

Challenges of Female Educators Transitioning to Departmental Heads Positions

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ABSTRACT

Promoting female educators to Departmental Head (DH) positions does not come easily for some, but it is sometimes accompanied by challenges. These challenges can stand in the way of newly promoted DHs if solutions to them are not implemented effectively. Therefore, this paper examined the challenges female educators face as they transition to departmental head positions. This study employed a qualitative approach within an interpretive paradigm. This study used purposive sampling to select 10 newly promoted DHs. Semi-structured interviews were used to generate data that were analysed thematically. Findings revealed five themes, which were the lack of support from the School Management Team (SMT), sabotage against newly promoted DHs by other females within the school, gender stereotypes, the lack of capacity-building programmes within the school and exclusion of female DHs from decision-making meetings. In response to the findings, this study proposes that School Management Teams include capacity-building programmes in their yearly strategic plans for newly appointed employees. Gender stereotypes should be discouraged by all means in school situations. The SMTs should embrace and warmly welcome newly appointed SMT members since they are promoted to bring change to new schools. Newly appointed DHs should not be neglected in decision-making meetings, so they are part of the decisions taken. The school principals should instil a sense of unity amongst staff members and ensure that newly appointed staff members are welcomed by all staff members irrespective of race.

KEYWORDS

Departmental Heads; females; challenges; transition; positions.

INTRODUCTION

As female educators realise they meet the requirements for a Departmental Head (DH) leadership position, they apply, and some get appointed. After the appointment, they transition from being educators to DH, where they have more responsibilities than before. Transitioning is a psychological process involving adapting to the change (Kralik et al., 2006). This means educators experience changes in life's developmental stages as they become DHs. Transition connotes the psychological processes involved in adapting to the change event or disruption (Bridges, 2004). Javadi et al. (2017) present some of the responsibilities of DHs. They are instruction coordinators, faculty heads, syndicate leaders, assistant principals, curriculum, subject or team leaders, academic assistant educators, co-curriculum assistant educators, heads of subjects, directors of student affairs, senior educators and senior special education educators, department chairs, sector heads, unit heads, educators in charge of subjects, and team leaders. In the end, after DHs have been appointed, they are tasked with numerous responsibilities. This indicates they need to switch from educators to leadership and management positions. At this time, these newly promoted DHs need to accept the new role in their career, that of being the leader and manager for the department (Arrieta & Ancho, 2020). So, these DHs are expected to lead departments and handle all departmental affairs.

However, during this transitioning period, some newly appointed DHs face challenges while, on the other hand, getting more opportunities to grow. Arrieta and Ancho (2020) lament that transitioning DHs from educators to school leadership and management positions is difficult. What creates more challenges is that these DHs are not trained before being appointed to new positions, which means they need support from relevant stakeholders. Unfortunately, the literature reveals that some DHs complain that they do not get support from the principals and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) (Baloyi & Khumalo, 2024). As per the literature, principals focus more on governance than curriculum implementation, such that when DHs present their input on how to ameliorate learner performance, principals are uncaring (Baloyi & Khumalo, 2024). Without training or qualifications in leadership and management, DHs must apply strategic leadership skills and operational knowledge effectively (Rebecca, 2024). In line with this, White (2000) notes that the lack of training for leadership and managerial knowledge and skills, where one would be a leader and or manager, may impede success.

One of the challenges DHs face is understaffing, which creates more workload and interferes with their responsibilities (Baloyi & Khumalo, 2024). It should be noted that DHs are promoted to leadership positions and do not relinquish instructional responsibilities. However, leadership and management responsibilities are added to their already existing teaching responsibilities, increasing their workload. On the other hand, DHs get opportunities for development and growth as leaders and managers. They become monitors of teaching and learning since they need to check work programmes for educators, amongst other things. They become motivators for educators to do the work. They also become role models to educators, effective communicators, and goal-setters (Manaseh, 2016; Seobi & Wood, 2016).

Against this backdrop, this intellectual piece examines female educators' challenges as they transition to Departmental Heads. Presenting challenges will assist the upcoming DHs in preparing themselves so that as they reach these positions, they know what to expect and how to tackle those challenges. Additionally, knowing these challenges will assist in improving school leadership and management since newly appointed female HDs will come prepared for these challenges, which will improve school performance. It will also help fight and reduce gender stereotypes and promote gender equity. Even though there are challenges, DHs have a chance to grow through the opportunities they will get. These opportunities will motivate those intending to apply for DH positions. This paper was guided by the research question: What are the challenges and opportunities for female educators transitioning to Departmental Head positions? Therefore, this paper will, in the end, produce a piece that contains the challenges and opportunities faced by departmental heads who transitioned from female educator positions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section is important because it helps the researcher to compare and contrast findings (Paul & Criado, 2020). When reviewing the literature, the researcher gets an opportunity to understand the research topic, identify the research gap and signal future research avenues (Paul & Criado, 2020). Lim et al. (2022) argue that a literature review links the readers to key areas of existing knowledge by helping them understand the key concepts in the study under investigation. They further argue that literature reviews are necessary because they provide theoretical support, thereby justifying the need to engage in the study and understand its logic. In sum, there is no way a researcher can undertake the study without reviewing the literature since he/she may not know what has been done and what has not been done around the area of interest or focus. Also, it may be impossible for the researcher to compare and contrast findings without reviewing the literature. Therefore, this section helped me understand the topic and identify the gap this paper addressed.

Some studies have been conducted on DHs, focusing on various aspects. Some of these studies focused on the roles DHs play in school improvement (Brown et al., 2000; Borole, 2010; Dyantyi, 2024; 2025; Hannay & Denby, 1994; Lambert, 1975; Leithwood, 2016). Baloyi and Khumalo (2024) looked at the experiences of Mathematics DHs in primary schools. Constraints and strategies of DHs when running their departments were produced by Mudau et al. (2024). Also, Umara and Hota (2024) discussed how DHs' administrative style affects teaching and learning in their departments. One can see that these studies focused on the established DHs in their positions and their roles, experiences, administrative styles, constraints and strategies; most of these studies were conducted a long time ago. These studies looked at DHs regardless of gender and appointment date, whether new or old. The only study that looked at the challenges DHs face was conducted by Mthethwa (2011), but it did not focus on newly appointed female DHs. All these studies conducted on DHs never looked at the newly appointed

females. The most recent study on newly appointed DHs looked at their formal induction programme (Mahome & Mphahlele, 2024) but not the challenges newly appointed females face. Therefore, this study looked at the challenges of newly appointed female DHs.

As female educators are promoted to DHs, they automatically become leaders of their department and report to the deputy principals and principals; they are also part of or members of the School Management Team (SMT), which oversees the day-to-day running of school activities. This implies a paradigm shift envisaged from these HDs as they move from educator to DH positions. For this reason, DHs should ensure that their leadership is effective since effective leadership can shape teacher efficiency, school culture, and critical education outcomes (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). DHs, regardless of gender, should fulfil their responsibilities diligently and in accordance with the law. They should conduct internal monitoring of curriculum activities, chair departmental meetings, prepare departmental reports, and keep records of departmental materials and formation and participation in the subject clubs (Kabaso, 2023). As female HDs do this, they should bear in mind that they should account for their department; hence, they should be prepared to demonstrate their professional skills and competencies in their supervisory capacity (Rebecca, 2024) since they supervise educators within their department. DHs are expected to influence aspects of school life like teaching and staff development (Yost et al., 2009); hence, they should know enough about their roles, teams, and managers regardless of their setting (Blandford & Gibson, 2000). Since the DHs are promoted from educator positions without leadership training, they need any support available to operate effectively as departmental managers. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) and SMT should support the HDs.

As department leaders, DHs are expected to communicate, inspire, supervise and translate vision into reality (Duşe, 2020). This suggests that DHs must influence their educators and the department to pull in the same direction. This means they should guide and support educators, control the work of educators and learners, develop policy, and coordinate assessment of all subjects within the department (Mthethwa, 2011). All these tasks may be too much and confusing for DHs, especially since they have not received training before being promoted to leadership positions. The mere fact that DHs have been promoted to leadership positions means that they are specialists in the field; hence, they are expected to guide and monitor post-level one educators on subject-related matters, and this calls for DHs to possess sufficient learning area or phase expertise to effectively support, guide, evaluate and monitor the post-level one educators' work (Mthethwa, 2011).

The transition from the educator level to the DH level comes with personal and organizational challenges that can create surprises, confusion, and sometimes even guilt since educators need to leave their previous roles and conceptions and assume the new ones (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). Some DHs experience non-cooperation demonstrated by educators towards them (Baloyi & Khumalo, 2024). The nature of the duties and responsibilities of DHs shows that they should work closely with educators since DHs supervise educators. However,

without cooperation, this supervision process may be inefficient. To complement this argument, Ogina (2017) and Onasanya (2020) lament that some schools have no healthy interaction between teachers and DHs. As a result, some teachers sabotage DHs by not doing their delegated work, which translates into insubordination and deliberate non-cooperation. Without cooperation between educators and DH, the entire department cannot function effectively. Additionally, strained interpersonal relations and a lack of teacher support and buy-in, whereas those contributing to smooth transitions are cooperative staff, working systems already in place at the schools, and familiarity with the system (Van Jaarsveld et al., 2015) can contribute to the challenges DHs face. Other challenges that DHs face are staff supervision, balancing life and work, the legacy of predecessors and the demands of the teachers and learners of the department (Edwards, 2016). With new responsibilities that DHs find themselves in, they need to balance their life with job demands, which becomes challenging for some DHs. As DHs cross from teaching to administration, they experience cognitive, emotional, and social journeys and learning to lead occurs on the job through experience (Hohner, 2016). DHs go through this stage as they get promoted and are expected to learn how to lead along their journey. DHs need to be prepared for these challenges because if not, their daily operation may be affected. DHs also encounter resistance and isolation from their peers (Carver & Meier, 2013), especially when one is promoted within the school where he/she was employed.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

This paper was framed using role theory (Biddle, 1966) and transition theory (Bridge, 1991). The role theory is about taking a new role and changing behaviour to align with the new role (Meleis, 2015). This theory assumes that the roles people play affect how they behave, do things, and even view themselves (Biddle, 1986) in relation to the new role. Roles that people find themselves in determine and influence the way they should behave. Biddle (1986) goes on to talk about corresponding behavioural expectations. This begins to say that as DHs assume certain roles, there are behavioural expectations for such roles, and DHs should live up to them. It means that new roles can influence one's self-concept and shape one's identity (Chreim et al., 2007). Biddle (1986) elaborates on a triad of concepts that underpin role theory. The first of these concepts is patterned and characteristic social behaviours, which relate to identities that social participants assume. The second concept is about behavioural expectations everybody knows, and performers should adhere to them (Biddle, 1986). These expectations are learnt through experience (Biddle, 1966), and fortunately, people are aware of these expectations.

Role theory (Biddle & Thomas, 1966) assumes that expectations towards roles are learned through experience and that individuals are generally aware of the expectations for the positions/roles they hold. This theory fits well in this enquiry since it talks about changing roles and behaviours aligned to it. Female educators transitioning to new roles of DHs are expected to behave like leaders since they lead departments. The DHs should always consider that as leaders and managers, they build their identities along the way.

Transition theory was also employed to frame this study. Transition theory articulates that people can learn and enact new roles influenced by the environment (Meleis, 2015). The environment plays an important role in determining the type of role one should play. Bridge (2003) identifies four phases of transition. The first one is 'endings', which suggests that as DHs assume their new roles, they must let the life before a new change or role go. They should identify what to keep and what to leave behind. The second phase is a neutral zone, a period where DHs have accepted leaving the old role but are still uncomfortable with the new role to assume; this is a confusing, uncomfortable, and chaotic stage in the DH's head. The third phase is a new beginning characterised by a new way of doing things, a new identity, and a new opportunity for growth. The fourth and last phase is the 'arrived' phase, which is characterised by lingering anxiety about the new position/role, and it is in this stage, one should reinforce new identity and behaviour. In line with these arguments by Bridges (2003), female DHs go through all these phases. As they transition from educator to DH position, they need to think about their behaviour and conduct. At the same time, they are still post-level one educators and decide what to continue doing and what to leave behind. This is an important decision since they need to start building their new identity as DHs. They should also bear in mind that their transition stage is characterised by anxiety since they venture into new positions.

These theories complement each other in that while role theory emphasises the change of behaviour due to a new role, transition theory views the environment as influencing the new role or change. So, the social environment plays a big role in enacting change. Role theory advocates for behavioural expectations for a new role. In contrast, transition theory entails leaving old behaviour for the new one influenced by the new role, which shows the interdependence of these two theories. Therefore, both these theories are suitable for this enquiry and complement each other.

METHOD

This paper adopted a qualitative approach for many reasons. With the qualitative approach, the researcher becomes the primary instrument for generating data through interacting with people/participants; inductive research strategies are used for this approach, and qualitative research offers a rich description of the phenomena under investigation (Hastie & Hay, 2012). In line with the qualitative nature of this research, the interpretive paradigm was found instrumental. The reasons were that this paradigm seeks to understand the complex and multiple perspectives of individuals, often using qualitative methods; interpretivists believe that there are many realities that individuals socially construct through their experiences and interactions, and interpretivism focuses on understanding how individuals experience and interpret their realities (Turin et al., 2024). This study was sampled purposively because the researcher willy-nilly selected participants based on the pre-set characteristics informed by the population features. There were 10 participants in this study selected because they were females/women, irrespective of their ages and experience, and they were departmental heads

based in the Umlazi district, KwaZulu-Natal. Semi-structured interviews were used to generate data. They consist of pre-prepared open-ended questions, which allow the researcher to interject if participants' responses are unclear or veer from the focus of the study (Karatsareas, 2022); this type can adopt a discursive strategy to secure desired data. Data were analysed thematically. The thematic analysis allows the researcher to develop patterns of meaning using the coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and thus construct themes. Before data were generated, ethics clearance was sought from the institution and the Department of Basic Education (DBE), where participants were employed. Participants signed consent forms, which ensured that their participation was voluntary, that they were at liberty to withdraw at any time they deemed fit, and that their identity would be secured through pseudonyms. After data transcription, the member-checking process was conducted to ensure the credibility of the data, and participants were happy with the data; hence, the data were ready for analysis.

FINDINGS

After employing thematic analysis, in which the researcher identified patterns and used open coding, the researcher constructed the themes presented in this section. One of the sections mentioned above was that 10 female departmental heads (DHs) were engaged in semi-structured interviews. It was also mentioned that pseudonyms were used to protect their identity. The participants in this paper were referred to as H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6, H7, H8, H9 and H10. Therefore, five themes are presented in this section.

Theme 1: Lack of support from School Management Team

The findings show that some SMTs do not support the newly promoted female DHs as envisaged. Most of these female DHs are new in the schools where they were appointed. They must be held by hand as they transition to new positions and assume duties in new schools. They trust the SMTs since they are their new professional peers. Their job becomes difficult if these female DHs do not get proper support. H3, H6 and H9 confirm this lack of support:

H3: *We also found that many of us get into positions by being appointed, and if it's through default then you have to meet the severity of not having support from internal structures above.*

H6: *The girl doing grade 10 reported that she was raped by her uncle and I had to follow the protocol and take the matter up the internal structures but was told to handle it myself on my own. When the matter got serious and the uncle had to be arrested, I was on my own, no one stood by me, I even went to the police station alone.*

H9: *So, you don't get much support, even if you ask if, okay, I have learners with visual impairment who are totally blind they need to... to make maybe the jaws of life. How do I incorporate them? Then... then they will tell you that they do not know inclusive education and then I will see that okay I have to make some plan, like give them groups with different abilities.*

These female DHs found themselves in a difficult situation of life and death after the learner reported having been raped, and the school was supposed to stand by her and support her since this issue unfolded in a school setting. Another one came across while teaching

learners with special problems, but when she reported to the SMT, they distanced themselves and never tried to help her. The deputy principal and principal were supposed to guide her in attending to these learners, but they did not do that, claiming they never had the expertise for inclusive education. Hence, the DH felt unsupported and neglected. As an immediate internal structure, the SMT should have provided the newly female DH with the necessary support. It is obvious that for newly appointed female DHs to offer any support effectively, they also need support from the higher structure since they do not understand the dynamics of the new school environment. Therefore, if newly appointed female DHs do not get proper support, they may not work effectively and show what they can do.

Theme 2: Gender stereotypes

One of the challenges that female DHs face is gender stereotypes, where there is a male preference over females in terms of duties and leadership. The findings show that some educators do not want to be led by a female and prefer to be led by a male to the extent that they can sabotage the newly appointed female DHs to show their disapproval of her leadership. This was confirmed by H1, H2, H4, H5 and H7:

H1: *When you are leading women, they believe that no you don't deserve that position, they rather being led by a man, even that man who is not a good leader but they will believe in him and gang up against a female. They don't support you... they don't support you if you are a... a woman.*

H2: *The problem is that the females do not support other female, they prefer males. They go to an extent of not doing what you ask them to do because they prefer a male over you as a female.*

H4: *There are women who are supporters of patriarchy at work, those old women, not one of them, some of them. But they will make sure that your leadership will be miserable on another level, they won't support you.*

H5: *In my school, two female colleagues did not submit test question papers as per scheduled time and they made me look like a moron in the principal's office and I know if it was their male friend they would not do so.*

H7: *For example, in my school, I said, my principal is a female, but there was a sabotage of her being a female because female teachers wanted a male principal.*

Findings show that the gender stereotype is at another level in some schools, and females enforce it against other females. Some females strongly believe in and prefer male leadership over female leadership. To show their disapproval of female leadership, they sabotage them by not doing the schoolwork allocated to them and not submitting schoolwork in time as instructed. Furthermore, they gang up against female DHs to frustrate them more and ensure that they make their leadership miserable. They do all these dirty tricks because they believe female DHs do not deserve to be in leadership positions, but males do.

Theme 3: Lack of Capacity Building Programmes

The findings from female DHs revealed a lack of capacity-building programmes to orientate newly appointed employees of the school. This suggests that even these new female DHs are

just thrown in the deep and need to see their way out on their own without or with little guidance. The SMT, with the principal in particular, knows that appointed DHs do not receive any training before they assume their duties. This means that they are not sure about their responsibilities as they become departmental heads. Newly appointed female DHs bank on the SMT to capacitate them. However, some schools do not provide capacity-building programmes to orientate newly appointed female DHs. This was elaborated on by the participants H2 and H8:

H2: The point to which I was referring to is what is happening in our school, no one capacitates us as new DHs.

H8: We help each other a lot, but in my school, there is no capacity building programme for DHs. We take initiative to ourselves to devise activities for our PL1 colleagues.

In some schools, newly appointed DHs are not orientated and capacitated enough to undertake their new responsibilities confidently. The failure to orientate newly appointed female DHs can interfere with how they are doing the job they are employed for as departmental leaders.

Theme 4: Exclusion on decision-making platforms

The female DHs lamented that they are excluded from decision-making meetings; they end up not knowing what is happening within the school, whereas they are SMT members, and they should be part of making decisions that affect the school. Female DHs also represent their department and are part of the SMT; however, they sometimes are sidelined by SMT decisions that affect the school. This was confirmed by H1 and H10, who complained:

H5: Some of us are not involved in the decision making whereas we are SMT members. We find out things from the clerks, the school clerks, they end up knowing more than us being in the SMT.

H1: In my school, the first constraint, as a DH is that I'm just a SMT member by name because my salary was raised and I got that appointment letter, but I'm not involved in any kind of decision making of the school.

H10: So, as DHs, we are not involved in any decision making, even if a teacher works under me, I just run like a puppet to tell teachers, but I cannot make any decision.

Findings show that for female DHs to know what is happening within the school, they sometimes rely on school clerks who know better than female DHs about decisions taken by the SMT. These female DHs are puppets who should do what SMT members tell them but have no say in decisions. They regard themselves as useless since they should be part of the decisions, but they are treated like post-level teachers who are not in management. It is clear from the findings that these newly appointed DHs cannot even make decisions on their own as department leaders; this undermines the female DHs.

Theme 5: Sabotage from female colleagues

Some female educators sabotage newly appointed female DHs so that they look like failures. These female educators gang up against the new female DHs, and this makes it difficult for newly appointed female DHs to undertake duties and responsibilities in this toxic environment where there is no support. H2 and H7 revealed that:

H2: *So, there is a lot of sabotage in my work especially some women do not look at me as their DH but something I don't know.*

H7: *In my school there are three females within my department who dodge classes and visit each to talk and talk about their issues during their class periods so that I look incompetent as their DH to the principal.*

Findings suggest that some female teachers undermine the newly appointed female DHs to the extent that they do not regard the DHs as their departmental leaders and managers. These females sabotage the newly appointed female DHs so that they look incompetent and failures within the SMT.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings show that even though female DHs are happy with their promotions but the lack of support from the SMT, which is the internal structure of the school, disables them from undertaking their new roles. The lack of support in the school environment is not new since Baloyi and Khumalo (2024) also alluded to it in their study. Mthethwa (2011) argue that one of the responsibilities of DHs is to offer support, guidance and mentoring to departmental members who are at a lower level than her. However, for DHs to undertake these tasks, they need support from the school, as represented by the SMT. So, if the SMT does not support the newly appointed female DHS, that can negatively impact the performance of the department and the school at large. Female DHs find themselves in the fourth stage of transition theory, as outlined by Bridge (2003), where they find themselves in a lingering anxiety about the new position/role. The lack of support maximises this anxiety instead of SMT to ease it. Female DHs find it difficult to reinforce their new identity and behaviour since they find the environment not supportive. The role theory emphasises the corresponding behavioural expectations (Biddle, 1986). Female DHs expect support from SMT, but the SMT keeps it away from them; hence, they find it challenging to perform their duties as new departmental leaders.

The application of gender stereotypes behaviour in a school setting affects the appointment of females to promotional positions. They associate this tendency with patriarchy. In line with this, Aksit and Salimzhanova (2024) note that cultural and traditional values influence gender roles and norms. Some educators, even females, prefer to get instructions from a male instead of a female. This is confirmed by Kuhn and Wolter (2020) when highlighting that gender segregation in occupations is persistent and elevating. In the same breath, Com (2024) argues that gender stereotypes can negatively impact people's opportunities and self-expression and can contribute to harmful behaviours like discrimination. Women prosper and venturing into various professional spheres, but gender-based discrimination persists (Aksit & Salimzhanova, 2024). In line with the role theory, it maintains that societal norms and expectations influence social roles. Therefore, gender stereotype practices within societies affect the roles female DHs should assume at school as departmental leaders.

Transition theory articulates that the environment influences new roles. Therefore, the SMT should make the environment user-friendly for the newly appointed female DHs. They can do this by capacitating new leaders within the school. Without capacity programmes, female DHs can be ill-equipped to navigate the complexities of their new roles, leading to role ambiguity and conflict. Also, the role theory elaborates on clear role expectations and adequate preparation that is essential for successful role performance. Capacity building entails enhancing human capital to develop the ability of an organisation to deliver efficient services (Edoun & Rameetse, 2024). So, when newly appointed female DHs are not capacitated, that can affect the efficiency of the whole school since capacity building can bolster management and governance so that the school can achieve its target (Mufidah et al., 2022). According to Rebecca (2024), newly appointed DHs should be prepared to demonstrate their professional skills and competencies in their supervisory capacity. However, it may be difficult for these DHs to undertake these responsibilities if they have not been capacitated. Potter and Brough (2004) propose nine capacity-building components: performance capacity, personal capacity, workload capacity, supervisory capacity, facility capacity, support services capacity, systems capacity, structural capacity and role capacity.

Newly appointed female DHs are unhappy that they are sometimes ostracised in decision-making. Being part of the SMT but hearing some decisions via clerks makes them feel undermined. This contravenes the argument by Tindale and Winget (2019) that decision-making is group-oriented, which means all relevant group members should be involved in decision-making. Barton et al. (2020) propose that decisions should be taken after consultation with all relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, Reina et al. (2021) also talk about collective decision-making, which advocates for decisions to be made while everybody is involved. The way some SMTs treat the promoted DHs is not conducive and can affect the school's operations. On the contrary, the transition theory suggests that inclusion and active participation are crucial for new role incumbents to integrate and contribute effectively during the transition period. This implies that the exclusion of female DHS may undermine the ability to perform their roles.

The newly appointed female DHs regard the behaviour of some female teachers towards them as a form of sabotage, preventing them from undertaking their roles. Working in such an environment is difficult for these DHs because they feel unwelcomed by their subordinates. The role theory indicates that conflict can arise from interpersonal dynamics and competing expectations. This is a problem because if some female educators unwelcome female DHs, that affects relationships among them. In the end, the behaviour of these female educators coincides with expectations from female DHs. Mavin (2006a) argues that by gender identification, women are expected to support and not sabotage each other. Also, this behaviour makes the environment hostile for the new female DH. Hence, as per the transition theory, such an environment impacts the psychological terrain of the individual. Furthermore, it hinders the transition process and can decrease job satisfaction and performance. What these female educators do to the female DHs coincides with the expectation as stated. The 'think manager-

think male' phenomenon has significantly enhanced female managers' difficulties in leadership positions (Kutlu & Akbulut, 2020). Kutlu and Akbulut (2020) warn that negative attitudes toward female leaders can discourage them from undertaking their tasks accordingly.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the challenges faced by female educators as they transition to departmental head positions. While significant progress has been made towards gender equality in educational leadership, lack of support and capacity-building programmes, gender stereotypes, sabotage by female educators, and exclusion of female DHs from critical decision-making platforms continue to hinder women's advancement in these roles. As a sequel to that, this study concludes that as much as newly appointed female DHs want to undertake their tasks and show what they are worth, the immediate structure which must support them does not do that; this demoralises these new female DHs. This study further concludes that newly appointed female DHs are prepared to assume their roles and responsibilities in the new environment where they are employed. However, they need to be brought on board through orientation and capacity-building programmes to know what is expected of them and understand their new employment setting. Gender stereotypes affect the promotion of females in school settings because some female educators prefer male leadership to female leadership. This becomes a problem for newly promoted females because they face undermining attitudes and sabotage. The exclusion of newly appointed female DHs when making critical decisions makes them unwanted and undermined. They end up hearing about decisions from clerks, which does not sit well with them. They feel like they are treated as morons who cannot contribute anything to decision-making, yet they are departmental leaders and members of the SMT.

Implications of Findings

This study proposes that SMTs should include capacity-building programmes in their strategic plans on a yearly basis and ensure that appointees are orientated to the dynamics of the new school where they assume new roles. The SMTs should remember that new appointees are part of the team and should be treated as such, not as trespassers. Gender stereotypes should be addressed through policies in schools. Also, the DBE should introduce policies that will do away with gender stereotypes and discourage discrimination underpinned by gender stereotypes in the workplace. School principals should ensure the effective implementation of these policies in their schools and ensure that they are gender stereotype-free to accommodate everybody. The SMTs should welcome newly appointed SMT members since they are promoted to these new schools to bring change. If the newly appointed ones are supported well, they will demonstrate what they are worth and bring changes since they will find an environment conducive. Newly appointed DHs are members of the SMT; hence, they should not be neglected from meetings so that they are part of the decisions taken. The school principals should instil a sense of unity amongst staff members and ensure that newly appointed staff members are welcomed by all staff members irrespective of race.

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