes away your confidence (DH 15).

## 7.4 Heavy workload and time constraints

Most of the participants reported that their workload had become heavier – the addition of management and leadership duties to their teaching load made it difficult to attend adequately to all tasks. Apparently, their old and new identities were simply combined, because they had to continue to teach after having been promoted to the DH position. The added workload called for more support in terms of management skills to enable the newly appointed DHs to give equal attention to both roles. Some of their comments in this regard are quoted below:

> The workload and responsibility have increased tremendously…The administration has also increased as I now have to monitor the administration for all teachers in addition to mine. I have now been a grade head as all DHs have been allocated in different phases (DH 4).

> The workload has now increased. Even though I teach, I have other subjects that I have to oversee and the admin work is too much (DH 2).

Even those participants who reported that their teaching load had decreased, still indicated that their administrative duties had increased.

> Now that I am a DH, the periods are lesser… You know, there is too much paperwork but it is caused by the department. One other thing that I have realised there is a lot of marking. They bring papers with half marks which some of the teachers cannot do because of lack of Maths knowledge. They give that work to me as the DH to fix it (DH 6).

> The workload in terms of classes has decreased but the administration and management duties have tremendously increased because now it is for the whole department and it takes my time with the learners (DH 12).

# 8. DISCUSSION

The study revealed that when DHs moved from the role of teacher to the DH role in the same schools where they had been teachers, they were affected by the negative attitudes and behaviours of former teacher colleagues. A possible explanation is that bruised egos made it

difficult for these teachers to accept that even though they could all apply for the promotion, there could only be one successful candidate. In contrast, there was no indication of such experience from participants who came from other schools. However, my study found that the DH who had been appointed from another institution experienced isolation. This could be because the appointed DH had no previous relationship with teachers in the new school. The feelings of loneliness could also have resulted from the newly appointed DH struggling to cope with the change in routine – from being in the classroom with learners to being "isolated" in an office environment. The finding of the negative attitudes and behaviours of former teacher colleagues is consistent with the findings of Hesketh (2014), who found that some subject leaders who were internally appointed experienced a negative change in their relationships with other departmental members. It also supports the finding of Beam *et al.* (2016), namely that leaders who had worked in the school as a former teacher experienced a lack of credibility in the eyes of their colleagues and they were often not granted respect in their new role.

This study found that most participants lacked management and leadership skills. This resulted in frustration and insufficient confidence to perform their management and leadership duties. Most participants seemed to be aware of the importance of having management and leadership skills in order to perform their duties effectively. This included the ability to deal with difficult teachers. This lack of management and leadership skills also emerged from the studies conducted by Chetty (2007), Bennet (2008) and Murphy (2011). They found that middle managers lacked adequate management knowledge and skills, which made it impossible for them to do the job effectively. The teachers in their studies were promoted to a leadership role without being equipped with the training they needed to be effective. It was also found that most DHs lacked subject knowledge of some of the subjects they were expected to supervise. The lack of subject knowledge by many DHs may well be blamed on the nature of the system, which does not consider subject knowledge of all the subjects a teacher will supervise once promoted to the DH position. This lack of subject knowledge is consistent with the findings from a South African study by Malinga (2016) who found that some DHs did not have the subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge or the credibility to lead the subject teachers under their supervision. As a result of their limited competency, they could not have meaningful discussions on curriculum issues with their teachers. It also supports Malloy's (2017) findings that all the DHs lacked relevant expertise in the subject. Consequently, teachers were not developed effectively in those schools for positive learner performance.

The participants agreed that they now had a much heavier workload due to their additional responsibilities and the increased number of duties that they were expected to perform (i.e. management and leadership duties in addition to their teaching responsibilities). This was especially the case because being the DH often required the promoted teacher to continue with teaching – making it challenging to fulfil both tasks effectively. Bennet (2008) found that DHs experience a heavy workload and time constraints, whereas Barole (2010) and Malloy (2017) also identified the problem of heavy workloads and indicated that DHs had difficulty balancing their teaching and management duties. This ultimately supports what Bridges' theory suggests, namely that in the neutral zone, people need to be supported in terms of what their new role requires in order for them to successfully perform their new responsibilities. In this case, DHs need to be empowered with time management skills in order to be able to balance both teaching and management duties. If they are not given the necessary support, they will

focus more on the familiar teaching role, rather than learn responsibilities of the new role. That could delay their movement to the last stage of transition, which is the new beginning.

## 9. CONCLUSION

In seeking to understand the challenges that DHs in seven primary schools faced during their transition from teacher to DH, the researcher found that the challenges included a negative change in fellow teachers' attitudes and behaviours, DHs' inadequate management and leadership skills, their lack of subject knowledge and heavy workloads and time constraints.

The researcher therefore concluded that the transition from the role of teacher to that of DH is more challenging than it appears. Relevant support should be provided to newly appointed DHs throughout all stages of the transition process to enable them to make a smooth transition and be effective in their new role. In conclusion, policymakers should develop policies to guide schools regarding the subject knowledge requirements that should be considered in the appointment of DHs. District officials – and subject advisors in particular – should provide subject-related support to DHs to ensure that the latter have the required subject knowledge to monitor the teaching of subjects they supervise. School principals should mentor newly appointed DHs to develop their leadership and management skills. Further research is needed to explore the support needs of the DHs and to help them overcome the challenges they face. Since this study was based on a small non-probability sample, the results cannot be generalised to all DHs going through a transition process. A larger study with larger datasets should be conducted in future, in primary as well as secondary schools.

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