

Leading From the Middle: The Leadership Role of Middle Leaders on the Management of Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

This article investigates the influence of middle leaders in improving classroom practice and learner outcomes in the Johannesburg East Education District of Gauteng province. It is becoming increasingly clear, both worldwide and in South Africa, that managing teaching and learning is one of the most critical tasks for principals and other school leaders. Managing teaching and learning is a fundamental factor in South Africa's new national certification for school leaders and future principals. Drawing on empirical findings of case studies based on a large doctoral project, the study demonstrates that the role of middle leaders is multifaceted and requires unending attention. These empirical findings also demonstrate that controlling teaching and learning is frequently insufficient and fails to adequately address the social and educational issues that middle leaders, teachers, learners and their communities face.

Keywords: Curriculum, Mentoring, Middle Leaders, Teaching and learning

1 Introduction

Leadership is a subject of focused attention in the educational literature, and it is extensively acknowledged that effective school leadership is vital for the provision of quality teaching and learning in the school. Indeed, there is a large volume of scholarly writings (e.g. Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, Harris & Hopkins, 2006; Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009; van Deventer & Kruger, 2010; Steyn & van Niekerk, 2013) that are based both on research and scholarship, whose attention is on school leadership, its forms, models of best practices and process and functions. It seems that we all know quite a lot about school leadership in general, but not much attention has been on the leading work of middle managers¹ in the school (Grootenboer, 2018). Most of the literature studies on educational leadership focuses more on school principals, and most of the research justifying these claims, however, is about the influence of principal leadership and by far the bulk of this research has been undertaken in secondary schools (e.g. Ribbins, 2007; Bush, et al., 2009; Cranston, 2009; van Deventer & Kruger, 2010; Bush, 2013; Steyn & van Niekerk, 2013) whereas the focus of this paper is on the roles and responsibilities of departmental heads as leaders of learning in improving the culture of learning and teaching in primary schools. Drawing from the research evidence provided on academic journals devoted to educational leadership and development research (e.g. *School leadership and Management, Educational Researcher, Journal of Educational Research, South African Journal of Education, Educational Administration Quarterly, Journal of Education Research, International Journal of Leadership in Education, School Effectiveness and School Improvement and Management in Education*

¹ In this paper, the term 'middle managers', 'departmental heads or DHs (in South Africa)' and 'middle leaders or MLs' are used, and in many contexts, they are used interchangeably. My preference is for 'middle leaders or MLs' as it commonly used in the international educational leadership research.

Journal) and as a component of a large doctorate research studying the factors that contribute to long-serving primary school teachers' work satisfaction, professional identity, and persistence between 2018 and 2024, this article summarizes empirical evidence addressing four key questions: what is the contribution of middle leaders on learner achievement in primary schools? How do middle leaders view their roles as potential drivers of change in primary schools and in education? What challenges do middle leaders face in providing the necessary leadership to their subject departments and to the school? What is it that middle leaders do to successfully provide the necessary leadership to their departments and their schools? What necessary working conditions that enable such significant leadership to their departments and schools? According to a review of the literature, not many research on the duties of middle leaders have been conducted in South Africa, particularly in the Johannesburg area. Therefore, by investigating the function of middle leaders on management of teaching and learning (MTL), this research fills a significant need in the body of current academic literature. In order to get fresh insights into the influence of middle leaders on MTL in primary schools, the researcher started by reviewing pertinent literature on middle leaders and school leadership.

2 Limitations of the research

The important limitations of the research which must be borne in mind when reviewing the literature were identified:

- The majority of the study found focused on curriculum coordinators, department heads, middle leadership, and subject leadership; however, pastoral leadership has not been extensively studied, nor has it been examined in special education needs schools (LSEN schools);
- Despite raising significant challenges that are pertinent to both sectors, the majority of the research conducted in this area has been conducted in secondary schools rather than primary schools. Most research on "middle leadership" has been conducted in the United Kingdom, despite some work being done in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States of America, as well as a body of work in the South African literature on education leadership by head teachers or principals rather than teacher leaders.

3 Research review on Middle Leaders

Learning area teams operate under the auspices of middle leaders (hereafter, MLs) in a particular learning area. A large number of research studies (e.g. Leithwood, et al., 2006; Robinson, et al., 2009; Bush et al., 2010; Mestry & Pillay, 2013; Naidu, et al. 2010; Naiker, Chikolo & Mthiyane, 2013) have been conducted on the roles and responsibilities of MLs as leaders of learning in the school. In the South African context, as leaders of learning, the MLs are viewed and defined as 'supervisors or departmental heads (DHs)' (Naidu, et al, 2012; Mestry & Pillay, 2013) of teachers whereas in other countries (e.g. UK, US, Ghana and Tanzania), MLs are referred to as 'middle managers (Odura, 2010; Bush, et al, 2013; Grootenboer, 2018). The duties of MLs as professionals are outlined in the PAM (Personnel and Administrative Measures of 1999) document as one of South African Legislative Framework which is defined in EEA of 1998 (i.e. Employment of Teachers Act of 1998). Researchers (Bush et al., 2010; Mestry & Pillay, 2013; Bush & Glover, 2013) and South African Legislative Frameworks such as EEA and PAM documents further emphasized that leading the process of teaching and learning is the core responsibility of the MLs. More specifically, Bush et al. (2009:3) says that while the school principal and SMT have a whole-school role, MLs have a responsibility of ensuring effective teaching and learning across their learning areas or phases. In other words, MLs as leaders of learning should make sure that teachers are teaching what they are employed and expected to teach. The reviewed literature for this paper is related to instructional leadership and the roles and responsibilities of MLs, including their managerial role as leaders of learning. As middle managers in the school, MLs have to lead and manage teaching and learning by means of their planning, organising, coordinating teachers and

instructional leadership in their departments in their school (Kruger, 2003:210; van Deventer & Kruger, 2010:109; Steyn & van Niekerk, 2013:143). So, the next section of this paper is focused on these management papers of MLs as leaders of learning, their responsibilities and how they can improve the culture of learning and teaching in their schools.

4 Understanding middle leadership

There has been some considerable literature into MLs (e.g. Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley & Beresford, 2000), although there are relatively few studies in quantity. Previous studies on education leadership have reported that school principals and administrators often invest in “expert teachers” to lead practice development of their colleagues, aiming to secure enhanced results (Collison & Cook, 2007, Bush, et al., 2009, Grootenboer, 2018). However, these ineffective drivers often miss the target. The bureaucratic policy push towards a “performative audit culture” has increased attention to the work of middle-managers, who occupy more middle-level roles in schools (Odura, 2010; Fullan, 2011; Bush, et al, 2013). It has been argued that MLs are often described as leading or highly accomplished teachers, with a predominant responsibility for classroom teaching. They play a crucial role in building capacity among others by facilitating professional development and investing in practices that directly reach the classroom. In the South African and in Australian contexts, middle leadership is particularly important in secondary schools (Spillane, 2004; Taylor, 2007; Bush & Glover, 2009, Leithwood, 2016). Leithwood’s (2016) review argues that middle-level leadership is underutilized in secondary schools, leading to resistance to reform efforts. The study highlights the importance of proximity to the classroom for influencing learner learning. The comparative influence of school-wide leadership (principals) and MLs on learner learning outcomes is relatively small. Three main reasons for this are structure, sources of leadership expertise, and teachers’ identity and culture. Structurally, MLs work with a smaller, more homogenous group of teachers and learners, making them more able to build a community of practice and work collegially (Grootenboer, 2018). According to Grootenboer, MLs often have responsibility for specific aspects of a school, such as discipline-based departments, and often have greater specialized knowledge and expertise than principals. In this study, it is argued that department or group leaders provide leadership related specifically to the functions and identity of the department or group, and often identify strongly with the nature and culture of the department. This makes them best placed to lead and develop, especially given that many teachers identify more strongly with their group than the whole school (Grootenboer, 2018). A number of studies have reported that factors constrained middle leadership include teachers’ beliefs and ideas about the role of MLs, teacher unions and policy, MLs’ own understandings and preferences, and the expectations and limitations of school-wide leadership. MLs often prefer to provide curriculum management and organization, rather than encompassing the leadership of others. These constraints can be context-specific and may vary across different nations, districts, systems, and schools. Several other studies have, however, documented that these challenges highlight the relational difficulty for MLs associated with leading professional development in their specific site and managing competing expectations for leadership and administration (Bush, et al, 2009; Leithwood, 2016, Grootenboer, 2018). Grootenboer, (2018) further indicated that MLs’ practices are strongly influenced by their roles in particular sites, and tensions arise between aligning with the whole-school reform agenda while remaining loyal to their departments. As indicated in many scholarship writings, MLs may also view themselves as curriculum managers rather than functioning collegially, collaboratively, and as co-learners with colleagues. A growing body of literature seeks to connect issues of school leadership with professional learning, often in relation to the cultivation of positive school cultures and effective professional learning communities. Furthermore, middle leaders are critical for developing educational outcomes for learners, as they exercise their leading in and around classrooms and their teaching peers. Middle leading entails a set of intricate ecologically interconnected practices that encompass concurrent leading and teaching, managing and facilitating educational development, collaborating, and creating communicative spaces.

5 Key influences on responsibilities and practices

As they interpret their duties in practice, middle leaders deal with conflicts relating to authority, professionalism, and camaraderie on a regular basis. Both national settings and educational institutions have had a significant effect on this work. According to the report, schools should embrace the open systems approach, which contends that departmental and school cultures have an influence on lower-level classroom settings that have an impact on learner learning. The department and school are also impacted by outside forces. This concept hasn't been utilized as much in the literature, though. In general, intermediate leaders have to manage these conflicts by interpreting their positions.

5.1 From inside the school

The role of MLs as middle leaders and instructional leaders of learning includes but not limited to supervising, providing guidance and exercising their leadership powers to provide the necessary leadership, resources and a create a conducive teaching and learning environment in order to improve the culture of learning and teaching (Leithwood, et. al., 2006; Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008; Robinson, et al., 2009; Bush et al., 2010; Mestry & Pillay, 2013; Naidu, et al. 2010; Naiker, et. al., 2013; Grootenboer, 2018). Specifically, Grootenboer (2018:8) stated that teachers look up to their MLs to provide directions on how to operate in their departments. Grootenboer further stated that all schools are expected to develop their mission and vision and this applies to middle leaders who are expected to develop vision for their departments. The departmental vision needs to communicate the essence of the learning area to the teachers in order for them to comprehend and make this vision theirs. In South Africa, the employment and duties of all teachers are guided by the EEA 64 of 1998. In addition to their teaching responsibilities, the roles and responsibilities of the MLs as leaders of learning are also stipulated in the PAM documents (see, DoE, 1999) which includes supervision personnel, administration, communication with colleagues, extra- and co- curricular activities. Middle leaders' core duties is being in charge of specified learning areas/subjects in a phase and accountable for performance of learners in those subjects. As middle leaders and leaders of learning, MLs are expected to teach and coordinate activities in their departments, develop teacher competency in pedagogical content of subject, establish suitable teaching methods and techniques, evaluate teachers, appraise teachers and provide professional development programs for teachers by means of in-service training, attend workshops and provide feedback for teachers, provide teachers with suitable learning and teaching materials, MTL (manage teaching and learning) changes in the curriculum. It is also their responsibility to cooperate with other SMT members and teachers at large in maintaining good relationships and teaching standards and assess learner progress in their learning (DoE, 2000, 2002; Robinson, et. al., 2009; Bush, et al., 2013; Grootenboer, 2018; Naiker, et al., 2013).

5.1.1 Institutional culture

Fletcher and Bell (1999) argue that the primary school culture is collegial, making it difficult for subject leaders to exercise direct leadership. Metcalfe and Russell (1997) suggest that the traditional culture of secondary schools is professional autonomy, which creates hostility to monitoring and quality assessment. However, secondary school teaching can be viewed as a production line, with demands for quality assurance that militate against the institutional culture of professional autonomy. This tension results in a "relaxed academic federalism" where departments operate autonomously but take into account wider school demands. Wise (2001) found that departmental colleagues were more significant influences than senior staff on heads of departments' interpretation and implementation of their role. Collegial cultures were much weaker outside subject departments, such as between MLs, pastoral units, and teachers and cross-curriculum co-coordinators such as ICT or LSENs. Glover et al (1999) found that in schools where subject leaders are valued and developed, subject staff are more likely to feel well led. In some schools that had been re-organised to enable more effective subject leadership, the role of the subject leader had developed more widely. A determining factor of this seemed to be the culture

within the school, which if it valued its subject leaders, had a high degree of trust and a collegial atmosphere was more likely to have moved forward. Elliot et al (1999) found that certain contextual factors were likely to lead to teachers' participation in curriculum leadership, such as a non-threatening atmosphere, emphasis on learners and learning, budget support for curriculum initiatives, well-developed communication networks, and administrative support for curriculum initiatives. When teachers felt confident, valued, and trusted, they were more likely to engage in curriculum leadership. In FET colleges, MLs have larger units to manage and greater responsibilities than their secondary school colleagues, but SMT support for them is seen as an important facilitator of their effective performance.

5.1.2 *Institutional structure*

The tension between collegiality and hierarchy in education is evident in various studies, with a hierarchical approach to MLs by senior managers making it harder for middle leaders (MLs) to contribute to whole-school development. There has been downward delegation of operational responsibility from senior levels, but these research studies continue to place these developments within a hierarchical framework. Signs of change, moving to more participative regimes, were also found. Subject departments are a central feature of school structure, defined by teachers' legitimacy within the larger school structure and as such, as strong organizational units. Subject expertise is the basis of legitimacy for subject leadership, although this legitimacy does not necessarily extend to monitoring the classroom work of departmental colleagues. Some studies argue that the more focused around a subject structure the organization is, the less opportunity there is for middle leaders to engage in cross-curricular work and assume a wider school role. Dimmock and Lee (2000, p354) describe subject departments as the linchpin of "strong, robust, rigid and bureaucratic organisational structures" which inhibit curriculum change. They suggest that MLs have to be re-conceptualized as team leaders within a more flexible structure for change to be possible. Hannay et al (2001) support this contention, arguing that restructuring is a crucial factor in the generation of change. Without restructuring, the changes in the role of the departmental chair or middle management will remain a barrier to change. A restructuring that flattened the school decision-making arrangements and made them more collective would provide the catalyst for the reculturing necessary for substantive change to occur. A structure creating greater teacher involvement in decision making and policy setting, and a flatter hierarchy, gives staff in positions of responsibility and the colleagues whose work they facilitate a clearer sense of why they carry the duties they do and greater willingness among their colleagues to collaborate. As Hannay and Smeltzer Erb (1999) point out, structures that create task-based positions of responsibility can generate whole-school change by challenging long-held assumptions. Evidence from Warren Little (1995) confirms the arguments of Hannay et al (2001) and Dimmock and Lee (2000) that subject departments are likely to be barriers rather than facilitators of large-scale educational change. Powell (2001) found in FET colleges that the subject department with its power and resources was highly resistant to change. Glover et al (1999) found that structure influenced what middle leaders perceived and enacted as their role. Brown and Boyle (1999) divided the structures into three conceptual types related to the structures that the head teacher had in place for facilitating decision-making within the school. Those that wanted and actively sought the involvement of middle leaders in whole-school decision-making processes developed a more collegial culture where there was a meshing of departmental and whole-school priorities, along with regular contact between MLs. Other more traditional decision-making organizations limited the input of middle leaders and created departmental sub-cultures and balkanization, which protect the status quo and inhibit change. The atmosphere that middle leaders perceived to exist in the school, the social dynamics, organizational structures, and image of the curriculum had an impact on their willingness to engage in curriculum leadership. Harris, Jamieson, Russ (1995), Sammons et al (1997) argue that school structure and culture do have some influence on departmental effectiveness.

5.1.3 Resources

Many studies (Glover & Miller 1999; Harvey 1997; Fletcher & Bell 1999) have indicated that obtaining and overseeing curriculum materials is an important aspect of subject leaders' responsibilities, and it can occasionally serve as an excuse for not carrying out more thorough curriculum monitoring. The primary concern when evaluating the resources available to topic leaders to fulfill their leadership position is undoubtedly time. In contrast to money, which seemed to be the key concern for primary school subject leaders, it was the top issue for secondary heads of department (Wise & Bush 1999) and Fletcher and Bell (1999). A research conducted on middle school administrators in the United States discovered that neither the district's nor the local community's financial support affected their perceived efficacy (Wettersten 1994).

6 Middle Leading Responsibilities and Practices

6.1.1 Middle Leading and Instructional Leadership

As mentioned earlier in this paper, researchers (e.g. Kruger, 2003; Leithwood, et al., 2006; Leithwood, et. al., 2009, Bush & Glover, 2013) argued that middle leaders' roles and responsibilities as instructional leaders includes providing instructional leadership for teachers, guidance, and supervision in order to enhance teaching, learning and learner achievement in the school. However, Bush (2007:400), Bush et al. (2009:6), Steyn and van Niekerk (2013:47) reasoned that MLs are not only concerned with MTL, they are also expected to invest their effort on the welfare of learners and the professional well-being of teachers by mentoring, coaching and developing them. As middle leaders, MLs are required to immerse themselves in the policy implementation, instruction and assessment in order to oversee and improve the culture of teaching and learning.

6.1.2 Planning

Researchers both locally and international have previously indicated that planning is an essential component of quality management of teaching and learning. Social Sciences (SS), for example, is one of the subjects or learning areas that were introduced in RNCS (Revised National Curriculum Statement for Grade R to 9. In terms of the regulations (see, DoE, 2002), SS as a learning area is taught from Grade 4 onwards. Prior to NCS (National Curriculum Statement) Grade R – 12, Geography and History were delivered in classrooms as separate under the umbrella of Social Studies. After the amendment of curriculum policy, Geography and History were combined into a single learning area commonly known as SS in schools today. SS consist of two imperative disciplines which include Geography and History that must be taught on equal footing and combined into one subject. Therefore, it needs MLs to deal with extensive planning in this particular learning area. Furthermore, the Department of Education (2004) states that although the two disciplines are taught separately within the subject. The most essential management work in a school is planning simply because it provides the school and each department within the school with the purpose and direction. According to van Deventer and Kruger (2010:80), planning is regarded as a process which determines the following forward and responding to questions such as 'what are the needs of the department, subject/learning area? when and where will the needs be addressed? Who will do what and what is needed? How is the plan to be executed? And why should the needs be met?' They further argued that these questions help to realise the educational need of establishing a quality culture of teaching and life-long learning through effective formative in school. Therefore, SS as a content learning area requires a lot of planning from the MLs as leaders of learning in their departments. MLs responsible for this particular subject are expected that teachers teach the content of the learning area and complete tasks that are set for learners within the academic period of school calendar and follow daily and weekly or termly plans as per ATPs (Annual Teaching Plans). As middle leaders, it is clear that an integral dimension of middle leading practice is managing and facilitating (Grootenboer, 2018:93). Van Deventer and Kruger (2010:79) believe that planning is a forward think, a

deliberate act, an intellectual activity that should take a fair amount of time because it requires thinking about, as well as visualizing the future of the department within the school and broader context of the South African education system. This practice stimulates mutual understanding of effective MTL within the department in order to improve a culture of teaching and learning.

6.1.3 Organising

Van Deventer and Kruger (2010:109) defined organising as a ‘process of establishing a structure that will facilitate the effective teamwork of teachers in order to achieve organisational goals and objectives. In most recent literature studies focused on school management and leaders and the role of the ML, in agreement with van Deventer and Kruger (2010), Tapala, Fuller and Mentz, (2021:5) maintained that organising involves developing actions or mechanism that will contribute effectively to the realisation of the school’s outcomes. Therefore, the MLs cannot realize the set results in their various departments without understanding and mastering the management papers which includes organising, delegation and coordination. Tapala et al. (2021) concluded that in the process of organising of teaching and learning activities, the ML has to clarify the roles, responsibilities and procedures teachers must follow, use appropriate channels of communication, evenly distribute teaching and learning resources to teachers, systematically team them up and hold them accountable.

6.1.4 Co- and Extra – curricular Role

Tapala and associates’ (2021) systematic review of several research articles examining perceptions of MLs on the curriculum leadership roles argued that apart from being in charge of the learning areas/subjects as middle leaders by executing some administrative papers, such as goal setting, planning, recording and reporting on matters related to their subjects, the ML is expected to take part in or oversee sporting and cultural activities. In their quest of improving the culture of learning and teaching, the MLs are also expected to participate in various committees, organise educational excursion, and supervise cleaning around the school. By getting involve in extra- and co-curricular activities, the departmental heads as MLs working in partnership with teachers are actually assisting learners to develop holistically (Tapala, et al., 2021).

7 From outside the school

Middle leaders have been shown to be influenced by a variety of external factors, forcing them to adapt to a setting that promotes more managerial and competitive approaches. There are a lot of factors that have caused uncertainty and a demand for professional growth and training, including mandatory staff appraisals, curriculum modifications, DBE, and the creation of the inspection framework. Sometimes it’s unclear if head teachers completely understood or agreed with these goals (Metcalf and Russell 1997). According to Adey (2000), the TTA standards for subject leaders, which were created in 1998, were a significant step in defining the duties and responsibilities of the subject leader in both primary and secondary schools. However, he contends that they were in advance of middle managers’ ideas and methods in the late 1990s. Bell (1996) lays out the formal policy requirements for topic leaders, ranging from managers to informal subject specialists. According to Metcalfe and Russell (1997, pp. 5–6), intermediate leaders are expected to function in a setting of “relaxed academic federalism” rather than “running a tight ship” as a line manager in a hierarchical organization, where monitoring is viewed as a quality control issue. Though they differ in nature, such as in the Netherlands, external rules are likewise a significant effect in other jurisdictions (Witziers et al. 1999). The culture of cooperation and camaraderie that characterizes primary schools is not adequately included in national curriculum and inspection requirements, claim Fletcher and Bell (1999). District advisers are valuable information sources for some areas, including as resources, curriculum, and professional development, and parents are thought to have some effect over learner discipline issues (Wise 2001).

8 Effective Middle Leadership practices and most relevant evidence enabled

Effective middle leaders (MLs) possess specialized pedagogical content knowledge to improve teaching and learning and gain the respect and allegiance of teachers involved in such improvement efforts. In many secondary schools, departments and their MLs make critical decisions about the curriculum, teaching methods, and evaluation methods. Teachers often perceive their principals' and deputy principals' lack of experience and subject-related expertise as isolating them from teachers. However, academically-based resistance to MLs is absent from their relationships with these leading professionals. According to Leithwood's (2016) work, MLs bring different perceptions to school decisions due to their subject or discipline specializations, giving heads a type of expertise and legitimacy that extends beyond the school. He further contend that the longer tenure of MLs facilitates the development of trusting relationships between teachers and MLs, contributing to school improvement. Departmental heads also serve as sources of improvement initiatives, as secondary subject-matter teachers are often members of informal networks across schools and districts and belong to professional subject associations, providing their own professional development opportunities (Bush et al. 2009, 2010, Naidu et al. 2012; Mestry & Pillay, 2013; Naiker et al., 2013; Grootenboer, 2018). This allows new ideas in the subject field and teaching methods to seep into the department, bypassing the professional development initiatives of either the school or the district. Drawing from numerous studies carried out in the United Kingdom (e.g. Early & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989; Harris, Jamieson & Russ, 1995; Bennett, Newton, Wise, Wood & Economou, 2003; Jarvis, 2008), South Africa (e.g. Bush et al. 2009, 2010, Naidu et al. 2012; Mestry & Pillay, 2013; Naiker et al., 2013), Australia and New Zealand (Grootenboer, 2018), and the United States of America (e.g. Hord & Murphy, 1985), effective middle leadership approaches are summarized in Table 4.1 in this section of the study review. The following table offers more comprehensive proof of middle leadership strategies that have been found to be effective across over 30 empirical studies that are pertinent to the review. Perhaps more significantly, Leithwood's (2012, 2016) study in Ontario found a lot of data on middle leadership that works. Other resources for controlling teaching and learning in South African schools were found by Bush et al. (2009) in the provinces of Mpumalanga and Limpopo.

Table 8.1 Conceptualisation of Effective Middle Leadership Practices (Adopted from Bush et al. 2009, 2010; also see Leithwood, 2012, 2016)

Setting directions	Middle leadership practices
Building a departmental shared vision	The department's vision is a shared goal that is communicated through professional conversations, aiming to set high standards and expectations. It develops and implements shared values with staff, collaborates with colleagues to agree on policies and practices, and recognizes the importance of the discipline's relevance to learners' lives. This vision is shaped by ongoing professional discussions and collaboration.
Identifies short-term objectives	Sets targets for learner achievement in collaboration with department colleagues
Creates high performance expectations	MLs prioritizes improving teaching and learning for all learners, collaborates with teachers to set performance appraisal goals, and provides constant pressure for change and improvement in learner outcomes. They also consider intellectual and social development as a prime concern for learners and their learning.
Communicates the organization's vision and goals	MLs' role also involves assisting teachers in understanding how their classroom work aligns with department and school goals, effectively communicating, connecting departmental objectives to school goals, and serving as a communication liaison, fostering communication from senior school leaders and department staff.
<i>Building Relationships and Developing People</i>	
Provides support and demonstrates consideration	MLs collaborates with staff to execute departmental agreed-upon actions.
Stimulates professional growth	The role involves supporting staff in various professional learning opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge, helping them identify their strengths and weaknesses, and mentoring them to encourage professional growth and development.
Models values and practices	Models what it means to be an "expert practitioner," a successful teacher who is up-to-date with developments in the disciplinary fields; Models professional, collegial, and cooperative ways of working; Models the importance of continuous professional learning
Builds trusting relationships	Collaborates with others on department and school matters; MLs are viewed as democratic and empowering

<i>Developing the Organization</i>	
Builds collaborative cultures and distributes leadership	The leader fosters a culture of improvement, encourages staff to change practices, is highly organized, collaborates, sets regular meetings to achieve teaching and learning goals, exemplifies a caring leadership style, and encourages the sharing of best practices, all of which contribute to a more effective and efficient work environment.
Structures the organization to facilitate collaboration	The individual actively participates in collaborative decision-making within the school community, promotes the sharing of effective practices and resources.
Builds productive relations with families and communities	Deals with learners who flout school rules and contacts parents because of this
Connects the department to its wider environment	The individual negotiates with colleagues, acts as a strong advocate for the department, and connects with external experts to support its work. They play a crucial role in the school's development and communicate local school and district initiatives to the community. They are well-connected and politically astute.
Is strongly involved in own professional development	Participates in and contributes to professional development across school and with professional associations
Maintains a safe and healthy environment	The role involves managing learner discipline, resolving department conflicts efficiently, meeting personal and social needs of learners for academic success, and providing a safe, supportive, and well-organized environment for teaching and learning.
Allocates resources in support of school vision and goals	The MLs coordinates administrative tasks and develops centralized management systems. They manage resources equitably, enhancing the department and learners. They ensure optimal teaching and learning processes, align the budget with teaching goals, provide staff with equitable access to resources, and vary class assignments to improve teacher practices. They also select appropriate texts for class use.
Develops and uses department policies to help ensure high standards of practice	Assuring high practice standards, sensitivity to flexibility in policy application, and facilitating the creation, communication, and implementation of clear policies and procedures, the individual works in conjunction with senior school leaders and department members to produce department policies.
<i>Improving the Instructional Program</i>	
Staffs the instructional program	Working with top management, she makes sure that qualified teachers are hired and that staffing shortages are promptly resolved; she also inboards new employees, mentors them, and keeps an eye on their training.

Monitors learner learning and improvement progress	Creates efficient and methodical procedures for assessing department and teacher performance while tracking learner growth; data is gathered in a number of ways, including by asking learners for their opinions.
	Helps teachers apply what they have learned in professional development to their classrooms; ensures that learners receive high-quality feedback; monitors the use and caliber of instructional materials; assists staff in interpreting assessment results and modifying instruction accordingly; ensures prompt and efficient management of learner discipline.
Buffers staff from distractions to their work	Defends colleagues against senior-management prejudices and policies; protects teachers from erosion of instructional time
Stays grounded in classroom teaching	Keeps up with the latest developments and initiatives in their profession; Keeps improving their own teaching abilities in the classroom;
Provides teaching resources	Promotes the implementation of department lesson plans; develops action plans and work schemes to promote efficient classroom practices.
<i>Securing Accountability</i>	
Builds staff members sense of internal accountability	Insists on improved learner learning as the main priority of the department
Meets the demands for external accountability	Participates in departmental policy development that aligns with school objectives; translates senior staff perspectives and policies into individual classrooms; communicates with and gathers data from other key areas of the school and represents departmental viewpoints to senior administrators; and supports the creation and execution of district and local curriculum improvement initiatives.
<i>Personal Leadership Resources</i>	
Cognitive	Possessing a broad range of educational topic knowledge, adopting a whole-school view on duties and using systems thinking, and being meticulous and well-organized
Social	Builds positive connections with parents, community members, and other department members; MLs are inclusive while interacting with staff and learners.
Psychological	Shows dedication, enthusiasm, and commitment to teaching, inspiring others around them (e.g., by working harder than anyone else in the department); MLs are adaptable, receptive to new ideas and suggestions from others and treat coworkers with care and consideration.

9 An empirical viewpoint on the difficulties encountered while moving from subject teaching to middle leadership is presented in the paper.

The transition from subject teaching to middle leading role in primary schools is a complex process that involves various challenges. This further creates challenges in the MTL in primary school. One of the main challenges is the change in relationships between teachers and their colleagues. Research studies have shown that MLs experience changes in their interactions with teaching colleagues, parents, and learners, as well as feeling that their qualifications, background, and ability to lead are questioned by fellow teachers. This suggests that when teachers are promoted to the ML role, their relationships with subject colleagues are affected negatively. Another challenge is the lack of role clarity. For example, New Zealand studies have found that MLs realize that their role is bigger than they had anticipated, and vice-principals still experience surprises during their first year in their management role. In Australia, Davidson (2016) found that new principals were overwhelmed when they realized the extent of their new responsibilities. Heavy workloads and time constraints also pose a challenge for MLs, as they are still allocated the same amount of time for their teaching, management, and leadership duties as teachers. A lack of management and leadership skills has been found in other research. High school departmental chairs in the US were not well prepared for instructional supervision, while Australian studies found that the development of these skills did not take place in a formalized manner. Some MLs learned on the job, using what they had learned from their role models and mentors, while others developed an understanding of the role through personal experience. In Hong Kong, there were insufficient training opportunities for middle leaders in primary schools, leading to a strong demand for training on interpersonal skills, crisis and resource management, and an understanding of education rules in the CPD curriculum. In Tanzania, Urrio (2012) found that MLs lacked the ability to influence the CPD of teachers and were unable to conduct classroom observations and motivate teachers due to a lack of preparation for the ML role. Kenyan studies have found that MLs are only inducted in information and communication technology skills, and professional training is offered through consultative meetings when necessary. South African studies have also revealed little or no induction for newly appointed MLs, and some MLs do not have the subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, or the credibility to lead subjects under their supervision. Despite these challenges, few South African studies have examined the challenges experienced by MLs in their transitioning to the ML role. This study aimed to focus specifically on the leadership role of middle leaders in the MTL.

10 Methodology

This qualitative study's main goal was to investigate the function of MLs in the MTL by using case studies of management, leadership, and classroom exercises in two particular primary schools. The reason this study concentrated on these subjects is that they offer a solid basis for all other subjects taught in education schools. The study used a snapshot technique to determine middle leadership and leadership characteristics at the time of data collection. The following questions are the focus of the investigation.

- What is the contribution of MLs on learner achievement in primary schools?
- How do MLs view their roles as potential drivers of change in primary schools and in education? What challenges do middle leaders face in providing the necessary leadership to their subject departments and to the school?
- What is it that MLs do to successfully provide the necessary leadership to their departments and their schools?
- What necessary working conditions that enable such significant leadership to their departments and schools?

The study collects data from two sources in order to answer the research questions. Analyzing the body of research on journals, books, and other secondary sources of information found through searches on Google Scholar, ERIC, Google Search, Researchgate, and ProQuest was the initial technique of gathering data. The second approach comprises four distinct tactics that were utilized to gather data for this investigation:

- Interviews with MLs to find out how they see their role in primary schools, how they lead and manage teaching and learning, and whether or not they take on MTL;
- Interviews with MLs for Languages, Mathematics, and Social Sciences to find out how they view learner outcomes in their respective learning areas and to evaluate their management and leadership practices.
- The purpose of the interviews was to determine whether and how these middle managers, who have a clear responsibility to lead their learning areas or phases, did so;
- To gather non-participant observation of staffroom practices to gather snapshot evidence of how instructions are given; and to find out what MLs thought about managing and leading their learning subjects.

Semi-structured interviews that the author conducted with MLs from a purposeful sample of two chosen primary schools served as the second source of data. In order to allow for comparisons between study locations and to give ample room for context-based factors, all of the interviews were semi-structured, recorded and verbatim. Participant and school sampling was connected to the objectives of a broader PhD study.

11 Ethical Considerations

The author adhered to ethical guidelines, viewing qualitative inquiry as a moral inquiry. As part of a larger PhD study, permission from the GDE was granted, and teachers were informed of their rights, aims, purpose, and confidentiality, allowing for their pulling out at any time (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

12 Data Collection and Analysis

Taking a critical theoretical stance, this qualitative study employed the Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) Method (Merriam, 2009; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). The six steps were non-linear, recursive, and gave reflexivity precedence over process. Through in-depth interviews, eleven themes were identified: sense of purpose, learner achievement, planning departmental activities, monitoring curriculum coverage, administrative support, the management of teaching and learning, school management teams, professional development, adaptability, professional identity, work intensification (work overload). The chaotic, time-consuming, and unclear data analysis underscored the significance of interpretation and reflexivity in qualitative research.

13 Trustworthiness and Credibility

The author gave a thorough account of the perspectives of the participants in the analysis of the research data, and peer member check was utilized to confirm that the data transcription was accurate and in line with the study's goals and research question (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

14 Assumptions of the study

According to earlier study, the researcher thought that participants were open and truthful in their survey responses since their privacy was protected and they were aware of the research questions before answering (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

15 Findings

These empirical findings are present based on the research questions outlined above.

The case studies identified several key factors.

Three key factors in effective middle leadership include being open, consultative, and collaborative, effective communication and diplomacy, and knowing, developing, and building a team. These behaviours and characteristics are reflected in existing literature on effective middle leadership. Further exploration of these factors is provided.

The importance of communication and diplomacy.

When discussing particular MLs (5), this factor was mentioned in 15 interviews; when discussing good middle leadership generally, it was mentioned in 12. This factor's initial dimension is the effectiveness of a ML's communication. One teacher clarified that effective communication was essential to a team's comprehension of the reasoning behind daily choices:

*"When your team supports you and understands that you are doing for a specific reason, you may defend the changes or actions you take by providing evidence."*ML3

At the same time, a ML at another school described how, in their opinion, good communication is essential to building vision and purpose:

*"I believe that having the ability to remind people of the reason we are doing this—for the learners—is important. Thus, I believe you need to communicate that feeling of purpose, and I hope that our department is focused on providing our learners with exceptional results as a team."*ML5

The research participants thought that MLs communicated well in a certain style, which is reflected in the second component of this quality, diplomacy. According to one ML, it's the capacity to engage in challenging dialogue with others without making them feel uncomfortable. Teachers and MLs alike emphasized in several interviews that a ML's diplomatic skills were essential for tasks like providing criticism, managing up, and monitoring performance.

The focus on understanding, developing, and building a team

When thinking about particular MLs, fifteen interviewees mentioned this aspect, and when thinking about good middle leadership in general, twelve mentioned it. The first component of this factor focuses on how well MLs know their team, both in terms of their strengths and abilities and any challenges they may be facing both within and outside of the classroom. According to one middle leader, understanding their team

is essential to effectively allocating personnel and making sure the department utilizes its people resources to the fullest:

*“To get the most out of each team member, I believe it’s important to get to know them, understand their strengths and shortcomings, and be able to help them grow. You should also know who is most suited for what work.”*ML4

Another ML, meanwhile, said that a crucial aspect of their efficacy was their capacity to offer their team members encouragement, support, and challenge at the appropriate moments, which depends on being observant and cognizant of their emotions:

*“Knowing when to go and offer assistance to someone who is under a lot of stress or when someone is feeling unmotivated and that you need to motivate them in some way. Giving someone responsibility might also help them feel stretched and pushed if they are feeling a little complacent. Therefore, I believe that one of my assets is my ability to comprehend people and how they function.”*ML2

As part of their succession planning, some deputy principals expressed the second facet of this factor. They believed that effective MLs build their team. Effective MLs are in charge of helping aspirational teachers advance into intermediate and deputy principalship positions in this regard. One way they achieve this is by assigning tasks to others and ensuring that departmental teachers don’t become set in their ways. A successful ML fosters a feeling of teamwork within their department, as the last component of this characteristic illustrates. According to a ML’s remarks:

*“That’s about being the middle leader; they are a really powerful team that sits in that office, eats together, works together, and plans together.”*ML1

According to a teacher at a separate school, their middle leader has created a cohesive team by carefully selecting new hires who share their values and desire to work with the group. A department’s connection with the larger school may suffer if this team-building activity is not executed well, according to one middle leader. According to the interviews, the best MLs are able to assemble a team in a way that encourages strong collegiate ties inside their department without impairing their capacity to work with other departments and lead up.

Being open, consultative, and collaborative is essential for success.

When discussing what made certain MLs effective, all fifteen interviewees mentioned this factor; when discussing effective middle leadership generally, eleven of them mentioned it as well. According to the interviewees, this component has three primary aspects. The first point made by teachers was that good MLs make themselves accessible to other employees, especially those on their team.

*“Even when they are facing that direction, responding to emails in a morning, they are quite willing to turn the chair around for everybody that enters.”*ML4

Second, respondents claimed that when making choices, successful MLs confer with their team. When we asked teachers how their department handled problems and how the vision was established, they frequently brought up this behaviour. As one teacher put it:

“They take your suggestions into consideration and debate them with you if you think something is amiss. You always feel like you’re being consulted. They are absolutely personable enough for you to truly voice your concerns. After we talk about it and decide whether it would help the department or, as I mentioned before, the vision or objectives, we put those changes into action...” ML1

Additionally, some of our respondents described how successful MLs engage with staff and learners to pinpoint problems in their department. According to one ML, this consultation might include both highly formalized techniques and casual, daily talks:

“I’m interested in learning how the faculty and learners in my department feel. Whether it’s a yearly survey or a formal one, I’ll poll teachers and learners to gather their opinions on how things are doing.” ML2

Lastly, the teachers emphasized the cooperative working approach of successful MLs. This was most frequently mentioned in reference to how successful MLs collaborate with colleagues in different departments to exchange resources, systems, and knowledge about the learners they instruct. One ML clarified:

“I’ve reached the point where I’m sharing that with other department heads that I believe might find it useful. Approximately five or six times a week, someone knocks on my door and asks, “Please, could you help?” It’s extremely pleasant since we all deal with the same kids.” ML5

The focus on the organization, planning, and resources of a project

The organization, planning, and resources collection of behaviours and traits comprise the fourth most commonly mentioned aspect, which is procedures and systems.

Procedures and systems are essential components of any organization.

The study focuses on the importance of good organizational skills and time management in effective middle leadership. It highlights the need for good data management systems, as well as the introduction of automated systems for data analysis within the department. This approach reduces staff workload and ensures uniform data collection for analysis. The interviews reveal that effective MLs must also have strong data management systems to effectively manage their resources. This method of data management, according to a top leader at another school, is essential for enabling MLs to “*know what they’ve got to do for very specific learner.*” Second, all MLs and deputy principal emphasized how crucial it is to have protocols in place for monitoring daily operations inside the department and holding employees accountable. According to another ML:

“The vision is important, but it requires people to do important tasks at the right time, such as planning lessons, delivering them within a structured manner, following behavioural systems, and following teaching methodologies. It is also crucial to ensure that people are marking books and following routines that are vital to the school’s operation.” ML2

The interviews highlighted the ML’s systems and procedures, which free up time for department teachers to focus on learner support, as demonstrated by a teacher who explained how the leader coordinated a coursework day:

“Learners were able to concentrate on their tests with little to no concern because the middle leader planned a day of assignments. Because of the event’s efficiency and organization, everyone could come without hesitation. As a result, pupils were able to concentrate on their academics without interruptions.”ML1

Both specific and abstract concepts of effective middle leadership.

The study discovered no consistent discrepancies between the abstract and particular ideas of an effective ML held by respondents. This suggests that the variables that are seen to be important for effective middle leadership in general are the same as those that are thought to be important for the MLs in our sample.

Based on their abstract or particular ideas, the study sought to ascertain if teachers and MLs recognized distinct factors of successful middle leadership. In both abstract and concrete conceptions of a successful middle leader, four criteria were most commonly found. Certain characteristics, including being results-driven and possessing an inspiring personality, were more likely to be found in abstract concepts. Nonetheless, there were no discernible distinctions between the general and particular ideas of a successful ML. The results imply that forward-thinking, strategic, and professionally knowledgeable MLs are essential.

Variation by role

The study reveals that teachers perceive effective multilingual MLs as capable delegators, while deputy principals view them as results-driven. MLs are more likely to identify factors that hinder and support their effectiveness. Two main differences emerged: deputy principals are more likely to define effective MLs as results-driven, while teachers are more likely to recognize the delegating role of MLs as significant to their effectiveness. These differences may be attributed to deputy principals’ ultimate responsibility for their school’s results and teachers’ desire for professional autonomy. However, most of these factors were identified by only one or two interviews with deputy principals and one or none of the interviews with teachers. This suggests that teachers and deputy principals may not be as aware of these barriers and supports as they could be.

The variation in performance within a department is significant.

According to the study, the most skilled MLs are more likely to be creative, keep up with changes in research and policy, and frequently try novel teaching strategies using research findings. The study divided case studies evenly between schools with a ML with relatively high departmental performance and those drawn from a random sample of remaining MLs. Despite the limitations in identifying high performing and random sample MLs, the study observed some differences in the propensity with which themes emerged between the two types of case studies. The greatest differences related to being professionally informed (in 9 interviews from the high performing sample and 1 interview from the random sample) and being bold, innovative, and resourceful (in 8 interviews from the high performing sample and 2 interview from the random sample). Professionally informed refers to the way MLs keep up with research and policy, such as changes to accountability measures, pedagogical developments, and academic research in their field. Being bold, innovative, and resourceful covers a range of activities, from trailing new teaching methods to seeking grant funding to support extra-curricular opportunities. A deputy principal highlighted how being professionally informed can provide a foundation for being bold and innovative. While these dimensions of middle leadership provide the biggest distinction between high performing MLs and those sampled

randomly, they cannot infer that they are necessary features of being an effective ML. Rather, being professionally informed and bold, innovative, and resourceful appeared to be more commonplace among the higher performing MLs in the dataset.

The results from Stage 1 and Stage 2 have been combined

By identifying team-level factors as well as organizational and management characteristics as relevant in interviews with teachers, middle leaders, and deputy principals, the second stage of the research supports the first stage. Case studies provide further light on these traits and behaviours; team dynamics, communication, and interpersonal interactions seem to be the most crucial components. The case studies back up these conclusions, which offer insightful information on management and organizational tactics. The key to success is *being open, consultative, and collaborative, effectively communicating, being diplomatic, and knowing how to build and develop a team.*

The study reveals that the use of procedures and systems is the most significant factor in ‘organisation, planning and resources’. It also highlights additional factors not identified in Stage 1, such as the importance of effective communication and collaboration among team members. The study identifies several factors that make an effective ML: results-driven, motivating, forward-looking, strategic, professionally informed, supportive, and embedded in professional networks. However, there is variation depending on the role of the leader. Teachers prioritize delegation, while deputy principals emphasize results-drivenness. High-performing department leaders are more likely to be professionally informed, bold, innovative, and resourceful. The case studies highlight the importance of these factors in leadership roles: sense of purpose, learner achievement, planning departmental activities, monitoring curriculum coverage, administrative support, the management of teaching and learning, school management teams, professional development, adaptability, professional identity and work intensification (work overload).

16 The individual narratives of challenges faced by MLs in their middle leading appointments.

A negative shift in the attitudes and behaviors of educators

The study found that the pessimistic views of previous colleagues (teachers) who appeared to doubt their legitimacy had a significant impact on MLs who had been internally promoted, whether to a post that was temporarily filled or not. Former peers also appear to be impacted by the ending stage, in addition to those who have been promoted. This was clear from what some of the internally chosen MLs said (quoted verbatim):

“Despite the fact that others applied, I was hired. They apply for the job because they want the money, not because they know the job. If you get hired, people will begin to despise you. It’s evident that people despise you due to your employment” (ML 1).

“I was the only applicant from my school to be shortlisted for the interview, despite the fact that several of us applied when the position was posted. Tension suddenly arose, especially among individuals who believed they were more competent than I was and perhaps even more skilled than me in speaking and presenting” (ML 2).

This is a direct comment from a participant who was internally appointed to the position where an acting ML had been in place:

“My promotion was difficult, particularly considering one of my coworkers was performing in the role I now hold. Although she was acting as a ML, I felt I was a good fit based on the advertising. It wasn’t simple, and she was a little upset with me because of that bad influence, but in the end, there were occasionally submission delays.” ML1

On the other hand, the viewpoint of a ML who had been appointed from outside the company indicated that she felt lonely and irritated. The final phase of transition, where she had to leave behind her former life of working in the staffroom with instructors, appeared to be difficult for the participant. It’s not as good as I expected, she said, adding that: *“all I wanted was to be part of management. My greatest difficulty is that I am no longer socially connected. I have a space of my own. It’s not as pleasant as I had imagined.” ML3*

Absence of leadership and management abilities

According to the majority of participants, they had not had the necessary training or leadership or management abilities. They appeared to be unsure of how to carry out their management and leadership responsibilities and to be in the neutral zone. They needed guidance as well. Below are quotes taken directly from certain participants’ comments:

“We require intensive training in time management and management abilities as MLs” (ML 2).

“If, like me, you are not trained, becoming the ML might be difficult. My lengthy tenure as a teacher was the only reason I was chosen. Managing people may be extremely difficult and unpleasant if you are not trained. How can I let them know?” ML 3.

Understanding micropolitics of education in primary school

When asked to describe their understanding of organisational politics and contrast it when they first became MLs. One ML reported that: *“At first, I did not think of it as something challenging as long as I understand my work. But as I got to sit in many of our meetings, I began to feel that there is more (micropolitics) than I thought. Being in that position is a different kind of a relationship you find yourself in. It can be frustrating because you don’t know what is happening. You can’t be prepared for that. Decisions are made for you and you are part of the challenge. In a school setting, its complex, you don’t have clear understanding what is being discussed.”* Another ML said:

“I thought I will be taught certain things. Nope! You keep guessing because micropolitics is not written down. No information about the structure. It’s not like you will see an organisational chart in the principals’ office or in boardroom, none. When you start working, one term will be enough to understand strength and weaknesses of people, who is bullying? Who does what? Then you can settle and do whatever is necessary. But it [micropolitics] changes your personality.” ML1

According to ML 4: *“the management of teaching and learning becomes challenging because you are not given any induction in terms multitasking between these roles. Teachers are angry and you are left behind with your teaching coverage. Everything becomes a challenge because there is too much workload for you with unproductive meeting and uncooperative teachers.”*

Insufficient expertise in the management of subjects

Additionally, several MLs said that they occasionally lacked the requisite topic expertise, which made it challenging for them to oversee the instruction and learning of other subjects. Although they did not always possess the necessary subject-matter expertise, these participants appeared to be in the neutral zone where they were supposed to observe other teachers' instruction. They also needed assistance linked to the issue.

According to some participants, *"the ML cannot even address the instructor about issues pertaining to learners' performance because he is more knowledgeable in certain topics but less so in others. It is challenging to help the educator because of this gap"* (ML4).

"The MLs are not being treated fairly. We are tasked with supervising even subjects that we don't understand. Since you cannot train a teacher in a subject you are ignorant about, I believe it to be unfair. To be able to assist instructors, each ML should be an expert in the disciplines they are tasked with overseeing; leading in areas you are not knowledgeable about undermines your confidence and is extremely aggravating" (ML 1).

Time restrictions and a heavy workload

The majority of participants said that their workload had increased since it was harder to focus on all of their responsibilities when they had to combine management and leadership responsibilities with their teaching job. They were promoted to the ML post and had to continue teaching, thus it seems that their old and new identities were just merged. The increased workload necessitated additional management skills assistance so that the recently hired MLs could devote equal time to both responsibilities. The following quotes some of their remarks in this respect:

"The amount of responsibility and workload has significantly grown. Additionally, the administration has grown as I am now responsible for overseeing the administration for every instructor in addition to myself. Since each ML has been assigned to a separate phase, I have now been a grade head" (ML 4).

"The burden has now grown. I handle other disciplines in addition to teaching, and the administrative workload is excessive" (ML 2).

Even individuals who claimed to have less teaching responsibilities nevertheless reported having more administrative responsibilities.

"Since I became a ML, my periods have decreased. You know, the department is to blame for the excessive amount of paperwork. Another thing I've noticed is how much marking there is. They present half-marked papers, which some teachers are unable to complete due to their lack of mathematical expertise. They assign me the task of fixing it as the ML" (ML 3).

"Class-related workloads have dropped, but management and administrative responsibilities have significantly grown as they now affect the entire department and take up my time with learners" (ML 4).

17 Conclusion

This paper was aimed at establishing how leaders of subjects can cultivate a positive culture of learning and teaching in the school. A number of relevant studies (e.g. DoE, 2000, 2002; Leithwood, et al., 2006, 2012, 2016; Robinson, et al., 2009; Bush et al., 2010; Mestry & Pillay, 2013; Naidu, et al. 2012; Naiker, et al.,

2013; Grootenboer, 2018; Tapala et al., 2021) related to the roles and responsibilities of MLs (also referred to as middle leaders) were reviewed and the author briefly discussed a number of these roles and responsibilities of the ML as leader of learning in the school in order to enhance the culture of learning and teaching. These roles and responsibilities includes but not limited to leading the curriculum implementation by means of instructional leadership, administrative papers, planning, organising, subject supervision or monitoring, professional development and administrative support of teachers, providing learning and teaching support material (LTSM) to teachers, intervening on learner poor performance, engaging stakeholders and getting involved in several committees (including the SMT/SLT) in order to influence decisions that support quality of teaching and learning in the school.

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