THE ROLE OF HEAD OF DEPARTMENT IN ENHANCING GRADE 12 LEARNERS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY IN VHURONGA 2 CIRCUIT IN VHEMBE DISTRICT OF LIMPOPO PROVINCE

by

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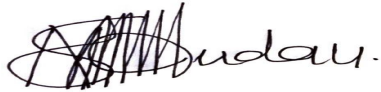
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DECLARATION

I, **Nthambeleni Salminah Mudau,** declare that:

**"The Role of Head of Department in Enhancing Grade 12 Learners'
Academic Performance: A Multiple Case Study in Vhuronga 2 Circuit in
Vhembe District of Limpopo Province"**

…is my own work and that all sources that I have consulted or quoted have been clearly
indicated and acknowledged by means of references.

09/03/2022

MUDAU NS   **Date**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The responsibilities of departmental heads in schools vary and encompass supporting the school managers at all costs. Many a time when the performance of Grade 12 leaners slump, the school managers are blamed because Grade 12 class remains the pride of any secondary school. The goal theory of leadership was identified and applied as the appropriate theory grounding the study. The interpretivist paradigm was placed at the center of this study. The researcher employed a multiple case study design in which several instrumental bounded cases were selected in order to develop a more in-depth understanding of the phenomena. The population of the study will comprise the heads of departments of secondary schools in Vhuronga 2 Circuit in Vhembe District. Purposive sampling will be used to select 12 HoDs from the four schools in the study area. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews, document analysis and observation schedules. Data will be analysed thematically. Findings will inform recommendations on the role of the heads of departments in enhancing the academic performance of learners.

Keywords: Role, head of department, enhancing, academic performance, enrichment programmes.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

SHDC	:	School Higher Degree Committee
DHs	:	Departmental Heads
DoE	:	Department of Education
PAM	:	Personnel Administrative Measures
RSA	:	Republic of South Africa
ELRC	:	Education Labour Relations Council
SGBs	:	School Governing Bodies
NPFTED	:	National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development
DAI	:	Development Appraisal Instrument
ISPF	:	Integrated Strategic Planning Framework
CAPS	:	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
FAL	:	First Additional Language
SMT	:	School Management Team
UNIVEN	:	University of Venda

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The advent of a democratic government in 1994 brought about change in the education system. The organogram of the school also changed. As a result, a school is managed by the school management team comprised of the principal, deputy principal, subject heads of department (HoDs) and master teachers (Ntsoane, 2017:22). The principal heads the school, whereas HoDs head their subject areas. Lewallen, Hunt, Potts-Datema, Zaza and Giles (2015:729) lament that the current demands for quality education are placing great pressure on schools to improve education service and delivery. It is on the basis of this demand that the role of the HoDs transcends a purely administrative function and becomes an all-inclusive task that focuses on, among other things, improving teaching and learning in classrooms and subsequently improving the academic performance of learners.

The government and parents expect educators to perform better at their present levels of teaching and learning. The whole issue of the performance of learners should be considered from the broad framework of inputs and outputs. Mullender-Wijnsma, Hartman, de Greeff, Bosker, Doolaard and Visscher (2015:365) state that the quality of educators, among other several factors, especially in relation to academic qualifications, may hamper or enhance the academic performance of learners. Thus, it becomes critical for the head of department to motivate educators to improve their professional qualifications for their own personal benefit as well as that of their learners. Highly qualified educators are inspired theoretically and practically to develop programmes for the enhancement of the academic performance of learners (Mestry, 2017:4).

In the drive to improve the performance of learners, especially in Grade 12 classes, the head of department must support educators through introducing many enrichment programmes for learners, which are conducted with the assistance of business and non-governmental organisations (Tsotetsi & Mahlomaholo, 2015:45).

This should take cognisance of the nature of the education system in South Africa, which is examination oriented (Ntsoane, 2017:34). This infers that the quality of education that is offered by any school is judged in terms of the number of learners who perform well in the national examinations (Duggan, Aisaka, Tabak, Smith, Erwin & Brownson, 2015:221).

Educators and the public in South Africa have often expressed concern regarding the low academic performance of learners in the national examinations. There is a strong understanding that the HoDs of schools have a great influence on the academic outcomes of learners. Cancedda, Farmer, Kerry, Nuthulaganti, Scott, Goosby and Binagwaho (2015:1840) note that in order to improve the academic performance of learners, the head of department should start by improving the general management of the department.

Stewart (2015:547) argues that it is imperative to set clear goals for the department and communicate such related targets to learners. In this case, the HoDs would also be providing the needed support for the achievement of the broad vision of the school through offering instructional leadership in the areas of their operational jurisdictions. This requires HoDs to provide the needed resources and guidance and be visible in all business transactions of the department that are critical for the academic performance of learners.

Stulac, Binagwaho, Tapela, Wagner, Muhimpundu, Ngabo, Nsanzimana, Kayonde, Bigirimana, Lessard and Lehmann (2015:405) ascertain that the quality of the departmental leadership makes the difference between the success and failure of a school. Kaur, Noman and Awang-Hashim (2016: 478) contend that in highly effective schools, as well as schools that have reversed a trend of poor performance and declining achievement, it is the HoDs who set the pace by leading and motivating learners and staff to perform to their best. This shows that schools make a great difference in the academic performance of learners.

Mincu (2015:253) suggests that school factors that the HoDs ought to address, as they exert an influence on the behaviour of learners and their academic achievement, include, among other things, the amount of teaching load and degree

of curriculum coverage, the extent and nature of the constitution of ability groupings, the expectations and attitudes of educators, styles of teaching and classroom management, class size, patterns of discipline and characteristics of school climate. According to Baingana, al'Absi, Becker and Pringle (2015:172), indicate that the HoDs are the leaders of departments, the pivots around which many aspects of the department revolve, and the persons in charge of every detail in the running of the departments – be it administrative or academic. Similarly, Shidhaye, Shrivastava, Murhar, Samudre, Ahuja, Ramaswamy and Patel (2016:13) present the HoDs as individuals that should be involved in the making of most decisions in the running of the school. It is, therefore, important that the HoDs should be astute leaders, thinkers and decision-makers. Mokgohlwe (2016:32) states that subtle HoDs are bound to use teamwork as a working strategy and would constitute committees and smaller groups of members of staff to establish appropriate teaching and learning approaches.

Richter, Daelmans, Lombardi, Heymann, Boo, Behrman, Lu, Lucas, Perez-Escamilla, Dua and Bhutta, (2017:103) observe that schools with HoDs that are not proud of their schools do not strive to enhance the academic performance of their learners. Instead, they attribute the poor standards of performance to such reasons as lack of preparation of educators, absenteeism and drunkenness. Therefore, Ovadia (2016:20) avers that HoDs that are keen to raise the academic performance of learners will work tirelessly to resolve the negative impacts of inadequate competencies of educators and the adoption of ineffective instructional strategies.

It is important to note that previous scholars have contributed to the extant academic knowledge with regard to the pivotal role of HoDs in the affluence and success of academic institutions. However, there is still a need to explore and contribute to the body of knowledge on the role that the HoDs play, specifically in enhancing the academic performance of Grade 12 learners in rural-based secondary schools. It is, therefore, against this background that this study investigates the role of HoDs in enhancing Grade 12 learners' performance in Vhuronga 2 Circuit, Vhembe District. Consequently, this background informs the next step on the statement of the problem.

1.2   STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Heads of department have a crucial role to play in enhancing the academic performance of Grade 12 learners in rural secondary schools. The low academic performance in these schools indicates considerable academic underachievement among learners (Kaur et al., 2016:478). Tavares (2015:1) explains that it is not apartheid or a lack of money or segregated educational institutions that fail South African learners. The lack of pedagogic content knowledge among teachers has, consequently, led to poor academic achievement of learners (Li, Hallinger & Ko, 2016:79). Therefore, the role of HoDs as members of the school management is paramount in enhancing the academic performance of learners.

HoDs, like principals, cannot exercise their instructional leadership role without delegating responsibilities. HoDs should work together with subject teachers to establish a culture of teaching and learning. The low academic performance of learners is usually characterised by a poor culture of teaching and learning (Hogue, Goss, Hollis & White, 2016:109; Macbeth, 2018:27). HoDs may be engaged in more paperwork than in instructional activities. Hence, they do not check whether teaching and learning programmes are in place to support learners. Kruger (2003:209) observes that HoDs are faced with the challenge of having to divide their time between instructional curriculum issues and non-teaching duties of administration. This shows that they sometimes abdicate some of their functions and services, which impacts negatively on the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. Some HoDs are also guilty of not inviting parents to participate in developing policies and assisting in decisions that would spur on learners (Bipath & Nkabinde, 2018:2). This calls for the role of HoDs to be that of mobilising stakeholder participation in schools to enhance learner academic performance (Darling-Hammond, Hyler & Gardner 2017:291). It is, therefore, against this backdrop that this study investigated the role of HoDs in enhancing the academic performance of Grade 12 learners in secondary schools.

1.3   AIM OF THE STUDY

The main aim of the study is to investigate the role of HoDs in enhancing the academic performance of Grade 12 learners in Vhuronga 2 Circuit in Vhembe District. The objectives of the study are:

- To examine the functions of the head of departments in enhancing the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.
- To explore factors that contribute to improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.
- To establish strategies that can be used to assist HoDs to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

1.4   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question is: What role can be played by HoDs to enhance the academic performance of Grade 12 learners? The following research questions have been formulated for this study:

- What are the functions of the heads of department in enhancing the academic performance of Grade 12 learners?
- What are the factors that contribute to improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners?
- Which strategies can be used to assist HoDs to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners?

1.5   PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW

A preliminary literature review is concerned with a systematic search and consultation of the literature that is related to the area under investigation. Studies have been conducted in the same field of study, but with a focus on challenges faced by educators in pedagogic content knowledge (Kaur et al., 2016:479). Similarly, Nawelwa, Sichinsambwe and Mwanza (2015:716) have interrogated the issue of the contribution of HoDs on the effective functioning of schools. However, this literature review outlines different views raised by academics and scholars in relation to this study on the role of HoDs in enhancing the academic performance of learners.

1.5.1 The Functions of HoDs in Enhancing Academic Performance of Learners

Bloom, Lemos, Sadun and Van Reenen (2015:647) suggest that planning is the cornerstone of any improvement initiatives within an educational institution. For HoDs to enhance the academic performance of learners, it is crucial to have a thorough plan to work towards achieving, where high standards and excellence are the norm. It is argued, however, that planning cannot be done in a haphazard manner. Nawelwa et al. (2015:716) observe that planning for enhanced academic performances is an activity that involves strategic initiatives that will lead the school towards action-oriented goals. In this sense, it becomes the instructional role of the HoDs to engage in curriculum management specifically designed to improve learner academic performances.

1.5.2 Improving School Resources

Kamps, Wills, Dawson-Bannister, Heitzman-Powell, Kottwitz, Hansen and Fleming, (2015:134) elucidate that a decline in the quality of education is reflected by increased instances of class repetition and higher dropout rates in secondary schools. Li et al. (2016:79) posit that these problems are due to a shortage of qualified educators, inadequate inspectorate services, overcrowding .and a lack of educational facilities and equipment. Gull and Shehzad (2015:246) maintain that the problems of inadequate resources and services are also experienced in South Africa. This implies that the mitigation of such problems is likely to improve the quality of education. Therefore, HoDs have to facilitate an improvement in the performance of learners through helping with the allocation of resources such as finance, human resource, teaching materials and adequate teaching time (Gull & Shehzad, 2015:246).

1.5.3 Creating a Demand System

Heads of department and educators should create a demand system to ensure excellent work and learner discipline. Educators influence learning by ensuring that the school curriculum is broad and balanced and by providing continuity and

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progression of learning (Swain-Bradway, Pinkney & Flannery, 2015:247). An educator's wholehearted involvement at work enhances curriculum change and effective teaching and it is a prerequisite for subject knowledge to be translated into learning programmes that are tailored to the needs of learners (Ryan, Kuusinen & Bedoya-Skoog, 2015:147).

1.5.4 Sound Teaching Methodologies

Lewis, Mitchell, Bruntmeyer and Sugai (2016:703) argue that the actions of educators that tend to increase and reward learner participation are more likely to give learners the opportunity to become influential in the lesson, and subsequently to improve learner performance. It becomes necessary, therefore, for HoDs to be vigilant in supporting educators to adopt diverse teaching methodologies to secure best classroom practices so that learner performance may improve.

1.5.5 School Discipline

Shaw, Gomes, Polotskaia and Jankowska (2015:115) view discipline as a skill that is taught and learned like any other skill. It is, however, important to reconcile the values of the parents and those of the school to avoid conflict in the adopted system of discipline.   In the current climate of transformation, it becomes important for HoDs to acknowledge that learners are more outspoken, are aware of their rights and easily query the decisions of their educators (Swain-Bradway et al., 2015:247). Healthy discipline in a school is, thus, a prerequisite for the success of curriculum implementation and extracurricular programmes to enhance the academic performance of learners.

1.5.6 Factors that Hinder Academic Performance of Learners

In order for learners to perform well academically, teaching and learning challenges need to be identified and addressed. The limitations that may negatively affect learner academic performance must be considered by the HoDs (Schonfeld, Adams, Fredstrom, Weissberg, Gilman, Voyce, Tomlin & Speese-Linehan, 2015:406).

1.5.6.1   Lack of goals

Ogbeiwi (2018:2) indicates that goals are generalised, broad and usually formulated over a long period. HoDs should set clear goals to achieve high learner academic performance. Without concrete and specific goals, learners may not realise their full academic potential (Li et al., 2016:79). The determination of goals is part of the planning tasks of the heads of department. Grobler (2015:343) states that when the planning task is evaluated, it is necessary that there should be clearly delineated goals with which to carry out such an evaluation.

1.5.6.2   Lack of effective institutional policies

Goodman-Scott, Betters-Bubon and Donohue (2015:57) describe school policy as a statement of purpose and a set of guidelines for achieving that purpose.   It provides a framework for the operation of the school or programme.   Grobler, Moloi and Thakhordas (2017:336) acknowledge that there is a possibility of failure in learner academic achievement processes if policies to promote learner excellence are absent; hence, policies should be capable of securing positive changes.

1.5.6.3   Ineffective communication

Dietrichson, Bøg, Filges and Klint Jørgensen (2017:243) define communication as an activity that takes place when a message is transferred satisfactorily from one part of the system to another, so that it can be understood and acted upon as desired. Morse and Allensworth (2015:785) describe communication as sorting, selecting, forming and transmitting symbols between people to create meaning. Effective communication among stakeholders in schools is crucial in fostering healthy relationships and partnerships (Jooste, 2011:15). Ineffective communication of teachers with learners and other relevant stakeholders negates a healthy ethos where learning and teaching take priority.

1.5.6.4   Strategies to assist HoDs to improve their performance

This section presents the strategies that can be adopted to assist HoDs to improve their practices in the quest to improve the academic performance of learners in schools.   Stulac et al. (2015:405) ascertain that the quality of the departmental leadership makes the difference between the success and failure of a school. Kaur et al. (2016:478) contend that in highly effective schools, as well as schools that

have reversed a trend of poor performance and declining achievement, it is the HoDs who set the pace by leading and motivating learners and staff to perform to their best.

The professional development of teachers is quite critical in helping HoDs to improve their performance in the departments that they head. Teachers need to be taught in such a way that they stay abreast of curriculum issues, managing teaching and learning as well as creating school-wide conditions for learning (Malatji, 2018:36). The launching of the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework (ISPF) for teacher education and development in South Africa in 2009 was intended to promote the development of teachers in their respective subject areas (Motshekga, 2009:7).

Stewart (2015:547) argues that it is imperative to set clear goals for the department and communicate such related targets to learners. In this case, HoDs would also be providing the needed support for the achievement of the broad vision of the school through offering instructional leadership in the areas of their operational jurisdictions. This calls upon HoDs to provide the needed resources and guidance and be visible in all business transactions of the department that are critical for the academic performance of learners.

Nomnian and Arphattananon (2018:51) maintain that setting goals should be about reconciling differences in the process of improving the academic performance of learners. The setting and prioritisation of goals helps HoDs to focus and provide room to maintain strengths and erase impediments in the quest to improve the academic performance of learners.

1.6   DEFINITION OF KEYWORDS

1.6.1 Head of Department (HoD)

Head of Department (HoD) is a structure in the school that is responsible for the proper running of the subject department or a phase in the case of a primary school. In this study, a department is made up of a subject head (HoD) and subject teachers. They are responsible for planning, organising, leading and supervising the

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departmental activities. The HoD manages departmental resources in such a way that the school functions efficiently and effectively (Siraj, Salam, Roslan, Hasan, Jin & Othman, 2014:19). In this study, the HoDs provided leadership to a team of subject teachers under their departments and ensures that an environment conducive to teaching and learning is created and maintained.

1.6.2 Learner Performance

Learner performance refers to the way in which learners deal with their academic studies and cope with or accomplish different tasks given to them by their educators. Hence, academic performance is the ability to study and remember facts when required in an assessment task. It is about the ability to communicate knowledge and demonstrate skills in a theoretical or practical way. It pertains to the extent to which learners, educators or the institution have achieved set educational goals (Msila, 2014:259).

Chikoko, Naicker and Mthiyane (2015:452) state that poor learner academic performance can be defined as the demonstrated ability of learners at school that is below the expected level for a given age, cognitive skill or schooling. In this study, poor performance means educational performance that is characterised by a persistent failure of learners to attain complete Grade 12 certificates.

1.6.3 Enrichment Programme

An enrichment programme provides learners with the chance to acquire mastery of standards at a deeper level than what is outlined in the required curriculum. The enrichment programme describes activities that schools provide to extend the education of learners. Enrichment programmes that are successful have the capacity to improve the life of learners at school, increase motivation, attainment and retention. These programmes serve as a positive response to the demands of higher education and employment organisations, which require a human resource that is flexible, resourceful and responsive (Siraj et al., 2014:19). In this study, enrichment programmes are concerned with systematic programmes that are

implemented to increase the knowledge and skills of learners to prepare them for further training and post school life.

1.6.4 Role

The role of HoDs refers to the functions and responsibilities that are accorded to the middle managers of a school to ensure the goals of a school are achieved (Bambi, 2014:21). A role is defined as a function or part played by an individual in a particular situation. In this study, a role relates to the responsibilities and functions performed by HoDs to deliver quality teaching to improve the academic performance of learners in schools.

1.6.5 Enhancing

Peters (2011:467) presents enhancing of the performance of learners as synonymous with improving their performance. It is a concept that expresses the intensity, increase or improvement of the quality, value or extent of something (Aspers & Corte, 2019:139).   In the context of this study, the concept of enhancing refers to the improvement of the academic performance of learners in schools.

1.7 RESEARCH PARADIGM, RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the research paradigm, research design and research methodology used in the study to investigate the role of HoDs in enhancing the academic performance of learners in schools. The methodology aspect will comprise discussions on data collection instruments, population, sampling and data analysis techniques. It also explains the piloting of the instruments to ensure the feasibility of the investigation.

1.7.1 Research Paradigm

A paradigm is the basic belief system or worldview that guides researchers to study, understand and report research (Maree, 2012:47). Wahyuni (2012:68) posits that

research paradigms are basic belief systems that guide the research endeavour. This study will use the interpretive research paradigm. Interpretivism holds the philosophical position that reality is constructed and resides in the existence of multiple worldviews that result from the interaction and communication among people (Wahyuni, 2012:68). Interpretivist researchers focus on the specific contexts of study to capture the lived experiences of practitioners. The emphasis is on the natural setting of the phenomenon of investigation for the purpose of understanding emerging meanings as shaped by the cultural, historical and social concerns of the participants (Chauvette, Schick-Makaroff & Molzahn, 2019:4).

1.7.1.1   Justification of the interpretivism paradigm

The interpretivist paradigm is appropriate for this study as it allows the researcher to perceive the world through the lens and experiences of the participants. This philosophical stance emphasises the essence of social interactions and engagement of people to uncover the salient cues, practices and opinions regarding the phenomena under investigation. Interpretivism enables the use of the various sources, methods and researcher for the purpose of triangulation (Thomas, Menon, Boruff, Rodriguez & Ahmed, 2014:3). It also allows for the generation of multiple layers of meanings from the subjective ways in which individuals view the world (Guetterman, Fetters & Creswell, 2015:218).

1.7 2   Research Approach

A qualitative research approach will be used in this study. Creswell (2014:13) avers that a qualitative approach is a strand of investigation that produces descriptive data. This information can either be written down or verbal statements obtained from participants based on their perceptions and experiences regarding the entity under study. Qualitative research is basically naturalistic and concerns data that is non-numerical. The purpose of this approach is mainly to explore and understand rather than manipulating and explaining factors or variables. It is interpretive and strives to reveal the process of development of the object of study and not the product or end result of research (Chauvette et al., 2019:4). According to Lichtman (2013:7), qualitative research is a method that is employed to gather, arrange and interpret information that is obtained from individuals. It normally pertains to the

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administration of in-depth interviews that are recorded in the process of the study (Nassaji, 2015:129). Qualitative research attempts to study entities in situ as the outcome is final, with no deliberate intention to predict the future. Similarly, Maree (2012:50) notes that qualitative research gives investigators the opportunity of knowing the participants as individuals, to experience their daily lives and view them in their natural situations. In this study, the qualitative approach will be employed to obtain the views of participants regarding the role of head of department in enhancing the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. The researcher will have a prolonged engagement with participants in schools to gather subjective data of interest in real settings.

1.7.3 Research Design

This study follows a multiple qualitative case study. It is a research design that utilises a concurrent strategy of enquiry. The purpose of a multiple case study is to understand a social or human problem through building a complex, holistic picture, in the form of words, reporting detailed views of informants emerging from a natural setting (Madigan, Cross, Smolkowski & Strycker, 2016:402). Maree (2012:70) states that a research design denotes a plan or strategy that is used in selecting participants, collecting data and analysing data in research. According to Morgan, Pullon, Macdonald, McKinlay and Gray (2017:1061), case study research involves an intensive examination of data in relationship to the specific context in which it occurs. Starman (2013:32) notes that a case can be a phenomenon, an individual, a group of people, an institution, an event, process or problem. In this study, the four selected schools and 12 teachers that comprise the group of participants form the multiple cases of interest in the study. This design presents facts in a narrative or verbal form. It is, therefore, suitable for this study as it is capable of providing an in-depth investigation into the quality of relationships, activities, situations or materials that are useful regarding the role of HoDs in enhancing the academic performance of learners.

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1.7.4   Research Methodology

Research methodology is described as a systematic manner of solving a problem or the science of studying the way in which research has to be conducted (Rajasekar, Philominathan & Chinnathambi, 2013:10). It entails the procedures that researchers engage in the process of explaining, describing and making predictions about a phenomenon. The research methodology shows the entire process of the research from the planning, through data collection and analysis to the reporting of results. Mohajan (2017:1) adds that the research methodology comprises not just the methods but also the rationale or logic behind the use of the selected methods in the context of the study.

1.7.4.1   Sampling techniques

The purposive sampling technique is used in this study. According to Kumar (2014:244), sampling is a method of selecting the participants of a study from the population. Taherdoost (2016:20) contends that the two broad methods of selecting samples of participants for data collection are categorised into probability and non-probability sampling methods.

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method, which involves the selection of a sample based on the characteristics of the population of interest and the objectives of the study. Purposive sampling is also referred to as selective, judgemental or selective sampling (Taherdoost, 2016:23). This technique is useful in instances where the researcher strives to reach the target sample fast and in cases in which the proportional representation of the sample is not of concern. The study will employ a heterogeneous or maximum variation purposive sampling to avail a diverse range of cases that are relevant to the phenomenon under study (Kumar, 2014:243). This technique serves to provide more insight into the nature of the entity of study. The justification for the use of purposive sampling in this study hinges on the fact that it supports the use of information-rich participants. HoDs will be preferred because they are accorded great responsibilities in the teaching and learning of learners, inclusive of those in Grade 12.

1.7.4.2   Population and sample size

HoDs in Vhuronga 2 Circuit in Vhembe District will constitute the population of this study. Population relates to the total group of individuals who are of interest in the study (Polit & Beck, 2017:785). Braun and Clarke (2019:291) posit that a sample is the subset of the population.   The researcher will select a sample of 12 participants. This is a sufficient sample that will be able to adequately address the main research question and the objectives of the study.   This suggests that care will be taken in this research to ensure the selection of participants for the study constitutes the size and characteristics that are prone to the attainment of data saturation,

The researcher reviewed the methods reflected in previous studies to mitigate the risks of repeating observed errors in the determination of the size of the research sample. Groenewald (2004) notes that between two and ten participants are recommended to constitute a sufficient sample that is required to reach data saturation. The study will comprise of a sample of 12 senior HoDs who will respond to interviews.

1.7.5 Research Instrument

This study will use a semi-structured interview guide in conducting interviews. Turner et al. (2018:97) note that an interview guide is a form of sheet or document containing a list of questions based on a phenomenon of study and used by the researcher to solicit relevant data. A structured interview guide contains a clear set of instructions for use by the interviewer that can provide comparable and reliable data (Johnson & Simon, 2018:14).   Semi-structured interviews are often preceded by observations and informal interviewing, which allow the researchers to develop a keen interest in the phenomenon of interest and a meaningful interview guide (Johnson & Simon, 2018:14).   This assists researchers to raise questions demanding facts, opinions and clarifications.

1.7.6 Data Collection

Data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest. It is done in an established systematic fashion that enables individuals to

answer research questions and evaluate outcomes. The data collection component of research is common to all fields of study including physical and social sciences, humanities and business. The emphasis to ensure accurate and honest collection of data remains imperative (Buka, Matiwane-Mcengwa & Molepo, 2017:19).

Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews, document analysis and observation. A check list will be produced and used to check the availability and non-availability of selected materials, practices and services as contained in the document analysis and observation tools. Document analysis will further entail reading and interpreting documents such as plan books, timetables, record of marks and book inventories. During observation, the researcher will observe the functions of HoDs such as lesson supervisions, chairing of meetings, counselling both teachers and learners, and teaching. Interviews will also be conducted with the HoDs with the aim of determining their perceptions on learner performance and their roles in dealing with poor learner performance. A tape recorder will be used to capture the responses of participants and the tape recordings will then be transcribed prior to analysis.

1.7.7   Data Analysis

Data will be analysed thematically. Data analysis is a process of inspecting, cleansing, transforming and modelling data with the goal of discovering useful information, drawing conclusions and supporting decision-making (Stewart, 2015:457). Merriam and Tisdell (2016:20) view data analysis as a systematic way to organise and synthesise data collected in a study.

The thematic analysis will be informed by the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2019:594). This will involve the transcription of data collected through field notes and interviews. The transcripts will be read and reread for fuller and more complete understanding. The preliminary codes will be established from areas of interest and significance in the data. These codes are derived from the organisation and segmentation of the data and from the meaning that emerges from it (Braun & Clarke 2019:594). The coded data will further be collapsed into working patterns or

themes. All information will be collated into the generated theme through the process of cutting and sorting.

1.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS

This section focuses of the measures of quality control that are used in the establishment of rigour in qualitative studies. Qualitative researchers do not use instruments with established metrics about validity and reliability; therefore, it becomes important to address the way in which the findings of the study are credible, transferable, confirmable and dependable. Trustworthiness concerns the criteria for enhancing the believability of findings of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018:121).

1.8.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the degree of confidence a qualitative researcher has in the truth of the findings of a study. This relates to the knowledge of the researcher pertaining to the judgement regarding the truthfulness and accuracy of the outcomes of a study. In this study, triangulation will be used to ensure credibility of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:18). Triangulation of sources of data collection will be used. Information from interviews, observation and document analysis will be compared and contrasted in the process of establishing credible standpoints.

1.8.2 Transferability

Transferability relates to the degree to which the study demonstrates that the findings are applicable to other contexts (Nassaji, 2015:129). It is basically about the generalisability of the outcomes of a study. In this study, thick descriptions of the processes, procedures and techniques of the study will be used to ensure the findings are applicable to similar contexts, situations or circumstances.

1.8.3 Confirmability

Confirmability is the degree of neutrality in the findings of a study. This shows that the study findings are derived from the responses of participants and not any personal motivations or potential bias of the researcher (Korstjens & Moser, 2018:121). This entails ensuring that the researcher does not taint the results of the study to make it fit into a certain narrative. In this study, the researcher will institute member checking. This implies that the researcher will meticulously transcribe the data collected through interviews and stored in tape recorders. After the transcriptions are done, the researcher will go back to the interviewees so that they can check to confirm whether the verbatim transcripts are a true reflection or representation of the information that they contributed during interviews.

1.8.4 Dependability

This is the extent to which the study can be repeated, and the findings remain consistent (Nassaji, 2015:129). The researcher can adopt an audit trail to establish the dependability of the results of a study. This entails the involvement of an outsider who will examine or review the process of the research including data analysis to ensure that findings are consistent and repeatable (Chauvette et al., 2019:5; Gunawan & Huarng, 2015:2239).

1.9   SCOPE AND DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study will be limited to secondary schools in Vhuronga 2 Circuit in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province. Vhuronga 2 Circuit consists of four secondary schools, and the study will specifically mirror practices in all public secondary schools to cast more light on the challenges encountered by both educators and HoDs in enhancing learner academic performance and the roles of HoDs in addressing such challenges.

1.10   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The maintenance of ethical standards is of importance when undertaking research, particularly research involving human participation. Ethical considerations concern

a discipline of moral values and moral conduct, which is expected in carrying out research (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delport, 2011:67). The following ethical standards will be upheld in this research.

1.10.1 Permission to Conduct the Study

This study will comply with the ethical requirements as required by the University of Venda Research Ethics Committee. The researcher will obtain clearance to collect data from the University's Ethics Committee as well as seek permission for field entry from the Department of Education (DoE). On receiving permission to proceed with the research, personal visits to the targeted schools will be made to arrange for face-to-face interviews with participants. The selected participants will also be asked to complete consent forms as evidence of voluntary acceptance to take part in the research.

1.10.2 Informed Consent

Respondents will be informed about the voluntary nature of participation and that they can withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice. The details about the purpose of the study will be clearly indicated and explained to participants. This includes the potential benefit of the study and the way in which the results will be disseminated (Chauvette et al., 2019:4). All participants will be required to append their signatures as proof of consent to participate.

1.10.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Anonymity is provided in situations where the specific responses of participants need not be easily associated with them. Leedy and Ormrod (2014:107) state that information that is obtained from the sample of study should be treated with confidentiality and anonymity. This means that the researcher will explain to the participants that their names or identities will not be divulged to the public. All information gathered will be treated as group data and no individual will be reported on. The researcher will use codes in reporting findings to avoid inflicting pain or harm on participants.

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1.11 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The importance of school leadership and management models has become a priority in educational policy agendas internationally.   Management and leadership play key roles in improving learner academic performance and in influencing the motivations and capacities of educators. Based on the foregoing, the significance of this study is, therefore, to arouse the interest of HoDs in driving the implementation of the continuous assessment policy in their schools, from the leadership and management perspective, hence addressing various challenges confronting educators and learners.   The study is also motivated by the desire to produce some lively discourses in the country regarding the role that HoDs should play in their schools to create an atmosphere conducive to the effective implementation of the available learning policy to improve learner academic performance.

It is envisaged that the findings and recommendations of this study may be useful to policymakers in the department, educators as implementers of the education policy, and to the school managers as school-based monitors and supporters of educators in the implementation process within the school context. Furthermore, the findings may be useful to curriculum advisors and subject specialists who are involved in curriculum advisory services and moderation of new learning methods to contribute to the performance of learners in the cluster circuits and districts.

1.12 PLAN OF THE STUDY

This study will be divided into five chapters.

Chapter 1 deals with the background to the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, significance of the study, the scope of the study, limitations of the study, organisation of the study, and operational definition of terms.

Chapter 2 reviews literature related to the concepts about the role of HoDs in enhancing the academic performance of learners in secondary schools. The chapter will discuss the functions of HoDs in the context of the education of learners, factors that contribute to improving the performance of learners and strategies that can be adopted to increase learner academic performance.

Chapter 3 deals with research design and methodology including the research paradigm, research approach and methods of data collection. The chapter will also discuss the study population, sample size and the sampling technique, procedures of data collection, data gathering tools and data analysis. Ethical considerations and significance of the study will be included in this chapter.

Chapter 4 includes the presentation of data analysis and interpretation of the findings. This will be addressed as informed by the aim of the study, literature review and the objectives of the study.

Chapter 5 comprises the summary, conclusion and recommendations of the study.

1.13   SUMMARY

This proposal provided a guideline regarding an investigation into the role of HoDs in enhancing the academic performance of learners in secondary schools. An introductory background to the study was provided to locate the context of the problem. This informed the framing of the problem statement, aim of the study, research questions and objectives. The research methodology was discussed including the research paradigm, research approach, research design and methods for data collection and analysis. The limitations of the study, ethical considerations, significance of the study and the research outline were also discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE ROLE OF HODS IN ENHANCING GRADE 12 LEARNERS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the roles or functions of HoDs in enhancing the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. These include the crafting of plans for the performance of schools, communicating information to drive school life, improving school resources, improving teaching and learning, and ensuring school discipline. The contextualization of the role of HoDs was outlined as a brief exposition of the HoD phenomenon. The discussion also focuses on factors that hinder the performance of HoDs in enhancing the academic performance of learners. The factors cover lack of knowledge of professional practice, lack of clear goals, constraints of time, lack of effective institutional policies, ineffective communication and inadequate resources. The chapter further interrogates some strategies that can be adopted to improve the performance of HoDs, such as improving their competencies, professional development of teachers, setting of clear goals for the department, creating a positive school culture, engaging in team-building efforts and eliciting community participation in school business.

2.2 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW

The preliminary literature review is concerned with a systematic search and consultation of the literature that is related to the area under investigation. In most cases, a number of studies would have been conducted in the same field of study. In this situation, several similar studies have been conducted, such as one that focused on challenges faced by HoDs regarding pedagogic content knowledge (Kaur et al., 2016:479). Similarly, Nawelwa et al. (2015:716) have interrogated the issue of the contribution of HoDs to the effective functioning of schools. Nevertheless, this literature review outlines different views raised by academics and scholars in relation to this study on the role of HoDs in enhancing the academic performance of learners.

2.3 CONTEXTUALISING THE ROLE OF HODS

The advent of a democratic government in 1994 brought about change in the education system. The organogram of the school also changed. As a result, a school is managed by the school management team comprising the principal, deputy principal, subject heads of department and master teachers (Ntsoane, 2017:22). The principal heads the school, whereas HoDs head their subject areas. Lewallen et al. (2015:729) observe that the current demands for quality education are placing great pressure on schools to improve educational service and delivery. It is on the basis of this demand that the role of the HoDs transcends a purely administrative function and becomes an all-inclusive task that focuses on, among other things, improving teaching and learning in classrooms, meeting parents, timetabling, evaluating teaching, budgeting and subsequently improving the academic performance of learners.

According to Baingana et al. (2015:172), the HoDs are the leaders of departments, the pivots around which many aspects of the department revolve, and the persons in charge of every detail in the running of the departments, be it administrative or academic. Similarly, Shidhaye et al. (2016:13) present HoDs as individuals that should be involved in the making of most decisions in the running of the school. It is, therefore, important that the HoDs should be astute leaders, thinkers and decision-makers. Mokgohlwe (2016:32) states that subtle HoDs are bound to use teamwork as a working strategy and would constitute committees and smaller groups of members of staff to establish appropriate teaching and learning approaches.

2.4 THE FUNCTIONS OF HODS IN ENHANCING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS

This section discusses the roles or functions of HoDs in crafting plans for the performance of schools, improving school resources, creating a demand system, improving teaching and learning, and ensuring school discipline.

2.4.1 Crafting Plans for School Performance

Teachers and the public in South Africa have often expressed concern regarding the low academic performance of learners in the national examinations. There is a strong understanding that the HoDs of schools have a great influence on the academic outcomes of learners.   Cancedda et al. (2015:1840) note that in order to improve the academic performance of learners, the head of department should start by improving the general management of the department. This can be done mainly by executing proper plans for the activities of the department.

Planning forms the basis of all other management tasks for HoDs. It is about creating and designing regulated activities with a view to addressing future needs. Planning reflects the objectives of the school, the resources, as well as the anticipated activities and involves drawing up the most suitable strategy for achieving these objectives (Tyner & Will, 2015:362).   As managers, heads of department are responsible for planning programmes for the year for their departments. The programmes entail preparation for lessons, evaluation of teachers and professional development programmes that are needed (Kuppens & Langer, 2016:329).

Bloom et al. (2015:647) suggest that planning is the cornerstone for any improvement initiative within an educational institution. For HoDs to enhance the academic performance of Grade 12 learners, it is crucial to have a thorough plan of activities, where high standards and excellence are the norm.   It is argued, however, that planning cannot be done in a haphazard manner. Nawelwa et al. (2015:716) observe that planning for enhanced academic performance is an activity that involves strategic initiatives that will lead the school towards action-oriented goals. In this sense, it becomes the instructional role of the HoDs to engage in curriculum management specifically designed to improve learner academic performance.

Richter et al. (2017:103) observe that schools with HoDs that are not proud of their schools do not strive to enhance the academic performance of their learners. Instead, they attribute the poor standards of performance to such reasons as lack of preparation of teachers, absenteeism and drunkenness. Therefore, Ovadia (2016:20) avers that HoDs that are keen to raise the academic performance of

learners will work tirelessly to resolve the negative impacts of inadequate competencies of teachers and the adoption of ineffective instructional strategies.

Ertesvåg and Roland (2015:195) argue that most schools in England have long-term planning for the curriculum and textbook adoption but rarely focus on the needs of the teachers and others who assist to implement those plans. This makes planning less effective in setting clear goals, motivating teachers and improving learner achievements.   Anecdotal evidence also shows that, although heads of department are involved in making policy decisions, they fail to implement them successfully. Barriers to effective planning also include fear of failure, lack of educational knowledge, lack of confidence and resistance to change.

Hendrickx, Mainhard, Boor-Klip, Cillessen and Brekelmans (2016:30) propose that, in addressing barriers to planning, HoDs should take into consideration the basic principles of planning. These include the need for training to develop proper plans. Planning should take place within the limits of the school's policy and revolve around the business of teaching and learning. The entire range of aspects of planning should be related and in line with the overall plans of the school. They have to consider human limitations and take into account the workload of teachers and the amount of time learners need to complete assignments.

2.4.2 Improving School Resources

Kamps et al. (2015:134) point out that a decline in the quality of education is reflected by increased instances repeating the grade and higher dropout rates in secondary schools.   Li et al. (2016:79) posit that these problems are due to a shortage of qualified teachers, inadequate inspectorate services, overcrowding and a lack of educational resources and equipment.   Gull and Shehzad (2015:246) maintain that the problems of inadequate resources and services are also experienced in South Africa. This implies that the mitigation of such problems is likely to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Therefore, HoDs have to facilitate an increase in the performance of learners through helping with the allocation of resources such as finance, human resources, teaching materials and adequate teaching time (Gull & Shehzad, 2015:246).

Asakawa (2017:184) states that it is the role of the HoD to make sure that educational inputs, that are of vital importance to the teaching of any subject in the school curriculum, are available. One of them is teaching materials that enable the teaching and learning process to go smoothly. Teaching materials include chalkboards, textbooks, apparatus and handbooks. Deeley and Bovill (2017:463) insist that the use of teaching materials is central to classroom instruction as it facilitates in making sure that the acquired information is kept firmly in the memory of learners. Mbokazi (2015:468) adds that a well-planned and imaginative use of visual aids in lessons arouses the interest of learners in the subject. It gives them something practical to see and do and, at the same time, helps to train them to think things out by themselves. Useful visual aids that are good for teaching comprise pictures, postcards, diagrams, maps, filmstrips and models.

Tupas (2015:122) contends that selecting materials that are related to the basic content of a course or lesson help learners to attain an in-depth understanding of such a lesson. Learning resources make the lesson attractive to learners, thereby sustaining their attention and motivation to learn. The use of pictures helps to trigger the thoughts and feelings of learners regarding the concept under study.

Fleming and Hutton (2017:10) clarify that it is also essential for the school to have sufficient and adequate human resources in terms of teacher quality for the teaching of all subjects in the school curriculum. Without the teachers as implementing agents, the goals of education can never be achieved. Schools should be properly and uniformly equipped with resources to promote sound and effective teaching. They need to have suitable textbooks, qualified teachers and libraries to enhance the academic performance of learners. The scarcity of these inputs tends to constrain educational systems from responding more fully to new demands. In order to raise learner academic performance, better learning materials are needed to be deployed and used in schools.

Gu, Ma, and Teng (2017:199) claim that the key functions of heads of department is to secure and operate the effective allocation, monitoring and control of the use of resources. An HoD is expected to prepare the departmental budget, which covers different responsible areas for the fulfilment of educational objectives, specifically the

teaching and learning process.   Díaz-Vicario and Gairín Sallán (2017:106) discovered that HoDs of public schools in Tanzania such as community secondary schools, have no real powers over staff in the subjects they head.   They cannot hire, relocate, reward, punish or fire them.   They also have limited resources to assist in creating living and working environments conducive for the staff to carry out their duties.

Graham and Edwards (2018:42) describe school finances as all the money the school gets for development and recurrent expenditures. Therefore, heads of department are accounting officers in their own right and, hence, responsible to know how money is allocated and expended. Schools get funds from various sources such as fees, the government budget (capitation), fundraising, school-based economic activities and external donors. In the various departments of the school, funds are required to facilitate the improvement of the school's opportunities and facilities as well as to meet the cost of running the school through its departments.

Begum (2016:108) observes that a head of department is supposed to identify resources needed to support the implementation of school policies.   Schools need to have a laboratory, apparatus, a library, textbooks, teaching aids, chalk, notebooks and teachers' reference books.   Also, the permanent construction and improvement of school buildings, painting, repairing of walls, windows, doors and school furniture, fencing, clearing and landscaping are other duties that may be delegated to the HoD by the school principal. Juhel (2016:588) explains that HoDs, as essential components of school management, should help in ensuring that all buildings meet the required standards. The head of department must control equipment and materials by overseeing their acquisition, storage and use in the department. Therefore, in order for the HoDs to effectively supervise the resources in their areas, they must make sure that the equipment and materials are updated and inspected periodically so that they function to help in the achievement of the school objectives.

The Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) (2016) indicate that one of the roles of the HoD is communication. This implies that the communication role is one of the fundamental functions of the head of department in enhancing the academic performance of learners in schools (RSA, 2016:38). The PAM (2016) indicates that within the communication role the head of department is mandated to cooperate with colleagues to maintain good teaching standards and progress among the learners and to foster administrative efficiency within the department and the school (Seabi, 2019:18). This implies that the head of department should establish the foundation for cooperation to ensure that excellent education standards are maintained and enhanced.

Furthermore, it is imperative to note that another function of the head of department within the communication role is to collaborate with teachers in other schools to develop the department and in the conduct of extra-curricular activities (RSA, 2016:38). This entails that the head of department facilitate the operation of an integrative and collaborative approach with HoDs in other schools for mutual growth and improvement (Seabi, 2019:18).

Moreover, as indicated by the Personnel Administrative Measures (2016) regarding the communication role, the HoD has the mandate of meeting parents and discussing with them the progress and conduct of their children at school (Bush & Glover, 2012:6). It is worth noting that the HoD also plays a significant role in meeting with the parents of the learners to make sure that progress reports are provided and to establish a collaborative platform to contribute ideas towards enhancing the performance of learners (RSA, 2016:38). It is important to note that parents also have a role to play in the performance of their children; hence, meeting the parents and engaging with them provides the premise for coming up with comprehensive measures for improving the performance of the learners (Bush & Glover, 2012:6).

HoDs participate in departmental and professional committees, seminars and courses to contribute to and improve their professional views or standards (RSA,

2016:38). This implies that the HoD plays an important role in enhancing the professional views and standards of other teachers. This is done by sharing with them the knowledge and skills that would have been obtained from development seminars and workshops (Seabi, 2019:51). The skills development of the head of department provides the basis for enhancing the departmental standards and the development of the other teachers.

In line with the Personnel Administrative Measures, the HoD is responsible for cooperating with further and higher education institutions in relation to the records, performance and career opportunities of learners (Seabi, 2019:48). This means that the HoD has a hand in the career guidance of learners and identifies opportunities that the learners can pursue. This also contributes towards stimulating learner academic performance. The HoD is also expected to maintain contact with sporting, social, cultural and community organisations (RSA, 2016:38). This implies that the HoD contributes towards the existence of continuous and effective communication among various sister organisations to advance learner and department prospects (RSA, 2016:38). On behalf of the principal, the HoD is also mandated to have contact with the public to continuously cultivate sustainable relationships for healthy teaching and learning.

2.4.4 Improving Teaching and Learning

The government and parents expect teachers to perform better at their present levels of learning. The whole issue of the performance of learners should be considered from the broad framework of inputs and outputs. Mullender-Wijnsma et al. (2015:365) state that the quality of teachers, among several factors, especially in relation to academic qualifications, may hamper or enhance the academic performance of learners. Thus, it becomes critical for the HoD to motivate teachers to improve their professional qualifications for their own personal benefit as well as that of their learners. Highly qualified teachers are inspired theoretically and practically to develop programmes for the enhancement of the academic performance of learners (Mestry, 2017:4).

Lewis et al. (2016:703) argue that the actions of teachers that tend to increase and reward learner participation are more likely to give learners the opportunity to become influential in the lesson, and subsequently to improve learner academic performance. Swartz, Osborne, Dawson-Edwards and Higgins (2016:465) also support the active participation of learners in the lesson as a way of improving their academic performance. HoDs work to assist teachers to perfect the skill of instructional delivery as a way of involving learners in the teaching and learning discourse (Taniguchi & Hirakawa, 2016:479).

In the drive to improve the performance of learners, especially in Grade 12 classes, the HoD must support teachers by introducing many enrichment programmes, which are conducted with the assistance of business and non-governmental organisations (Tsotetsi & Mahlomaholo, 2015:45). This should take cognisance of the nature of the education system in South Africa, which is examination oriented (Ntsoane, 2017:34). This infers that the quality of education that is offered by any school is judged in terms of the number of learners who perform well in the national examinations (Duggan et al., 2015:221).

Mincu (2015:253) suggests that there are several school factors that HoDs ought to address as they exert an influence on the behaviours of learners and their academic achievement. They need to be helpful in creating a space that is appropriate for learning. Buthelezi, Mhlongo and Sweli (2012:16017) observe that teachers have a duty to create classrooms that nurture the personal, cognitive and social development of every learner. Classrooms have to be arranged in such a way that they can cater for individual and group learning. HoDs need to be vigilant in supporting teachers to adopt diverse teaching methodologies to secure best classroom practices for the progressive education of learners. They have to ensure that teachers adopt astute management practices in teaching. Teachers need to be skilled in chalkboard writing, positioning themselves while teaching and the constitution of ability groupings (Buthelezi et al., 2012:16017).

Mincu (2015:253) avers that teachers have to be appraised on the teaching of large classes. This is problematic in some schools with overcrowded classes. Tsotetsi and Mahlomaholo (2015:50) believe that teachers that are empowered with subject

content knowledge are better positioned to deal with the gaps created in classes regarding the number of learners and their diversity in knowledge and abilities. Similarly, the pedagogical content knowledge of teachers should be considered in relation to the size of teaching load and the degree of curriculum coverage that has to be done. This implies that HoDs have to make sure that teachers in their departments are not overloaded with work to allow them to cover the syllabus in a smooth manner.

Asterhan and Rosenberg (2015:134) state that the availability of the authorised syllabi and timetables of subjects for all classes are essential in teaching and learning. The HoDs have to make sure that the preparation of schemes of work, lesson plans, filling of the subject logbook and mark books are available and well prepared by teachers. These, again, must be inspected regularly. Furthermore, Maguire, Braun and Ball (2015:485) add that HoDs work to ensure more instructional time is efficiently and effectively spent to enable learners to have fruitful actual learning, which is believed to lead to a better grasp of learner content and improved performance. They are supposed to observe classroom teaching, lesson plans, teachers' notes and students' exercise books to trace the quality of teaching and learning in their departments.

Ampofo, Onyongo and Ogola (2019:11) observe that one of the key concerns for successful educational institutions is to make sure that teachers are well supervised. Supervision is the process that involves teachers in the instructional dialogue to improve teaching and learning to yield learner academic performance (Sullivan & Glanz, 2013:58). This is critical for the achievement of school objectives (Mankoe, 2007:38). HoDs conduct various supervision practices such as one-on-one classroom observation to improve instruction and professional capacity (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2009:85). They assess the manner in which teachers plan for lessons, deliver instruction and assess learning.

HoDs assess the preparation of teaching and learning documents, regular and punctual class attendance, use of instructional time and working relations. The schemes of work for teachers and lesson plans constitute the vital documents that assist in the effective delivery of instruction. A number of items are scrutinised in

lesson plans such as the relevance, adequacy and appropriateness of learning objectives, selection of resources and the techniques used to evaluate learning. Ampofo et al. (2019:12) note that HoDs regularly check the notes of learners, class exercises, moderation of examination materials and marking schemes. They identify gaps in the knowledge, skills and competencies of teachers to provide the critical support required for professional development.

HoDs need to demonstrate effective teaching competencies to allow teachers to model the practice. This is supported by Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner (2017:46) who argue that demonstrations should be done to assist teachers with techniques on ways to deliver knowledge and to encourage them to thoroughly prepare and present their lessons. Bipath and Nkabinde (2018:2) further observe that the high educator-learner ratio is among the contributory factors ushering in low academic performance of learners in schools. Overcrowded classes are detrimental to the academic progress of learners. This is caused by the fact that teachers are unable to adequately attend to the learning needs of individual learners.

Some HoDs are guilty of not inviting parents to participate in developing policies and assisting in decisions that would spur on learners. This calls for HoDs to mobilise stakeholder participation in schools to enhance learner academic performance. Therefore, this study is premised on an investigation of the role of HoDs in enhancing the academic performance of grade 12 learners in secondary schools.

2.4.5 Ensuring School Discipline

The development of an effective disciplinary system in a school is an important aspect of the role of the HoD, and it is likely to influence the academic performance of learners in schools. Shaw et al. (2015:115) view discipline as a skill that is taught and learned like any other skill. It is, however, important to reconcile the values of the parents and those of the school to avoid conflict in the adopted system of discipline. This implies that the HoD has to be innovative, dynamic and skilful in facilitating the interaction and integration of the values and goals of stakeholders, inclusive of people within and outside the school. This may pertain to teachers, support staff, parents, private organisations and members of the community.

In the current climate of transformation, it becomes important for HoDs to acknowledge that learners are more outspoken, are aware of their rights and easily query the decisions of their teachers (Swain-Bradway et al., 2015:247). Healthy discipline in a school is thus a prerequisite for the success of curriculum implementation and extracurricular programmes to enhance the academic performance of learners (Russell, Meredith, Childs, Stein & Prine, 2015:92). The HoD should pursue discipline as an important element of school and classroom practice as it contributes to improve the academic performance of learners. A lack of proper discipline may lead to the prevalence of chaos in the classroom, which subsequently leads to impoverished academic performance. The implication is that school discipline is a tool for effective teaching and learning.

It is quite important to note that the Department of Education has outlawed the use of corporal punishment to enforce discipline in schools. This makes the role of HoDs even more tricky as teachers have to be equipped with supplementary disciplinary options to allow lessons to be delivered as planned. Teachers must be taught ways of disciplining learners that are not wasteful in terms of time. They must be able to deal with those learners who are extremely rude without disrupting learning. Conditions should be created for teachers to enjoy the profession in the wake of current circumstances in schools that foster the manifestations of indiscipline. The DoE (2003) observes that it is the role of HoDs to equip teachers with skills to mitigate the occurrence of indiscipline such as cultivating interest in schooling and developing in learners mutual love and respect in the classroom.

2.5 PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE OF HODS IN LEARNER ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

This section focuses on the perspectives of the role of HoDs in improving the academic performance of learners in secondary schools in Vhuronga 2 Circuit in Vhembe District. The discussion includes the global or international perspectives, African perspectives and the South African perspective.

In the United States of America, HoDs play a major role in leadership and management of schools (Feeney, 2009:214). HoDs have a distinctive function in serving a lot of people in the operations of schools. They work as department leaders or middle line managers. According to Jaca (2013:29), HoDs work as liaisons, enforcers, fixers, managers and advocates. They also function as representatives of their departments, communicators and mediators. This implies that HoDs are the right people to represent departments because they are perceived to possess expertise and experience pertaining to the needs, expectations and the general mandate of their subject areas.

Jaca (2013:29) maintains that HoDs provide resources for the department. This is possible because they preside over the preparation of budgets for the department, which is used to feed into the composite one for the entire school. They participate in the formulation of policy as well as in ensuring that policies are implemented according to plans. Ling (2010:15) states that HoDs take care of the challenges encountered in their respective departments and communicate with teachers to ensure that the subject areas are run in a smooth manner. It is also the business of HoDs to promote participation and collaboration within and outside the departments.

Gordon (2013:8) reports that HoDs are expected to be exemplary in current educational issues, enforce change and to market new policy practice and act as important middle persons. They are central in the implementation of professional development practices for other teachers. In reporting on the professional development of teachers in the USA, Zapeda (2015:52) indicates that HoDs are tasked to lead and contribute to the whole school leadership. This is the role that is anticipated to result in quality teaching and learning in the classrooms. There are, however, challenges that HoDs experience in the execution of tasks to improve school performance and learner academic achievement (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012:28). These hinge on the way in which they have to juggle administrative and curriculum activities within the greater demand for improved educational performance.

In the United Kingdom, a formal and recognised university degree is essential to engage in the teaching and learning enterprise in schools. The position of HoD is

viewed as the next logical and progressive step from being a classroom teacher. It is noted that a lot of teachers choose not to apply for the post of HoD because they want to avoid the extra stress of managing other staff members and dealing with bureaucratic shortcomings. However, there are other teachers that recognise the role of the HoD as a steppingstone in the direction of the quest to achieve principalship. The rules for obtaining the office of HoD depends on ministerial and school policies, but teachers normally need to have at least four years of teaching experience prior to being considered for the job of HoD.

Fullan and Hargreaves (2012:38), on reporting on professional development for HoDs in the United Kingdom, insist that the programme aims to develop their capacity to deal with everyday functions and challenges that they encounter. The intention is to have HoDs develop a voice and to act as purposed. According to Fullan and Hargreaves (2012:41), the improvement of outcomes of learning rests upon changes in practices, attitudes and knowledge, which are consequences of participation in staff development activities. It, however, appears that little is done to prepare teachers for the role of HoDs, there is little in-service provision as well as research in the professional care of HoDs. It is, at times, assumed that some teachers would, through the process of osmosis, acquire skills, develop philosophies and obtain competencies that would equip them with desired dispositions for the post of HoD (Harris, Jones, Ismail & Nguyen, 2019:256).

Generally, the current education system demands professionals that are highly skilled in the service of learners in schools. In the United Kingdom, Fullan and Hargreaves (2012:30) note that professional development in education circles needs to be innovative, continuous in execution and involve a variety of components such as formal and informal. Capacity development of teachers in the teaching context is perceived to be a coherent attempt to transform classroom practice, beliefs of teachers and perceptions, which cumulatively yield positive change in the academic outcomes of learners (Harris et al., 2020:256). It will, however, be argued that it is the HoDs who should be of focus in supporting teachers, who possess the central responsibility in the enhancement of teaching and learning in schools. This researcher believes that the subject boundaries need to be blurred, subject differences flattened, and new categories introduced to enhance teaching and

learning in schools. In this regard, subject departments may occur in tandem with other committees and units, which emanate in response to continuing challenges. These groupings can be formed in the form of the school improvement group and the community links group (Turner & Sykes, 2016:28).

In Kenya, HoDs in schools are generally regarded as middle level managers (Wanjohi, 2007:6). The organogram is traditionally hierarchical, having the principal or head teacher at the top and the deputy principal occupying the next position. The heads of department assume the middle level of administrators and then the teachers anchor the organisation structure. HoDs constitute a crucial communication link between teachers and the school administration. They are also expected to offer on the spot and direct leadership to teachers placed in their departments. This is the function that the principals are unable to provide as a result of the cluster of other responsibilities placed upon them (Mathu, 2013:14).

Mathu (2013:14) maintains that HoDs play a vital role in the business of the school. They are presented as catalysts of action in their departments. These are expert teachers that can speak with other teachers concerning the specifics of teaching. They are basically subject teachers but have administrative functions that allow them to act as a bridge connecting teachers with school managers. Gichobi (2012:7) notes that HoDs act as instructional leaders in their professional fields. It is expected that they are most knowledgeable and effective on matters of teaching and learning at school. This makes them prone to operate as resource persons and consultants in the subject areas that they command.

Among the primary roles of HoDs is to identify the teaching strategies that are most innovative and effective in facilitating instructional delivery in classrooms (Mathu, 2013:15). They lead teams in ensuring that there is success in developing, delivering and assessing programmes (Onno, 2010:30). HoDs participate in evaluating activities and appraising teachers in their subject areas. It is expected that HoDs have to select, prepare and organise instructional materials and to facilitate the effective use thereof in classrooms. In most schools, HoDs are given the responsibility of planning and organising short courses and school-based workshops on specific teaching areas or topics and to work as advisers to the

principal or deputy principal. Precisely, they are responsible for instructional activities in their subject areas (Onno, 2010:25). They mentor and coach teachers on ways to improve performance and support learners, both in curriculum and social areas.

Gichobi (2012:10) states that the role of the HoD involves dealing with the needs and priorities of the department. The HoDs are in control of the departmental stores and supplies in conjunction with other teachers. They are in charge of maintaining textbooks, equipment inventories and ledgers for their departments. HoDs are involved in personnel management where they participate in inducting new members of staff, supervising teaching and learning, and evaluating the performance of teachers. They stimulate interest, enthusiasm and the morale of teachers in the department (Muriuki, Onyango & Kithinji, 2020:149). It is also the function of HoDs to teach learners in their areas of specialisation. They are active in motivating learners to learn and to provide them with guidance and counselling services (Muriuki et al., 2020:149).

In South Africa, there is no particular preparation or formal qualification needed for one to assume the position of head of department. The promotion of individuals into the post is simple and presented as a reward (Kotze, 2002:12). The role is often taken up by many people with meagre preparation and little training. The traditional stance is that HoDs in secondary schools require only their qualifications and experience as teachers. This position is for those teachers that have obtained a senior certificate and a minimum of three years of teaching at a tertiary institution (Bambi, 2014:15). This is a level two post that can be applied for by teachers, even in their first year of teaching. The Education Labour Relations Council: Collective Agreement 5 of 2006 (ELRC, 2006) is the basis for the appointment of HoDs. This allows for career pathing for teachers who are qualified post level 1 to progress to senior teacher positions, inclusive of that of HoD.

In some cases, the appointment of HoDs can arise as a consequence of political affiliations. This is in line with Mercer, Barker and Bird (2010:119) who criticise the appointment of HoDs on the basis that the selection criterion is inconsistent. The personality focus at interviews is also perceived as clouding the judgement of the

panels. It is also noted that in some schools, the School Governing Bodies (SGBs) depend on instinct and 'gut feeling' to make appointments. The appointed individuals are then trained to be able to function in the new positions. However, Mestry and Grobler (2002:21) believe that the training that is provided to HoDs is insufficient and inadequate to institute any meaningful change in the new appointee.

2.6 FACTORS THAT HINDER THE PERFORMANCE OF HODS IN IMPROVING THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS

This section discusses the factors that hinder the performance of HoDs in enhancing the academic performance of learners. These factors include the lack of knowledge of professional practice, lack of clear goals, constraints of time, lack of effective institutional policies, ineffective communication and inadequate resources. The factors are interrogated as follows:

2.6.1 Lack of Knowledge of Practice

In spite of the complexity of problems surrounding the majority of school heads, very little attention has been given to address issues relating to their appointment, training and support. Bush and Glover (2012:211) discovered that most countries continue to appoint heads from within the ranks of senior classroom teachers with little or no preparation for the onerous and complex task of school headship. The head of department must be the main change agent in the school by promoting the increase of capability in teaching through administering all school activities to secure the best outcomes. The HoD should possess a positive personality that facilitates successful school performance. This may be achieved through securing the collaboration and commitment of other members of staff. Schonfeld et al. (2015:406) maintain that the HoD has to keep a close eye on issues that negatively impact on learner academic performance.

HoDs must have essential skills, which include high levels of decision-making, problem-solving and communication skills, especially when handling meetings in the departments (Kelz, Evans & Röderer, 2015:119). A head of department, being a human resource and relationship manager, needs to have individual capacity to

motivate others and to promote team spirit in the department. While teaching the subject of specialisation in the department, the head of department should have effective instructional leadership and supervision skills and create an atmosphere that facilitates effective learning. This requires critical and creative thinking to maintain interactive learning in the department (Louis, Murphy & Smylie, 2016:310).

Bambi (2014:30) believes that HoDs provide professional leadership in schools to secure quality teaching and learning. This calls for them to be knowledgeable regarding critical management and leadership tasks and be accountable for the roles. They have to possess requisite knowledge pertaining to curriculum development, classroom teaching, teacher effectiveness, supervision, teacher evaluation as well as staff development. However, Kruger (2003:209) observes that HoDs are faced with the challenge of having to divide their time between instructional curriculum issues and non-teaching duties of administration. Harris and Jones (2017:214) indicate that HoDs are faced with numerous obstacles in the delivery of their tasks in schools, which attracts pressure from both the top and bottom of the organogram. Hirsh and Bergmo-Prvulovic (2019:360) also note that the tasks of HoDs are demanding and time consuming, such that they sometimes struggle to find a balance between these tasks and their classroom teaching. They tend to feel isolated and in conflict with their peers. These tasks involve concerns of timetabling, budgeting and finance, meeting parents, managing stock, resource allocation and supervision.

This is exacerbated by the fact that HoDs are appointed to positions without proper training for the job (Van Deventer & Kruger, 2003:62). In the same breath, Gichobi 2012:6) holds that HoDs are not well prepared or trained to empower them with the requisite skills to handle the to handle the culture of management and instructional challenges in their areas of practice. Tlali and Matete (2020:4) observe that in the exercise of their duties, the development needs of HoD are often overlooked to the extent that they are sometimes ill prepared for their roles and responsibilities. Tshepo, Tapala, Van Niekerk and Mentz (2020:2) reveal that in South Africa, the formal qualification for HoDs has not been developed, and the current leadership training is only focused on school principals and their deputies. The qualification in educational leadership and management has also not been of importance in the

promotion to position of HoD. This has frequently resulted in role conflicts, ambiguities, tension and stress.

Bassett (2016:99) maintains that, while it is assumed that HoDs are appointed owing to their possession of requisite leadership skills to conduct their roles effectively, this is rarely the case. This implies that there is a need for effective leadership development of HoDs to equip them with knowledge and skills to deliver on their mandate. In this regard, Tlali and Matete (2020:5) recommend that the responsible ministry, school boards and principals need to ensure that HoDs are motivated and empowered to adequately perform their roles and responsibilities.

2.6.2 Lack of Clear Goals

Ogbeiwi (2018:2) indicates that goals are generalised, broad and usually formulated over a long period. HoDs should set clear goals to achieve high learner academic performance. The setting of goals helps the school, through the department, to achieve the targeted vision (Wang, Gurr & Drysdale, 2016:270). The inability of HoDs to set concrete and specific goals impedes the efforts of learners to realise their full academic potential (Li et al., 2016:79). The determination of goals is part of the planning tasks of the heads of department. Similarly, Grobler (2015:343) states that the evaluation of planning tasks should be based on goals that are clearly delineated.

In order for the HoD to enhance the academic performances of learners, it is crucial to have a thorough plan to work towards, where high standards and excellent academic performance of learners are the norm. Melby-Lervåg, Redick and Hulme (2015:512) argue, however, that planning cannot be done in a haphazard manner. Planning for enhanced learner academic performance is an activity that involves strategic initiatives that will lead the school towards action-oriented goals. In this sense, it becomes the professional role of the HoD to engage in strategic planning, specifically designed to enhance learner academic performance.

2.6.3 Constraints of Time

Brown and Rutherford (2010:79) state that HoDs have an extensive set of responsibilities placed upon them. The main constraint is on the amount of time that is available to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning taking place in their departments. These constraints function to reduce the manner in which HoDs have a direct influence over their main responsibilities. It is, however, doubtful that HoDs would work very differently in the pursuit of their concerns even if provided with more time to do their work. It is quite possible that some HoDs would hide behind a lack of time to avoid monitoring teaching and learning in schools. Brown and Rutherford (2010:79) add that HoDs are generally preoccupied with management and administrative routines such that they have less time to deal with curriculum issues to improve the academic performance of learners.

Murphy and Bleiberg (2019:67) note that lack of time is aggravated by competing priorities in the practice of HoDs. Time is one of the basic resources in schools as the implemented programmes depend on their availability. The business of preparing a timetable of teaching periods, sporting and extramural activities rests with the amount of time that can be expended on such activities (Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014:53). HoDs that are involved in many activities find themselves lagging behind in their core function of monitoring the performance of teachers and learners. Lack of time is a hindrance that needs to be overcome, but this may not be easy to do because HoDs have a lot of work to perform. This scarcity of time tends to be a vicious cycle in the operations of HoDs, which, in most instances, forces them to work beyond the official work hours. HoDs are not just expected to function within the school but are inclined to attend external activities such as workshops, meetings and development programmes. This scenario reflects the reason for insufficient time for HoDs to effectively perform their roles to improve the academic performance of learners.

2.6.4 Lack of Effective Institutional Policies

Goodman-Scott et al. (2015:57) describe school policy as a statement of purpose and a set of guidelines for achieving that purpose. It provides a framework for the

operation of the school or programme. Grobler et al. (2017:336) acknowledge the huge possibility of failure in learner academic achievement processes in instances where policies to promote such desired achievements are absent. This implies that policies should make it possible for HoDs to deliver on their mandate to improve teaching and learning in schools. In South Africa, the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development (NPFTED) seeks to promote strong leadership and good management in schools and to ensure that professional development activities relate precisely to the responsibilities of teachers in the classroom (Du Plessis & Eberlein, 2018:2). The Employment of Teachers Act (No. 76 of 1998) stipulates that HoDs should engage in classroom teaching, ensure effective functioning of the department, and promote the education of learners. Similarly, the Performance Standard 9 of the Development Appraisal Instrument (DAI) as related to Resolution 8 of 2003 of the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC, 2003a:43), mandates that managers, including HoDs, should develop teaching personnel in the four areas of pastoral care, staff development, leadership and the building of commitment and confidence (RSA, 2007:17). This gives evidence to the existence of policies and guidelines governing the practice of HoDs in schools. This shows that South Africa has guiding instruments for professional practice. The desirable imperative is that individuals elected to work in the office of the HoD should acquaint themselves with standing policies to effectively deliver positive change in schools for the improvement of learner academic performance.

Mathu (2013:14) also affirms that HoDs have a duty to translate policies for teachers who are supposed to implement them in schools. HoDs also have to interpret policy for the teachers below them, as directed by the principal. These policies have often been formulated from beyond the school, such as the Department of Education and the district offices. Mathu (2013:14) highlights that this aspect of the role of HoDs is transactional and suggests that they possess a measure of power over other teachers. In this regard, it is critical that HoDs work closely with other teachers to develop approaches and strategies that will provide capacity to implement such policies.

2.6.5 Ineffective Communication

Dietrichson et al. (2017:243) define communication as an activity that takes place when a message is transferred satisfactorily from one part of the system to another so that it can be understood and acted upon as desired. Morse and Allensworth (2015:785) describe communication as sorting, selecting, forming and transmitting symbols between people to create meaning. Effective communication among stakeholders in schools is crucial in fostering healthy relationships and partnerships (Jooste, 2011:15). The ineffective communication of teachers with learners and other relevant stakeholders negates a healthy ethos in which learning and teaching take priority.

The role of HoDs is regarded as multi-layered. It involves the improvement of communication and establishing a collaborative relationship with other teachers (Bipath & Nkabinde, 2018:2). HoDs encourage teachers to contact parents and guardians early in the year so that they can explain the procedures of addressing class activities and homework tasks. HoDs need to enforce in teachers and other stakeholders that the collaboration between the home and school should be an attitude rather than an activity; this communication can occur through phone calls, emails, newsletters and small or large group meetings (Allington & Cunningham, 2002:304). HoDs may be hindered in the execution of their duties when communication channels are blocked or where there are limitations in the availability of modes of communication.

Before implementing the vision, the leader needs to communicate the vision to all educational stakeholders, particularly those inside the school. The vision needs to be well articulated so that it can be easily understood. And, if the vision is to inspire enthusiasm and encourage commitment, it must be communicated to all the members of the school. Harris and Jones (2017:16) posit that strategic vision must be communicated through multiple means. Some techniques used by institutions to communicate the vision include disseminating the vision in written form, preparing audio-visual shows outlining and explaining the vision, and presenting an explanation of the vision in speeches, interviews or press releases by the organisation's leaders.

There is need for protocols to be observed in communicating information that is vital for the functioning of school business. The transmission of information should generally flow through the ranks from teachers, HoDs, deputy heads, through to the principal in schools. However, while this route is ideal, it should not be allowed to scuttle efficiency, as poor communication may arise from information bottlenecks. Tshepo et al. (2020:10) note that overstepping of protocols in information sharing among the teaching fraternity hinders the operations of HoDs. This allows certain information to circulate within the school without their knowledge, rendering them incompetent (Ghavifekr & Ibrahim, 2014:48). It is also common for HoDs to hear about some information in the corridors of the schools without receiving it directly from their superiors. This makes them frustrated, discouraged and feeling trivialised. It is, therefore, important that HoDs serve as critical components of the school communication systems. They are supposed to obtain timely communication of curriculum-related issues, be able to share it with relevant people at appropriate times and collectively act upon it.

2.6.6 Inadequate Resources

Powis, Priestner and Tilley (2016:87) continue that most heads of department in community secondary schools are in a difficult position, since they are expected to improve learners' academic performance in a period of less resources. Mathu (2013:13) notes that HoDs need to be at their best in maintaining equipment and materials such as textbooks, timetables, lesson observation materials and inventories of resources. It must be easy to access the resources that the department has so that those that are rarely needed can be included in the departmental budget. HoDs are required to be familiar with stores and store-keeping awareness documentation, filing and filing system practices as well as record-keeping (Wanjohi, 2007:6). Bush and Glover (2012:211) add that, for effective teaching and learning, the required materials have to be provided in time and sufficiently. While this ideal is desirable for HoDs, the situation in most schools is quite dire. Most public schools tend to reel in abject shortages of teaching and learning materials, rendering it difficult for learner academic performance to be improved.

Putnam, Sungkhasettee and Roediger (2016:652) argue that effective teaching and learning in the school depends on its leadership and the way human resources are managed. These resources include the principal and their deputy, heads of department, class teachers, learning area educators, class representatives and learners. The South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996) encourages the involvement of learners in their own education through the introduction of learner representative councils at secondary school level. This raises challenges for many principals and teachers who are accustomed to the traditional methods of strict supervision and control of learners who in the past have had too little or no voice in the organisation of their education.

Ghaffar (2014:214) admits that the possible source of obstacles in the teaching and administrative functions in schools includes competition for common but scare resources. McIntosh, Predy, Upreti, Hume, Turri and Mathews (2014:32) maintain that a lack of resources impedes HoDs from carrying out their duties. They sometimes find it hard to work at their best in the wake of inadequate, or absence of, resources to assist in their work. The shortage of textbooks appears to be a major barrier in the delivery of teaching and learning excellence in schools. Tshepo et al. (2020:9) indicate that, while improvisation of resources can be made to facilitate teaching and learning, there are those that cannot be improvised, such as essential study materials. Learners, at times, have to struggle to share available materials, even in circumstances of overcrowded classrooms. This greatly affects the work of HoDs.

The socioeconomic environment of the school also influences the way in which schools are resourced and the subsequent performance of HoDs in their delegated duties. Tshepo et al. (2020:12) reveal that South African schools are categorised according to quintiles, from quintile one to five. Quintiles one to three consist of schools in disadvantaged communities where parents are unable to pay tuition fees, mostly due to unemployment and reliance on the social grant. Quintiles four to five are made up of schools in communities that are economically sound, with parents who can afford to pay tuition fees for their children. This implies that HoDs in schools with limited resource provision experience difficulties in the conduct of their roles to improve the academic performance of learners. HoDs and their teachers in

the departments struggle to help learners from poor backgrounds – the majority of them come from child-headed or dysfunctional families. The challenges of a lack of support from home, lack of infrastructure, illiteracy and poor sanitation coalesce to affect the performance of HoDs.

2.7   STRATEGIES TO ASSIST HODS TO IMPROVE THEIR PERFORMANCE

This section presents the strategies that can be adopted to assist HoDs to improve their practices in the quest to improve the academic performance of learners in schools. The study discusses strategies that include improving the competencies of HoDs, professional development of teachers, setting clear goals for the department, creating a positive school culture, engaging in team-building efforts and eliciting community participation in school business.

2.7.1 Improving the Competencies of HoDs

Stulac et al. (2015:405) ascertain that the quality of the departmental leadership makes the difference between the success and failure of a school. Kaur et al. (2016:478) contend that in highly effective schools, as well as schools that have reversed a trend of poor performance and declining achievement, it is the HoDs who set the pace by leading and motivating learners and staff to perform to their best. This shows that schools make a great difference in the academic performance of learners.

The development of HoDs must be both school based and community based so that they acquire knowledge and skills to promote teaching and learning in schools. HoDs have to be able to motivate and develop the professional practices of teachers to allow them to contribute significantly to improving the academic performance of learners (Malatji, 2018:37). HoDs have to be developed in various aspects such as marking, giving of feedback on assessments, monitoring and supervising departmental members.

Bush (2018:68) argues that the lack of experience of HoDs in curriculum leadership is an ignored area in South Africa. This is an area that requires urgent attention

(Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019:46). Under normal circumstances, HoDs should ensure that all concerned individuals clearly understand the purpose of the curriculum. They must be in a position to explain the stages and procedures of curriculum implementation as well as promote collaboration among critical stakeholders. Bush (2018:67) adds that it is the failure of HoDs to discern the challenges related to curriculum implementation that has hindered their ability to adapt to their work. It is, therefore, critical that HoDs be developed with knowledge and skills to influence curriculum planning, delivery and development.

Bantwini (2010:84) is of the view that Curriculum Policy Assessment Statements (CAPS) put a greater demand on the role of HoDs in South Africa. CAPS requires HoDs to be specialists in the specific subjects that they lead and to be skilled in the implementation of the curriculum (Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014:53). In this regard, HoDs need to be developed so that they are able to rally other teachers towards the achievement of desired skills and attitudes. It is believed that the acquisition of strategic curriculum leadership by HoDs is bound to lead to more effective teaching and learning practice (Bush, 2018:85). HoDs must possess curriculum insight and transformative acumen to overcome possible barriers in the execution of their roles to leverage the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

2.7.2 Professional Development of Teachers

The professional development of teachers is quite critical in helping HoDs to improve their performance in the departments that they head. Teachers need to be taught in such a way that they stay abreast of curriculum issues, managing teaching and learning as well as creating school-wide conditions for learning (Malatji, 2018:36). The launching of the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework (ISPF) for teacher education and development in South Africa in 2009 was intended to promote the development of teachers in their respective subject areas (Motshekga, 2009:7). Bambi (2013:70) also supports the improvement of teacher competencies as they are perceived to constitute an essential part of school management.

Kutame, Ravhuhali, Mutshaeni and Maluleka (2015:49) argue that the strategies of professional teacher development have not been effective in improving the quality of

teaching, especially in some rural schools. This view is contested by Graggs (2011:79) who believes that HoDs should work to develop and plan with teachers for the implementation of positive change processes in schools. According to Bambi (2013:68), the growth and development of teachers is related to the academic improvement of learners in schools. This improvement of teachers is associated with skills and positive attitudes, which are desired for the acquisition of progressive methods and approaches. It is in this regard, that HoDs must play a role in the professional development of teachers. This can come in the form of departmental workshops and seminars to promote quality teaching and learning in schools. Internal staff members or external people with expertise can be used to impart knowledge and skills to teachers on effective teaching and learning. It is, therefore, teachers with a rich understanding of the teaching profession that are better placed to assist HoDs to succeed in the performance of their duties.

2.7.3   Setting Clear Goals for the Department

Stewart (2015:547) argues that it is imperative to set clear goals for the department and communicate such related targets to learners. In this case, HoDs would also be providing the needed support for the achievement of the broad vision of the school through offering instructional leadership in the areas of their operational jurisdictions. This calls upon HoDs to provide the needed resources and guidance and be visible in all business transactions of the department that are critical for the academic performance of learners.

Nomnian and Arphattananon (2018:51) maintain that setting goals should be about reconciling differences in the process of improving the academic performance of learners. The setting and prioritisation of goals helps HoDs to focus and provide room to maintain strengths and erase impediments in the quest to improve the academic performance of learners. HoDs need to set their own departmental goals in line with school goals so that there will be collaborative efforts among the various work teams within the school towards the attainment of improved learner academic performance.

2.7.4 Creating a Positive School Culture

HoDs can exercise their instructional leadership role through delegating responsibilities to other teachers. They should work together with subject teachers to establish a positive culture of teaching and learning. Macbeth (2018:27) views school culture as a common value system, an agenda and collegial relations between the teachers, learners and support staff. Macbeth (2018:27) has shown clearly how collegial norms influence the chance that HoDs would make an impact in their own schools. Where there is a positive school culture, learners are more interested in academic learning, have a lower rate of absenteeism and are more organised. Plüddemann (2015:186) maintains that, in such environments, fewer learners quit school and learners get better grades. Teachers are more satisfied with their jobs, are healthier and have higher levels of morale compared to other schools. There is also a high degree of motivation for further school improvement.

The culture of a school appears to be a deciding factor when it comes to a school's state of readiness and its capacity to improve. Hogue et al. (2016:109) support the development of a network of common beliefs, norms, values, attitudes and behaviours as necessary cultural components in a school. This network enables teachers to positively influence learner academic performance. The establishment of a conscious attempt to promote a culture of increased collegial relations leads to heightened teaching and learning as well as higher levels of motivation of teachers in schools. Diem, Frankenberg and Cleary (2015:712) observe that HoDs need to work on the strong points of teachers to ensure a culture of excellence is made prevalent. This is critical in motivating teachers to a new culture of teaching and learning.

2.7.5 Engaging in Team-Building Efforts

Team building tends to encourage new practices that may permeate the academic performance of learners. This is especially so when such team-building efforts are embraced by teachers that are more inclined towards change. Sedgewick, Hill, Yates, Pickering and Pellicano (2016:1297) add that team building has the potential to build team spirit through the rallying of performances around common goals.

Participation in workgroups helps teachers to realise that they have useful skills to contribute towards the collective good of the school.

The low academic performance of learners is usually characterised by a poor culture of teaching and learning. HoDs may be engaged in more paperwork than in instructional activities. Hence, they do not check whether teaching and learning programmes are in place to support learners. This shows that they sometimes abdicate some of their functions and services, which impacts negatively on the academic performance of learners. Peurača and Vejmelka (2015:123) believe that HoDs should engage team-building techniques to forge cooperative partnerships with the entire staff in delivering practices and services in schools. Similarly, Lucas-Molina, Williamson, Pulido and Pérez-Albéniz (2015:298) argue that team building, when done by HoDs, is an effective method for addressing real problems facing a school. This may allow for the growth of networks and partnerships, which are useful in solving challenges. Staff development practices can also become more linked to the needs of the learners. Team-building training further stands to influence goals such as communication, trust and support, which are examples of skills and attitudes (Wilson-Daily, Kemmelmeier & Prats, 2018:12).

Lauritzen (2016:319) identifies team building as one of the 21 elements of collegial practices of those in leadership. Its place on the significance of collegial leadership for the success of the school is underscored by the apparent need to inculcate collegial leadership skills in HoD trainees. These are individuals that are expected to become the future school leaders. Dale (2017:129) contends that HoDs who acquire team-building skills during their training are also better equipped to become more effective leaders in the future, ensuring learner academic achievement.

2.7.6 Eliciting Community Participation in School Business

HoDs should ensure that parents and the entire community are encouraged to participate in the activities of the school. This would ensure that the business of the school is understood and owned by the people whose children form the main objective of the existence of the school. Ryan and Gottfried (2017:563) state that the whole school community should in some way be involved in the activities of the

school. The community has to be familiar with the culture of the school. It is essential, however, that the HoDs play a pivotal role in making sure that the parents share the vision of the school. This stems from the point that HoDs are an appendage of the central administration of the school, without which the body fabric of the school is fractured.   Darling-Hammond et al. (2017:291) contends that the community needs to participate in the running of the school so that it is aware of what the school and the various departments are doing.

Allington and Cunningham (2002:304) advise that parents need to establish easy communication between teachers and HoDs.   Such contact exceeds homework and class activities to significantly impact the cooperation of parents and the academic performance of learners.   Bipath and Nkabinde (2018:2) aver that schools with a sound relationship with the community are bound to obtain assistance from the community in times of difficulty.   The community needs to have the freedom of unlimited opportunities to come to the school to converse with teachers, use school facilities and use the school as a resource to develop themselves and their children. This implies that HoDs need to cultivate a cultural relationship between the school and the community hinging on principles of collaboration and openness.

According to Brown and Rutherford (2010:79), HoDs should take the front seat in the effort to design and construct social networks with the school community. This is the part of the school that needs to assume an active part in addressing the worsening conditions facing many learners and their families.   HoDs must strive to construct integrated networks of partnerships with various groups.   This pertains to forging fresh links with parents or guardians that will allow them to support their children in effective teaching and learning. They have to demonstrate shear sensitivity to aspects that may curtail organizational success such as race and gender variables (Brown & Rutherford, 2010:79).

2.8   CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this chapter discussed the roles of HoDs in enhancing the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. These included the crafting of plans for the performance of schools, communicating information to drive school life, improving

school resources, improving teaching and learning and ensuring school discipline. The contextualization of the role of HoDs was outlined as a brief exposition of the HoD phenomenon. The discussion also focused on factors that hinder the performance of HoDs in enhancing the academic performance of learners. The factors covered the lack of knowledge of professional practice, lack of clear goals, constraints of time, lack of effective institutional policies, ineffective communication and inadequate resources. The chapter further interrogated some strategies that can be adopted to improve the performance of HoDs such as improving their competencies, professional development of teachers, setting of clear goals for the department, creating a positive school culture, engaging in team-building efforts and eliciting community participation in school business.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   INTRODUCTION

This section describes the research design and methodology used to address the research questions on which the study is based. It discusses the research population, sampling, data collection instruments and data analysis techniques used in this study. The research paradigm, which provides a philosophical basis for the conduct of the research, is articulated and used to make decisions on the appropriate approach for the study. The connection between the interpretivist paradigm and the qualitative approach is well reflected in the study. The chapter also discusses ethical considerations of the study, inclusive of permission to conduct the study, anonymity and confidentiality adopted in the research process. An in-depth presentation of the trustworthiness of qualitative data and the process of qualitative data analysis are made.

3.2   Research Design

A research design is best described as the overall plan according to which the participants in a proposed study are selected, as well as the means of data collection and/or generation (Creswell, 2015:77). A research design provides a clear framework for the selection of research methods as well as the basis for data interpretation and analysis. A research design thus constitutes the sample selection and the collection, measurement and analysis of data. Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler (2011:27) define research design as the blueprint for fulfilling research objectives and answering research questions.

The study was carried out using a case study research design. Ndebele (2014:103) notes that a case study design is an appropriate way of evaluating educational programmes as educational activities operate in a social context. Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan and Hoagwood (2015:533) contend that the fundamental belief of qualitative research is that, to create meaning for research individuals

studied, multiple realities should exist instead of searching for one reality. The researcher in qualitative research believes that participants of the study actively participate in social actions and thus understands the phenomena under study in different ways. Jaca (2013:42) avers that a case study design allows researchers to operate in a bounded context. This implies that researchers are able to conduct investigations within a limited or confined research environment of few cases. Case studies are mostly anchored in real life situations, and this makes them ideal for use in providing rich and detailed accounts of a phenomenon under study.

Case study design allowed this researcher to conduct this study in school contexts and to interview participants in natural settings. This design also allowed the researcher to use multiple sources and instruments for data collection. This availed freedom in data collection through providing the latitude for the use of a semi-structured interview guide in the collection of data. The interviews generated adequate information, which was essential to address the purpose of the study and research questions.

3.3   RESEARCH PARADIGM

A paradigm is the basic belief system or worldview that guides researchers to study, understand and report research findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Creswell and Zhang (2009) posit that research paradigms are basic belief systems or worldviews that guide researchers' inquiry. Denzil and Lincoln (2008:245) view a paradigm as consisting of a set of beliefs that is used to guide action. According to Sobh and Perry (2006), there are four different research paradigms, which are positivism, realism, constructivism and critical theory. Positivism may be regarded as a research strategy and approach that is rooted in the principle that truth and reality are free and independent of the viewer and observer (Karasi, Shambare & Nkondo, 2017).

The positivist paradigm asserts that real events can be observed empirically and explained with logical analysis (Kaboub, 2008:99). Positivists hold the viewpoint that the world conforms to permanent, unchanging laws or rules of causation and happenings (Pollack, 2006:111). Positivism, on another note, according to Stahl

(2007:96), appears to be a weak or deficient foundation for research and investigation in drawing nuanced or in-depth conclusions. For instance, there are several problems regarding induction, initiation and general applicability. Further points of critique and analysis address the epistemological problems ensuing from positivist ontology (Lee & Baskerville, 2003:204).

Realism, in general, is defined as the view that entities exist independently of being perceived or independently of our theories about them (Philips, 1987:205). Creswell (2012:48) explains the aim of a realist paradigm as being to generalize the findings of a research study and being based on the perceptions of people with regard to their settings. Kazi (2003:89) saw the desire and purpose of realist research as being to develop a family of answers from an exploration of several contingent contexts and different reflective perceptions of participants. Critical theory researchers assume social reality to be historically and socially constituted and to be produced and reproduced by people (Myers, Montgomery & Anderson-Cook, 2009:74). The aim of the critical researcher is to openly critique the status quo and to focus on the conflicts and constraints in society (Karasi et al., 2017:87). Thus, the critical theory paradigm encourages evaluators to question and evaluate the cultural, political, social and gender assumptions underlying the phenomenon being investigated (Reeves & Hedberg, 2003:44).

The research paradigm used in this study is interpretivism, which holds the philosophical position that reality is 'constructed' by the researcher and places more emphasis on the existence of multiple worldviews that result from the interaction, contact and communication among people (Bailey, 2006:47). Interpretivist researchers focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to come to an understanding of the historical, cultural and social settings of the participants (Thomas et al., 2014).

3.3.1   Justification of the Interpretivism Paradigm

The interpretivist paradigm was used in this study as it ascertains that reality is 'constructed' by the researcher and places more emphasis on the existence of multiple worldviews that result from the interaction, contact and communication

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among people (Creswell, 2006:67). This implies that, to understand the role of HoDs in enhancing academic performance, there is need to interact, contact and communicate with those involved to get comprehensive conclusions. This paradigm allows the researcher to view the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants.

Researchers subscribing to the interpretivist school of thought often talk about the processes of interaction among individuals – about social interaction and engagement. They also focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to come to an understanding of the historical, cultural and social settings of the participants (Thomas et al., 2014:78). For this study, the interpretivist paradigm was used since it involves an understanding of multiple meanings of participants and allows for theory generation.

3.4   RESEARCH APPROACH

A qualitative approach is perfect for the exploration of human experience (Yin, 2011:76). Denzin and Lincoln (2008:88) attests to the contributions of qualitative researchers to the body of knowledge in various disciplines. A qualitative methodology is applied in studying complex issues, and it enables the researcher to generate strong data on the experiences, perceptions and beliefs of the participants in order to deepen the understanding. Yin (2011:8) observes that a qualitative approach is distinguishable from other approaches by its ability to represent the perspectives and views of participants, as the voices of the participants are emphasised. This research is appropriate for the exploration of the human experience because the researcher can complete an investigation as constructed and understood by those who have firsthand experience on the problem (Marshall & Rossman, 2014:78). This deems qualitative research as critical in allowing the researcher to gain a deeper grasp of the phenomenon under study. This is made possible through a more open interaction with participants in actual settings. The researcher is also afforded the opportunity to understand and explain behaviours that are not easily measured through the use of questionnaires (Creswell, 2012:49).

The aim of the research was to generate new knowledge in a bid to better understand the dynamics within the role of HoDs in enhancing the academic performance of learners and, to achieve this, there was a need to utilise and adopt the methodology best suited to achieve the research objectives, while capturing important insights from the relevant data (KLN, 2014:89).

A key advantage of using a qualitative methodology lies in it building a holistic description of the researcher's study area and enabling a more holistic understanding of complex issues and processes (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:47). However, qualitative methods do have their own challenges, as observed during the study. There is a tendency for the participants to deviate from the objective(s) of the research and give out historical data that is not directly relevant to the objectives of the study.

3.5   POPULATION AND SAMPLING

3.5.1 Population

The population of participants for this study consisted of HoDs in Vhuronga 2 Circuit in Vhembe District. The population of Vuronga 2 Circuit in Vhembe District consists of four schools. The study was aimed at gaining information and drawing conclusions from this population from the Vhuronga 2 Circuit in Limpopo Province.

3.5.2 Sampling

In this study, purposive sampling was used to select the study participants. The rationale for using purposive sampling in this study was that the four public schools under study were representative of the entire population and met the purpose of the study. In short, the researcher identified information-rich participants from whom to gather data. Purposive sampling was employed because it is suitable for studying people's culture. The participants were chosen because they understood the culture of the school community and had experience in teaching high school learners. Roy, Zvonkovic, Goldberg, Sharp and LaRossa (2015:243) assert that purposive sampling assumes that the researcher knows the population under study and that the

selection of participants is based on the judgement of the researcher regarding their suitability for the study. Guest (2014:215) states that qualitative researchers purposefully select people or settings for study because they acknowledge the complexity that characterises humans.

3.6   DATA COLLECTION

Data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest in an established systematic fashion that enables one to answer stated research questions, test hypotheses and evaluate outcomes. Data was collected through the use of an interview schedule. Patton, Hong, Patel and Kral (2015:45) state that an interview schedule is a written list of questions, open or closed-ended questions, which are prepared for use by an interviewer in an interview session. The participants were able to tell their stories in a free-flowing manner because they gave each other chances to talk. The data collection component of the research is common to all fields of study including physical and social sciences, humanities and business. While methods vary by discipline, the emphasis on ensuring accurate and honest collection remains the same (Matiwane-Mcengwa & Molepo, 2017:19).

3.6.1 Qualitative Data Collection

Interviews were conducted with the HoDs on their roles in improving learner academic performance in schools. An interview schedule with semi-structured questions was designed to guide the researcher during the interview process. The researcher asked questions and made follow-ups on the participants' answers. This allowed the researcher to have flexibility in the way in which the participants provided information. A tape recorder was used to capture the responses from the participants, and the information on tapes was later transcribed before being analysed.

3.7   DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a process of inspecting, cleansing, transforming and modelling data with the goal of discovering useful information, informing conclusions and supporting

decision-making. Data analysis has multiple facets and approaches, encompassing diverse techniques under a variety of names, while being used in different businesses, sciences and social science domains (Brayda & Boyce, 2014:318).

3.7.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

All data collected was first transcribed. Once the data had been sorted and typed, the researcher read and reread the texts to try and understand the data. Once the data were typed and sorted, a hard copy was printed as the data was saved in a computer as a Microsoft Word document. The in-depth interviews were recorded, using a digital voice recorder and then transcribed using Microsoft Word. The transcriptions were analysed using Archive of Technology, Lifeworld and Everyday Language. Text interpretation (ATLAS.ti) version 8, which is a qualitative data analysis computer programme. The thematic analysis was effectively used in the data analysis process.

The steps in the analysis process included the following:
- **Becoming familiar with the data**: Becoming familiar with the data involves the transcription of raw data that was obtained from participants. This data might be tape recorded interviews, video recordings and written field notes (Braun & Clarke, 2019:594). Lacey and Luff (2009:19) note that the transcription of data is likely to be influenced by researcher's bias when only sections that are of interest to the researcher are included. This was avoided by instituting verbatim transcriptions. The non-verbal cues were also included as they provided useful data that assisted to clarify communications. The researcher read and reread the transcripts to gain a fuller and complete understanding of the gathered data.

- **Generating initial codes**: This pertains to organising data into easily retrievable sections. This involved the identification of initial codes. These are composed of information, which may either be interesting or significant and systematically occurring across the data set. Names and other identifiable materials were removed from the transcripts. The data that belonged to the same categories were organised and segmented under a

specified code. The codes were derived from the patterns and meanings that emerged from the data. In this study, the researcher used abbreviations and code numbers to identify interviewees. The development of a code was guided by the research questions, literature review and the purpose of the study.

- **Searching for themes**: The researcher developed patterns from data collated under the developed codes. Themes related to concepts that emerged from the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2019:594). The step relates to defining and giving names to themes that come from the data. The themes were derived from collapsing codes to constitute working themes and grouping information according to existing themes. The themes were continuously refined as detected by the contained details.

- **Reviewing the themes**: The constructed themes were reviewed with the intention to ensure that they communicate sense and reflect the content required under the given themes. Data from the various participants were analysed, compared and their suitability for the designated themes checked. These working themes were employed to help in shaping the final themes.

- **Defining and naming themes**: This stage involved assigning definite names to the themes so that they capture the entire content per theme. It is preferred that there should be no overlap in the formulation of themes, especially the major themes. This was achieved by making use of other expert researchers.

- **Producing a report**: This step is the last and final stage in the analysis of qualitative data. This is where the data collected are analysed and synthesised to address the main research question as well as the objective of the study. The step required the researcher to be creative in exposing the role of HoDs in improving the academic performance of learners. It is essential, at this time, to understand that the quality of the collected data plays a crucial part in determining the quality of the research outcomes. Verbatim excerpts were used to support the findings of the study and to show

that these findings are not a reflection of the interests, imagination and disposition of the researcher.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations also contain statements about the kinds of justification that will be used in normative statements. Acting to achieve the best outcome is, on the other hand, a justification based on consequences and not on principles. These justifications are referred to as 'consequentialist ethics. The regulatory responses recommended in this report to protect genetic information reflect a balance among these considerations. Participants contributed positively to a body of knowledge about the role of HoDs in improving the academic performance of learners. Participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time or to decline to answer any question in the study. The following ethical issues were addressed in the study.

3.8.1 Permission to Conduct Research

Permission for field entry was obtained prior to conducting the study. This was applied for and provided by the University of Venda Research Ethics Committee. The Department of Education offered clearance to proceed to schools to conduct interviews with selected participants. The participants were also asked to complete consent forms as evidence of an admission to participate in the study.

3.8.2 Informed Consent

Participants of the study were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and that they were at liberty to withdraw their participation at any point in the study without incurring penalties. The purpose of the study was given to participants, and potential benefits that would accrue to stakeholders, including learners, educators, HoDs and the whole school community were revealed. This is in line with Chauvette et al. (2020:4) who warn that participants of the study need to be told about the purpose of the study to ensure that they are not conned or forced into involvement in the study that would not yield any benefit to them. They were told that data will be disseminated to the public through presentations, workshops and publications. It

was also made clear from the onset that there would be no financial reward for participating in this study. The clarifications were all made to ensure that participants were protected from harm that exceeds that which they are usually exposed to in their everyday life.

3.8.3   Confidentiality and Anonymity

Anonymity is offered when the specific responses and information from participants is not associated with them (Chauvette et al., 2020:4). The participants were assured that their names or identities would not be divulged in the publication and publicization of the results. The readers were obstructed from linking the real participants with their information, which was provided through the use of codes. The information from the participating individuals was kept under lock and key in a cupboard.

Fetters and Molina-Azorin (2020:138) present confidentiality as making sure that the information collected during a study is not readily available to the public. In the process of data collection, there is information that is private and not for public consumption, and this is the content which the researcher safely guards. The responses of participants were never shared with other people outside the study.

3.9   TRUSTWORTHINESS

When qualitative researchers speak of research 'validity and reliability', they are usually referring to research that is credible and trustworthy. It is generally acceptable that engaging multiple methods of data collection, such as observation, interviews and document analysis will lead to trustworthiness (Maree, 2012:97). The key criterion or principle of good qualitative research is found in the notion of trustworthiness. This is about the neutrality of its findings or decisions. A qualitative study cannot be called transferable unless it is credible, and it cannot be deemed credible unless it is dependable (Babbie & Mouton, 2012:47). The following criteria for trustworthiness of a qualitative study were addressed.

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3.9.1 Credibility of the Study

Credibility ensures that the representations of the research participants' socially constructed realities actually match what the participants intended (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016:67). Saunders et al. (2016:67) further point out that a range of techniques to ensure credibility include: a lengthy research involvement to build trust and collect sufficient data, the use of reflection using a third party to discuss ideas and test out findings and developing the best analysis to ensure the best possible explanation of the phenomenon under study. It is also essential to ensure that the researcher's preconceived ideas about the outcome of the study are not prioritised over the social constructions of the participants. In this study, credibility was ensured through member checking. This involved going back to the research participants so that they could confirm that the outcomes of the study are linked to the information that they provided during the interviews. The transcriptions of the information, which was tape recorded, were shown to the participants to confirm their ownership of the transcribed data. This was done to avoid misrepresentation of their views as a strategy to enhance the credibility of the results of the study.

3.9.2 Dependability

Jaca (2013:52) presents dependability as a concept used in qualitative research to refer to the degree to which disparities can be tracked and explained. In quantitative research, this is conceived as reliability. Dependability of qualitative data refers to the stability of data over time and conditions (Nassaji, 2020:428). In this study, dependability was ensured through an audit trail. It was easy for this researcher and an independent researcher to carry out an audit on the processes and procedures that were involved in the research. The transcripts, field notes and audiotapes were preserved for future reference and viewing as a strategy to track the conduct of the study. Detailed descriptions of the steps involved in the research process were made.

2.9.3 Transferability

Transferability relates to the generalisability of the findings of a study (Headley & Plano Clark, 2020:150). This relates to the way in which the findings of the study are transferable or applicable to other similar settings of groups of people. Nassaji (2020:428) contend that transferability concerns the possibility of applying the outcomes of a study in other contexts or participants. To ensure the applicability of transferability, the researcher offered a rich and thick description of the characteristics of the study participants, the context and the strategies used in the collection of data. It also entailed the provision of a sufficiently detailed account of the data within the given context and the reporting thereof (Headley & Plano Clark, 2020:149). The researcher further selected participants with rich information and collected data until the point of saturation was reached.

2.9.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the contribution of the participants. It reflects the way in which researcher's bias, interest and motivation are prevented from influencing the outcomes of the study (Chauvette et al., 2020:4). Confirmability describes the potential for congruency of data in terms of relevancy, accuracy and meaning. It is concerned with the establishment of whether the research data represents the information offered by the participants and that the interpretations are not inspired by the imagination of the researcher. In this study, the audit trail adopted enabled careful documentation of the research process to give an external expert researcher the opportunity to arrive at the same results.

3.10 CONCLUSION

The methodology section provided a clear description of how the data was collected, organized and analysed. This is an integral part of the whole study, given that a poor research design could lead to inappropriate or invalid findings and conclusions. The population and sampling techniques were described in detail to clearly show the methods that were used to select participants from the entire research population.

The data collection process, including the instrument used for this, as well as the data analysis process, were described. This was done bearing in mind that it is from the analysis that meaningful conclusions and recommendations can be drawn for future research and for those in both the sample and the research population.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the presentation of the findings of the study on the role of HoDs in enhancing the academic performance of Grade 12 learners in Vhuronga 2 Circuit in Vhembe District in Limpopo Province. The discussion was informed by the purpose of the study and the research questions. This solicited information pertains to the role of HoDs in enhancing Grade 12 learners' academic performance, factors contributing to the performance of Grade 12 learners, challenges hindering the academic performance of learners, and strategies that can be adopted to improve the performance of learners. The schools under study mainly belong to the less-resourced category, with four falling in quintile 2, and two in quintile 3. Only three schools were in quintile 4. This quintile caters for schools that are well resourced to produce improved learner performance. However, two participants did not indicate the quintiles to which their schools belonged. They may have felt that it was not important to register the quintile levels of their schools.

4.2   BIOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

The study comprised 11 individuals that participated in the interviews that were conducted. The sample of participants was acknowledged as adequate to attain data saturation. The participants were categorised into three groups, which relate to the gender, age and the quintile of the schools. The sample comprised seven males and three females. This was indicative of male dominancy in the position of HoD in the circuit within which the schools under study belonged. With regard to age, one participant was 27 years old, three were in the 35 to 44 age range, two were in the 45 to 49 age range and five fell in the 50 to 54 age range. The emerging picture showed that participants were mature individuals that had accrued a wealth of experience in the profession.

4.3   ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH INFORMATION

This section consists of themes and sub-themes that emerged pertaining to the role of HoDs in enhancing the performance of Grade 12 learners in the Vhuronga 2 Circuit schools in Vhembe District. These themes and sub-themes were developed based on the items on the interview guide and derived from the research objectives and purpose of the study. They required information on the role of HoDs in the performance of learners, factors contributing to learner academic performance, challenges hindering learner academic performance, and strategies that can be adopted to improve learner performance. The themes and sub-themes are tabulated in the following table.

Table 4.1: Summary of Themes and Sub-themes of Analysis

Theme Number	Themes	Sub-Themes
1	4.4 Role of the HoD in the performance of learners	4.4.1 Ensuring teaching and learning occurs 4.4.2 Encouraging learners 4.4.3 Creating productive communication 4.4.4 Promoting discipline
2	4.5 Factors contributing to learner academic performance	4.5.1 Effective communication 4.5.2 Parental involvement 4.5.3 Availability of resources
3	4.6 Challenges hindering the academic performance of learners	4.6.1 Lack of discipline 4.6.2 Poor home backgrounds 4.6.3 Low quality of teachers 4.6.4 Lack of resources 4.6.5 Large classes
4	4.7 Strategies that can be adopted to improve academic performance	4.7.1 Reducing workload of teachers 4.7.2 Use of team teaching 4.7.3 Professional development of teachers 4.7.4 Community participation 4.7.5 Creating a positive school climate

4.4   ROLE OF THE HOD IN THE PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS

4.4.1   Ensuring Teaching and Learning Occurs

The study confirmed that HoDs ensure that there is teaching and learning taking place in schools. They preside over the management and administration of school activities. This is done through engaging in a number of activities such as assessing teachers, conducting meetings and working closely with teachers to offer them support and advice on matters pertaining to the delivery of the curriculum.

One participant noted that:

> "*HoDs ensure class activities are undertaken, assess teachers, support, advice and contribute to curriculum implementation*" (T2).

HoDs make class visits to verify the content that teachers deliver and continuously check on the readiness of teachers to provide undented service to learners.

One participant indicated that:

> *"HoDs have the mandate of "checking the content coverage or the subject taught per term".*

Participant T3 concurred, noting that:

> "*HoDs ensure that teaching and learning runs smoothly by evaluating teachers' work and suggest[ing] ways to improve teaching and learning*".

In essence, this is what T9 referred to as:

> "*Ensuring good professional practice and quality of teaching*".

HoDs ensure that they supervise teachers in their professional practice. This includes teaching, marking, monitoring performance and the giving of feedback to learners on time.
T7 noted that:

"They supervise teaching and learning, that marking is done, feedback given, and [they] monitor class activities".

Literature states that HoDs work to assist teachers to perfect the skill of instructional delivery as a way of involving learners in the teaching and learning discourse (Farrell, 2015:438; Taniguchi & Hirakawa, 2016:479). Onyongo and Ogola (2019:12) note that HoDs regularly check the notes of learners, class exercises, moderation of examination materials and marking schemes.

The study showed that the HoDs are supposed to craft plans for the functioning of the department. T5 was explicit on this, stating that:

> *"HoDs must have departmental plans". It is evident that such plans should be derived from the existing policies. This is observed in the statement that they "must have curriculum assessment and policy statement-CAPS".*

In a veiled mention of organisation goals, T5 hinted that:

> *"HoDs must be able to set targets for the next term in order to improve results"*.

Nawelwa et al. (2015:716) observe that planning for enhanced academic performance is an activity that involves strategic initiatives that will lead the school towards action-oriented goals.

In line with this view, T6 notes that:

> *"The encouragement of HoDs must be done at all times to help learners to study with better visions"*.

4.4.2 Encouraging Learners

HoDs, as the face of their departments, are expected to play a key role in motivating people in their subject areas towards work excellence. This is particularly important with regard to learners coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. Such learners require motivation to be able to carry on with schooling in the face of varied

challenges that are real in their lives. Participant T5 alluded to the fact that HoDs need to search information concerning the background of learners to enable the application of fitting interventions.

T5 said that:

> "*They should search for information about learners' environment.*
> *They must be closer to learners from poor economic backgrounds*".

This, according to T1, is intended to "*encourage, motivate, counsel and guide learners so that they can work harder all the time*".
This is supported by the conviction of T6, that:

> "*HoDs should play special roles of encouraging and strengthening learners and teachers at school*".

4.4.3 Creating Productive Communication

The study showed that HoDs should strive to ensure that the functions of the school are kept healthy through appropriate use of communication. Communication needs to be effective and efficient in all directions and channels. It is in this regard that HoDs are expected to be exemplary to allow teachers and learners to emulate their behaviour and practices. Good communication eradicates ambiguity and makes sure that instructions and plans are conducted according to expectations. It also ensures that sound relationships are cultivated among all relevant stakeholders in the education of learners. Participant T1 said:

> "*HoDs can make sure that there is a good relationship between learners and teachers at school. This creates a good working environment both for learners and teachers*".

A head of department, being a human resource and relationship manager, needs to have individual capacity to motivate others and to promote team spirit in the department (Kelz et al., 2015:119).

4.4.4 Promoting Discipline

HoDs, as authority holders, are envisaged to promote discipline among both teachers and learners. This is critical as discipline is considered as the mother of development and success. Indiscipline breeds failure and confusion. Discipline is primary because it fosters respect for policies and regulations as well as spurs human effort. In this regard, participant T1 reasoned that:

> *"HoDs can highly assist learners to perform well, work on discipline and respect"*.

T6 took this further, indicating that:

> "*These HoDs must be like fathers and mothers to learners so that learners might uplift their performance*".

In this function, HoDs should work to instil discipline and prevent learners from various social ills such as drug and alcohol abuse and teenage pregnancy. This is because "*drug abuse and alcoholism affect learners psychologically"* (T6). Drugs prevent learners from sustained focus and, consequently, retards their academic performance. In this regard, literature states that the development of an effective disciplinary system in a school is an important aspect of the role of the HoD, and it is likely to influence the academic performance of learners in schools (Shaw et al., 2015:115).

4.5   FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LEARNER ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

4.5.1 Effective Communication

The study established that HoDs have a duty to communicate activities and programmes in their departments. They communicate upwards as they convey to their line managers issues in their departments, and at the same time, communicate the goals and vision of the organisation to subordinates. They present the plans and activities of the departments to teachers through various forms of communication such as memos, letters, notices and meetings. These maybe be face-to-face or virtual.

T1 said:

> "*Their language should always be motivationally positive for all groups of learners and teachers*".

With the same understanding, T4 acknowledges that "*language has an impact on learners' performance*". The language used in class needs to be at the level of learners' understanding. Teachers should not use language that is too difficult as to obscure learners' understanding. This is supported by T6 who contends that "*the use of difficult language and hard resources*" impact on learner performance. It is, therefore, imperative that HoDs support the use of appropriate language that is suitable for learner concept mastery. Literature contends that the role of communication is one fundamental functions of the head of department in enhancing the academic performance of learners in schools (RSA, 2016:38).

4.5.2 Parental Involvement

The study showed that parental involvement is crucial in improving the academic performance of learners. Parents are envisioned to play a pivotal role in the learning of their children. Parenthood is regarded as the first and most important institution to participate in the education of learners. Parents usually constitute the primary resource centre regarding information related to the learning of children. They possess the knowledge pertaining to learners' learning needs, characteristics and their disabilities, which provides vital information needed by teachers to properly address the learning challenges of learners. HoD1 indicated that:

> "*The school, the community and learners' homes should be positive working environments*".

It is suggested that Parents' Day needs to be a common occurrence to guide and strengthen the disposition of learners to learn. The collaboration between teachers and parents is considered key; as such, HoDs are anticipated to play a crucial role in fostering a progressive and unified working relationship between the two groups. This can further "*reduce the level of drug abuse, early pregnancies, unnecessary dropping out of school, and so on*". The HoD has the mandate of meeting parents and discussing with them the progress and conduct of their children at school (Bush

& Glover, 2012:6).   Parents also have a role to play in the performance of their children; hence, meeting the parents and engaging with them provides the premise for coming up with comprehensive measures for improving the performance of the learners (Bush & Glover, 2012:6).

4.5.3 Availability of Resources

The findings of the study indicated that the availability of resources is a must for effective teaching and learning to occur.   These resources may be produced by either learners or teachers, but they can still be purchased. They may be in the form of teachers' resource books, curriculum assessment policy statements, record of marks and exercises that are used by learners. T1 noted that:

> "N*ecessary and relevant resources must be provided for both learners and teachers";* similarly, T6 concurs that: *"Relevant and well-understandable resources must be provided".*

This implies that the resources used must be well produced, relevant and easy to use by both teachers and learners. The availability of resources that cannot be operated by both teachers and learners is a disservice to the learners' academic progress. The needed resources must also be delivered on time to avert anxiety and frustration. T7 emphasises this point, indicating that:

> "*HoDs see to it that resource materials are provided on time*".   Essentially, teachers must have "*all valued stationery and tools that enhance learning and teaching*" (T8).

These resources also need to be adequate to address the targeted needs gap. Regarding this aspect, T10 mentioned that:

> *"HoDs should ensure timely and adequate provision of the relevant equipment needed to improve teaching and learning".*

Literature points out that schools should be properly and uniformly equipped with resources to promote sound and effective teaching (Fleming & Hutton, 2017:10). Gu et al. (2017:199) claim that the key functions of heads of department is to secure and operate the effective allocation, monitoring and control of the use of resources.

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4.6 CHALLENGES HINDERING THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS

4.6.1 Lack of Discipline

The study revealed that a lack of discipline impedes the enhanced academic performance of learners in Grade 12. This is because indiscipline brings about a lot of disciplinary problems that impede academic progress. Lack of discipline is exhibited variously, such as learners absenting themselves from school, flouting school rules, not carrying out assigned tasks and eventually dropping out of school. They may indulge in illicit activities such as drug and alcohol abuse, sexual activities and bullying. Participant T1 said:

> "*Indiscipline causes learners to be affected psychologically, and even lead[s] others to have or to spend more time in negatives activities, like drug abuse, instead of studying. Some learners get pregnant and drop out of school and have poor study hour*s."

The DoE (2003) observes that it is the role of HoDs to equip teachers with skills to mitigate the occurrence of indiscipline such as cultivating interest in schooling and developing in learners mutual love and respect in the classroom. A lack of proper discipline may lead to the prevalence of chaos in the classroom, which subsequently leads to impoverished academic performances (Russell et al., 2015:92).

4.6.2 Poor Home Backgrounds

The response to this interview item showed that family background that is dysfunctional has a negative influence on Grade 12 learners' academic performance. This poses a situation that is disadvantageous to teaching and learning. Such a situation is characterised by poverty and a lack of support and requisite resources for study. HoD1 presented such a situation as one that is viewed as "*negative and uninteresting backgrounds*". Learners from poor home backgrounds also experience challenges that relate to weak mastery and use of language. This may entail low proficiency in both the home language and the First Additional Language (FAL). This refers to the language of teaching and learning that is used at school. This is

crucial, as attested to by participant T5, who believes that "*language also hinders performance*". A weak command of English, for example, increases the propensity of learners to perform poorly in the academic subjects. This, therefore, increases the need for HoDs to find ways to ensure that the home environment of learners does not work to disfavour their academic progress.

4.6.3 Low Quality of Teachers

Teachers that are not well trained are a significant element in the reduction of learners' performance in schools. Quality teachers are those that have been groomed to develop positive attitudes to teaching and equipped with the requisite competencies to deliver substantive teaching. These are teachers that are ready to harness all possible instruments or tools for the betterment of teaching and learning. HoD2 noted "*underperforming or non-prepared teachers*" as presenting setbacks to improved learners' academic performance. Excelling schools require HoDs that have commitment and interest in the teaching and learning discourse. An HoD of this calibre is expected to pass on similar attitude and mentality to teachers in their areas of management as a catalyst for improved learner outcomes. They assist teachers "*to adopt a positive mental attitude and to work on improving where they are falling short*" (T7). Fleming and Hutton (2017:10) clarify that it is also essential for the school to have sufficient and adequate human resources, in terms of teacher quality, for the teaching of all subjects in the school curriculum.

4.6.4 Lack of Resources

Teaching and learning resources are considered as foregrounding the academic performance of learners. These resources come in various forms such as the tangible, intangible and financial. Resources are considered the drivers of the teaching and learning process. The absence of these work-enablers renders the whole process of education meaningless. HoDs, therefore, are supposed to ensure that they liaise with the broader school administration to facilitate the planning, procurement, distribution and effective use of all relevant resources. T2 highlighted the "*lack [of] or poor infrastructure*" as a challenge that hinders the better performance of learners. Similarly, T4 identified the "*lack of textbooks at school*" as

an obstruction to improved academic performance of learners in schools. Furthermore, T4 notes that "*insufficient learning materials impact on learners' performance*".

The constraint of time is one factor that also emerged strongly as hindering the functions of HoDs for the improvement of learner academic performance. HoDs have a lot of duties and responsibilities, which hamper unscathed delivery of instructional leadership roles. There is, therefore, a need to infuse the efforts of other stakeholders in the management of teaching and learning activities so that HoDs can be relieved of other duties and be committed to enhancing the performance of learners. Kruger (2003:209) observes that HoDs are faced with the challenge of having to divide their time between instructional curriculum issues and non-teaching duties of administration. In such a situation, "*HoDs can have good time of encouraging learners and teachers*". This implies that the HoD contributes to the existence of continuous and effective communication among various sister organisations to advance learner and departmental prospects (RSA, 2016:38). The late delivery of teaching materials also provides a barrier to effective teaching and learning in schools. This was revealed by participant T10 who said:

> "*Late delivery of stationery and other materials affect[s] teaching and learning of the subjects*".

4.6.5 Large Classes

Large classes are realised to be a contributory feature in breeding challenges hindering the desired performance of learners in Grade 12. The reality of large classes implies that teachers are inundated with work. They are unable to attend to the individual learners' needs. This springs from the fact that learners as individuals have backgrounds that are vast and need to be taken on board in regard to the implementation of instructional processes. HoD2 mentioned that "*overcrowded classes*" constitute barriers to the enhanced performance of learners. Mincu (2015:253) avers that teacher have to be appraised on the teaching of large classes. This is problematic in some schools with overcrowded classes. Bipath and Nkabinde (2018:2) further observe that the high educator-learner ratio is among the

contributory factors ushering in the low academic performances of learners in schools.

4.7   STRATEGIES THAT CAN BE ADOPTED TO IMPROVE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

There are many strategies that can be adopted to improve the academic performance of learners in Grade 12. These include reducing the workload of teachers, using team teaching, organising workshops for teachers and improving the assessment of learners. These strategies are discussed hereunder.

4.7.1 Reducing Workload of Teachers

Reducing the workload of teachers was provided as one of the strategies to enhance the academic performance of learners. Teachers need to have enough time to plan for teaching, teaching, evaluating actions and implementing interventions for those learners experiencing learning difficulties.   HoD2 suggested that this can be done by making sure that each teacher is made to teach one subject.   The participant suggested that:

> "*The strategy of reducing [the] workload for teachers in Grade 12 –*
> *in the sense of one teacher one subject – and reducing the number*
> *of learners to 20*".

HoDs have to make sure that teachers in their departments are not overloaded with work to allow them to cover the syllabus in a smooth manner (Riel & Berry, 2012).

4.7.2 Use of Team Teaching

The use of team teaching emerged as one of the strategies that might be employed to elevate academic performance of learners in Grade 12. This strategy offers different teachers the opportunity to try diverse methods of teaching, and in the process ensures that the learning needs of learners are diagnosed and addressed. HoD2 said that:

> "*Content can be delivered by different teachers using different strategies*".

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Teachers are likely to opt for this method of teaching at times when faced with the teaching of a topic considered to be difficult or in case of a need to buttress the understanding of learners. T4 believes that HoDs "*must outsource other subject teachers*"; the implication being that HoDs need to avail themselves of expertise and experience that are not available within the existing staff complement. This is usually available from neighbouring schools or within the same circuit.

4.7.3 Professional Development of Teachers

The study established that school authorities need to organise regular workshops for teachers. These workshops should be aimed at imparting the values of hard work and the understanding of the entire teaching profession. This entails encouraging and motivating learners towards active participation in class for improved academic performance. Teachers need to ensure that they prepare for lessons well in advance to cater for all aspects of content knowledge in their teaching and to avoid haphazard sessions; it is in this context that T7 advised that:

> "*HoDs should make sure that teachers prepare for the lesson before teaching*". HoD2 hinted that "*demotivated teachers should be taken to workshops at least every Saturday*".

This pointed to the need to also motivate teachers that might be victims of the burden of the demands of teaching. Teachers have to master the expected subject content knowledge, pedagogics of teaching, assessment of learning and interventions for less-performing learners. This implies that more and constant support should be provided to teachers. This is attested to by HoD3 who said that:

> "M*ore support must be provided to educators and learners as well as SMT (School Management Team)*".

HoDs provide various support practices such as one-on-one classroom observation to improve instruction and the professional capacity of teachers (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2009:85).

4.7.4 Community Participation

Community participation carries the mantra that all those that are interested in the learning of children must be accorded the opportunity to fully participate in the activities of the school. In this vein, the study revealed that community participation is pivotal for the academic success of learners. Community participation ensures that various challenges experienced by learners, such as poverty, child-headed families, ill health and disintegrated social fabric, are addressed to mitigate their grave effects on education. The involvement of community members, including parents, is hailed to offset some of the negative effects of teaching learners outside their usual family influence. T6 suggests that:

> "*Teachers should work in connection with parents and the community at all times*".

This facilitates effective counselling, guidance and support as these become a shared practice, especially between teachers and responsible family members. It is on the basis of this understanding that T7 desired HoDs to work at "*creating a communal environment*". The implication being that education in schools should mirror beliefs and practices in communities, and as such, exist as a true entity within the larger community. Literature reveals that the HoD must support teachers by introducing many enrichment programmes, which are conducted with the assistance of business and non-governmental organisations (Tsotetsi & Mahlomaholo, 2015:45).

4.7.5 Creating a Positive School Climate

HoDs are anticipated to contribute to creating a positive school climate. They are viewed to stand between school principals and the community to forge an atmosphere that is a catalyst for teaching and learning. Participant T3 said that they create a "*conducive atmosphere in which all learners learn and study well*". This may entail collaborating with both teachers and parents/guardians to make it possible for underperforming learners to have extra lessons or catch-up sessions to master those content areas that are difficult to them. T4 noted that a strategy to deal with underperforming learners may involve "*using previous question papers and*

preparation of extra lessons during holidays". Teachers and learners need to work together as a unit for improved results. The working together of teachers and learners implies a sharing of responsibility and accountability for actions as well as ensuring that the institutional vision and goals are shared and upheld. Participant T6 indicates that:

> "*Teachers and learners should…work together. The more they work as a unit, the better the results*". In fact, HoDs "*make sure that learners and teachers are working in a good relationship*".

Participants indicated the need for technology resources to be integrated into the teaching and learning environment to raise the learners' academic performance. This is in line with current trends in education, which use technology to ease access to and the development of knowledge. Technology enables the quick retrieval and storage of information, which is pertinent for teaching and learning in schools. As a strategy to improve the performance of learners, T8 highlighted:

> "*The introduction of technology and other facilities that enhance teaching and learning*".

T9 added that:

> "*There is a need for HoDs to work at ensuring timely and adequate provision of textbooks, materials and equipment required for effective teaching of subjects at school*".

Therefore, HoDs have to facilitate an increase in the performance of learners through helping with the allocation of resources such as finance, human resources, teaching materials and adequate teaching time (Gull & Shehzad, 2015:246). Asakawa (2017:184) states that it is the role of the HoD to make sure that educational inputs that are of vital importance to the teaching of any subject in the school curriculum are available.

4.8 CONCLUSION

This section consisted of themes and sub-themes that emerged pertaining to the role of HoDs in enhancing the performance of Grade 12 learners in the Vhuronga 2 Circuit schools in Vhembe District. These themes and sub-themes were developed

based on the items on the interview guide and derived from the research objectives and purpose of the study. Participants were required to respond to issues pertaining to the role of HoDs on the performance of learners, factors contributing to learner academic performance, challenges hindering learner academic performance, and strategies that can be adopted to improve learner performance. The themes and sub-themes were tabulated in a table prior to the detailed analysis provided.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers a summary of findings,conclusion and recommendations pertaining to the role of heads of department on the academic performance of Grade 12 learners in Vhuronga 2 Circuit in Vhembe District in Limpopo Province. The summary will be based on the major themes of the study inclusive of the role of HoDs on the learners' performance, factors contributing to learners' academic performance, challenges hindering learner academic performance, and strategies that can be adopted to improve learner performance. Suggestions for research are provided focusing on the potential breadth and scope of the field. Conclusions will hinge on the results of the study and literature review. Recommendations to improve the role of HoDs on the performance of learners will also be discussed.

5.2   SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The summary of the results of the study will be guided by the themes of the study as derived from the objectives of the study and literature review.

5.2.1   Role of the HoD in the Performance of Learners

This section provides a summary of findings of the study on the role of HoDs on the academic performance of learners.

5.2.1.1   Ensuring teaching and learning occurs

The study confirmed that HoDs ensure that there is teaching and learning taking place in schools. They preside over the management and administration of school activities. This is done by engaging in a number of activities such as assessing teachers, conducting meetings and working closely with teachers to offer them support and advice on matters pertaining to the delivery of the curriculum. HoDs make class visits to verify the content that teachers deliver and continuously check

on the readiness of teachers to provide good service to learners. They ensure good professional practice and improved quality of teaching. HoDs ensure that they supervise teachers in their professional practice. This includes teaching, marking, monitoring performance and the giving of feedback to learners on time. They assist teachers to perfect the skill of instructional delivery as a way of involving learners in the teaching and learning discourse. HoDs regularly check the learners' notes, class exercises, moderation of examination materials and marking schemes developed by teachers. The study showed that HoDs are supposed to craft plans for the functioning of the department. Such plans should be derived from existing policies. Planning for enhanced academic performance is an activity that involves strategic initiatives that will lead the school towards action-oriented goals.

5.2.1.2   Encouraging learners

HoDs, as the face of departments, are expected to play a key role in motivating teachers in their subject areas towards work excellence. This is particularly important with regard to learners coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. Such learners require motivation to be able to carry on with schooling in the face of a myriad of challenges that are real in their lives. HoDs need to search for information concerning the background of learners to enable the application of fitting interventions to identify learning problems. This is intended to encourage, motivate, counsel and guide learners so that they can work harder at all times. HoDs play special roles of encouraging and strengthening learners and teachers at schools.

5.2.1.3   Creating productive communication

The study revealed that HoDs should strive to ensure that the functions of the school are kept healthy through the appropriate use of communication. Communication needs to be effective and efficient in all directions and channels. It is in this regard that HoDs are expected to be exemplary to allow teachers and learners to emulate their behaviour and practices. Good communication eradicates ambiguity and makes sure that instructions and plans are conducted according to expectations. It also ensures that sound relationships are cultivated among all relevant stakeholders in the education of learners. This creates a good working environment both for learners and teachers. A head of department, being a human resource and

relationship manager, needs to have an individual capacity to motivate others and to promote team spirit in the department.

5.2.1.4   Promoting discipline

HoDs, as authority holders, are expected to promote discipline among both teachers and learners.   This is critical as discipline is considered as the mother of development and success.   Indiscipline breeds failure and confusion.   Discipline is primary because it fosters respect for policies and regulations as well as spurs human effort.   HoDs must become foster parents to learners so that learners might uplift their performance.   In this function, HoDs work to instil discipline and prevent learners from various social ills, such as drugs, alcohol abuse and teenage pregnancy.   Drugs prevent learners from sustained focus and, consequently, retard their academic performance.

5.2.2 Factors Contributing to Learner Academic Performance

This section presents a discussion of factors that contribute to the academic performance of learners.

5.2.2.1   Effective communication

The study established that HoDs have a duty to communicate activities and programmes in their departments.   They communicate upwards as they convey to their line managers issues in their departments and, at the same time, communicate the goals and vision of the organisation to subordinates.   They present the plans and activities of the departments to teachers through various forms of communication such as memos, letters, notices and meetings.   These may be face-to-face or virtual, written or verbal.   Language has an impact on learners' performance.   The language used in class also needs to be at the learners' level of understanding.   Teachers should not use language that is too difficult as to obscure learner understanding.   It is, therefore, imperative that HoDs support the use of appropriate language that is suitable for learner concept mastery.

5.2.2.2   Parental involvement

The study showed that parental involvement is crucial in improving the academic performance of learners. Parents are envisioned to play a pivotal role in the learning of their children. Parenthood is regarded as the first and most important institution to participate in the education of learners. parents usually constitute the primary resource centre regarding information related to the children's learning. They possess the knowledge pertaining to the learning needs, characteristics and disabilities of learners, which provides vital information needed by teachers to properly address the learners' learning challenges. Parents need to work in collaboration with teachers and HoDs to guide and strengthen the disposition of learners to learn. The collaboration between teachers and parents is considered key; as such, HoDs are anticipated to play a crucial role in fostering a progressive and unified working relationship between these groups. The HoD has the mandate of meeting parents and discussing with them the progress and conduct of their children at school. Parents also have a role to play in the performance of their children; hence, meeting the parents and engaging with them provides the premise for coming up with comprehensive measures to improve learners' performance.

5.2.2.3   Availability of resources

The findings of the study indicated that the availability of resources is a must for effective teaching and learning to occur. These resources may be produced by either learners or teachers, but they can still be purchased. They may be in the form of teachers' resource books, curriculum assessment policy statements, or a record of marks and exercises that are used by learners. Teachers and learners alike should be provided with relevant and understandable resources. This implies that the resources used must be well produced and easy to use by both teachers and learners. The availability of resources that cannot be operated by both teachers and learners is a disservice to the academic progress of learners. The needed resources must also be delivered on time to avert anxiety and frustration. These resources also need to be adequate to address the targeted needs gap. One of the central functions of the HoD, evidently, is to secure and operate effective allocation, monitoring and controlling of the use of resources.

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5.2.3 Challenges Hindering the Academic Performance of Learners

This section discusses challenges that are identified as hindering the academic performance of learners in schools.

5.2.3.1   Lack of discipline

The study revealed that a lack of discipline impedes the enhanced academic performance of learners in Grade 12. This is because indiscipline brings about a lot of disciplinary problems that stand in the way of serious academic progress. A lack of discipline is exhibited variously, such as learners absenting themselves from school, flouting school rules, not carrying out assigned tasks and eventually dropping out of school. They may indulge in illicit activities such as drug and alcohol abuse, sexual activities and bullying. Some learners get pregnant and drop out of school and have poor study behaviour. HoDs must be able to equip teachers with skills to mitigate the occurrence of indiscipline, such as cultivating interest in schooling and developing in learners mutual love and respect in the classroom. A lack of proper discipline may lead to the prevalence of chaos in the classroom, which subsequently leads to impoverished academic performance.

5.2.3.2   Poor home backgrounds

The study showed that a dysfunctional family background has a negative influence on the academic performance of learners in Grade 12. This poses a situation that is disadvantageous to teaching and learning. Such a situation is characterised by poverty, lack of support and requisite resources for study. Learners from poor home backgrounds also experience challenges that relate to weak mastery and use of language. This may entail low proficiency in both home language and the FAL. Poor language competencies hinder increased academic performance of learners. This, therefore, increases the need for HoDs to find ways to ensure that the home environment of learners does not work to destruct their academic performance.

5.2.3.3   Low quality of teachers

Teachers that are not well trained are a significant element in the reduced performance of learners in schools. Quality teachers are those that have been groomed to develop positive attitudes to teaching as well as equipped with requisite

competencies to deliver substantive teaching. These are teachers that are ready to harness all possible instruments or tools for the betterment of teaching and learning. Underperforming teachers present setbacks to improved learner academic performance. Excelling schools require HoDs that have commitment and interest in the teaching and learning discourse. This calibre of HoDs is expected to pass on a similar attitude and mentality to teachers in their areas of management as a catalyst for improved learner outcomes. They assist teachers to adopt a positive mental attitude and to work on improving the performance of learners.

5.2.3.4   Lack of resources

Teaching and learning resources are considered as foregrounding the academic performance of learners. These resources come in various forms such as the tangible, intangible and financial. Resources are considered the drivers of the teaching and learning process. The absence of these work-enablers renders the whole process of education meaningless. HoDs therefore, are supposed to ensure that they liaise with the broader school administration to facilitate the planning, procurement, distribution and effective use of all relevant resources. Inadequate infrastructure, and lack of learning resources and materials obstruct improved academic performance of learners in schools. Time constraint is one factor that also emerged strongly to hinder the functions of HoDs for the improvement of learner academic performance. HoDs have a lot of duties and responsibilities, which hamper unscathed delivery of instructional leadership roles. There is, therefore, a need to infuse the efforts of other stakeholders in the management of teaching and learning activities so that HoDs can be relieved of other duties and be committed to enhancing the performance of learners.

5.2.3.5   Large classes

The study revealed that large classes are realised to be a contributory feature in breeding challenges hindering the desired performance of learners in Grade 12. The reality of large classes implies that teachers are inundated with work. They are unable to attend to individual learners' needs. This springs from the fact that learners as individuals have vast backgrounds and need to be taken on board in regard to the implementation of instructional processes. Overcrowded classes constitute barriers to enhanced performance of learners. The high educator-learner

ratio is among the contributory factors ushering in low academic performances of learners in schools.

5.2.4 Strategies that can be Adopted to Improve Academic Performance

HoDs need to adopt valuable strategies to improve the academic performance of learners in Grade 12. These, among others, include reducing the workload of teachers, using team teaching, organising workshops for teachers and improving assessment of learners. These strategies are discussed hereunder.

5.2.4.1 Reducing workload of teachers

Reducing the workload of teachers was provided as one of the strategies to enhance the academic performance of learners. Teachers need to have enough time to plan for teaching, teaching, evaluating actions and implementing interventions regarding those learners experiencing learning difficulties. This can be done by making sure that each teacher is made to teach one subject. The number of learners in the class can also be reduced to make sure that close attention is given to every learner. HoDs should preside over a limited number of teachers so that they can perform administrative work as well as teach their classes effectively. This is particularly relevant for teaching HoDs. This would facilitate smooth coverage of the syllabi.

5.2.4.2 Use of team teaching

The use of team teaching emerged as one of the strategies that might be employed to elevate academic performance of learners in Grade 12. This strategy offers different teachers the opportunity to try diverse methods of teaching, and in the process ensures that the learning needs of learners are diagnosed and addressed. The subject content can be taught by different teachers using different teaching methods. Teachers are likely to opt for this method of teaching, at times when faced with the teaching of a topics considered difficult or in case of a need to buttress the understanding of learners. HoDs, therefore, need to avail themselves of expertise and experiences that are not available within the existent staff complement. This may be available from neighbouring schools or within the same circuit.

5.2.4.3   Professional development of teachers

The study established that school authorities need to organise regular workshops for both HoDs and teachers. These workshops should be aimed at imparting the values of hard work and the understanding of the entire teaching profession. This entails encouraging and motivating learners towards active participation in class for improved academic performance. Teachers need to ensure that they prepare for lessons well in advance to cater for all aspects of content knowledge in their teaching in order to avoid haphazard sessions that lack depth and opportunities for application. Demotivated teachers should be taken to workshops regularly. Teachers have to master the expected subject content knowledge, pedagogics of teaching, assessment of learning and interventions for poorly performing learners. This implies that more and constant support should be provided to teachers. HoDs provide various support practices such as one-on-one classroom observation to improve instruction and professional capacity of teachers.

5.2.4.4   Community participation

Community participation carries the mantra that all those that are interested in children's learning must be accorded the opportunity to fully participate in the school activities. In this vein, the study revealed that community participation is pivotal for academic success of learners. This ensures that various challenges experienced by learners such as poverty, child headed families, ill-health and disintegrated social fabric, are addressed to mitigate their grave effects on education. The involvement of community members, inclusive of parents is hailed to offset some of the negative effects of teaching learners outside their usual family influence. Teachers should work in collaboration with parents and the community to address the needs of learners. This facilitates effective counselling, guidance and support as these become a shared practice, especially between teachers and responsible family members. Education in schools should mirror beliefs and practices in communities, and as such, exist as a true entity within the larger community.

5.2.4.5   Creating a positive school climate

HoDs are anticipated to contribute to creating a positive school climate. They are viewed to stand between school principals and the community to forge an atmosphere that is a catalyst for teaching and learning. They create a conducive

atmosphere in which all learners learn and study well. This may entail collaborating with both teachers and parents/guardians to make it possible for underperforming learners to be offered extra lessons or catch-up sessions to master those content areas that are difficult to them. Teachers and learners need to work together as a unit for improved results. This involves sharing of responsibilities and accountability for actions as well as ensuring that institutional vision and goals are shared and upheld. Participants also indicated the need for technology resource to be integrated into the teaching and learning environment to raise the academic performance of learners. This is in line with current trends in education, which uses technology to ease access to and the development of knowledge. Technology enables quick retrieval and storage of information, pertinent for teaching and learning in schools. HoDs have to make sure adequate provision of textbooks, materials and equipment is done on time to enhance teaching and learning in schools. Therefore, they have to facilitate an increase in the performance of learners through helping with the allocation of resources such as finance, human resources, teaching materials and adequate teaching time.

5.3   CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

This section provides conclusion of the study with regard to the role of HoDs in enhancing Grade 12 learners' academic performance.

5.3.1 Role of the HoD in the Performance of Learners

The study concluded that HoDs ensure that teaching and learning takes place in schools. They preside over the management and administration of school activities such as conducting meetings and working closely with teachers to offer them support and advice on curriculum issues. They make class visits to verify the content that teachers deliver and check on the readiness of teachers to teach. They ensure good professional practice and improved quality of teaching. They assist teachers to perfect the skill of instructional delivery. HoDs are supposed to craft plans for the functioning of the department that are derived from the existing policies.

The study also concluded that HoDs play a key role in motivating teachers in their subject areas towards professional excellence. This is important for learners coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. They motivate learners to carry on with schooling in the face of a variety of challenges in their education journey. HoDs search for information concerning the background of learners to enable the application of appropriate interventions to identify learning problems. They play special roles of encouraging and strengthening both learners and teachers to perform well.

The study concluded that HoDs should strive to ensure that the functions of the school are kept healthy through appropriate use of communication. They should use appropriate and efficient communication in all directions and channels. HoDs must be exemplary to allow teachers and learners to emulate their behaviour and practices. Sound relationships are desired to be cultivated among all relevant stakeholders in the education of learners. They should have the capacity to motivate others and to promote team spirit in the department.

HoDs promote discipline among both teachers and learners. Indiscipline breeds failure and confusion. Discipline is primary because it fosters respect for policies and regulations. They prevent learners from different social ills such as drug and alcohol abuse and teenage pregnancy. Drugs prevent learners from positive academic performance as they reduce sustained educational focus.

5.3.2 Factors Contributing to Learner Academic Performance

The study concluded that HoDs are duty bound to communicate to teachers' activities and programmes in their departments. They communicate the goals and vision of the organisation to subordinates. They present plans and activities of the departments to teachers through various forms of communications. The language used in class also needs to be at the level of understanding of learners. They have to support the use of appropriate language that is suitable for learner concept mastery.

The study showed that parental involvement is crucial in improving the academic performance of learners. They possess the knowledge pertaining to the learning

needs and disposition of learners. Parents must work in collaboration with teachers and HoDs to assist learners to learn. The HoD has the mandate of meeting parents to discuss with them their children's progress.

It was further concluded that the availability of learning resources is a must for effective teaching and learning. The resources used must be well produced, and easy to use by both teachers and learners. The availability of resources that cannot be operated by both teachers and learners is a disservice to the academic progress of learners. The needed resources must also be delivered on time to avert anxiety and frustration. These resources also need to be adequate to address the targeted needs gap. HoDs should secure and operate effective allocation, monitoring and control of resources.

5.3.3 Challenges Hindering the Academic Performance of Learners

The study concluded that lack of discipline impedes enhanced academic performance of learners. Lack of discipline is shown in many ways such as learners absenting themselves from school and drop out of school. HoDs must equip teachers with skills to mitigate the occurrence of indiscipline. Lack of proper discipline may lead to the prevalence of chaos in the classroom which leads to impoverished academic performance.

It is concluded that family background that is dysfunctional has a negative influence on the academic performance of learners. Learners from depressed home backgrounds also experience challenges that relate to weak subject content mastery and poor language acquisition in both home language and the FAL. HoDs need to find ways to ensure that the home environment of learners does not work to destruct the learners' academic performance.

Teachers that are not well trained contribute to the reduced performance of learners in schools. Quality teachers are those that have been groomed to develop positive attitudes to teaching and have requisite competencies to deliver substantive teaching. HoDs assist teachers to work on improving the performance of learners. It was concluded that learning resources are considered important in the academic

performance of learners. The absence of these work-enablers renders the whole process of education meaningless. The constraint of time is one factor that also emerged strongly as hindering the functions of HoDs for improved learner academic performance. HoDs have a lot of duties and responsibilities, which hamper the delivery of their instructional leadership role. They need to enlist the assistance of other stakeholders in the management of teaching and learning.

Large classes were realised to contribute to hinder the desired performance of learners in Grade 12. The reality of large classes implies that teachers are inundated with work. They are unable to attend to individual learners' needs.

5.3.4 Strategies that can be Adopted to Improve Academic Performance

Reducing the workload of teachers was identified as one strategy that could enhance learners' academic performance. Teachers need to have enough time to plan for the teaching discourses. Class size could also be reduced while HoDs should preside over a limited number of teachers so that they can perform other instructional leadership roles.

It was suggested that the use of team teaching could assist in uplifting the academic performance of learners. This strategy offers different teachers the opportunity to try diverse methods of teaching the same learners. It is the HoDs' responsibilities to look for able teachers even beyond the school to assist in team teaching.

The study concluded that school authorities need to organise regular workshops to improve the competencies of both HoDs and teachers. This entails encouraging and motivating learners towards active participation in class for improved academic performance. Teachers have to master the expected subject content knowledge to help the poorly performing learners. HoDs have to provide various support practices to improve instruction and the professional capacity of teachers.

The study concluded that the community should be accorded the opportunity to fully participate in school activities. This is pivotal for the academic success of learners. The involvement of community members, including parents, is hailed to offset some

of the negative effects of teaching learners. Teachers should work in collaboration with parents and the community to address the needs of learners. Education in schools should mirror beliefs and practices in communities to support the academic success of learners.

HoDs are anticipated to contribute to creating a positive school climate. They should forge an atmosphere that is academically friendly all learners. Teachers and learners need to work together as a unit for improved results. This involves the sharing of responsibilies and accountability for actions done. HoDs integrate technology resources into the teaching and learning environment to raise the academic performance of learners.

5.4   RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations of the study were guided by the findings of the research and the conclusions as follows:

5.4.1 Role of the HoD in the Performance of Learners

- HoDs should ensure that there is effective teaching and learning taking place in schools. They should do that through their management and administration duties such as conducting meetings, making class visits to verify the content that teachers deliver and checking on the readiness of teachers to teach.
- They should ensure good professional practice and improved quality of teaching by offering constant support and advice to teachers.
- HoDs need to craft plans for the functioning of the department that are derived from the existing department, school and departmental policies.
- They should play a key role in motivating teachers and learners in their subject areas towards professional excellence. This is particularly important for learners coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- HoDs should strive to ensure that the functions of the school are shared through appropriate use of efficient communication to create sound relationships among relevant stakeholders and be exemplary in their behaviour to both teachers and learners to emulate them.

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- HoDs promote discipline among both teachers and learners. Discipline is primary and prevents learners from different social ills which will reduce sustained educational focus.

5.4.2 Factors Contributing to Learner Academic Performance

- HoDs are duty bound to effectively communicate the activities and programmes in their departments. They should communicate the goals and vision of the organisation to harmonise both the school and individuals.
- They should present departmental plans and activities to teachers through various forms of communication. The language of instruction used in class should be at the learners' level of understanding.
- HoDs should cultivate parental involvement in school activities to improve the academic performance of learners. This can be done by communicating with parents to establish particular learners' needs.
- They should make sure learning resources for effective teaching and learning are available and academically friendly on time for school.

5.4.3 Challenges Hindering the Academic Performance of Learners

- HoDs must equip teachers with the skills to mitigate the occurrence of indiscipline.   A lack of proper discipline may lead to the prevalence of chaos in the classroom, which leads to impoverished academic performance.
- They need to find ways to ensure that learners' home environment does not destruct the academic performance of learners. They should ensure that the problems related to the influence of home language and FAL are resolved amicably.
- HoDs need to develop quality teachers that exhibit positive attitudes to teaching and have the requisite competencies to deliver substantive teaching.
- Time constraint hindered the functions of HoDs for improved learner academic performance as they have a lot of duties and responsibilities, which hamper the delivery of instructional leadership roles. They need to co-opt able other able stakeholders in the management of teaching and learning.

- Large classes are a serious challenge in Grade 12 classes and strain teachers thus preventing them to attend to learners' individual needs. HoDs should divide Grade 12 classes into smaller manageable sizes of 20 for effective teaching and learning, assessment and relevant interventions where necessary.

5.4.4 Strategies that can be Adopted to Improve Academic Performance

- Teachers' workload should be reduced to allow them time to plan, teach, assess learners' work and give them constructive feedback on time. plan for the teaching discourses.
- School authorities need to organise regular workshops to improve the competencies of both HoDs and teachers.
- The community should be accorded a space to fully participate in the school activities. Teachers should work in collaboration with parents and the community to address the learners' needs. Education in schools should mirror beliefs and practices in communities to support the learners' academic success.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

These are limitations that are characteristic of this study. Participants of the study comprised only HoDs, making it impossible to triangulate sources of data or information. The boundary of the study was mainly confined to one circuit in Vhembe District. This meant that the results of the study could not be generalised to the entire province, let alone the district. The methods procedures of the qualitative paradigm were used in this study. This rendered the study methodologically limited. Despite the noted shortcomings, the researcher is convinced that the findings of the study are reflective enough to mirror the practices and experiences of HoDs in the Limpopo Province.

5.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The study serves to locate a fertile ground on which to anchor possibilities for further study. A similar study in the field could be conducted with other stakeholders that are pertinent in the education of learners. These could include learners themselves, teachers, members of the school management team and parents. A mixed methods study could also be staged in the area to allow significant variables to be extrapolated in the process.

5.7 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter presented a summary of the findings of the study, conclusion of the study as well as recommendations. These aspects were guided by the research objectives and literature review. The discussions were focused on the role of HoDs in the performance of Grade 12 learners, factors that enhance the performance of learners, challenges encountered that hinder the performance of learners, and strategies that can be adopted to enhance the performance of learners. The chapter provided a conclusion of the study based on findings of the study, limitations of the study and suggestions for further study. The summary of the chapter closed the discussion.

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ANNEXURE A: CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant

My name is **Nthambeleni Saliminah Mudau** and I am a student (Master of Education in Educational Management) at the University of Venda. In order to complete my research project, I am inviting you to participate in the research titled: *"The Role of Head of Departments in Enhancing the Academic Performance of Grade 12 Learners: A Multiple Case Study in Vhuronga 2 Circuit in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province."*

The research questions formulated for the study are:

RQ1: What is the role of the head of department in enhancing academic performance?

RQ2: What are the conditions that are conducive to enhancing learners' academic performances?

RQ3: What are the recommended ways in which the head of department can assist in enhancing academic performance?

The following ethical standards will be followed throughout the research process:

a) This study is anonymous and voluntary, and all information obtained will be confidential.

b) You can withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice.

c) All information gathered will be treated as group data and no individual will be reported on.

d) This research is in accordance with the rules and regulations of the University of Venda research guidelines, and the researcher will not misuse his position as a researcher for personal power or gain.

e) This research is not intended to harm the respondents or their businesses.

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f) Only respondents who are 20 years and above are allowed to participate in this study.

Be assured that all the information gathered from you will remain confidential.

If you are willing to participate in this interview, please sign below:

Signature…………………………………

Date………………………………………

Thank you for your participation

Yours sincerely,

Nthambeleni Salminah Mudau

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CONCEPTUALISING HODS ROLE IN ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Please note the questions provided below serve as a guideline, questions might be rephrased or changed during the discussion process to solicit more information and to probe. The questions are aligned to the above research questions and also divided into areas of inquiry to assist the researcher in answering the questions.

1. Based on your own experience and understanding, what are the responsibilities of the HoD to enhance tangible improvement in learner academic performance?

2. What level of accountability should be shown by the HoDs towards academic improvement?

3. To what extent does this responsibility and accountability enhance academic performance?

Probing Questions

a) Can academic performance be improved in schools?

b) How can it be improved?

4. What strategies can be applied to deal with the underperforming subjects?

Probing Question

To what extent can these strategies bring a turnaround in the academic fraternity?

5. What are the challenges hindering better performance of learners?

6. In your opinion to what extent do these challenges impact on learners' performance?

7. How best can these challenges be dealt with?

8. What atmosphere can HoDs create to boost the performance of learners?

9. What is your opinion with regard to academic performance hindrances?

THANK YOU