



The Roles of Department Head: Key to School Improvement

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Abstract

Department Head/ Head of Department (HOD) plays an important role in terms of influencing the teachers in a specific subject area (their area of responsibility) to act and aim high for the school improvement. HOD is a middle manager of the school. It is their task to elevate the standards reached by students within that subject area. HOD is enhancing the quality of teaching delivered by the teachers to raise the overall standards of education and ensures that teachers are equipped with the materials and technology they needed to deliver the curriculum effectively. This article will briefly describe the how the roles of head of department affect the school improvement in achieving a quality education, this will also show the different findings from different studies which examine and evaluate the leadership capacity of HOD in secondary high school, tries to gain a deeper understanding on how HOD perceive their role as leader of teachers and what an HOD does in their position in terms of continuous learning.

Index Term:

Department Head / Head of Department (HOD): Faculty members responsible for the coordination or administration of an academic area of study.

Academic Area: Pertaining to areas of study that are not primarily vocational or applied, as the humanities or pure mathematics.

Middle Management: The intermediate level of management, excluding top-level management on the one hand and first-level supervision on the other

Leadership Effectiveness: Success in influencing people to strive willingly for group goals

Instructional Leadership: Providing direction, coordination, and resources for the improvement of curriculum and instruction

Educational Improvement: Enhancing the value or quality of education

Teacher Collaboration: An interactive process that enables teachers with diverse expertise to work together as equals and engage in shared decision making toward mutually defined goals

Curriculum: Plan incorporating a structured series of intended learning outcomes and associated learning experiences -- generally organized as a related combination or series of courses

Secondary Education: Education provided in grade 7, 8, 9 and 10

Workshops: Programs in which individuals with common interests and problems meet, often with experts, to exchange information and learn needed skills or techniques.

Leadership development: It expands the capacity of individuals to perform in leadership roles within organizations

Professional learning: It is what teachers engage in to stimulate their thinking and professional knowledge and to ensure that their practice is critically informed and up-to-date.

Mentoring: It is a system of semi-structured guidance whereby one person shares their knowledge, skills and experience to assist others to progress in their own lives and careers. Mentors need to be readily accessible and prepared to offer help as the need arises - within agreed bounds.

Workplace Coaching: The process of equipping people with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities they need to fully develop themselves to be effective in their commitment to themselves, the company, and their work; improves employee and organizational resiliency and effectiveness in change.

I. INTRODUCTION

This study purposely chose to describe the roles of Department Head (HOD) for school improvement. They are in charge for the advancement of their subject area; they implement strategic policies and contribute to the modification of school improvement plan. They also manage the budgets and expenditures; the effective dispersion of funds and the project to prioritize. HOD interacts directly to the teachers who play a vital role in the lives of their students and the students take an active role in their learning by recognizing they are accountable for their academic success. Head of the Department have so many opportunities when it comes to school improvement. They

have roles but sometimes they experience difficulties and challenges in their position, this is the time when they are not doing well in their jobs, it is like a domino effect, it will affect the teachers, the students and the environment. The School Head must do something about it. This article will talk about the roles of the Head of Department and how their roles will contribute to the meaningful change of education system in their school, it will also discuss the struggles in their position which hinder them to perform well and imbibe positive attitude towards work; opportunity to share the vision and mission of the school; motivate their teachers to work together for the betterment of the school and importance of trainings, seminars and workshops that will address their needs as HOD.

II. RESULTS

The following listed below are the results from the studies conducted related to this article.

- The findings showed that HODs play an active role in curriculum development and implementation, human resource management, students' affairs, management of physical facilities and school community relations.
- All Heads of Department are required to exercise leadership, demonstrate vision, and empower others in order to deliver the agreed departmental strategy within the Faculty. It is recognized that the methods by which Heads of Department carry out their duties and the extent of delegation, will depend on such factors as the size and nature of the Departments and the personal approach of the individual Head of Department.
- Organizing department meetings, setting department goals and managing department collaboration were the top three roles that participants undertook, which they also ranked as the most important. Respondents reported strong relationships and support from their administration. Being sufficiently trained and receiving appropriate compensation received the lowest mean responses. A strong correlation was found between job satisfaction and the three questions on support from administration, support from the School Head and receiving sufficient leadership training.
- The findings confirmed that HoDs are a key link between principals and the educators in their classrooms. This supports the view that HoDs have formal responsibilities and accountabilities and they wield a horizontal and a vertical influence. Recommendations are made to improve professional development practice by HoDs in particular and in the education system in general.
- The study describes a two-fold strategy for developing successful schools which requires departments to improve: their teaching and their pupils' learning; their capacity to both make and implement policy and so to facilitate the progress of change. They suggest that improving teaching and learning is best addressed at the departmental level by an evolutionary approach that emphasizes vision, commitment, planning, action and review rather than grandiose aims, statements, over elaborate policies and detailed, long-term plans.
- It concludes by suggesting that heads of department have a major contribution to play in managing cultural change at both the department and whole school level.
- HODs construct their roles uniquely, but in general terms most HODs consider academic and scholarly work (own and that of the department) as part of the leadership role they fulfil. Leadership at HOD level at university incorporates both managerial and leadership ideas. HODs consider their leadership environment to have qualities of the following known university environments: collegial, enterprise, bureaucratic and corporate.
- However HODs lack regular workshops and seminars where they could be inducted on various managerial skills to improve their quality of service delivery in their departments. The study also showed that teachers and HODs perceived HODs as lacking some necessary skills for running their departments well. Some of the skills they felt were lacking included information technology, time management, supervision and also record keeping

- Some HODs felt that the responsibilities delegated to them by the principals were overwhelming and this caused role overload on their part.
- A close look at the role and function of department leaders in this high school reveals an absence of the teacher leadership necessary to promote the broad-based leadership capacity that results in improved student achievement.
- Three major conclusions resulted from this study. One, secondary school department heads at the two government schools in Belize are school leaders whose multifaceted role includes myriad duties, responsibilities, and obligations. Two, department heads are street-level bureaucrats who implement and enforce policies and regulations through their classroom routines and the decisions they make. Three, policymakers, school management, and department heads need to invest in sustained professional training and development activities that are specifically designed for department heads.
- The study reveals the following findings: (a) HODs encountered challenges in implementing the goals set because teacher absenteeism and late coming present a problem; (b) HODs experienced challenges in managing class work and giving feedback because of the workloads that they themselves have; (c) Overcrowded classes become a problem when trying to give learners individual attention; (d) Holding meetings assists in empowering teachers as they share information and improve their communication skills and enhance their knowledge.
- The research participants perceived their leadership role to be rooted in teaching. They noted their management and leadership roles. They recognized the importance of support for their work and the support that they provide to others. In addition, they provided an overview of key strategies that they implement to lead in their individualized contexts. Department heads also noted the difficulties associated with their position and the effects that these challenges have on them as individuals
- The study concludes that HoDs must be empowered enough to perform their roles successfully for better results
- Results indicate that department and department-head effects on students are consistently positive, practically meaningful and larger than school effects. Well-functioning departments are powerful centers for improvement. But significant hurdles to effective department-head leadership often minimize its effect, for example, some secondary teacher cultures, some teacher union policies, and some heads' own conceptions of their roles and responsibilities. Conditions enabling successful department-head leadership are identified.
- Findings included distinct connections between CREATER change process stages and the Leadership Grid. Suggestions as to how education leaders should approach change attempts within their schools are discussed. Introduction Secondary school department chairs are considered content-area specialists and instructional leaders who occupy organizational positions that lie between senior leadership and teachers (Feeney, 2009; Hannay&Erb, 1999; Lucas, 2000; Sergiovanni, 1984; Tucker, 1993; Wettersten, 1994; Zepeda, 2007). Their position, as Ginny Lee (1987) and Kenneth Leithwood (1994) observed, requires them to simultaneously manage the smooth operations of their departments while leading meaningful change.
- As a result, HODs experienced both role conflict and role ambiguity between the espoused nature of the job and the reality of the job. Furthermore, some critical features of high

leadership capacity, such as enquiry-based decisions, reflective practices, and broad-based skilful collaboration, are often missing in the leadership responsibilities of HODs.

- However, HODs have not been prepared or trained to equip them with the necessary skills to handle the added responsibilities and management challenges arising from these changes. This has resulted in role ambiguities, role conflicts, tension and sometimes stress.

- The HODs suffer from role overloads; with most of their roles conflicting with those performed by class teachers, subject heads and head teachers. Regular professional courses, seminars and workshops need to be organized in order to equip the HODs with appropriate knowledge and skills for effective performance of their duties and responsibilities.

- The findings of this thesis indicate that the role of anHoD has issues resulting from and pertaining to the intensification of demands within the role that have occurred since the inception of Tomorrow's Schools (Government of New Zealand, 1988). The issues identified by the participants were the lack of leadership training that is provided for them. As a subject based instructional leader they identified being provided with ongoing subject based professional development, however, the participants also unanimously identified the lack of leadership training despite it being an important aspect of their multi natured role. The lack of time available to complete tasks in especially in the area of compliance meant that they had difficulty in completing these tasks to a level that met their own professional standards. The time constraints facing the participating HoD also led to tension within the role as tasks they are required to complete were by their very nature in competition with one another. Conceptualizing the findings of this research project into a cohesive framework highlights the difficulties facing HoDs as a manager and leader.

- Most respondents felt confident in their role but, somewhat paradoxically, expressed a need for further development in their areas of greatest confidence, which may well reflect the increasing complexity of the role of the middle leaders in schools.

- There was evidence of delegated leadership and of inclusive leadership environments, both of which supported the manager in role. There were indications that the middle manager role crossed the managerial/professional divide, with managers showing market awareness, spending time setting targets and measuring against performance indicators, yet also providing academic leadership within their department. There was, however, evidence of a lack of role definition, which serves to undermine the autonomy and authority of managers working at this level. Further research is planned which will investigate the management structure and culture of sampled further education colleges, in order to identify features which facilitate or impede the middle manager role.

III. SUMMARY

After the rigid review and analyzation of the findings obtain from the related studies, articles, and research adapted in this article, the result has shown that:

Department Head have a major contribution in facilitating the progress and cultural change in educational system of whole school level and are required to exercise leadership, exhibit vision, and empower the teachers within the subject area. **HOD**

roles circulate in: Leadership and Management, Responsibility for Teachers and Students, People Management, Financial Management and Quality Assurance. They are in charge in the development and implementation of the curriculum, management of the physical and school community, organize the department meetings, manage the collaboration of their department and set department goals. However, Department Heads encountered many difficulties and challenges in their roles, these are as follow: lack regular workshops and seminars specifically designed for department heads, (this has resulted in role ambiguities, role conflicts, tension and sometimes stress); skills in information technology, time management, some HODs felt that the responsibilities delegated to them by the principals were overwhelming and this caused role overload on their part. HODs encountered challenges in implementing the goals set because teacher absenteeism and late coming present a problem; managing classwork and giving feedback because of the workloads that they themselves have; This article concludes that HODs must be empowered enough through seminars, trainings and workshops specifically designed for them in order to perform their roles successfully and these will result to functioning departments that will lead to school improvement.

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