LEADING FOR LEARNING: UNVEILING THE ROLE OF DEPARTMENT HEADS AT A
CANADIAN RESEARCH-INTENSIVE UNIVERSITY

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By

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ABSTRACT

The department head plays a pivotal role in leading teaching and learning activities in universities, which has been correlated with student success, satisfaction, retention, and graduation rates. The challenging nature of the department head’s role is reflected in job postings that require the capacity to integrate strategic leadership into the improvement of teaching and learning. Existing leadership research has largely focused on department heads’ managerial, administrative, and political duties, but little attention has been paid to the processes of how they fulfill their roles as learning leaders. Hence, this study investigated how department heads lead teaching and learning at a Canadian research-intensive university.

The data from this qualitative study was collected through document analysis and semi-structured interviews with eight department heads and thematically analyzed using the software NVivo. University policy documents were analyzed, gaining a greater understanding of department head leading practices of teaching and learning. All the interviewed heads have supported faculty instructional effectiveness or satisfied student learning needs. Most strategies encompassed faculty pedagogical support, teaching assignment management, and curriculum development to promote student learning experience and cultivate an inclusive and collegial atmosphere.

Through an exploratory case study, this research sheds light on the vital role of university department heads in facilitating pedagogical innovation and fostering high-quality learning experiences. The interview revealed new expectations of student learning as a result of changeable social trends, change resistance by faculty members, and institutional resource constraints. Hence, it is recommended that universities consider providing professional development for improving the practices of department heads as learning leaders. Moreover, evidence indicated that shared leadership of heads enhanced departmental decision-making. However, few department heads had action plans for addressing equity, diversity, or social justice in teaching and learning.
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CHAPTER ONE – Introduction

The evolving higher education landscape, influenced by the globalization of economy, politics, and technology, is posing several challenges to universities all over the world (Maddock, 2023). Effectiveness in student performance rates, in conjunction with excellence in learning and teaching, are influencing the needs placed on universities (Frisk et al., 2021). Thus, universities actively give strategic priority to the instructional effectiveness of faculty members. However, it is a long-term process that involves practice, reflection, and summary, which not only depends on the efforts of faculty members but also the measures taken by academic leaders. The department head, as a middle leader, plays an instrumental role in creating an active learning environment that promotes equity and inclusion, nurturing faculty career development and improving student accomplishments (Munna & Kalam, 2021). While deans seem to accurately represent the profile of the college’s populace and the external environment (Montez et al., 2002), department heads have the advantage of being able to connect with students and faculty members. Direct access to classrooms grants heads an opportunity to support faculty members in their teaching endeavors, ultimately facilitating student learning improvement.

Since there has been increasing attention to the significance of middle leadership of learning and teaching (Marshall, 2012), a growing number of studies regarding this area have emerged, offering valuable perspectives and understanding of middle leader positions (Armstrong & Woloshyn, 2017; Berdrow, 2010; Kruse, 2022; Maddock, 2023; Thornton et al., 2018). For instance, Program Leaders supervise the program quality and student learning experience (Stensaker et al., 2019), whereas Associate Deans lead strategic cross-department curriculum initiatives (Floyd & Preston, 2018). Nevertheless, Maddock (2023) systematically reviewed higher education literature in 2010–2020, identifying a lack of empirical research specifically focused on the role of department heads in leading learning and teaching.

Hence, this study provides a framework for how department heads seek to improve teaching and learning within academic units at a Canadian research-intensive university. Department heads are perceived as learning leaders who make efforts to enhance faculty teaching quality, assign faculty teaching duties, engage students for learning, and develop curricula and
programs. Subsequently, university policy documents in relation to teaching and learning are collected and analyzed. Also investigated are the roles and responsibilities of department heads in leading their departments for learning through semi-structured interviews, both faculty teaching support and student learning needs. By investigating this topic, valuable insights into the strategies, challenges, and impacts of department heads’ leadership on enhancing the learning environment and promoting academic excellence within the university can be gained. Such research contributes to the understanding of how department heads might optimize their plans for positive educational outcomes and student success in the future.

**Background to the Problem**

Department heads often regard their role as overwhelming since they are situated in increasingly complicated and uncertain organizational environments and have limited power and authority (Kruse, 2022; Pepper & Giles, 2015). According to Chun and Evans (2015), the authority of department heads is rooted in the respect earned from the faculty members they lead, based on their solid credentials in both teaching and research. The collegial culture among faculty members, noted by Bergquist and Pawlak (2008), encourages academic freedom, autonomy, and expectations of cooperative decision-making, which further restricts heads’ influence. If a head exercised excessive control, conflicts with faculty members would be produced.

Aside from constrained power, other factors that may impede the effectiveness of department head leadership have been recognized, comprising heavy workloads, limited appraisal methods, insufficient resources and unsuitable structures (Marshall et al., 2011; Nguyen, 2013). While there is an ideal for department head leadership to predominantly stay focused on student learning, the reality is that their leadership practices are influenced by the imperative for public accountability (Marshall et al., 2011). Another remarkable issue observed is the absence of role-specific professional development to adequately prepare heads for their responsibilities (Berdrow, 2010; Marshall, 2012; Pepper & Giles, 2015; Thornton et al., 2018).

However, this does not mean the role and function of department heads are not crucial. The academic unit is a key administrative body in higher educational institutions, and so chairing,
or heading a department is vital (Wald & Golding, 2020). The department head position description collected in this study illustrates that heads undertake many important assignments, including budget management, office hours scheduling, and faculty development (Armstrong & Woloshyn, 2017). An Australian study, conducted by Scott et al. (2008), reported the role of heads has become important in accomplishing enhancements of departmental teaching efficiency, helping faculty members achieve their teaching goals to increase educational outcomes.

Even though the department heads’ position is important, Clarke (2009) revealed their role has not been thoroughly understood. Existing research overlooks the examination of how university department heads make a difference in faculty pedagogical development. More importantly, it is also unclear how department heads’ backgrounds and experiences would contribute to promoting the instructional effectiveness of faculty members. Additionally, there is limited knowledge related to the strategies and challenges of department heads in curriculum development processes. Lastly, how department heads address student and peer feedback for the improvement of teaching is still unknown. Given the significance of academic success to a university’s enrolment and international reputation, these questions deserve further examination.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the role of department heads in leading teaching and learning at a Canadian university. In an ever-changing society, it is imperative for each department to innovate methods for improving educational outcomes in the university. Therefore, I conduct a qualitative case study, where department heads’ backgrounds and practical experiences in facilitating faculty’s teaching practice, curriculum development, and utilization of student and peer feedback for teaching improvement, are thoroughly investigated. This study seeks to maximize the professional satisfaction of faculty members while promoting the success of students.

**Significance of the Study**

This research holds practical significance for university administrators, especially for department heads, who play a crucial role in improving the quality of teaching and learning.
Maddock (2023) noticed the close relationship between department heads and educational outcomes. The beliefs, views, and attitudes of department heads can influence the approaches they choose to support faculty members in enhancing instructional effectiveness, which further shapes the quality of instruction, contributes to overall student engagement and achievement, and fosters a positive educational climate. To illustrate this, Frisk et al. (2021) conducted an empirical case study in a Swedish Comprehensive University, identifying the significance of department heads’ experience in facilitating departmental educational activities.

This study has the potential to enhance leadership development in higher education. According to Wald and Golding (2020), highlighting the positive aspects of the department head’s role can inspire faculty members to recognize their own leadership potential. The study may shed light on the barriers and difficulties in teaching and learning department heads experience and how they fulfill leadership responsibilities to address these issues. The findings in the study have implications for promoting the effectiveness of leadership development programs within the academic context.

While there is a range of literature exploring department heads’ research-related roles (Cervino, 2018; Sobrero & Jayaratne, 2014), Maddock (2023) commented on the distinct lack of studies pertaining to academic middle leading for learning through contemporary lenses. Echoing this limitation, this study filled literature gaps in the area of department heads’ support for teaching and learning within higher education settings. Insights and recommendations of this study could also be useful for future researchers to explore other academic middle leaders’ everyday practices of leading for learning.

As most Canadian universities are committed to navigating social change, the findings of this research give the opportunity for departments to optimize their organizational strategies. By deepening an understanding of the challenges they face in teaching and learning, department heads can tailor their leading approaches. The enhanced insight can enable them to implement targeted solutions that better align with the changeable needs of students, faculty members, and the broader society, thereby responding to political, economic, and cultural changes.
**Research Question**

To investigate the role of department heads in leading teaching and learning at a Canadian research-intensive university, the study focuses on one question: In what ways do university department heads lead teaching and learning for their academic units? This primary question gives rise to the following five sub-questions:

Sub-Q1: In what ways do university department heads support faculty members in developing their teaching practice?

Sub-Q2: How do university department heads initiate and oversee curriculum and program development?

Sub-Q3: How do university department heads use student and peer feedback for the improvement of teaching?

Sub-Q4: What backgrounds and experiences do university department heads have that inform their practices in support of teaching and learning?

Sub-Q5: How is department head leadership for learning described in policy documents?

**Description of the Study**

This study employed a qualitative research approach, to gain greater insights into how department heads lead teaching and learning for their academic units at a Canadian research-intensive university. This choice was made due to the fact that “qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 2), which was appropriate for this study to investigate how participants interpret and reflect upon their personal experiences and perceptions of the world (Bergman et al., 2010). A single case study is chosen as the research strategy for this study. The case of this study is the department heads at a Canadian research-intensive university (a member of the U15), which provides undergraduate and graduate programs in over 150 areas of study.

The study employed two sources of evidence to address the research question. I reviewed university policies pertaining to teaching, learning, and supervision. These included standards for
promotion and tenure, university guidelines of learning, and other documents and policies related to the duties of department heads relevant to the teaching and learning activities within academic units. I recruited a diverse participant pool with respect to academic disciplines, genders, and races. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight department heads using open-ended interview questions related to the research question. Each interview was carried out in blocks of 40-60 minutes during office hours through Zoom, allowing the interviewees to recall their working experiences within a comfortable context. The data collected through these two methods was analyzed through thematic analysis – a technique of working with data via transcripts that examines, identifies, and reports patterns in those data (Braun & Clark, 2006).

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are the parameters of the research determined by the researcher’s choices regarding what to include and exclude (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). These boundaries restrict the study to specific criteria such as age group, race, gender, geographical location, or other characteristics, aiming to focus the findings on a specific target population and make them more relevant and feasible in confirming the research objectives (Price & Murnan, 2004). There are five delimitations for this study. The first delimitation is limited to department heads as participants rather than presidents, deans, associate deans, or provosts. The subsequent delimitation is limited to university department heads but not heads in secondary schools. In addition, the chosen location of this study is delimited to one Canadian research-intensive university and this study does not cover other international universities. Also, non-departmentalized colleges are excluded from this study. The final delimitation relates to the role of department heads in teaching and learning rather than research and administration.

**Limitations**

The limitations of a study are the restrictions that affect the generalizability and practical applicability of the results, which arise from the initial decisions made while designing the study (Price & Murnan, 2004). These limitations are based on the fact that some factors are frequently
beyond the control of researchers. There are three limitations in this study. To start with, the research is conducted at merely one public university, leading to limited generalizability of the findings as interviewees’ working environments may be unique compared with other universities. The perspectives of department heads at this university, especially those interviewed, may differ from those in other countries such as the U.S.A., the UK, and Australia because of variations in educational systems worldwide. Given that the sample size is relatively small, this study finds it difficult to accurately represent the overall profile of university department heads and to find significant relationships from the data. Finally, this study has a limitation that plagues all voluntary studies – department heads may be unwilling to spend too much time on interviews and give resourceful answers due to their busy schedule.

**Definition of Terms**

To facilitate comprehension within the research, it is imperative to explain frequently employed concepts and terms. The following elucidations aim to alleviate any ambiguity surrounding the core terminology and foster a mutual understanding essential for effective communication of their meanings.

*Department Head or Department Chair:* A faculty member who is responsible for managing a department. Their duties involve “evaluating faculty and staff, overseeing the budget, moving the department forward, and serving as the figure head role of the department” (Williams, 2007, p. 22).

*Faculty:* “Tenured and tenure-track institutional faculty appointments” (Cervino, 2018, p. 21). Universities hire faculty members into tenure-track or non-tenure-track positions. There are three career stages of tenure-track faculty members: professor, associate professor, and assistant professor whereas non-tenure-track faculty members principally undertake teaching positions and contribute to teaching assignments (Bess & Dee, 2008).

*Academic freedom:* The liberty granted to faculty members and students to engage in teaching, studying, and the pursuit of knowledge and research without undue interference or constraints imposed by laws, institutional rules, or external pressures from the public (Hogan &
Trotter, 2013).

*Instructional effectiveness*: A wide spectrum of knowledge, preparation, skills, and attitudes that contribute to successful teaching and student learning. It is a multifaceted concept that encompasses various behaviours, skills, and characteristics necessary for productive educational outcomes (Scheerens, 2016).

*Teaching assignment*: Designed to ensure that the strategic goals and obligations of the departments in teaching, supervision, research, and service are accomplished, resulting in faculty members and instructors advancing their careers (Joyce et al., 2018).

*Curriculum development*: The multi-step procedure of improving a course taught at educational institutions or the process of creating new courses and programs. While the exact process will change from institution to institution, the broad framework includes stages of demands analysis, goal setting, syllabus design, implementation, and evaluation (Richards, 2016).

*Faculty Development*: Activities in which staff participate to enhance their knowledge and skills as researchers, teachers, scholars, educators, leaders, and managers, including organizational development, instructional improvement, the development of professional skills, and the teaching of specific content fields (Burgess et al., 2019).

*Learning Leaders*: Individuals who offer specialized professional development support to educators. They apply their experience and up-to-date knowledge of effective pedagogy and education systems to cooperate with educators, providing learning solutions tailored to the educators’ particular context and needs (Scott et al., 2008).

*Peer feedback*: The critical comments and assessments made by peers based on their judgment. It is a way of supporting the learning process by offering an intermediate assessment of the performance against the criteria, followed by feedback on strengths, weaknesses, and tips for enhancement (Falchikov, 1996).

**The Researcher**

Since the researcher’s biases might influence the interpretations of findings in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2023), it is essential to reveal my positionality by gaining insights into my
previous backdrops, experiences, and professional philosophy. Through my study journey, I have observed that the higher Power Distance Index (PDI) among Chinese teachers compared with those in Canada leads to students not challenging the absolute authority of teachers, eroding students’ individuality and independence. The prevalent focus on exam-oriented education in China—“To judge heroes by grades only”—sidelines the psychological education, moral education and legal education that students should ideally receive. Under the background that entrance examinations determine fate, parents increasingly highlight pushing their kids to excel. Unfortunately, some students suffer from depression due to the lack of emotional outlets in fierce competition. Such an educational model cannot inspire teachers’ creativity in teaching, nor can it stimulate students’ enthusiasm for learning. I feel the urgency to change this situation, however, an instructor’s influence on the reform of the education system is minimal, and relying on one teacher who improves the teaching quality alone is merely a drop in the bucket. What I mean is that it is futile without the support of educational leaders who are crucial influencers in the improvement of teaching and learning.

Having worked as a teacher in a secondary school in China, I received invaluable mentorship and guidance from the Director of Teaching Affairs. The role resembled that of Canadian department heads, nurturing teachers’ professional growth. Informal classroom observations, emphasized by Ing (2010), significantly influence instructional effectiveness. In my own experience, the Director of Teaching Affairs regularly visited my classes in September, followed by insightful discussions on observed strengths and weaknesses. The feedback gleaned from the conversation served as a precious resource, allowing me to continually adjust teaching strategies, thereby improving pedagogy steadily. It is evident that the support, attitudes, and beliefs of academic leaders have a positive impact on teachers’ instructional effectiveness. This finding is reasonable not only in secondary schools but also in universities. Understanding the pivotal role of academic leaders in facilitating a positive learning environment motivates me to conduct a study that aims to investigate the role of department heads in leading teaching and learning at a Canadian research-intensive university.
I had multiple assumptions about leaders and administration that affected the way I perceived participants’ responses. Firstly, I assumed that department heads are critical in supervising teaching efficiency and curriculum quality within the department. Secondly, I assumed that department heads are learning leaders who facilitate teaching and learning improvement for both faculty members and students. Thirdly, I assumed department heads’ practices regarding teaching and learning are guided by university policies. Fourthly, I assumed power and authority are essential for department heads to support teaching and learning activities within the department. Lastly, I assumed leading teaching and learning is a priority for department heads in the university. Although these assumptions may be grounded in some extent of truth, it is imperative for me to remain conscious of the potential biases that they may introduce into my analysis. For example, my assumption that department heads are always effective learning leaders may cause me to ignore the fields that require improvement under their guidance. To mitigate potential prejudices, I engaged in introspection to identify my own biases and employed peer review and collaboration to seek feedback from experts in this area.

**Organization of the Thesis**

The thesis is organized into six chapters arranged in the following sequence. Chapter One has primarily discussed the impetus of why I carried out this study, elucidating the necessity of exploring how university department heads lead academic units for learning. It presents the introduction of the study, the background of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, and research questions. A description of this study was given, followed by delimitations, limitations, assumptions, definitions, and the role of the researcher. Chapter Two begins with a detailed review of the leadership development of university department heads, encompassing their background, roles, leadership, faculty development initiatives, as well as professional preparation and training. Having synthesized the literature on instructional leadership, leadership for learning, and middle leadership of learning and teaching, significant literature gaps are identified. Chapter Three describes the philosophical worldview and research methodology used in this study, providing a robust justification for their application. The chapter
also depicts the research strategy, participant solicitation and criteria, data collection and analysis methods, along with trustworthiness and ethical considerations. Chapter Four presents the processes of document collection, coding, theme generation in detail and findings from a review of the job profile and policy documents regarding department head leadership of teaching and learning. Chapter Five shares the overarching findings of the research based on semi-structured interviews with department heads. Chapter Six starts with interpretations of findings by revisiting the research questions, suggests the implications of the study results, as well as offers recommendations for further research, and draws a conclusion about the research.
CHAPTER Two – Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the function and role of department heads in leading teaching and learning at a Canadian research-intensive university. The literature reviews provide “a framework for establishing the importance of the study and the benchmark for comparing the results with other findings” (Creswell & Creswell, 2023, p. 59). This chapter endeavors to make a connection with the existing research and literature concerning the leadership development of university department heads and the theoretical perspectives of leading for learning, resulting in deep comprehension of effective leadership practices in higher education institutions. Throughout the process, the literature gaps are identified that illuminate the pertinent fields requiring further examination. Lastly, this chapter delineates a conceptual framework that serves as a roadmap to define the scope of the research and facilitate the decision-making for methodologies and data analysis techniques in Chapter Three.

Leadership Development of Department Heads in Universities

The majority of research on leadership in higher education primarily explores senior positions such as deans, provosts, or presidents (Kezar, 2017). Little is known about middle-level leaders, such as department heads (Chilvers et al., 2018). Hence, this section reviews literature regarding five themes of university department heads: a) background; b) roles, responsibilities, and challenges; c) leadership; d) faculty development; e) training and preparation.

Background of Department Heads

In the recent few years, there has been an emerging body of research specifically examining the characteristics of department heads (Brinkley-Etzkorn & Lane, 2019). Considering they make up to 80% of organizational decisions in the university (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004), it is essential to realize their profile due to their important positioning. According to demographic data on department heads, their age, on average, was around 46 years old (Carroll, 1991). However, more recent research indicates that it has increased to 53 years old (Cipriano &
Riccardi, 2016). While Carroll (1991) did not investigate their race, other researchers took it into consideration. A survey conducted by Vacik and Miller (1994) illustrates the position of department heads is predominantly occupied by White faculty members. This scenario has experienced minimal change, though other ethnic groups have gradually emerged in the United States such as Asian (4.2%), African American (12.8%), and Hispanic or Latino (13.5%) (Zippia, 2022). Historically, only 10% of department heads were women who were less likely to become full professors (Carroll, 1991; Carroll & Wolverton, 2004). Nevertheless, the proportion has increased to 34%-36% in Canadian public universities and to 54% in American universities in recent years (Bichsel & McC Chesney, 2017; Boyko, 2009; Gmelch et al, 2017). In addition, a substantial proportion of university department heads are tenured with doctoral degrees and strong competencies in both teaching and research (Cipriano & Riccardi, 2016; Cowley, 2017; Gmelch et al., 2017).

Faculty members are selected as department heads from the pool of departmental senior members, though procedures allow for external recruitment (Stawnychko, 2021). Approximately 20% of heads resign every year in Canada (Gmelch & Miskin, 2011). One possible reason is that the tension linked with serving as department heads outweighs the corresponding benefits that come with the position (Floyd, 2012; Gmelch et al., 2017). Floyd and Dimmock (2011) argued that whether heads advance to more senior positions or leave the position depends on their capacity to deal with the conflicts among their multiple identities. According to their identity-conflict management abilities, Floyd and Dimmock (2011) divided three career trajectories and types of department heads, shaped by socialization factors, which are shown in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1

*Career Trajectories and Typology of Academics who Become Department Heads*
Roles, Responsibility, and Challenges

As the position of department heads is vital for efficient departmental operations (Armstrong & Woloshyn, 2017; Berdrow, 2010; Kruse, 2022; Maddock, 2023; Thornton et al., 2018), it is essential to define their role appropriately. The position of department head, often known as the department head in Canada, but as the department chair in the U.S.A., is typically a continuously hired role with additional official responsibilities in teaching, research, and leading academic units (Clarke, 2009; Meek et al., 2010).

While department heads seem to be crucial in leading and coordinating academic units, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding, analysis, and contextualization of their roles (Clarke, 2009). Maddock (2023) regarded the role of university department heads as “multi-
faceted, demanding and poorly understood” (p. 13). In general, their role is aligned with management, leadership, and academics (Armstrong & Woloshyn, 2017; Berdrow, 2010; Freeman et al., 2020; Gonaim, 2016; Thornton et al., 2018). Specifically, their role as a curriculum planners and coordinators contributes to promoting learning efficiency within the department (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). Ackerman et al. (2020) investigated wide themes pertaining to the department head’s role in mathematics service courses, encompassing scheduling classes, placing students in suitable courses, deciding course content, evaluating courses, and considering the adjustment of course directions. They noted that effectively delivering the courses requires collaboration with math faculty as well as colleagues from other departments across the campus, which implies the importance of relational leadership. Department heads prioritize their research responsibilities while simultaneously managing administrative duties within the department (Gmelch, 2016). Cervino (2018) undertook a qualitative explanatory study to explore how department heads support faculty research productivity in a public research university. Interviews with 22 department heads revealed four main role categories: evaluating departmental productivity, fostering a research-friendly climate, supporting faculty tenure and promotion, and nurturing faculty research careers. Three strategies for heads to balance their dual responsibilities as leaders and researchers were also found by the study: encouraging professional goals, acknowledging the administrative importance of research, and preserving research productivity.

The internal and exterior departmental tasks are additional responsibilities of the department head leadership. Department heads oversee the operations of their departments and ensure that they function smoothly (Stawnychko, 2021). The practice includes the head’s endeavors of managing resources and finances, developing staff and personal benefits, and maintaining collegial cultures (Armstrong & Woloshyn, 2017; Cowley, 2019; Freeman et al., 2020; Taggart, 2015). Meanwhile, Weaver et al. (2019) asserted that department heads are also tasked with advocating for their department, representing external stakeholders or university communities. Despite the fact that researchers outlined various responsibilities of department
heads, there remains a lack of clarity regarding how to effectively evaluate the execution of these responsibilities. Thus, Cowley (2017) proposed four key criteria for evaluation, including balancing finances, managing schedules, discussing regularly within the department, and applying for grants, promotion, and tenure.

The multifaceted nature of the department head role results in a widespread consensus that it is exceedingly challenging to lead the department (Armstrong & Woloshyn, 2017; Freeman et al., 2020; Kruse, 2022; Maddock, 2023). Gonaim (2016) considered the department heads’ role as “a greyish area, ambiguous, and complex” (p. 281). The challenging nature of the department heads’ role, as noted by Creaton and Heard-Laureote (2021), is reflected in job posts that require the capacity to integrate strategic leadership into the improvement of teaching and learning. Buller (2012) argued that the Head of Department is viewed as “probably the most important, least appreciated, and toughest administrative position in higher education” (p. 3).

Many researchers have identified challenges that department heads face. For example, Armstrong and Woloshyn (2017) implemented an interpretative study and interviewed ten department heads at a Canadian university, ascertaining the management challenges in terms of three areas: managing positions, managing people, and managing self. Adopting a case study as the research strategy, Thornton et al. (2018) investigated capacities that facilitate department heads to handle challenges at a single university in New Zealand. They found mentoring from former heads, professional development, and previous knowledge and leadership experience could help heads cope with those challenges. The participants appealed universities to alleviate heads’ burden, offer more professional development opportunities, and delegate their leadership roles, thus improving their job satisfaction and work performance.

**Leadership of Department Heads**

Leadership skills of department heads are crucial for promoting excellent department cultures. Bystydzienski et al. (2017) explored the leadership of department heads in facilitating culture change that underscores inclusion and collegial processes. Armed with surveys and
interviews, they found that effective leadership enables department heads to enhance policies, beliefs, and practices that embrace diversity. This transformative approach creates a supportive climate for women and underrepresented faculty. Change, however, is a difficult process that frequently runs into resistance in organizations for a variety of reasons, including a reluctance to break from established practices and routines, a fear of the unknown, worries about an increase in workload, and skepticism about the benefits of the proposed changes. According to McArthur (2002), department heads would be best served by democratic leadership, which emphasizes faculty empowerment, in order to successfully collaborate with faculty members and overcome resistance to change.

Flexible leadership has becoming increasingly critical, particularly in changeable political, economic, and social environments (Ruben et al., 2016). Limited empirical research has been carried on the role of leadership efficacy within the department in response to dynamic academic climate. Leadership efficacy is the ability of leaders to illustrate successful leadership skills and behaviors (Hoyt, 2005). In a study carried out at a state university in Turkey, Akbulut et al. (2015) used surveys to gauge the effectiveness of leadership among 70 faculty members across three social science departments. The study found that department heads effectively moved departmental affairs forward and navigate changing settings by developing leadership efficacy through positions as innovators, visionaries, and motivators.

Numerous scholars have examined department heads’ individual leadership styles. (eg.; Akbulut et al., 2015; Bystydzienski et al., 2017). Nonetheless, their research on department heads’ leadership neglects collective power and relationship building. Branson et al. (2016) filled this gap by investigating the leadership of department heads at a New Zealand university. They underscored the complexity of department heads’ roles, highlighting four interconnected dimensions of relational leadership: learning and development, trust and credibility, organizational structure and power dynamics, and communication modes. The study implied the need for department heads to navigate multi-dimensional relationships within organizational networks, considering the impact of their decisions and the decisions of others on overall
relationships and context.

Considering the necessity for department heads to be effective in creating organizational strategies, defining priorities, and creating policy frameworks, they must develop their leadership skills. (De Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009). Despite the formidable obstacles that academic leaders encounter when leading academic units universities worldwide, little has been done to fully develop department heads’ leadership potential (Armstrong & Woloshyn, 2017). Boyko (2009) asserted that the majority of department heads were devoid of continuous access to leadership development opportunities. To guide department heads in becoming effective leaders, Gmelch (2019) designed a leadership development framework for department heads that involves three aspects, including “conceptual understanding, skill development, and reflective practice” (p. 13). Conceptual understanding is critical for department heads fulfilling their duties effectively and efficiently. Considering heads’ duties may change based on the contextual and organizational situations of colleges or the whole university (Gmelch, 2019), they should establish their own understanding of academic leadership and accomplish a suitable alignment with their roles and positions by familiarizing organizational structures and culture and navigating recent dynamics that differentiate one department from another (Gmelch, 2015). Additionally, skill development is necessary for heads to fulfill obligations. They need to act courageously in crucial leadership moments such as making financial decisions, fostering external collaborations and community involvement, evaluating the performance of faculty members and staff, as well as undertaking specific responsibilities in instruction and research (Scott et al., 2008). Moreover, reflective practice lies at the core of the skillful handling of circumstances featured by value conflict, uniqueness, instability, and uncertainty (Schon, 1983). Department heads’ development is an introspective journey of self-discovery, personal consciousness-raising, and constructive feedback for growth and improvement. Through communication, as highlighted by Gmelch (2019), department heads share their perspectives and dilemmas, seeking insights and feedback from their colleagues to examine and address these challenges collaboratively. Even though this framework can guide department heads’ work to some extent, empirical research is scarce in this
area – particularly research that stresses the necessity of examining the leadership development of department heads within specific contexts such as Canadian universities.

**Faculty Development**

The renewal and rejuvenation of organizations, whether in industry, business, or academic settings, depend on staff development (Zahra et al., 2013). Human resources managers typically provide support for staff professional growth. Likewise, department heads are also uniquely positioned to drive this function within their academic units. Horne et al. (2016) explored the role of leadership in developing academic talent in universities from the lens of organizational support and social exchange. With a sample of faculty members and staff at a large South African university, the research examined the degree to which quality leader–member exchange relationships, as opposed to formal institutional resources, influence the development of academic talent. The study disclosed findings regarding the manner in which relational resources, manifested in the leader-member exchange between supervisors (leaders) and employees (followers), impact employees’ views of investment in their professional development. The study also highlighted the key role of department heads as leaders in nurturing the progress of academic staff (followers). Pifer et al. (2015) further illustrated this finding through mixed-methods research, analyzing survey data from faculty members at 13 liberal arts colleges in the USA. The results indicated that department heads play indispensable roles in providing assistance for the professional development of faculty members. To sum up, while growth is determined by the individual faculty member, researchers acknowledged that the department head serves as the front-line leader who is responsible for enabling that development (Clarke, 2009; Pifer et al., 2015; White, 2017).

Over the past few years, department heads have increasingly recognized the significance of incorporating external resources to support the professional development of faculty members. According to Cervino (2018), department heads frequently seek out and introduce external information from sources of other department heads, deans, and professionals, developing
management strategies for faculty workloads and offering faculty members innovative opportunities for advancement. Noticeably, few studies explored how department heads utilize their personal background and experiences to support faculty members’ teaching and research practice. While previous research has explored the role of heads in facilitating faculty development, the influence of value match between department heads and faculty members on faculty development has received little attention. Virick and Strage (2016) particularly focused on this gap in their quantitative study, using person-environment fit and value congruence theories to evaluate the impact of value match or mismatch between department heads and junior faculty members. They discovered that achieving value congruence can improve junior faculty members’ organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

Various studies acknowledge the department head’s contributions to faculty recruitment and retention (Bensimon et al., 2000; Creswell et al., 1990). Moses (1989) claimed that promoting faculty members, annually reviewing probationary faculty members, and reviewing tenured faculty members are the priority duties of heads. They actively contribute to the recruitment and socialization of new faculty members, helping them smoothly integrate into the department (Riley & Russell, 2013). The induction of the new faculty members, noted by Staniforth and Harland (2006), is one of the important duties of department heads in faculty development, which often comprises guiding, nurturing, and fostering advancement across various stages of faculty professional careers. In addition, McDowell (2000) carried out a study investigating the role of department heads in exit interviews with faculty members. The research revealed that their proficiency in conducting such interviews is often lacking due to inadequate professional preparation.

Department heads usually support faculty pedagogical development through mentoring, supervision, and evaluation. Firstly, mentoring is a critical role of department heads owing to the fact that many new faculty members perceive it as an important indicator of workplace satisfaction and future success (Pinto, 2016; Stawnychko, 2021). Junior faculty members expect heads to assist in identifying campus resources that can advance their pedagogy (Phillips &
Dennison, 2015). Gappa and Trice (2010) found heads have a set of strategies for providing mentoring for faculty teaching practices, for instance, by visiting classes, developing mentoring programs, and proposing clear guidelines and expectations for faculty members. Secondly, department heads serve as vital in supervising faculty members in attempting to communicate and achieve a range of objectives. Their supervision duty involves providing guidance, instruction, support, and engagement to faculty members, fostering an environment conducive to achieving exceptional performance and job satisfaction for faculty members (Riley & Russell, 2013). The supervisory role of department heads also encompasses teaching quality assurance by fostering self-regulation and peer regulation between supervisors (department heads) and supervisees (faculty members). Thirdly, department heads are entrusted with the task of effectively evaluating faculty members’ teaching outcomes and contributions and providing valuable feedback about their teaching to support their professional growth (Ewing & Crockford, 2008). The evaluation process maintains the academic standards of the institution and ensures that faculty members are recognized and rewarded based on their accomplishments. In Honeycutt et al.’s (2010) research of eighteen marketing department heads, strategies were implemented to motivate faculty members towards instructional improvement, including financial incentives for achieving high scores on teaching evaluations, recognition and incentives for outstanding teaching performance, and funding for travel to attend conferences.

**Training and Preparation**

It is widely acknowledged that there is a lack of appropriate formal role-specific professional learning that prepares department heads for their leading practices (Berdrow, 2010; Freeman et al., 2020; Pepper & Giles, 2015; Preston & Price, 2012; Thornton et al., 2018). Hence, this section underscores the necessity of training, fields of training needs, and training programs for department heads in higher education institutions.
The Necessity of Training

While higher education institutions are increasingly recognizing the importance of middle leadership development, very few institutions offer leadership training programs aimed at preparing department heads for their positions (Brinkley-Etzkorn & Lane, 2019; Cipriano & Riccardi, 2016; Maddock, 2023; Wolverton et al., 2005). The shift from the role of a faculty member to the department head has been portrayed as a challenge (DeFleur et al., 2010; Wolverton et al., 2005). However, as most universities have inadequate hiring, training, promotional, and succession-planning systems (Cassie et al., 2006; Gmelch, 2019), little advanced or ongoing guidance is provided for department heads to adapt to the new role (Brinkley-Etzkorn & Lane, 2019; Wheeler et al., 2008). Gmelch and Miskin (2011) discovered only 3% of department heads received formal professional training in readiness for their role. Recently, the circumstance has improved somewhat, Cipriano and Riccardi (2016) revealed that 17% of heads have undergone formal management training. Despite a slight increase, there is still a large number of heads who have not been trained.

The absence of training opportunities might result in department heads being less prepared to effectively chair their department, thus intensifying the complexity of their work. This renders heads reluctant to undertake various leadership tasks, which ultimately leads to low job morale (Cipriano & Riccardi, 2016; Gonaim, 2016). For example, they may find themselves adrift when attempting to respond to various needs of deans, faculty, staff, and students (Kruse, 2020). The impact of poorly prepared department heads goes beyond their personal effectiveness as leaders. It is believed that less prepared academic leaders are more likely to suffer from decreasing resources, rising accountability, and changes in technology and student enrolment, which might threaten departmental operations (Wolverton et al., 2005). Given the inadequate training department heads receive, it is more likely for them to struggle to respond to internal and external challenges so that the progress of the departmental instructional effectiveness and research productivity may be adversely affected (Morris & Laipple, 2015). In this scenario, departments may lack motivation, direction, and purpose (Kezar, 2017), resulting in a
demotivated team, which further inhibits the advancement of the whole department.

To address this concern, Berdrow (2010) proposed a socialization model that allows one-year shadowing time to prepare prospective heads for headship. During this period, the new department head would cooperate with the previous head to work on the related tasks of being a head, while the previous head would also have more time to prepare for their incoming roles. In this way, not only can they transition into new positions successfully, but also become effective leaders, contributing to the effectiveness of departments and the university as a whole. Brinkley-Etzkorn and Lane (2019) recognized Berdrow’s (2010) approach and stressed the significance of ensuring department heads are familiar with university policies about solving interest conflicts, evaluating faculty members, and maintaining consistency of the job in other fields within the department. From the long-term perspective, however, department heads need to receive training to strengthen their leadership. Morris and Laipple (2015) asserted that heads who receive professional development training perform better than those who do not.

**Fields of Training Needs**

As receiving training is vital for academic leaders, the initial phase is determining the fields in which they would benefit to enhance their leadership. Given that little empirical research specifically investigates procedures and strategies of distinguishing wide-ranging training needs for university department heads, Aziz et al. (2005) carried out a case study in a public university and demonstrated the structured design and execution of a program can thoroughly evaluate the department heads’ training needs. The finding of this study illustrated that professional development, legal issues, and budgeting management are the most important training areas. However, Paape et al.’s (2021) findings were quite different from Aziz et al.’s (2005) who adopted the mixed-method approach, organizing three focus groups and a three-phase Delphi survey across universities with diverse geographical locations, to gather input directly from department heads regarding the specific training needs they identified. Their finding highlighted a growing demand for training in areas such as student issues management, conflict resolution,
faculty mentoring, and interpersonal communication skills.

Notably, these studies only listed essential training needs instead of filtering out those that are less in demand. Using a sequential mixed technique, Brinkley-Etzkorn and Lane (2019) filled the gap by investigating the department heads’ training opportunities in a southern state university. This study’s comparative analysis yields beneficial insights despite its limited generalizability to other institutions. Aside from pointing out that interpersonal skills are a crucial training area for achieving departmental goals, they also discovered that the least important areas are using information or policy understanding. This finding suggests the future trend of training for department heads should focus on altering behavior and strengthening capacity instead of solely mastering knowledge. In addition to knowledge and administration capacity training, department heads need to learn social intelligence to cultivate positive rapport with faculty members. Afzalur Rahim et al. (2015) conducted a study and established a structural equation model to examine how the social intelligence (SI) of department heads is related to the turnover intention (TI) of faculty members. The results revealed that department heads’ SI is negatively correlated with TI and highlighted the importance of encouraging heads to be trained in terms of cognitive empathy, social skills, as well as situational awareness. Hence, Afzalur Rahim et al. (2015) appealed to the policymakers of universities to provide training opportunities aimed at improving heads’ essential SI competencies, which are required for various academic disciplines.

Although the need for training of university department heads has been recognized by researchers in developed countries such as the USA, the stance on this matter is surprisingly sparse in developing countries. To fill this gap, Nguyen’s (2012) qualitative study identified the areas that department heads need to be trained in a Vietnam university through interviews and document analysis. The study indicated that heads have a range of training needs, but the most paramount ones are research techniques, the roles of the heads, management knowledge and skills, and English language proficiency. This study, however, did not explore the department heads’ training needs for leading teaching and learning.
Training Programs

The productivity of each department is contingent upon the efficacy of department heads, as they play a critical role in driving the progress of their department. As such, it is essential for them to possess the indispensable knowledge and skills to lead their departments toward achieving organizational goals. To nurture the necessary skills for influential leadership, heads must take proactive steps such as attending specialized conferences and workshops, seeking mentorship, serving on departmental boards and committees, or participating in special projects (Gmelch, 2004). While on-campus training geared at preparing department heads to be effective leaders is limited (Gunsalas, 2006), there are a few reputable training programs available throughout North America, as shown in Table 2.1, which offers department heads valuable management tools and learning resources.

Table 2.1
Training Programs for Department Heads Provided by North American Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRAINING PROGRAMS</th>
<th>INSTITUTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heads and heads: Leading Academic Departments</td>
<td>University of Manitoba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CICan Leadership Institute for Program Heads</td>
<td>College &amp; Institutes Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department Head Certification Training</td>
<td>NAKHE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming a Successful Department Head</td>
<td>AAMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department Head Leadership Training</td>
<td>ESC of Central Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Ed Department Head Academy</td>
<td>University of Central Oklahoma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department Chairs Assessment Training</td>
<td>Laney College</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Investing in these training programs can improve the effectiveness of department heads to some extent, contributing to the success of academic departments and the conversion of the university’s visions and missions into reality (Gonaim, 2016). Nevertheless, it is imperative to consider the limitation of these programs as they are not systematic and standardized. To be specific, the content and structure of these programs may vary significantly from one institution to another, and there is often no standard framework for assessing their effectiveness. Department
heads might find it difficult to determine which program can satisfy their learning needs. Thus, institutions need to evaluate their programs before promoting them widely. Meanwhile, the training fields of these programs are not comprehensive (Brinkley-Etzkorn & Lane, 2019). Taking a Canadian program hosted by the University of Manitoba as an example, this program comprises various topics: assessing yourself as head, providing leadership tools for department heads, promoting collegiality and managing conflict, working effectively with faculty, staff, and contract instructors, assessing opportunities in the current environment and formulating plans and managing headship (University of Manitoba, 2023). However, the program does not cover the training for department heads to lead their academic units enhancing teaching and learning and then become learning leaders, though this field is also important for the success of the department.

**Leading for Learning**

This section reviews the key literature concerned with leading for learning. While numerous researchers have undertaken large-scale leadership studies, the majority of these studies predominantly focus on leadership for management roles. Interestingly, there is a limited body of research that specifically examines leadership as an instrument for enhancing teaching and learning outcomes in higher education. The review aims to critically address this notable gap in the extant literature. The section explores the key concepts, theories, and models associated with instructional leadership, leadership for learning, and middle leadership of learning and teaching, striving to assess their potential impact on teachers’ growth and students’ achievements. Through a comprehensive analysis of relevant literature, this review seeks to provide insights into how educational leaders can effectively use these leadership frameworks to foster a culture of learning and continuous improvement within their institutions. The literature on instructional leadership and leadership for learning appears to be more well-developed in the K-12 sector. Although there are significant contextual differences between K-12 and higher education sectors, this review explores the literature broadly in the hopes that research in the two sectors might be complementary.
Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership (IL), conceptualized approximately 40 years ago, often faces ambiguity in its definition, resulting in a variety of opinions and perspectives on its proper implementation (Gümüş et al., 2018; Webb, 2005). Ng et al. (2015) summarized this concept from narrow and broad perspectives. The narrow one emphasizes the activities directly related to teaching and learning such as mentoring or supervising teachers, whereas the broad one refers to all actions that indirectly lead for learning like creating school goals, missions, and visions. Nevertheless, Toprak (2020) noticed the development of various leadership frameworks in 1995 led to a gradual decline in interest in IL practices. After the shortcomings of the IL became more evident, as noted by Bush (2015), transformational leadership and later distributed leadership started to take precedence.

Existing research on educational leadership has largely focused on educational leaders’ managerial, administrative, and political duties (Munna, 2021). Little attention has been paid to their instructional roles as learning leaders. Mestry et al. (2013) carried out a case study about the IL of school principals through semi-structured interviews, providing valuable insights into their pressure and tensions in balancing administrative and instructional responsibilities and highlighting the importance of IL in teaching and learning enhancement. Undoubtedly, a growing body of studies revealed that IL practice can strengthen students’ academic performance (Bush, 2015; Fred & Singh, 2021; Hallinger et al., 2015; Jalapang & Raman, 2020; Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011; Puruwita, 2022). Robinson et al. (2008) analyzed the data pertaining to the effect of five different models of leadership on students’ accomplishments in New Zealand, drawing a conclusion that IL produces the most significant impact.

An Instructional Leadership Model (ILM) has the potential to enhance the growth of IL. The model underscores how important it is for instructional leaders to pay attention to the quality of delivering courses in the classroom, to guarantee that students can accomplish the intended learning outcomes (Day, 2020; Hallinger & Heck, 2011). A number of ILMs have been put forth by Hallinger and Murphy (1985), Leithwood et al. (1990), Murphy (1990), and Weber (1996).
Alig-Mielcarek (2003) summarized their models, thereby identifying three notable similarities: “defining and communicating goals, monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process and promoting and emphasizing the importance of professional development” (p. 42). Using these three shared dimensions as a foundation, Alig-Mielcarek and Hoy (2005) developed and empirically tested a new ILM, as shown in Figure 2.2. This model explains student achievement is determined by four variables, involving instructional leadership of principals or department heads, academic press in educational institutions, socioeconomic status, and level of student performance. Notably, students’ socioeconomic status significantly impacts their learning, which subsequently affects leadership responses (Bush, 2017). Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be considered “unprepared learners”, leading to minimal or no academic progress (Munna, 2023).

Figure 2.2

*Instructional Leadership Model*

![Instructional Leadership Model](image)

*Note: Adapted from Alig-Mielcarek and Hoy (2005)*

Recent research suggests the positive significance of IL on school performance (Ahn et al., 2021), however, it has several limitations. While IL encourages the alignment with government-mandated reforms, Webb (2005) contended it may impede teachers’ creativity within schools. Ahn et al. (2021) noted two problematic issues of IL. For one thing, it solely focuses on the role
of principals, ignoring the contributions of teachers and other school stakeholders and overlooks the complex dynamics among leaders, subordinates, and circumstance factors. This narrow focus challenges our ability to understand how different lens influence student learning progress, staff professional development, and school climate. For another, IL prioritizes teaching over learning, disregarding the role of students internalizing knowledge and becoming self-directed learners (Bush, 2011). In the 21st century, there has been a shift in the way of implementing IL, moving away from a hierarchical structure (Bush, 2015).

While much of the existing literature on IL focuses on K-12 education (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Ing, 2010; Mestry et al., 2013; Ubben et al., 2007), there are invaluable lessons for higher education institutions. The strategies of IL that have proven effective in K-12 settings, such as setting clear organizational goals, utilizing data for informed decision-making, and facilitating collaboration among instructors, can be valuable for higher education as well (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; McEvan, 2003; Salleh, 2013). University department heads also need to create a student-centered learning environment through the utilization of formative assessment techniques, differentiated instruction, and technology integration within the department. This can support personalized learning experiences and improve student engagement. In addition, university heads should provide professional development opportunities for faculty members, creating a supportive learning community for their instructional effectiveness improvement. Through this cross-pollination of ideas, higher education can leverage the rich knowledge and experiences from K-12 IL to drive educational innovation.

**Leadership for Learning**

Leadership for learning (LfL) refers to a strategy that school leaders employ to achieve important educational outcomes, with a particular focus on student learning (Robinson et al., 2008; Tulowitzki & Pietsch, 2020). This strategy goes beyond traditional classroom instruction and incorporates ongoing professional development for educators as well as organizational skills to strengthen capacity building (Hallinger, 2011). The knowledge foundation of LfL, noticed by
Murphy et al. (2007), comprises 8 main dimensions. These dimensions include creating visions for learning, implementing intriguing instructional programs, designing a comprehensive curriculum program, establishing a reliable evaluation program, encouraging communities of learning, acquiring and utilizing resources effectively, developing sustainable organizational culture, and advocating for the demands of students and the community.

As mentioned earlier, IL is undoubtedly a significant model for teaching and learning improvement. However, it fails to capture a comprehensive view of leadership that encompasses the efforts of each individual who has distinct responsibilities and varying degrees of involvement in the teaching process (Leading for Learning Sourcebook, 2003). Echoing this limitation, recent developments in school leadership research have led to the emergence of LfL as a holistic framework integrating elements of previously used theories. Ahn et al. (2021) pointed out that the prospects for leadership are increased by LfL’s recognition of the idea that leadership is a shared responsibility among the numerous parties engaged. The views, attitudes, and values of teachers, education assistants, principals, heads of department, and other staff are worthwhile to be taken into consideration in leadership practices. LfL also requires collaborations with parents and communities. Townsend and Bayetto (2020) undertook a research project examining how Tasmanian school leaders engage parents and communities to enhance students’ reading skills. Data from case studies at five specified schools, where principals adopted LfL to encourage skill development, were analyzed for the study. The findings suggested that it is imperative to investigate ways to involve families and communities in the decision-making process regarding student learning improvement.

School leaders frequently ignore teaching and learning enhancement because they are so busy with administrative duties (Mulford, 2003). This increasing concern triggered the birth of the Leadership for Learning Framework. Dempster (2013) developed a comprehensive approach to leadership development within educational institutions, as illustrated in Figure 2.3. This model aims to empower educational leaders in influencing learning across academic units, ultimately leading to improved student learning outcomes.
Dempster (2013)’s framework includes eight dimensions. First and foremost, all leadership actions like having a strong foundation of evidence and establishing disciplined dialogue are surrounded by a moral purpose, namely, improving learning and achievement. Also, it emphasizes the need for reliable actions in five terrains of successful leadership: enhancing professional growth, creating conducive learning environments, developing curriculum and teaching methods, obtaining support from parents and the community, and exhibiting leadership skills. These domains are the essential components that skilled leaders must continuously navigate to achieve their moral goals.

Middle Leadership of Learning and Teaching

Middle leadership (middle management) has gained significant academic attention since
the late 1990s, yet it remains a lack of clear understanding of middle leaders’ identities and their responsibilities (De Nobile, 2018). Due to the increasing workload for principals, IL in high schools is often shared with middle leaders, though it was exclusively placed on principals in the past (Robinson et al., 2008). Effective middle leadership requires technical skills, strategic thinking, and interpersonal abilities to drive successful changes in teaching and learning through collaboration and relationship-building (Marshall, 2012). Middle leaders employ different sorts of leadership frameworks, such as transformational (Berdrow, 2010; Marshall, 2012), distributed (Lárusdóttir & O’Connor, 2017), and a combination of leadership-bureaucratic and professional leadership (Zhang et al., 2021), encouraging collaborative practices and stimulating positive changes in teaching and learning.

Middle leadership has become increasingly important due to its positive influence on school improvement (Lipscombe et al., 2021). Highfield and Rubie-Davies (2022) compared the combined academic outcomes of students within each department, they found significant correlations between certain middle leadership strategies and academic achievements. Additionally, Forde et al. (2019) performed a thorough examination of successive Scottish and Irish educational policies pertaining to middle leadership. Their analysis revealed two main its components: the interpretations of middle leadership objectives and the major shifts in policy paradigms. Indeed, there has been a progression of policy concepts from assigned duties to administrative duties and ultimately to leadership focused on enhancing learning. While there are extensive studies exploring the abstract personal traits of middle leaders, there is a noticeable lack of research specifically focused on their implementation of leading for learning (Rönnerman et al., 2017). To fill the gap, Murphy (2020) examined the role of middle school leaders by intertwining theory and practice, which spotlighted their actual experiences in leading learning improvement and establishing a link between the school system’s demands and the learning needs of students and teachers. It is worth noting that this study utilized the Practice Architecture theory to explore how middle leaders carry out their practices in educational contexts, which is also recommended by Maddock (2023) for further research within higher education contexts.
In contrast to school middle leaders, university middle leaders’ learning and teaching duty is more complicated (Maddock, 2023), because they are required to balance the conflicting needs of teaching, research, and management (Gmelch & Miskin, 1993; Gonaim, 2016). Although middle academic leaders such as department heads have suffered significant obstacles, researchers noticed that their leadership responsibilities have become essential for driving positive educational reforms that benefit students and faculty members (Clegg & McAuley, 2005; Hotho, 2013; Marshall, 2012). Despite this acknowledgement, there is a lack of comprehensive exploration of the function of department heads concerning teaching and learning in universities. The research in this field is still in its infancy. Accordingly, it is imperative to thoroughly investigate the department head leadership of teaching and learning in the university.

**Conceptual Framework**

Figure 2.4 outlines the conceptual framework that synthesizes the concepts pertaining to the research topic. As the figure illustrates, it highlights the roles and functions of department heads who lead the academic units to facilitate teaching and learning within the changeable and complex academic environment. The literature implied establishing a learning organization is the mission of instructional leaders such as department heads. Figure 2.5 also indicates how department heads lead for learning: mentoring new faculty members, leading curriculum development, assigning faculty members’ teaching duties, using background and experiences to support teaching and learning, and utilizing student and peer feedback for the improvement of teaching. The literature analysis suggests that educational policies regarding teaching and learning are pivotal tools for setting clear expectations and standards for teaching practices, which can inform instructional practices and interventions. As a result, this study is guided by the *University Standards for Promotion and Tenure, Guidelines of Learning*, and other documents and policies related to the duties of department heads in leading teaching and learning.

**Figure 2.4**

*Overview of Department Heads as Learning Leaders*
Synthesis

There is a consensus that university department heads play an increasingly critical role in teaching (Maddock, 2023; Preston & Price, 2012), curriculum development (Ackerman et al., 2020; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013), research (Cervino, 2018), and administration (Armstrong & Woloshyn, 2017; Cowley, 2019; Freeman et al., 2020; Taggart 2015). Moreover, some researchers recognized that the responsibilities of department heads are multifaceted (Gmelch, 2019; Stawnychko, 2021; Weaver et al., 2019). Hence, the complexities and ambiguity inherent in this position result in department heads experiencing challenges and tensions (Buller, 2012; Creaton & Heard-Laureote, 2021; Gonaim, 2016), partly because they undertake multiple tasks at the same time (Kruse, 2022). Faculty development is also a critical duty for department heads to lead the academic unit (Bystydzienki et al., 2017; Gardner & Ward, 2018; Horne et al., 2016), especially in teaching, by mentoring, supervising, and evaluating faculty members (Cariago-Lo et al., 2010; Ewing & Crockford, 2008; Gappa & Trice, 2010; Phillips & Dennison, 2015; Pinto, 2016; Riley & Russell, 2013; Stawnychko, 2021). Despite the fact that scholars acknowledged department heads make great contributions to their academic units, it is believed that heads received less training, both formally and informally (DeFleur et al., 2010; Gmelch & Miskin, 2011; Wheeler et al., 2008; Wolverton et al., 2005). While there is ample literature about
department heads’ roles and responsibilities, research directly linked to their role in teaching and learning is scarce.

A large number of researchers have recognized that IL advances teaching and learning, particularly in teachers’ professional development and students’ achievement (Fred & Singh, 2021; Hallinger et al., 2015; Jalapang & Raman, 2020; Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011; Mestry et al., 2013; Puruwita, 2022; Robinson et al., 2008). However, others found the limitations of IL as it merely values the role of principals instead of wide school communities and disregards the role of student self-learning (Bush, 2011; Bush, 2015; Webb, 2005). Later, LfL brought about a shift in the way of leadership implementation (Bush, 2015). LfL emphasizes the importance of the engagement of multiple parties in activities that aims to enhance students’ learning (Ahn et al., 2021; Townsend & Bayetto, 2020), which makes up for IL’s shortcomings. Remarkably, both IL and LfL models highlight the significance of directing and supervising curriculum programs and facilitating teachers’ professional development (Dempster, 2013; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Existing studies mainly focus on the connection between IL or LfL and principals in schools, but it is unclear how university leaders lead teaching and learning.

Numerous studies discuss the role of middle leaders or middle leadership of teaching and learning in K-12 education (Forde et al., 2019; Highfield & Rubie-Davies, 2022; Lipscombe et al., 2021; Murphy, 2020; Rönnerman et al., 2017). Of the studies included in the review, there is a handful of research in such area relevant to the higher education setting. Those descriptive studies focused on the identification and authority of middle leaders such as department heads, and present an overview of their positions and the principles for them to enact leadership. The findings of those studies discussed their characteristics or the tensions and challenges they have. Overall, the reviewed studies revealed a lack of empirical research and theoretical perspectives with regard to department head leadership of learning and teaching, particularly in higher education. To address this gap, the present study aims to investigate the actual experiences of department heads in promoting teaching and learning at a Canadian research-intensive university.
Summary

Chapter Two starts by presenting background information on department heads in higher education institutions in North America. The two sections of this chapter are the leadership of university department heads and the theoretical framework of leading for learning. Section One details the general roles and responsibilities of department heads and the challenges and tensions that department heads face when managing the department. However, this section lacks a specific focus on how department heads lead their academic units for teaching and learning in higher education contexts. Consequently, Section Two discusses the evolution of instructional leadership, leadership for learning, and middle leadership of learning and teaching with ample empirical examples and expresses the concerns of the research gap regarding the ways department heads lead for learning.

Chapter Three presents the research methodology used to further explore the role of the heads of department in fostering teaching and learning in the university. The chapter also discusses research methods and the rationales for employing them to investigate how the practices and strategies used by department heads promote learning outcomes in the academic setting.
CHAPTER Three – Methodology and Method

There has been an emerging body of studies on academic leadership roles that suggest considering departmental leaders’ special duty with respect to teaching and learning improvement in universities (Frisk et al., 2021; Preston & Price, 2012). Accordingly, this research aims to delve into the roles of department heads in leading for learning at a Canadian research-intensive university. The purpose determines the choice of this study’s research approach, research strategy, as well as research methods. This study used a qualitative methodology that incorporated a constructivist worldview with an exploratory case study design and inductive research methods. I investigated one question: In what ways do university department heads lead teaching and learning for their academic units? Five sub-questions were given as follows, benefiting answering the primary questions:

Sub-Q1: In what ways do university department heads support faculty in developing their teaching practice?

Sub-Q2: How do university department heads initiate and oversee curriculum and program development?

Sub-Q3: How do university department heads use student and peer feedback for the improvement of teaching?

Sub-Q4: What backgrounds and experiences do university department heads have that inform their practices in support of teaching and learning?

Sub-Q5: How is department head leadership for learning described in policy documents?

Chapter Three articulated the research path of this study. I described the research questions and aims, followed by the discussion of the worldview, research approach, research strategy, research methods, and data analysis respectively. Finally, I also presented trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Worldview

The worldview, as a synonym for paradigm, is defined as a technique of contemplating
and understanding the multifaceted nature of the real world (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Patton, 2002). Kaushik and Walsh (2019) asserted that worldviews contain similar basic elements that are inherently philosophical. The decision of paradigms, to varying degrees, is influenced by the researchers’ position concerning ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology (Creamer, 2018). The dimensions of these paradigms are depicted in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1**

*Philosophical Issues That Define Paradigms*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradigm Dimension</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontology</td>
<td>Views about the nature of reality (singular or multiple, knowable, or never knowable).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>Views about the relationship between the knower and reality and the participant, what inferences are credible or warranted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Strategies for generating and justifying empirical knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axiology</td>
<td>The role of values in social inquiry.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Adapted from Creamer (2018).*

Based on my stance on these four paradigm dimensions, the constructivist paradigm is chosen to serve as the worldview in this study. It is a worldview where individuals seek to comprehend the world in which they live and work, generating or inductively developing a theory or pattern of meaning (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Mertens, 2010). This paradigm serves as a valuable instrument applicable for research across diverse academic disciplines including education, particularly in the field of learning (Adom et al., 2016). Endeavors to transmit higher education toward a more constructivist practice have potential implications for policymaking across diverse colleges at the university.

In general, constructivism is linked with qualitative research methods, in which the researcher makes extensive use of participant perspectives and develops their own interpretations of the phenomenon (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Therefore, in the context of examining how department heads lead learning improvement, constructivism is apt for exploring their beliefs,
views, and values in shaping their understanding of their leadership of learning and teaching. The paradigm not only addressed the processes of interpersonal interaction but also emphasized on the participants’ living and working surroundings (Mauldin, 2020). Under the guidance of such paradigm, I was better able to grasp the participants’ historical and cultural contexts in this study.

This study considered how constructivism has informed department heads educational reform practices. Specifically, methods were explored through which a constructivist perspective of teaching and learning may enhance professional practice of heads by balancing traditional and updated views of teaching methods and curriculum development (Shively, 2015). Throughout, a constructivist lens that aligns more closely with the viewpoints of university academic leaders could be found.

**Research Design**

**Research Approach**

This research utilized a qualitative methodology based on diverse epistemological and ontological traditions (Köhler et al., 2021), to fully comprehend department heads’ duties in leading teaching and learning. This research methodology involves gathering, interpreting, and analyzing diverse non-numerical data such as interview transcripts, audio recordings, existing documents, etc., to understand the phenomenon being studied (Bansal et al., 2018; Gephart, 2004; Köhler et al., 2021; Mertler, 2022).

The reasons why I chose the qualitative approach are as follows. As described by Creswell (2004), this approach investigates individuals, groups, and meanings related to a central social phenomenon, which directly coincides with the focus of this study: exploring department heads’ roles in fostering a positive learning community within their academic unit. Mertler (2022) pointed out that qualitative research concentrates on the approaches for people to make sense and meaning out of their daily lives. This approach enabled me to focus on the context of participants, examining what participants were thinking and considering based on their daily working experience (Crotty, 2015). Assumptions, goals, motives, reasons, and values were what I was
interested in, which shaped my research questions for this qualitative study (Fraenkel et al., 2012). In addition, the small sample size of participants is a key characteristic of qualitative research (Queirós et al., 2017). Considering the small group of interview respondents, department heads’ beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors could be studied in greater depth and breadth. Moreover, the flexible framework of the qualitative method (interactive approach) facilitates the building and rebuilding of research design (Maxwell, 2012), examining knowledge that is typically out of reach, therefore gaining fresh perspectives. In this way, participants were allowed to decide what was aligned with their values and beliefs freely (Flick, 2011).

Research Strategy

The objective and research questions of this study, in conjunction with the constructivist paradigm, led me to choose an exploratory case study as the research strategy. Yin (2014) defined a case study as an empirical inquiry that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 16). Creswell (2004) stated “cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time” (p. 15). Utilizing a case study, I could capture dynamics of the social phenomenon within the defined context and time. In addition, the case study allows for an in-depth analysis of a single case or phenomenon (Lee, 2022). Given the complex nature of department heads’ role in leading for learning, a thorough investigation through a case study was essential. Furthermore, the purpose of a case study was to gain a well-rounded comprehension of individuals or groups, generalizing information to others. Although this research was carried out at a single university in Canada, to some extent, it had implications for administrators from other higher educational institutions. However, the case study sometimes is criticized because of its high subjectivity and lack of scientific rigour, and it is challenging to generalize findings to a broader population (Pedrosa et al., 2012). To address these concerns, I made efforts to avoid biases throughout the data collection and analysis procedure by using theoretical sampling (e.g.
making a specific conceptual framework). Further, I searched for prospective and substitute explanations and clarified how conclusions were drawn, assisting readers to judge the case study report’s credibility and reliability.

In an exploratory case study, the researcher can explore different aspects of the phenomenon, as well as identify contextual factors that may impact it, especially if there is little existing research on the topic (Chopard, 2021). Ellinger & McWhorter (2016) claimed that exploratory case studies are particularly valuable in filling the gap and enhancing our understanding of the phenomenon. This “exploratory” methodology addressed a significant knowledge gap in this research, given that little was known about how university department heads lead for learning until now. Furthermore, exploratory case studies can also be used to generate new hypotheses and theories about the phenomenon (Hassan, 2022). After reviewing the literature on middle leadership, it’s obvious that there was merely a small amount of literature related to middle leadership of learning and teaching in higher-education (Maddock, 2023). While deeply investigating the actual experiences of university department heads in supporting teaching and learning practices for their units, the patterns and modes of how they mobilized their leadership to establish learning organizations were identified. These patterns could then be utilized to develop a framework to inform department head leading practices.

The most important trait of a case study is defining the unit of analysis within a bounded context (Stawnychko, 2021). Nonetheless, what concerned Yin (2012) was that “the boundary between the case and its contextual conditions – in both spatial and temporal dimensions – may be blurred” (p. 6). This emphasized the necessity of carefully considering the parameters and scope of a case study. The case for this study focused on the department heads at a prominent university that is recognized as one of the 15 research-intensive universities in Canada. This institution plays a significant role in shaping research and innovation agendas at the local, national, and international levels, and receives funding from provincial governments to support its initiatives (Stawnychko, 2021).
Research Methods

Generally, there are various methods employed to gather case study data, which is determined by the features of the case (Ellinger & McWhorter, 2016). Yin (2009) found that collecting empirical data from a wide variety of sources can facilitate triangulation. Consequently, this study adopted two data collection methods in attempting to get detailed findings. Semi-structured interviews with department heads were the main means of data collection. Document analysis acted as the supplementary method, which contextualized the findings from interviews. This combination is favorable in a case study for increasing the study's depth, breadth, and rigor (Flick et al., 2004). By using different methods to collect data, I could validate the results of this study across data sets, thus reducing potential risks for biases (Morgan, 2022).

Document Analysis

Document analysis is an interaction between researchers and written records, both personally and non-personally, comprising annual reports, archives, letters, rules, regulations, policy documents, etc. (Busetto et al., 2020; Morgan, 2022). Any text-based material is a potential resource for qualitative studies (Patton, 2015). Savin-Baden and Major (2013) indicated that documents provide supporting details such as examples, explanations, and evidence that might be less likely to obtain through other methods. For example, when investigating the department heads’ role in academic governance, it is impossible to conduct direct observations on what their daily work looks like. It is unlikely for participants to provide well-rounded information during interviews owing to the limited time frame and they may express concerns that the research findings could hold no significance or potentially harm their communities (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). By contrast, if conducted a document review with pre-existing texts, the data would be stable. Although this qualitative research method has been undervalued for long time, it provided a solid foundation for me to locate diverse literature on this research topic (Flick, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tight, 2019).

I extensively reviewed a variety of university policy documents concerning teaching,
learning, and supervision. By reviewing the job description of department heads, I explored the expectations placed on them in fostering a culture of teaching and learning excellence within their academic units. This process provided me valuable insights into the practices of department heads in mentoring, evaluating, and supervising faculty to improve teaching strategies and curriculum standards. In addition, I reviewed the faculty collective bargaining agreement and support materials for tenure and promotion provided by the labour relations units of the university. This scrutiny aimed to identify policies about how department heads assess the teaching responsibilities of faculty members.

**Semi-structured Interviews**

The interview, a commonly employed method in qualitative research, serves to illuminate individuals’ subjective views, values, experiences, and inspiration (Busetto et al., 2020; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Denny & Weckesser, 2022; Köhler et al., 2021). After analyzing the features of the semi-structured interview, I decided to select it as the primary research method of this study, considering its various merits. For one thing, it was a means for gaining further insights into the department head leadership of learning and teaching based on the fact that secondary data (document analysis) required detailed explanations, capturing the complicated dynamics surrounding their facilitation of learning improvement. In contrast to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews enabled for unexpected topics to emerge and to be adopted by the researcher (Busetto et al., 2020). For most participants, this method created an atmosphere to encourage them sharing their experiences and views more naturally and spontaneously, thus producing new perspectives that deepened understandings of the phenomenon. The semi-structured interview offers flexibility, especially for its diverse formats (e.g. face to face, email, in-depth, or brief, interviews) (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). After making a comparison of each format’s strengths and weaknesses, the in-depth interview was ultimately selected due to the small sample size of participants in this case study, thus probing precious perspectives and identifying highly valuable findings rapidly.
Participant Selection

The selection of participants is key to carrying out a study in social science research. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), purposeful sampling will “best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (p. 280). Hence, this study deliberately selected participants who possessed the knowledge, experiences, and perspectives of leading teaching and learning for their academic units. There were approximately 62 department heads who were the targeted potential respondents and served as scholars and administrators across the university. Participants must be appointed as a department head at the time of the study. I sought participant diversity with respect to gender, discipline, and career stage/length of time as a department head. I did not recruit participants who were on sabbatical or administrative leave at the time of the study. Also, participants who had similar roles such as directors of units were excluded since they may have some additional responsibilities that were not germane to the study.

Participant Recruitment

Initial contact was through the Dean’s office across departmentalized colleges within this Canadian research-intensive university. Invitations emails were sent to Deans and copied to their executive assistants. Simultaneously, the recruitment letter was attached to introduce the study, outlining the purpose and objectives of this research project, participation requirements, and researchers’ contact information in detail. Dean’s office was asked to forward the request for participation. Specifically, the recruitment letter was sent to each potential participant by the dean on behalf of the researcher, and interested participants were directed to contact the researcher.

In the first-round of recruitment, there were four participants agreed to participate in interviews, however, one of them withdrew from the study. Then, the second call was launched for achieving a satisfying sample size. The result of this round suggested that five participants confirmed to accept the invitation of interviews while additional three participants showed interests. Unfortunately, scheduling interviews with the latter group was unsuccessful due to their time constraints. Consent forms (Appendix D) and Interview Guide and Questions (Appendix E)
were sent to participants who agreed to be interviewed. Eight interviews were carried out through Zoom to explore their role and experience in leading learning improvement as department heads.

**Interviews**

Interviews with each participant lasted 40-60 minutes. The interview protocol (Appendix E) was developed inductively through the literature review and reflected the conceptual framework articulated in Chapter Two. The protocol was divided into 3 main areas: responsibility for formative faculty development, responsibility for curriculum development, and arrangement of teaching assignments. The interview questions were open-ended, which permitted participants to provide more alternatives and details compared to limited-choice surveys (Allen, 2017). I asked several basic questions but also followed up the given responses with additional questions, probes, and comments that encouraged participants to explain their unique insights (Mertler, 2022).

**Data Analysis**

This section outlines the method and processes for data analysis in this study. Data analysis is perceived as the most challenging and perplexing phase in qualitative studies, with little attention from scholars (Thorne, 2000). Interpreting qualitative data is an eclectic procedure and the analysis of data often interweave and merge the data-gathering process as well (Mertler, 2022). To well organize the data, I employed NVivo to transcribe the data, which was a powerful qualitative data analysis software. With this tool, I imported audio files directly into the software and transcribed them within the same interface. This integrated feature saved time by eliminating the need to switch between different tools or platforms. NVivo was also functioned as organizing, coding, and analyzing the transcribed data. I assigned codes, created annotations, and applied thematic tags to identify patterns, themes, and key insights within the transcriptions. These features facilitated in-depth exploration and interpretation of the qualitative data, allowing me to draw insightful conclusions.
This study utilized thematic analysis, a data-driven and inductive process (Kovach, 2020). It is a technique for spotting, interpreting, and summarizing patterns in data (Braun & Clark, 2006), which is appropriate for the constructivism paradigm. As noted by Harper and Thompson (2011) and Nowell et al. (2017), this method enables the investigation of how social constructs are created, thus revealing deeper themes within the data (Harper & Thompson, 2011; Nowell et al., 2017). By emphasizing commonalities and distinctions and generating unexpected findings, thematic analysis allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the data (Nowell et al., 2017). Braun and Clark (2006) identified six steps for thematic analysis as “familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming names, and producing a report” (p. 35). The data analysis process I undertook based on Braun and Clark’s (2006) framework, along with additional elaboration on each step, are as follows.

**Familiarizing with the data.** It is imperative for researchers to be familiar with the scope of the information by immersing in the data once the data has been collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To achieve this, I read through the entire data set twice and carefully sought the trends and connections among them before starting coding. Meanwhile, I did note-taking of my review and reflection for coding, which benefiting for going back to check in the following stages.

**Generating initial codes.** The initial generation of codes from the data was the second step of my analysis. As underscored by Nowell et al. (2017), qualitative coding is an iterative procedure and a way of having a dialogue with data (Nowell et al., 2017). Beginning with unstructured data, I analyzed its underlying interrelations (Morse & Richards, 2002). Having simplified the data down to its distinctive features, I attentively analyzed the entire database to ensure every piece of data received equal attention, which ultimately contributed to the development of consistent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moreover, I assigned appropriate labels to index data associated with themes once identified (King, 2004). Employing open coding techniques, I listed many categories, which was vital for capturing the data’s overall relevance and leading to subsequent investigation (Bryman, 2016). As I progressed through each transcript,
I had some preliminary notions regarding what these categories could be and thus, the codes had become more solid and transparent.

**Searching for themes.** To create themes and sub-themes from the data, this stage in my thematic analysis entails putting these diverse sets of codes into logical groups (Khurram, 2015). As visual representation was an efficient way to seek diverse codes into themes, I used a mind map to establish theme piles (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the data collection phase, I integrated relevant concepts extensively, involving initially structuring the conceptual framework to create comprehensive and well-organized codes to assist in the structure of the data (Nowell et al., 2017). Then, I narrowed my data into potential themes and sub-themes.

**Reviewing themes.** Having developed a collection of themes, it became imperative to refine them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To assess the coherence among the themes, theoretical framework, and data, I checked whether themes were linked with the coded extracts and the entire data set (Pearce, 2022). Any unnecessary or excessively overlapping codes were deleted (Nowell et al., 2017). Similarly, to complete the missing part of the analysis, I went over the data to identify any extra themes before creating a thematic map. A new code was added whenever I witnessed a pertinent problem in the text that had not been addressed by existing codes (Nowell et al., 2017).

**Defining and naming themes.** Once the thematic map had been produced, themes should be arranged in an organized manner that accurately reflects the data as the art of storytelling (Nowell et al., 2017). Hence, I wrote an ongoing analysis for individual themes, and refined the particulars of every theme into sub-themes. In addition to recognizing the story conveyed by each theme, I evaluated its relevance to the overarching narrative guided by my research questions, aiming to avoid overlaps among themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At the end of this stage, each theme’s definitions and names were generated (Pearce, 2022).

**Producing the report.** After constructing the themes, I provided valuable insights into the data and carried out a conclusive analysis for the report. The manuscripts were carefully reviewed, followed by the selection of vivid and compelling extract examples to conduct the final analysis.
Throughout this process, I revisited the original theoretical and conceptual literature that guided my study, in addition to other relevant studies that supported my research questions and objectives. To ensure the consistency of my findings, I compared them with existing research and estimated the extent that my study’s potential contribution to the current knowledge on the topic. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasized the importance of presenting thematic analysis report in a logical, clear, cohesive, non-repetitive, and intriguing manner. So that I fully and systematically described the procedures followed to arrive at my findings, I wrote the report adhering to the “Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative studies (COREQ) reporting requirements” (Tong, et al., 2007, p. 352).

**Establishing Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, trustworthiness measures the validity, reliability, and genuineness of research results (Cypress, 2016), which can be employed to judge the research design’s quality (Yin, 1994). This study adhered to the widely accepted criteria of trustworthiness put forth by Lincoln and Guba (1985), despite the emergence of more flexible ones proposed by other scholars recently (Forero et al., 2018). Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined four criteria, including credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability, which served as fundamental benchmarks to evaluate the trustworthiness of the findings for this research.

**Credibility**

Qualitative methods, such as interviews, observation, and focus groups, require a high level of rapport between the researcher and participants (Stahl & King, 2020). Hence, it is necessary to make sure that “the results of qualitative research are credible, and believable, from the perspective of participants” (Mertler, 2022, p. 203). However, unlike quantitative studies, where reliability can be quantified, qualitative research aims to explore the experiences and views of individuals or groups, leading to reliability is difficult to be measured. To promote credibility in qualitative research, strategies such as ongoing observation, triangulation, and prolonged engagement are often used (Nowell et al., 2017). In this study, credibility was strengthened
through member checks. Participants were given the opportunity to review their interview transcripts to confirm the accuracy of the information they provided. They were encouraged to making any necessary additions, alterations, and deletions to the transcript and then asked to sign the transcript release form (Appendix F). Eventually, they were invited to review a summary of interpretations to ensure the validity and reliability of research findings.

**Dependability**

Dependability highlights the importance for researchers to consider the changeable research setting in which the study takes place and make sure the procedure of research is rational, transparent, and precisely recorded (Mertler, 2022). In light of this, I kept the potential impact of contextual dynamics on the study in mind and adapted my approach and interpretations accordingly. To maintain transparency, I documented sampling procedures, research methods, and any modifications made during the study. As engaging in reflexivity by critically examining the researcher’s assumptions, biases, and perspectives is also important to ensure dependability (Mertler, 2022), I kept track of transcripts, field notes, and a reflexive journal. These practices aimed to achieve the dependability of the study’s results by facilitating transparency, accountability, and reflection.

**Transferability**

Transferability means the extent to which the findings can be generalized beyond initial situations in qualitative research, which predominantly concerns applicability (Polit & Beck, 2012). I facilitated transferability by providing descriptive and contextualized statements regarding the research trajectory and respondents, enabling readers to determine whether the results of the study were applicable to their own situations (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Also, I was cautious of each detail when collecting, interpreting, and analyzing data relevant to this study, which contributed to more reliable research findings that could be utilized to inform educational practices. Moreover, I categorized and ordered the transcribed data prior to determine themes to
support the transferability of this study, therefore ensuring the final report was both true and precise (Cypress, 2016).

**Confirmability**

Confirmability, as defined by Connelly (2016), refers to how reliable and coherent a study’s findings are, and whether the findings can be verified by other scholars. Korstjens and Moser (2017) claimed that neutrality is what confirmability primarily focuses on. Thus, I tried to protect the data’s inter-subjectivity as much as possible. The interpretation of the study was solely influenced by the data itself rather than my personal biases and assumptions. Furthermore, I maintained an audit trail to document the study path and methodological memos log, keeping accurate records of all the justifications for my methodological, theoretical, and analytical decisions, which guaranteed the openness of research processes.

**Ethical Considerations**

The considerations of ethics for research, particularly if the research involves human beings, are increasingly important (Polonsky, 2010). Admittedly, ethics were also pivotal in this study, especially when interacting with university department heads. It was imperative to be cautious of morals and ethics principles while respecting their dignity, authority, and academic freedom during the interview process. Approval was obtained from the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board, following the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2018). The approval was secured prior to any involvement of participants. Several issues of ethics, including voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, as well as the potential for harm, were carefully addressed (Bhandari, 2022). Throughout the study, these ethical conducts were held with the highest standards.
Voluntary Participation

One of vital ethical considerations of this study is voluntary participation. Swain (2016) highlighted the necessity for participants to engage in the study voluntarily and be notified that they could freely withdraw at any moment throughout the research process. During the recruitment of interview participants, I made it clear that they were able to opt-in voluntarily, and there was no compensation for them. Also, I explicitly informed them that they had the freedom to exit the study without providing any justification, and that there would be no penalty for doing so. What’s more, I constantly reminded them of their right to decline answering questions that are sensitive or inappropriate.

Informed Consent

Another key ethical principle is informed consent, which pertains to respondents’ voluntary agreement to engage in research (Shawa, 2017). I ensured all participants were aware of the requirements and any potential risks of their involvement (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2017). Further, I familiarized them with all the pertinent details related to this research, including the study’s theme, purpose, data collection and analysis methods, duration, and institutional approval number. Also, official letters and consent forms were sent to them, thus ensuring that each of them granted written, definite, and validated consent to take part in the research. All the documents were signed and returned by them.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Maintaining anonymity and confidentiality plays a crucial role in facilitating cooperation and trust between researchers and participants. For that reason, it is essential to protect the privacy and sensitive information of participants. Their private information such as specific locations or demographic details were upheld confidential. I employed password protection, ensuring that participants’ data was protected from unauthorized access. Additionally, their real
names were replaced with pseudonyms. Since there was a limited sample of participants, the traits that potentially exposed their identities were redacted manually, including the names of departments, disciplines, curricular and programs. During the document analysis process, a deliberate effort was made to conceal identifying details such as the names of authors, agencies, institutions, and documents. This precautionary measure was taken to hold confidentiality, protect sensitive information, and ensure alignment with data privacy regulations and ethical guidelines.

**Potential for Harm**

Assessing and minimizing the possibility of harm is paramount for guaranteeing the well-being of both participants and institutions involved in the research. In the context of a research project, the concept of potential for harm refers the possibility of adverse effects on participants, researchers, communities, or institutions, spanning physical and mental aspects (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2017). Despite the minimal risk of harm in educational research (Johnson & Christensen, 2000), there remained the potential for participants to encounter psychological, social, or reputation risks during data collection in this study. To address this concern, participants were provided with consent forms and information sheets detailing the nature of the study and potential risks before starting interviews. By familiarizing themselves with these documents, they were empowered to make informed decisions regarding their voluntary participation, fully comprehend any potential harm that might arise.

**Summary**

This chapter presented the methodology framework driven by the research questions, purposes, and contextual factors of this study. The philosophical stance, research approach, research strategy, and procedures for conducting the study were all addressed in this chapter. Employing a qualitative case study, the research explored department heads’ experiences concerning leading for learning. The investigate of this phenomenon was grounded in a theoretical and philosophical underpinning of constructivism. The chapter depicted data
collection and analysis methods with the rationale for selecting these techniques. To be specific, data was gathered through document analysis and semi-structured interviews, which were subsequently subjected to thematic analysis. Measures for trustworthiness were outlined so that readers could decide whether the research process was credible. Finally, ethical considerations were proposed, in compliance with the Canadian Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.
CHAPTER FOUR – Findings of Document Analysis

This study aims to gain insights into the leadership practices and strategies employed by department heads in fostering a culture of learning at a Canadian research-intensive university. In order to do so, this chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of data from policy documents, with the objective of answering the study’s fifth sub research question: How is department head leadership for learning described in policy documents?

In this chapter, data collected through documents is analyzed, followed by findings pertaining to department heads’ roles and responsibilities of leading for learning. I start by providing an overview of document collection and give a detailed description of policy document features before elucidating the emerging themes to conceptualize the case study.

Document Analysis Methods

For this case study, reviewing and analyzing policy documents provides a solid foundation for understanding department heads’ leadership practices during the semi-structured interviews reported in Chapter Five. This section depicts the methods used for gathering documents, including source search, selection, criteria, and organization. Subsequently, the features of documents were thoroughly examined. These initial steps provide the context for uncovering emerging themes and presenting findings later in Chapter Five.

Document Collection

The purpose of data collection in this study is to gain insights into how department heads support teaching and learning activities within their respective academic units. To achieve the research aim, a comprehensive document collection process was undertaken. Hence, a systematic and structured approach was employed, ensuring that the collected documents were informed both the primary research question and the four sub-questions.
Source of Documents

The case of this study is a Canadian research-intensive university. The researcher collected document data available in respective academic units and university official publications and websites. Key documents included departmental reports, which are regularly maintained by academic units. The reports offered invaluable insights into aspects such as department heads’ position descriptions, the competencies and techniques expected, as well as departmental standards for faculty promotion and tenure. Additionally, the study leverages official university publications like strategic plans, annual reports, and academic handbooks produced by the university administration, which shed light on the overarching strategies and practices that influence the decision-making of department heads in terms of teaching and learning. Moreover, official university webpages served as a rich resource, providing information on policies, programs, and teaching and learning standards that revealed the university expectations on teaching excellence.

Document Collection Process

Document analysis is the systematic process of reviewing and evaluating various types of documents, including both printed and electronic formats. This study used three steps to collect the documents: a) identification of relevant documents; b) document selection; c) document organization.

Identification of Relevant Documents. A keywords search strategy was employed to access the documents on the university website. The search string (Table 4.1), a combination of three sets of terms that include variations, synonyms, and hyponyms to account for different terminology used in the documents was used to identify related webpages and university publications posted on the website. I contacted Vice-Deans or Associate Deans from a range of colleges via email to seek documents with regard to the leadership development and teaching and learning role of department heads.

Table 4.1.
Search Strategy Used on University Official Websites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Search Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>(“department head” OR “head of department”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenon</td>
<td>AND (“teaching and learning” OR “learning community” OR “learning environment” OR “teaching quality” OR “effective instruction” OR “support learning” OR “learning activity” OR “academic course” OR “student learning”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>AND (“higher education” OR “college” OR “university” OR “department” OR “unit” OR “academic unit”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Document Selection. This step involved conducting a thorough review of potential sources to identify documents related to the research questions and objectives. By defining inclusion and exclusion criteria, I only took relevant materials into consideration. For example, documents must explicitly discuss department heads’ strategies, duties, or initiatives regarding teaching and learning. Inclusion criteria extended to official policy documents and guidelines issued by the university administration offices, academic units, or relevant governing bodies. Personal opinions and discussion, unofficial blogs, or unverified statements are excluded from the study. Documents that encompass repetitive or duplicate information were excluded to avoid redundancy in the analysis.

Document Organization. Organizing the collected documents with a basic inventory is a pivotal step in the document collection process. I created an inventory in the form of a spreadsheet, which serves as a structured repository for essential identification details of each document such as the title, source, and publication date. Beyond these essentials, additional descriptive elements like author(s)/unit(s), keywords, file locations, and brief descriptions were included to provide a well-organized overview of each document’s content and context, which allowed me to retrieval easily when needed.
Document Features

This section introduces the features of university documents concerning the job description of department heads, faculty renewal, promotion, and tenure, and guidelines of teaching and learning. To ensure confidentiality, this study has masked the name of author(s) of the documents and omitted or rephrased any words that might reveal the identity of the study site.

Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Policy Documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Document Name</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Profile for Department Heads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Standards for Promotion and Tenure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidelines of Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Policy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Job Profile of Department Head

The Job Profile of Department Head, as shown in Table 4.2, was created by the Human Resources (HR) Division based on the Higher Education Legislation. At the beginning of this document, the primary position purpose of Heads of Department is outlined, followed by a variety of their responsibilities that can be categorized into strategic planning, resource management, people and learning environment, collegial processes, scholarly work engagement, and department specific issues. The detailed explanations of these responsibilities are in the section of accountabilities (expected outcomes). Moreover, the nature of heads’ work has been depicted in this document, which further elaborates the academic duties of department heads. Also, the document states the competencies of heads, which are the desired attributes that aligns with the Institutional Vision and Core Principles. The document defines each competency, accompanied by its core principles, including leadership/ vision, support for progress, results orientation, personal effectiveness, communication, and relationship building.

Renewal, Tenure, and Promotion

The policies of Renewal, Tenure, and Promotion can be found by searching Deputy Provost, Academic Affairs on the university website and locate the section of “Tenure &
Promotion”. The web pages provide detailed information regarding *University Committee, Tenure, Promotion and Renewal Articles, and Standards for Promotion and Tenure.*

**Tenure, Promotion and Renewal Articles.** The collective agreement between the university (“the employer”) and the Faculty Association (“the association”) is currently in effect. Three types of policy articles concerning renewal of probation, tenure, and promotion can be found in the collective agreement. Detailed information is accessible by clicking the tabs of Article 14, Article 15, and Article 16 on the website of *Employment Agreement.* Article 14 introduces definition of renewal, committees on renewal, powers of the committees, standards of performance, rules of procedure, departments and colleges, interpretation, grievance in the case of non-renewal of a probationary appointment, and powers of the arbitrator. Similar to Article 14, Article 15 states the definition, purpose, consideration, committee, basis, procedures, and transition of tenure. There is also a *Tenure Process Chart* shown on under the tab of “About Tenure, Promotion and Renewal”. Article 16 has not been reviewed because it mainly focuses on promotion for librarians, which is not very close to the target research populations of this study such as faculty members or department heads.

**University Standards for Promotion and Tenure.** Tenure and promotion both occur within the context of values articulated in “A Strategic Planning Framework” at the university, adopted by University Board. The *University Standards for Promotion and Tenure* was most recently updated by the University Committee, guiding all of university decisions including the collegial evaluations of tenure and promotion, which are critical for the university’s standing within the academic community. In this document, seven evaluation categories for promotion and tenure are presented with comprehensive explanations, which are subsequently accompanied by the corresponding standards for each category. The categories of research, scholarly, and artistic work, administrative duty, and public service and contributions are not directly related to the research purpose and questions of this study and therefore were not considered to be analyzed.

**Additional Departmental Standards.** In conjunction with the university policy for promotion and tenure, policy documents from seven departments served to complement and
enhance the standards specific to each department on campus. These additional standards further clarify the expectations and criteria for promotion and tenure within diverse academic units, offering a comprehensive and department-specific framework for evaluation and decision-making.

**Teaching and Learning**

The last set of documents are regulations and deadlines that guide teaching and learning practices on campus. A range of documents were reviewed and depicted as follows, comprising 1) *Guidelines of Learning* web pages that aim to recognize the knowledge, abilities, and the ways of teaching and learning, 2) the *Course Policy* document that outlines regulations for class delivery, student assessment, and examinations structured within a framework with three levels of authority and responsibility: university, college, and department, 3) *Student Learning Experience Assessment Survey* web pages that introduce the history of student evaluation mechanism development and its functions.

**Guidelines of Learning.** This learning document outlines the shared pursuits, commitments, and responsibilities in the university learning communities. It serves as a conceptual map and planning document, listing three main parts: our journey of teaching and learning, our teaching and learning pursuits, and our commitments and responsibilities to one another. The guidelines depict a shared journey of transformation and lifelong learning for its community, emphasizing respectful engagement, active learning, critical thinking, and ethical behavior. It also highlights the commitments of educators to uphold teaching standards, create inclusive learning environments, and continuously enhance their teaching practices. This document underlines the university’s dedication to adapting in response to evolving knowledge and fostering relationships.

**Course Policy.** The *Course Policy on Class Delivery, Examinations, and Assessment of Student Learning* document, overseen by the University Registrar and authorized by the University Board, incorporates academic and curricular terminology reflecting the institution’s commitment to maintaining academic standards and ensuring a fair and consistent approach to teaching, assessment, and student evaluation. This policy undergoes periodic revisions and
updates to adapt to evolving educational practices and administrative requirements. Noteworthy revisions have included adjustments to the final examination schedule, changes in grading systems, and the introduction of specific guidelines regarding student assessment issues and special circumstances. Academic regulations at all levels in this document is publicly accessible to all members of the university community. The policy’s purpose, scope, expectations for instructors, departments, colleges, and the university, and detailed procedures for class delivery and student assessment are depicted. *Class Delivery* policy primarily focuses on class syllabus, contact hours and availability of instructors, student attendance, class evaluation by students, and class recordings. The assessment of students policy explains the regulations of grading systems, examinations, student assessment issues and special circumstances, and procedures for grade disputes.

**Student Learning Experience Assessment Survey (SLEAS).** Any user can access documents relevant on *Student Learning Experience Assessment Survey* through the link of “teaching and learning”. This website lists 8 advantages of using SLEAS, followed by the essential elements that need to be included in the SLEAS, which can be accessed through the “mid-course/end of course SLEAS” tab. The answers to the related questions of SLEAS can be found under the “SLEAS FAQ” tab. The *FAQ - SLEAS* document serves as an informative and comprehensive guide to collect invaluable insights into teaching and learning experiences, addressing prevalent inquiries from both instructors and students. Its importance extends beyond course evaluations, playing a pivotal role in assessing faculty performance for promotion and tenure. Customization is a key feature, allowing departments to tailor questionnaires to meet their unique needs. This guide also elucidates the transparency and confidentiality aspects of SLEAS reports, clarifying the accessibility for instructors and designated reviewers. Practical advice is offered to both instructors and students, covering their roles, increasing response rates, and responding effectively to feedback. A brief history of the SLEAS decision-making process is described on the website, which involves relevant documents. The project for *Teaching Quality Framework* was led by the Teaching and Learning Centre team, focusing on the development of a
shared framework for teaching quality. The project overview, methodology, data collection, and the conceptual framework are presented in this document. The *Overview of Instructor Feedback Survey* document, commissioned by the Evaluation Working Group in 2016, addresses the critical need to evaluate and update *Teaching Evaluations* (TES) methods. It provides a concise overview of relevant literature and recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the TES in assessing teaching quality, emphasizing the distinction between formative and evaluative purposes. Due to the lack of connection between the documents *Literature Review on TES and Principles for working group* and research questions, they were not included for review and description.

**Themes and Findings**

Document analysis was an iterative process of importing documents into NVivo, reviewing relevant documents, and making notes of interesting findings. Separate initial thematic coding was performed on a subset of the data from documents by selecting specific segments of text and assigning appropriate codes to encapsulate the content’s meaning. Following this, I carried out a second round of coding of the full data set, along with detailed note-taking to justify decisions, which were systematically recorded in a code book. Then, the codes were reviewed to identify potential themes by seeking recurring patterns, similarities, or connections among these codes.

Next, I engaged in the refinement of similar or related codes into broader themes through the comprehensive process of categorizing and structuring the codes. Some codes were merged, split, or evolved into more refined themes as the process progresses. To validate the emerging themes, I continuously went back and forth between the codes and the identified themes, making adjustments or modifications as needed. Before finalizing the themes, I developed clear and concise description for each theme.

**Themes**

Through the thematic analysis of the documents discussed above, five main themes were identified. Each of them involved at least two categories, which are presented as follows.
Theme 1: Academic Governance in Higher Education

The Provincial legislation that regulates the University outlines a structure for university administration, which includes a President, Vice Presidents, Deans and Department Heads. According to this Legislation, the University Board is one of governing bodies responsible for overseeing and directing the university’s academic affairs while Department Heads are corresponding executors as academic middle leaders. The analysis of documents Course Policy and Job Profile of Department Heads indicates that department heads have a pivotal role in academic governance.

Table 4.3 provides a detailed breakdown of codes under the theme “Academic Governance in Higher Education”. It shows that department heads are responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations of their departments, focusing on grade management, assessment and examination, and administrative tasks and procedures. Department heads have the power to establish additional regulations for class delivery, notwithstanding they have limited authority in leading practices compared with other senior administration positions. Notably, though budget and resource management is an administrative duty of department heads, the academic outcomes can be ensured if they can administer all department resources effectively.

Table 4.3

Codes for the Theme “Academic Governance in Higher Education”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorizes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Document(s)</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade Management</td>
<td>Approval of final grades report</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approval of grade changes</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reporting final grades to the registrar</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement in confirmation</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment and examination</td>
<td>Approval of class assessment change</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Authorizing examination time change</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confirming examination methods and relative weighting</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establishing procedures for backup or additional invigilation</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supplying enough invigilators</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obtaining approval from the College</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Administrative tasks and procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative tasks and procedures</th>
<th>Job Profile of DHs</th>
<th>Course Policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budget and resource management</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing additional regulations for class delivery</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publishing regulations online</td>
<td>Job Profile of DHs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission protocol</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 2: Quality Assurance of Teaching and Curriculum**

Canadian universities are committed to maintaining the quality and enhancing the ongoing development of their academic programs in a transparent and responsible manner (Universities Canada, 2023). Higher education in Canada is under the jurisdiction of the country’s 10 provinces and 3 territories, with each Canadian university having the autonomy granted by provincial legislation to manage academic matters and define its own quality assurance standards and processes (Universities Canada, 2023). Despite variations in internal quality assurance policies among institutions, they primarily focus on evaluations of academic programs through self-assessment and peer review processes, encompassing (a) a mandatory review of all new and substantially revised programs; (b) curriculum evaluations; (c) periodic self-study reviews; (d) student satisfaction surveys; (e) peer reviews of programs by external disciplinary experts; and (f) the process and quality assessment results are public.

The references to Job Profile of Department Heads, Teaching Evaluations, Teaching Quality Framework, and Course Policy highlight multifaceted strategies of department heads in terms of curriculum development and teaching support. Under the “Curriculum Development” category, the emphasis is on ensuring academic standards and relevancy, attracting high-achieving students, and implementing quality enhancement mechanisms. Department heads are expected to be involved in the whole processes of curriculum development, including course context analysis, course planning, and course evaluation, reflecting a systematic approach to curriculum design, assessment, and continuous improvement.

In the “Teaching Support” category, Table 4.4 underscores the aspiration for excellence in teaching performance, recognition through awards, and the evaluations and support of instructors. With references from Teaching Quality Framework, Teaching Evaluations, Course Policy, and
Promotion and Tenure, the table elucidates key activities of department heads, include reviewing instructor syllabi, revising existing classes, supporting teaching dossier development, directing special topics classes, and developing templates for syllabi. These codes emphasize the significance of instructor preparation, evaluation, and ongoing support to enhance teaching quality and effectiveness.

The analysis of the Course Policy document particularly highlights that curriculum evaluation represent indispensable mechanisms for department heads to gauge the alignment of instructional materials with stated learning objectives, identify any gaps in the curriculum, and explore innovative teaching methods. Assessing the teaching performance of individual instructors is a crucial step of pedagogical development, allowing department heads to recognize outstanding educators and provide constructive feedback to instructors who may need additional support.

Table 4.4

Codes under the Theme “Quality Assurance of Teaching and Curriculum”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorizes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Document(s)</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum development</td>
<td>Academic standards and relevancy assurance</td>
<td>Job Profile of DHs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attraction of high academic achievers</td>
<td>Job Profile of DHs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creating quality enhancement mechanisms</td>
<td>Job Profile of DHs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program quality assurance</td>
<td>Teaching Evaluations</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Course context analysis</td>
<td>Teaching Evaluations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Course planning</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Looking for course patterns</td>
<td>Teaching Evaluations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing cross-college and interdisciplinary courses</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing new courses</td>
<td>Teaching Evaluations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incorporating new and contemporary course materials</td>
<td>Teaching Evaluations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Course evaluation</td>
<td>Teaching Evaluations</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Customizing evaluation modules</td>
<td>Teaching Evaluations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teaching excellence support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Referenced Framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aspiring for the highest standards of performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awards for teaching excellence</td>
<td>Teaching Quality Framework 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating instructors</td>
<td>Teaching Quality Framework 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing Instructor syllabi</td>
<td>Course Policy 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revising previously existing classes</td>
<td>Teaching Quality Framework 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching dossier development support</td>
<td>Promotion and Tenure 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directing special topics classes</td>
<td>Teaching Evaluations 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing template for syllabus</td>
<td>Course Policy 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 3: Faculty Performance Evaluation**

Renewal, tenure, and promotion processes are critical for the academic career progression of faculty members. University and departmental documents play a significant role in guiding these processes, particularly in the evaluation of teaching performance. This evaluation is multifaceted, with department heads using a set of criteria outlined in the *University Standards for Promotion and Tenure*, fostering an interdisciplinary approach that addresses both educational quality and effective human resource management (Arnăutu & Panc, 2015). The teaching evaluation criteria emphasizes the organization, preparation, and clarity of communication for instructors who teach introductory, advanced, or clinical courses, as well as courses in certificate or diploma programs, including distance learning. For supervising students in various contexts like fieldwork, study-abroad programs, or graduate studies, the focus is on adopting innovative teaching methods, integrating teaching pedagogy, and incorporating scholarly work into teaching. Additionally, in terms of overseeing multiple sections of courses, the evaluation underscores student support provision, responsiveness to student concerns, and contributions to pedagogical research and program development.

The table provides a structured overview of the multifaceted approach to faculty performance evaluation, highlighting key processes, assessments, and documentation required for effective support of faculty career development. As for “Evaluation and Performance” category, it is obvious that coordinating peer and student evaluation of faculty performance is the most critical responsibility of department heads in faculty promotion and tenure, involving the process of gathering feedback to comprehensively assess the effectiveness and quality of faculty
members’ teaching. This finding stems from documents such as SLEAS, Teaching Evaluations, and the Teaching Quality Framework. Selecting the right external referees is a critical support of department heads in the “assessment process” section, followed by determining assessment categories, forming assessment committees, assessing faculty performance based on standards, and conducting annual reviews for promotion and tenure, contributing to the fairness and accuracy of promotion and tenure decisions for faculty members. All these strategies are referenced from the University Standards for Promotion and Tenure document. Additionally, the category of “Documentation and Justification” demonstrates department heads’ roles in justifying non-renewals, providing department rationale statements, and presenting evaluation evidence, all sourced from the University Standards for Promotion and Tenure document, which ensures transparency and accountability in faculty performance assessment.

**Table 4.5**

*Codes under the Theme “Faculty Performance Evaluation”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorizes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Document(s)</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation and performance</td>
<td>Coordinating peer and student evaluation</td>
<td>SLEAS</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Providing constructive feedback</td>
<td>Teaching Evaluations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review SLEAS reports</td>
<td>SLEAS</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom visits</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Providing consultation to faculty</td>
<td>Job Profile of DHs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment process</td>
<td>Determining assessment category</td>
<td>Promotion and Tenure</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Form an assessment committee</td>
<td>Promotion and Tenure</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty performance assessment</td>
<td>Promotion and Tenure</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standards assessment</td>
<td>Promotion and Tenure</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selecting external referees</td>
<td>Promotion and Tenure</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Annual review promotion and tenure</td>
<td>Promotion and Tenure</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentation and Justification</td>
<td>Non-renewal justification</td>
<td>Promotion and Tenure</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Providing department rationale statement</td>
<td>Promotion and Tenure</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Providing evaluation evidence</td>
<td>Promotion and Tenure</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 4: Academic Dispute Resolution**
Table 4.6 categorically presents the overview of key strategies that university department heads employ under the theme of “Academic Dispute Resolution.” In the “Communication and Feedback” category, department heads use active listening and clear communication skills to collect opinion from stakeholders for seeking potential resolutions, as indicated by references in the Job Profile of Department Heads. In addition, the importance of collecting and reflecting on student feedback is underscored, with multiple references from Teaching Evaluations and SLEAS highlighting its significance in addressing academic concerns effectively. The “Conflict Resolution and Conciliation” section showcases department heads’ duties in solving grade disputes and initiating and completing conciliation procedures in a timely manner, as substantiated by references in the Course Policy. Overall, the table offers a comprehensive insight into the multifaceted approaches and responsibilities of department heads in managing and resolving academic disputes through effective communication, feedback mechanisms, and structured conflict resolution processes within higher educational settings.

Understanding the intricacies of resolving grade disputes between instructor and department heads (DHs) is essential for maintaining academic integrity, ensuring fairness within departments, and foster a positive collegial climate. The Course Policy outlined its procedures: (a) DHs predetermine a conciliation mechanism for grade disputes; (b) If a dispute persists after five business days post-exams, DHs initiate a five-day conciliation process; (c) Should conciliation fail, an arbitration committee is formed, with a three-day deadline for a final decision; (d) Within two days of unsuccessful conciliation, DHs compile and send a list of materials considered to the dean; (e) The arbitration committee is given three business days to reach a final decision on disputed marks; (f) The committee’s decision is submitted within three business days, with any necessary grade changes approved by DHs; (g) If the committee can’t decide within three days, they will have two additional days to resolve differences, or the dean makes the final decision; and (h) Upon completion of the process, affected students can request free corrected transcripts from the registrar.

In addition to prescribed methods and rules for evaluating student performance, the
The academic governing body of the university has powers under the *University Act* includes hearing academic appeals by students or former students concerning academic decisions affecting them. They are designed to provide a fair and equitable process for individuals whose academic standing has been adversely affected by extenuating circumstances (Course Policy, 2023).

Though the assessment of academic work by students is a responsibility of the instructor who has been assigned to the course, the role of department heads in the appeal processes is receiving the request for reassessment from students and to make a decision about grade change within 30 days.

As noted in teaching and learning documents, collecting and reflecting student feedback are the effective ways of department heads to deal with academic dispute between instructors and students, contributing to a supportive academic environment.

**Table 4.6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorizes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Document(s)</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication and feedback</td>
<td>Active listening</td>
<td>Job Profile of DHs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clear communication</td>
<td>Job Profile of DHs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collecting student feedback</td>
<td>Teaching Evaluations</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflection on student feedback</td>
<td>Teaching Evaluations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflic Resolution and Conciliation</td>
<td>Solving grade dispute</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listing writing materials in conciliation</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commencing the conciliation procedure</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completing conciliation process on time</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nominating arbitration committee</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 5: Learning Community**

Table 4.7 systematically categorizes the diverse roles of university department heads into three overarching aspects: backdrop, professional development, and community engagement.

Under the backdrop category, department heads are emphasized for their involvement in fostering academic engagement, highlighting information literacy and ethical use, and assigning teaching duties, as evidenced by references in *Job Profile of Department Heads* and *Guidelines of Learning*. In terms of professional development, department heads are acknowledged for their
expertise and knowledge sharing, providing supervision and direction, offering mentorship, and facilitating instructor training, with references spanning across *Guidelines of Learning, Course Policies, and Job Profile of Department Heads*. Finally, in the arena of community engagement, department heads are recognized for promoting community-driven learning, sharing a unified vision and mission, cultivating a conducive work and learning environment, and identifying shared interests, as substantiated by references from *Guidelines of Learning* and *Job Profile of Department Heads*.

As shown in Table 4.7, the most vital role of department heads in creating a learning community is prioritize creating a healthy, diverse, inclusive, and positive environment when making a decision to support student learning, which is beneficial to ensure teaching and learning that reflects the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). Department heads also employ expertise and knowledge sharing in support of teaching and learning and create opportunities through learning collaboration and partnerships that encourage the exchange of ideas, resources, and best practices among faculty members, staff, and students. Sharing and committing to a common vision is another critical role of department heads, ensuring that all faculty members are dedicated to the common principles and standards, contributing to the overall educational quality within the department.

**Table 4.7**

*Codes under the Theme “Learning Community”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorizes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Document(s)</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Backdrop experiences</td>
<td>Academic engagement</td>
<td>Job Profile of DHs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information literacy and ethical use</td>
<td>Guidelines of Learning</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undertaking teaching assignments</td>
<td>Job Profile of DHs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>Expertise and knowledge sharing</td>
<td>Guidelines of Learning</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervision and direction</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td>Course Policy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructor training</td>
<td>Job Profile of DHs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community engagement</td>
<td>Promoting community-driven learning</td>
<td>Guidelines of Learning</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing a common vision and mission</td>
<td>Guidelines of Learning</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work and learning environment</td>
<td>Job Profile of DHs</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.1 is a word cloud contains the 60 most frequent words used in university policy documents pertaining to teaching and learning. Word frequency query was run based on the following criteria: (a) including words with a minimum length of 5 letters; (b) including stemmed words (e.g., “recommends”); (c) excluding words regarding the name of institutions to maintain anonymity; and (d) excluding words with implicit meaning (e.g., “regard,” “since,” etc.).

According to the word cloud, the university, departments, and communities have shared responsibilities to provide positive conditions and environment for faculty teaching practices, student learning improvident, and productive educational outcomes. Even though the primary focus of the document analysis is on the role of department heads within the university, the most frequent word is “students” instead of “heads”, which implies all the leadership practices of
department heads should be directed towards the goal of enhancing student learning, development, and growth.

**Summary**

Chapter 4 presented five overarching themes that emerged in the document analysis, including academic governance, quality assurance of teaching and curriculum, faculty performance evaluation, academic dispute resolution, and learning community. The document *Course Policy* reports the most extensive information associated with university department heads’ role in leading teaching and learning compared to other documents, especially in enhancing instructional effectiveness and curriculum quality. In contrary, *Guidelines of Learning* is identified as a document that exhibits a lesser degree of relevance or direct connection to the specific research theme. Renewal, tenure, and promotion documents illustrate the depth and breadth of information concerning faculty development. The *University Standards for Promotion and Tenure* is a pivotal document pertaining to the role of department heads in supporting faculty professional development.

After carefully analyzing these documents and observing the frequency of codes in tables above, I can draw the conclusion that “evaluation”, “authorization”, and “evidence-provision” are the most pertinent duties of university department heads as learning leaders. These insights provide implications for the following interview stage by emphasizing the importance of investigating department heads’ roles in faculty development, course and curriculum improvement, and academic dispute resolution within university settings, as explained in Table 4.8. The following chapter presents findings of semi-structured interviews.

**Table 4.8**

*Main Duties of Department Heads and the Implications for the Interview Stage Based on Document Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles/Duties</th>
<th>Faculty Development</th>
<th>Course and Curriculum</th>
<th>Academic Dispute</th>
<th>Implications for the Interview Stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improvement</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Evaluate faculty performance → assess the strengths and weaknesses of faculty members → identify areas for professional development and support.</td>
<td>- Evaluate student and peer feedback objectively among disputes → mediate conflicts effectively.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Evaluate teaching and curricular → determine their effectiveness → identify outdated materials, teaching methods, or content areas that require revision or enhancement.</td>
<td>- Investigate strategies for evaluating faculty performance → Inquire about approaches of evaluating curriculum and program quality → Explore participants ways to evaluate the reliability of feedback evidence in academic disputes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Authorize resources allocation and exam and grade change → support faculty teaching practices → faculty professional growth.</td>
<td>- Resolve conflicts by enforcing university policy documents → ensure fairness in dispute resolutions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Syllabus approval → ensure teaching quality. → Approve curriculum and programs changes and innovation → align with institutional requirements.</td>
<td>- Question department heads about grade approval initiatives → Ask about procedure of approvals in curriculum development and revision → Inquire about their supervision of faculty syllabuses. → Explore strategies of ensuring equity in academic dispute resolutions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence-base</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Provide evidence of faculty achievements, contributions, and areas needing improvement → faculty promotion and tenure.</td>
<td>- Collecting feedback and department rationale statement → maintaining integrity and accountability in dispute resolution processes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Using data evidence on course efficiency, student performance, and feedback → inform decisions on curricular and programs.</td>
<td>- Query about evidence-based practices in supporting faculty promotion and tenure → Inquire about data collection methods for curriculum improvements → Explore evidence utilization in resolving academic conflicts such as grade appeal.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FIVE – Findings of Semi-Structured Interviews

The study aims to investigate the leadership role of department heads in facilitating teaching and learning within academic units. This chapter endeavors to answer the primary research question: In what ways do university department heads lead learning for their academic units? Moreover, this chapter delves into the following four sub-questions:

Sub-Q1: In what ways do department heads support faculty in developing their teaching practice?

Sub-Q2: How do department heads initiate and oversee curriculum and program development?

Sub-Q3: How do department heads use student and peer feedback for the improvement of teaching?

Sub-Q4: What background and experiences do department heads have that inform their practices in support of teaching and learning?

Following the review of institutional documents, participants were recruited for the interview phase. The following section summarizes the findings from the interviews and presents participant characteristics, emergent themes, and a synthesis of the findings.

The Characteristics of Interviewees

The study aimed to achieve participant diversity in terms of gender, discipline, and career stage/length of time serving as a department head. In the interviews, there was an equal distribution between male and female participants, with each gender comprising 50% of the total. Among the eight participants, 75% originated from Humanities and Social Sciences Colleges, whereas the remaining 25% worked in Natural Science Colleges. The majority of participants possess extensive teaching and leadership experience as department heads. Notably, one participant has held the position of department head for around nine years, underscoring his long-standing commitment and expertise in leading the department. Aside from being the department head, another participant had the experience of serving as a Vice-dean, showcasing his broad
range of academic leadership responsibilities.

**Introduction of Participants’ Background and Teaching Experience**

**Participant 1: Anna**

Anna is an associate professor with two Bachelor’s degrees, a Master’s degree, and a Ph.D. degree in the Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines. While she was immersed in her Master’s study, she started teaching as an instructor who taught undergraduate courses, which sparked her interest in instruction. Therefore, she decided to get a teaching degree and become a teacher after graduation. Following the completion of her B.Ed, she got a teaching position in Arctic Canada and she taught in the North for 14 years in two different indigenous communities, which deepened her understanding of the impact of colonialism on the education system. She claimed that “these experiences shaped my teaching methods, led to my doctoral research, and directed the trajectory of classes that I taught”.

Furthermore, Anna believed that her teaching experience and academic background were beneficial for her in informing faculty’s pedagogical practices. For example, she suggested faculty members critically consider course material selection, examining whether they are representative of multiple worldviews and disciplines rather than singular one. Anna recalled that one of the largest teaching challenges she confronted was that she was not specific enough on her assignment expectations.

One of the things I aim to balance is being specific enough for students to understand their tasks while also being vague enough for assignments to be open-ended, allowing students to move them in a direction that makes sense for them. This involves working with language and clarity to serve the purposes of students while also pushing them to think more broadly. (Anna)

Drawing from the lessons she learned, she typically assisted departmental faculty members in structuring their syllabi and defining course requirements, especially in terms of articulating assignment expectations.

**Participant 2: Jack**
Jack is an associate professor who has completed Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Ph.D.’s degrees in both Applied and Social Science areas. He taught a couple of graduate courses in his doctoral study, which was his first teaching experience. He remarked that he gained valuable insights from his supervisor's mentorship on effective teaching strategies, which paved the path for his current teaching practice. While working in the current university, he continuously improved teaching quality by attending workshops and programs to update teaching philosophy and visiting the Teaching and Learning Center to learn more innovative teaching methods.

As a department head, Jack actively mentored new faculty members by imparting his rich teaching experience and supplying content materials for undergraduate courses. As the lead developer in a new faculty network, he not only provided access to online resources but also offered continuous support. Jack recalled a recent instance where he aided a sessional instructor in modifying the course syllabus and rubric.

**Participant 3: David**

David is a full professor who holds an undergraduate degree, a master’s degree, and a professional certificate. Despite not completing his doctoral degree, he has amassed 25 years of experience in his current job. He argued that his standout competency lies in coaching faculty members and teaching students.

He demonstrated exceptional skills in motivating faculty members to work independently and collaboratively. He has refined his ability to align individuals towards a shared goals, ensuring individuals contributed effectively while also empowering them to focus on their responsibilities, solve challenges, and devise innovative and systematic solutions.

**Participant 4: Eric**

Eric had rich administrative experiences, working as a Vice-Dean, a leader within the office of the Vice President of Research, and an advisor to university international initiatives. Eric asserted that there is scarce training and support for teaching in his experience.

I belong to a generation where faculty members were trained as academics to learn how to do research and publish articles. I don’t think it has changed very much yet. The focus of
Training for the hiring of Ph.D. graduates into faculty positions is primarily on research, with almost zero attention paid to teaching. (Eric)

Thus, he personally adapted by closely observing effective and ineffective teaching methods from faculty members during his student years. Early in his career, he was unexpectedly assigned to teach an introductory course with minimal preparation or support. Learning by doing, he worked tirelessly to improve his lecturing skills, modeling after mentors he admired.

Furthermore, he identified organizational and cultural issues in terms of faculty teaching training, acknowledging the evolution of teaching support units but noted a misalignment with faculty needs and a lack of formalized communication between the Teaching and Learning Center and faculty members who see themselves as subject experts and capable teachers.

Eric’s leadership champions innovative interdisciplinary initiatives. When he was the Vice-Dean, he pioneered a dual-degree program, merging Applied Science and Social Science requirements into a four-year Bachelor of Arts and Science degree. Additionally, he facilitated the integration of a Health Studies program into a Social Science Department. He believed this model could be applied in different disciplines to cultivate well-rounded students.

**Participant 5: Steven**

Steven, a distinguished full professor, boasted an extensive teaching career spanning four Canadian universities. Noticeably, he proudly asserted, “I’m one of three National Teaching Fellows on campus”, illustrating his exceptional contributions to teaching. His impressive track record includes receiving approximately 30 teaching awards, a testament to his commitment to pedagogical excellence.

Previously, Steven held a crucial role at the Teaching and Learning Center, leveraging his outstanding teaching expertise to enhance the skills of fellow faculty members and sessional lecturers. He provided mentorship to top-tier faculty members aspiring to attain the esteemed National Teaching Fellowship. Steven’s dedication to elevating teaching standards highlighted his influential role in shaping the educational landscape within his department.

**Participant 6: Tina**
“I’ve always liked teaching and dedicated a substantial part of my career to it,” shared by Tina, an associate professor holding Bachelor’s and Ph.D. degrees in Social Science but specializing in a Natural Science pillar. In 2015, she took a significant step forward in her professional development by pursuing and obtaining a coaching degree from a renowned university in Western Canada. The rigorous training and comprehensive curriculum she underwent during the program further enhanced her ability to guide, mentor, and support faculty teaching efficiency.

Similar to Jack, Tina furthered her teaching training through workshops at the Teaching and Learning Center, which promoted her pedagogical methods and allowed her to integrate new strategies into her instructional practices. Therefore, her commitment to excellence in teaching has been recognized with honors such as the Master Teacher Award and other prizes. Furthermore, her exploration into emotional intelligence has deepened her understanding of human interactions, enabling her to create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for both faculty members and students.

Combining her previous experience with coaching skills and knowledge, she has actively engaged in sharing information and resources for pedagogical improvement with faculty members and communities through presentations and conferences where she contributed to the academic discourse. She took pride in realizing that her colleagues had implemented some of her suggestions, resulting in positive changes in their classes.

**Participant 7: Linda**

Linda’s teaching journey also began during her Ph.D. study, where she received no formal mentoring and was thrust into teaching. This experience, combined with her background in government work before returning to academia, has shaped her approach to mentoring new faculty members. She attended teaching conferences to improve but noted the absence of formal training in teaching was widespread on campus and claimed, “I’ve had no formal training in teaching, and most of my colleagues are in the same boat”.

Hence, Linda actively shared her experiences through informal monthly gatherings with
junior faculty members, where she discussed pitfalls she encountered and how she navigated them. While these sessions were informal, they proved instructive and effective for her colleagues. Their feedback had been overwhelmingly positive, with attendees finding her insights incredibly helpful. When faced with challenges in their classes, they appreciated Linda’s firsthand solutions and strategies, often returning the following month to report successful implementation and improved teaching experiences.

**Participate 8: Amy**

Despite lacking formal training in teaching, Amy is a full professor who has grown into her role through experience and learning from colleagues. She initially found herself teaching courses with existing syllabi but soon realized the importance of developing her own teaching strategies. Amy had actively sought guidance from other professors, learning valuable techniques such as using rubrics for grading assignments.

Recognizing the significance of teaching in academia, Amy emphasized the importance of training for Ph.D. students who aspired to become university professors. While her Ph.D. students have already received teaching training, she believed it would be beneficial for others pursuing similar career paths.

In terms of sharing teaching experiences and strategies with colleagues, Amy described her informal conversations among faculty members. These discussions often arose when someone faced a teaching challenge, leading to collaborative problem-solving and the exchange of ideas among peers. Amy’s academic journey highlights the importance of ongoing learning and adaptation in the field of education.

Overall, 37.5% of participants stated that they received no formal training in teaching from the university. Therefore, they had no choice but to improve their teaching by themselves through diverse approaches, including pursuing a teaching degree (25%), attending workshops and conferences (37.5%), visiting the teaching and learning center (50%), seeking advice from senior colleagues (25%), and imitating the pedagogy of other experienced instructors (37.5%). Furthermore, a significant portion (75%) of participants indicated that they had mentored faculty
and Ph.D. students on teaching methods, organized department gatherings to share knowledge, expertise, and information aimed at pedagogical development, and provided support for faculty members to win teaching excellence awards.

**Emergent Themes**

Armed with the analysis tool of Nvivo, I prepared data by importing eight interview transcripts into it, followed by deciding to use both description and interpretation-focused coding strategies. To streamline the organization of the data, I created containers and gave labels for sub research questions, including “teaching practice support” “curriculum development” “student and peer feedback” and “background and experience”. Then, I started coding the data by looking for relevant information and developed initial codes representing such information (Table 5.1), then I dragged and dropped the significant into the corresponding sub research question.

**Table 5.1**

*Initial Codes of Interviews*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching practice support</th>
<th>Curriculum development</th>
<th>Student and peer feedback</th>
<th>Background and experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>guiding syllabuses; hiring TA; mentoring; annual review; recommendation of Teaching and Learning Center; faculty teaching assignments faculty knowledge and expertise; faculty teaching preferences and</td>
<td>course planning; curriculum evaluation; take external advice; enrich course contents; degree program reform; curriculum renewal; approval of curriculum templates; collaborating with faculty members; cross-department collaborations.</td>
<td>open communication; teaching evaluation; teaching feedback; classroom visits; consensus building; deescalate tensions; department meetings; relationship improvement showing respect; ensuring inclusion;</td>
<td>teaching innovation; attending workshops; doctoral degrees; teaching experience; teaching training.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After exporting the list of codes, I sought data by creating tables with a range of columns for sub-research questions. I did not isolate the codes generated from interview transcripts but carefully observed their relationships, overlaps, and divergences to see whether they could be grouped. I put codes with relationships into the same column of the table. Once all the codes were put into appropriate columns, I assigned each cluster’s label which can represent all cluster members based on what I had there to form sub-themes (Table 5.2) that address the research question, followed by grouping sub-themes. Finally, I went back to Nvivo to create containers and name the themes and dragged and dropped all the codes into the themes. To enrich and validate the interview findings, I integrated insights gleaned from document analysis, facilitating a comparison between the findings derived from both sources. Despite the diverse input from participants, six main themes were identified: (1) faculty development, (2) faculty teaching load management, (3) student-centered education, (4) curriculum review and innovation, (5) inclusion and empowerment, and (6) obstructive factors. Each of these themes encompassed at least three sub-themes.

Table 5.2

_Coding Scheme for Department Heads’ Leadership of Teaching and Learning_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty development</td>
<td>Mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promotion and tenure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty teaching load management</td>
<td>Teaching assignment procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equity and equality principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching assignment adjustment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching assignment considerations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-centered education</td>
<td>Skill development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Career adaptation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptation of social changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum review and innovation</td>
<td>Demand identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborations</td>
<td>Quality assurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusion and empowerment</th>
<th>Academic freedom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anti-racism and anti-oppressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstructive factors</th>
<th>Budget constraints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resource limitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty shortages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Faculty Development**

Faculty development was the first theme identified during the analysis of interviews, which was also one of the sub-themes in document analysis. The key purpose of faculty professional development is to assist faculty members in developing skills pertaining to the academy: teaching, research, and administration. However, this study solely focused on faculty pedagogical development. As illustrated in Table 5.1, three sub-themes emerged from the interview transcripts: (1) mentoring, (2) evaluation, and (3) promotion and tenure.

**Mentoring**

The university department head data related to the first theme of faculty development comprised much guidance and support the heads utilized owing to the fact that faculty members hope to develop plans for teaching improvement and innovation in their class. In this theme, participants discussed their experience of mentoring faculty members and sessional lecturers’ instructional effectiveness through in-person mentorship, peer mentorship facilitation, teaching resources and expertise sharing, and professional training opportunities.

Junior faculty members and sessional lecturers are prime beneficiaries of informal mentorship programs provided by department heads. For example, Anna typically trained new faculty to learn “how to use kit canvas, access library resources, and construct their resources page within the library”. To ensure the teaching quality of instructors, department heads place an exceedingly high emphasis on the quality and scrutiny of their syllabi.
The department head is responsible for approving course syllabi upon faculty members constructing their syllabus according to the guidelines and the expected content based on university policies. (Eric)

Before approving the syllabi, Anna, Jack, Eric and Amy checked instructors’ syllabi, gave feedback and asked for revision if necessary before its implementation, thereby avoiding potential risks in class and ensuring the effectiveness of courses. For instance, Jack offered feedback on various aspects such as “assessments, exams, and syllabus questions”. Eric identified potential issues or conflicts within the syllabus and bringing them to the attention of the instructor. If a course begins on a specific date, but students can add or drop classes within two weeks afterward, assigning work during this period might pose problems. Some students may not consider themselves late as they registered within the permitted time frame. If the instructor refuses to accept their assignment, I’ll discuss it with them, but if we can’t reach an agreement, there's nothing I can do. (Eric)

Nevertheless, normally department heads will micromanage faculty syllabus checks since they recognize that “most of the time, there’s no issue. It's typically just a minor matter of correcting the date” (Amy). This demonstrates their full respect for the academic freedom of faculty members, without interfering with their decisions on course content.

Furthermore, the majority of department heads expressed frustration with the restricted access to materials necessary to bolster faculty members’ instructional efficiency. Despite this challenge, they persistently sought to complement their efforts by providing additional resources. Department heads, for instance, offered teaching assistants (TAs) and shared course-related materials, syllabuses, and rubrics with faculty members. The extra TA resources they provided should instructors “want to implement innovative approaches, such as creating new courses or new methods of assessment in their courses” (Linda). Eric highlighted the proactive approach of sharing contemporary and pertinent materials with faculty members who teach specific courses, ensuring they stay updated with relevant developments in their respective disciplines. Eric’s commitment to facilitating knowledge exchange underscores the collaborative spirit within the
When I know a faculty member is teaching a particular course, for example, the A course, and I’m reading materials online or in other ways, I make it a point to share them. If I see something that is contemporary and important in terms of changing the nature of work or confirming some major hypothesis that I know about in Z discipline, I’ll forward that to the instructor with a comment. (Eric)

Some department heads foster a supportive and a collaborative climate through the sharing of existing syllabi when faculty members transition into courses previously taught by their colleagues.

by sharing the syllabus we use, along with the learning objectives and assessment. As a lot of our courses fit within the broader spectrum of the curriculum, this helps ensure that they have a clear understanding of what needs to be taught. (Tina)

This practice reflects department heads not only fosters continuity within the curriculum but also facilitates a smooth transition for the incoming instructor. By providing access to the previous syllabus, including its structure, content, and learning objectives, the new instructor has a comprehensive understanding of the course’s scope and expectations.

Professional training for faculty members, encompassing skills and competence development, is crucial. Department heads actively supported this initiative by encouraging faculty members to seek further capacity training at the Teaching and Learning Center, aimed at empowering faculty members to excel in their roles and continuously improving the learning experience provided to students.

If we don’t have that knowledge and skill as individuals, we should educate ourselves, acquire it, go to the Center for Teaching and Learning, go to the employment services people, and explore the experiential learning framework for the W University and adapt. (Eric)

Department heads promoted faculty members’ involvement in gatherings organized at various levels within the university. This commitment to professional growth is exemplified by
Tina’s statement “We send out a list of workshops and seminars that we suggest people to attend”. To ensure faculty members could be exposed to cutting-edge teaching methodologies and best practices, department heads sent instructors who demonstrate a keen interest in prioritizing teaching as a focal point of their career to specialized national and international conferences.

Eric emphasized the imperative for faculty members to engage in continuous self-education through these knowledge dissemination events, which enable them exchange ideas, share best practices, and stay informed about the latest developments of teaching methodologies.

We also have to then re-educate ourselves, acquiring new skills, new knowledge, new insights, and new pedagogical techniques so that we can incorporate some of these new legitimate in our view and expectations about what a graduate of our program should know and should be able to do. (Eric).

While most of the heads actively offered in-person mentoring for teaching, they also supported peer mentorship. Anna pointed out that sessional lecturers in her department were often “assigned to be mentored by the person who had the expertise in that specific area”.

Similarly, Jack shared his involvement in facilitating apprenticeships, “I paired the new faculty member with someone experienced, perhaps from within our ranks, to collaborate on developing improvement plans for the new faculty member”. Anna highlighted the dynamic nature of peer mentorship, where reciprocal contributions from both mentors and mentees drive their professional growth.

Coaching involves assessing changes and identifying what’s effective among other aspects. It’s particularly beneficial if the faculty member communicates what they’re working on and their goals, allowing for targeted support in those areas of their teaching. (Anna)

At the heart of Anna’s message lies a fundamental principle: cultivating a culture steeped in mutual respect, trust, and open communication, which serves as the cornerstone for nurturing lasting mentorship relationships. David’s view on shared responsibility for curriculum oversight, mentorship, and support aligns closely with the principles of collaborative leadership in
I do provide some mentorship, but I believe in flat administrative structures where colleagues can also provide mentorship, particularly the professors who have the potential to disseminate best teaching practices. The Learning Center can also provide such support...Department heads are not uniquely positioned to offer guidance on these matters. (David)

This idea is quite intriguing. Shared responsibility is one of the important elements in leadership for learning. While commonly embraced in K-12 settings, this concept is increasingly recognized as valuable in higher education as well. This adaptive approach reflects inclusive leadership practices in higher education institutions.

**Teaching Evaluation**

The approaches for evaluation of faculty teaching are various, including student evaluation, classroom observation, and recognition of teaching excellence. One path is through student evaluation, where feedback from learners provides valuable input on instructional effectiveness, course content relevance, and overall satisfaction. David commented the student evaluation is a “very good tool to learn what students’ impressions are of their learning.” Tina provided further insights into the evaluation process, noting that “we rely on midterm and final evaluations, which are automated and provide prompt feedback upon grade submission.” Additionally, all eight department heads utilized a standardized questionnaire for student evaluations.

Another method of teaching evaluation is conducting classroom observations, where administrators or peers assess teaching practices firsthand, observing interactions, instructional techniques, and student engagement. Anna, David, and Linda shared their experience of classroom observation, including department head class visits, the delegation of the committee to conduct classroom observations, and the organization of group sessions specifically for class visits.

Anna emphasized her experience of observing instructors during teaching seminars,
attentively noticing their practices and interactions with students. Subsequently, she crafted assessments by offering tailored suggestions for improvement. Her focus extended beyond the identification of areas for refinement, delving into actionable recommendations for immediate implementation.

I’ve observed faculty members during their teaching sessions and subsequently provided them with evaluations detailing my observations and suggestions for improvement. Specifically, I concentrated on identifying changes that can be implemented in the short term, such as adjustments in classroom movement, vocal projection, or student interaction techniques...After observing their teaching practice, then I would talk about what I saw, and how they might improve, what other options they might consider or what other approaches they might take for coaching. (Anna)

Likewise, David recalled his role in conducting group classroom observations, particularly when peer review was necessary. He engaged faculty members to learn lessons from others, explore new pedagogical techniques and adapt successful practices to their teaching contexts. After the observations, he facilitated the process of delivering feedback by overseeing the drafting and distribution of feedback letters.

Individuals who are going up for promotion to associate or full professors, as well as those applying for probation renewal or tenure, are required to undergo peer review. Would arrange sessions where colleagues observe these individuals’ classroom activities, engage with them, and subsequently draft and send feedback letters to both the individuals and myself. (David)

If there’s a problem identified in class visits or faculty needs some extra support, department heads identify the root causes of the issues and devise actionable solutions to address the issue directly. They navigated such situations by setting meeting agendas, inquiring about faculty teaching needs or even doing subsequent observations.

Any issues should be promptly identified and monitored by the subsequent committee the following year to ensure progress. If improvement isn't observed and recurring issues
persist, as department head, then I would get involved and have a discussion with the individual on how these problems are likely to impact their progress towards tenure and promotion. I would offer them advice on how they might want to go about rectifying that, whether it's the assistance we can provide at the department level...Teaching and Learning Center. (Linda)

While teaching evaluation serves as a valuable mechanism for monitoring faculty performance, department heads have raised potential concerns about the limitations associated with peer and student assessments. For example, the peer evaluation itself may be limited by the fact that it provides only a snapshot of the instructor’s teaching performance. A single observation may not fully capture the breadth and depth of the instructor’s teaching practices or the dynamics of the classroom environment.

Peer evaluations are scheduled for a single day. Since the instructor is aware of our visit, we anticipate they will be well-prepared. Hopefully the students will actively participate, but often they may feel intimidated or forget to contribute, posing a challenge. For the peer assessment, one-time observation may not be representative of what usually goes on. (Amy)

One prominent concern is the subjective nature of student evaluations. Faculty members may possess different teaching philosophies, methodologies, and disciplinary backgrounds, leading to varying interpretations of what constitutes effective teaching. As a result, student evaluations may reflect personal biases or preferences rather than objective criteria, potentially leading to inconsistencies and disparities in evaluation outcomes.

The stereotypes that societal prejudices are making their way into student feedback. So we actually take student feedback not with a grain of salt, but we look at the whole global pattern of it, especially in the case of people of color, other marginalized groups, and people with different gender identifications or different sexual orientations. (Linda)

To address the challenges associated with evaluating teaching performance fairly and accurately, Eric meticulously devised a comprehensive method that considers the complexities
involved in the process, especially focusing on the mean.

In relationship to other classes at the same level (200, 300, and 400 level), and within the Z Department, we regard this as the individual’s level of performance based on the assessments of the students. This is how it compares to other classes at the same level and to the mean within the Z Department. We use that as a way to locate a continuum where faculty sit in terms of the assessments of their teaching ability and performance.

(Eric)

Department heads encouraged the teaching excellence of faculty by praising, encouraging, and writing a support letter for them to win teaching awards. Even if there was improvement space for faculty members to win such awards, heads assisted them in meeting the award eligibility requirements.

As a faculty developer, we keep track of their teaching. When they start getting into that area of excellence, we’ll recommend them for the award. Alternatively, if they’re close to eligibility, we’ll recommend that they make some changes to be eligible for certain awards. (Tina).

This practice reflects department heads acknowledging faculty members who demonstrate exceptional skills, innovation, and dedication to pedagogical advancement.

Promotion and Tenure

The recognition and support of the advancement in faculty professional work is a key duty of department heads. All participants mentioned the necessity of conducting annual reviews of the teaching performance of faculty members who have not attained full professorship. This regular review process ensures that teaching standards are consistently upheld and provides opportunities for constructive feedback and faculty professional development.

collected all student feedback obtained from surveys such as the [student survey of instruction] or other current feedback mechanisms...received reports from peer evaluation committees, tracking the teaching progression of each candidate for tenure and promotion...looked at what their
peer reviews of teaching are and what the student evaluations show to identify their strengths and weaknesses. (Anna)

Department heads facilitated the inclusion of supplementary evidence for faculty promotion and tenure, as deemed appropriate by the faculty themselves. Jack suggested that letters from students praising teaching quality could be added to faculty teaching portfolios during renewal applications. He encouraged faculty members to incorporate multimedia elements, such as teaching recordings or photographs, to further illustrate their teaching effectiveness. David played a supportive role in this process, emphasizing the importance of proper documentation and procedure. He highlighted the procedure of paperwork from the department to the Dean's office and eventually to the university committees. All evaluations were carefully reviewed and considered by relevant stakeholders at each stage, which demonstrates higher transparency and accountability in decision-making regarding faculty promotion and tenure.

Faculty Teaching Load Management

The data regarding the third theme of faculty teaching load management from department heads includes a variety of strategies as they plan, discuss, and assign teaching duties to faculty members and teaching staff. Eric argued that the process is highly complicated, as it requires “paying attention to a number of variables simultaneously, not all of which are complementary and, some of which are maybe contradictory.” In this theme, the participants discussed faculty teaching load management in relation to the process of arranging faculty members’ teaching assignments, equity and equality principles, teaching assignment adjustment due to special situations, and considerations of faculty’s teaching assignments.

Teaching Assignment Procedures

Department heads follow a specific procedure for assigning teaching duties, guided by collective agreements and their own experiences of leading academic units for teaching and learning. Steps included course number calculation, preference inquiry, duties-roster made and circulation, department meetings, submission for approval, and disagreement resolution.
Determining the number of courses according to program requirements is the initial step in assigning teaching loads for faculty, as the ultimate goal is to deliver courses and facilitate students’ graduation.

So what does our program need? What courses we must offer on a regular basis in sufficient numbers to allow all majors to get the degree in an efficient and effective manner? That's a programmatic issue. (Eric)

To achieve the happiness and satisfaction of faculty and prevent conflicts arising from teaching assignments, department heads must confirm faculty teaching preferences.

I request their wish list, consisting of two statements outlining their preferences, typically including introductory and mandatory classes in our program. Then, I inquire about their additional desired classes. Once they provide their preferences, I will do my best to assign both required and elective classes in alignment with faculty preferences.

(Eric)

After prioritizing faculty teaching preferences, department heads strive to distribute teaching assignments among faculty. Anna prepared a draft assignment of duties-roster, which was circulated among faculty members for review. Having presented everyone’s assignment of duties for the upcoming year, heads explained why they had assigned it in that way, and then they led a discussion in department meetings. Notably, this aspect of the procedure does not involve a collective vote to ratify the assigned duties. Steven clarified, “as a department head, I have a unique role, and that is to determine which classes individuals teach.” What he means is that department heads have authority to decide faculty teaching assignments directly without the need of a collective vote. Eric assumed this is partly because “achieving perfect equity and entire satisfaction in any given year may be challenging.” Therefore, department heads could still assign faculty at this moment if it aligns with his original intentions even if there are disagreements in department meetings.

Accordingly, department heads were questioned about how they would address faculty
dissatisfaction with their assignments. Jack indicated that usually he tried to come to a point of agreement about teaching assignments.

The department head is a challenging position, and everything is controlled by contracts or the Dean's office. Whether I like it or not, that responsibility falls on my shoulders. I try to avoid persuading people into tasks they are not inclined to do. (Jack)

However, Jack still acknowledged a possibility of serious complaints happening. David stated that faculty members would have the option to approach the Faculty Relations of the university if there were concerns about unfair treatment. At the departmental level, Eric addressed this issue by providing a detailed explanation when submitting these assignments to the Dean's office for approval. The Dean, usually in consultation with Eric and the faculty member, makes the final decision. Often, however, the Dean simply acknowledges Eric’s rationale by stating, “OK, you've provided good reasons.” While faculty members may not always be completely satisfied, given the circumstances, Eric ensured transparency by showing faculty members a document outlining standards and procedures for teaching duty assignments in case of disagreements. If errors were identified, faculty members would promptly point them out, and Eric adjusted his strategy to adhere to the agreed-upon procedures.

After communicating teaching assignments at the department level, the assignment of teaching loads progresses to colleges, where the Vice-Dean or the Dean review and approve it. If the loads were not approved, they would provide feedback, indicating that certain aspects need to be addressed before final approval, as David mentioned.

**Equity and Equality Principles**

Equality and equity principles in teaching assignments were highly contentious, which were upheld for two main purposes: to ensure fair distribution of teaching responsibilities among faculty members and to maintain balanced workloads across all instructors.

What department heads aimed to do was ensure that every faculty member in the department teaches both required and elective courses with specific credit allocations unless it’s written in their contract that they’re going to teach fewer courses. Amy indicated this entails each
faculty member teaching at least one introductory-level class annually, ensuring everyone has the chance to teach an upper-level class, and then distributing the remaining two classes across intermediate levels.

However, all the department heads responded that accomplishing absolute equality is not always advisable. David explained that “when an agreement doesn’t fully satisfy everyone involved, it’s usually referred to as a compromise.” He emphasized that not all 3-credit courses were equal in terms of workload and complexity. For example, teaching an online course with 350 students versus a smaller course, both carrying three credits, required strategic faculty assignment to balance teaching loads effectively.

In our collective agreement, it says that teaching loads should be equitable. It does not say that teaching load should be equal. Equal is different than equitable. (David)

Eric acknowledged the challenges posed by the guidelines at the college level, where research-active faculty are typically assigned 12 credit units of courses to teach per year. Instead, he proposed that faculty members who are not actively involved in research should be expected to teach a higher number of courses.

The complexity of determining what is equitable in teaching, especially when considering faculty members who apply for and are successful in getting an external research grants, managing those grant programs, and supervising numerous students doing lots of publications. (Eric)

However, achieving equity in teaching load assignments seems to be taken for granted. While Eric admitted that he had not yet found a satisfactory solution to this issue, he still believed it was necessary to figure out solutions in department meetings.

I don't know how to assign those unequal teaching loads equitably. But in the environment of academic leadership and headships, these hard conversations are one of the things I think it’s my responsibility to put onto the agenda. I know it’s an uncomfortable topic, but we still need to talk about it because avoiding it only prolongs existing real or perceived inequities, which is bad for morale. (Eric)
Fortunately, other department heads have worked out several good measures to assign teaching duties equitably by considering whether faculty members hold any heavy administrative tasks that they would be doing that would buy them out of any teaching.

We’ve had three tenured faculty members serving in major administrative roles, which has affected their regular teaching responsibilities. I'm currently working on securing releases for them. (Amy)

For those who teach large classes with a high volume of student contact hours, assignment marking loads or extensive lab responsibilities, Jack and Tina minimized their committee assignments or tried to balance out other types of activities that were required of them.

In essence, the imperative to achieve equity in distributing teaching duties became an daunting task, particularly in departments where the pool of available faculty and sessional lecturers was significantly constrained. The scarcity of resources exacerbated the situation, placing immense pressure on departmental leadership to devise creative solutions to ensure that the educational needs of students were adequately met despite the challenging circumstances.

**Teaching Assignment Adjustment**

Department heads were asked about the solutions to address situations where there was insufficient faculty members available to teach a specialized course. In instances of selective courses, David, Tina and Steven opted to cancel the course. However, for required courses, David would change the curriculum whereas Anna and Tina would endeavor to assign instructors with the necessary expertise and knowledge by seeking internal and external assistance, such as adjunct professors, emeritus professors, and industry experts in the relevant field. Occasionally, they may also employ knowledgeable Ph.D. students working in the area. If that expertise resided in the community, they would sign a short-term employment contract. Yet, David alerted that is “very dangerous for us to create a space in our degree for a required course”. To mitigate potential risks, Anna carefully reviewed resumes and CVs to assess candidates’ teaching experience and determine where they can best contribute to the department teaching. If the instructor does not always work out well, she would likely not offer that person a position in a
similar class anymore.

Decisions are not always straightforward, particularly when faculty members are on sabbatical or parental leave, leaving the department in a tough position. Tina typically reached a compromise by requesting temporary stand-ins while working towards a long-term solution. As an example she gave, given a faculty member’s COVID-related absence last year, four professors collectively took over two courses, showcasing faculty members’ willingness to assist each other.

**Teaching Assignment Considerations**

Department heads were asked about the factors that they perceived most important when making decisions about faculty teaching assignments. Faculty knowledge and expertise emerged as the foremost factor weighed by department heads, including career stage and qualifications of faculty members. Tina highlighted the practice of reducing the teaching load for assistant professors and gradually increasing it as they advance to higher ranks. David never assigned teaching out of someone’s area of expertise.

When I was a faculty member, my expertise was limited to subject A. If my department head attempted to assign me to teach subject B, I would have contested this decision with the Faculty Association, asserting that I lacked the qualifications for teaching subject B. While there are subjects within our department that all faculty members are capable of teaching, many topics are discipline specific. It seems that the situation tends to be automatic over time. (David)

Department heads acknowledged the importance of accommodating faculty teaching preferences and interests. By meeting these preferences, it is possible to stimulate their passion for teaching, ultimately leading to a positive learning experience for students.

Happy instructors who are comfortable with the teaching material that they’re passionate about are going to be better in the classroom. (Linda)

Faculty rotation is a strategy to mitigate the monotony of teaching the same courses repeatedly and inspire longstanding interests, a practice highlighted by Anna, Tina and Amy. This approach involves implementing a system where faculty members alternate between
teaching different classes over successive years, such as teaching Class A one year and Class B the next.

Some department heads prioritized to accommodate instructors’ desires to teach classes aligned with their research interests. By adopting this strategy, the department promotes a teacher-scholar model, allowing faculty members to balance their teaching responsibilities with scholarly pursuits.

Wherever I can, anything I can do is create or assign courses that would facilitate and maximize faculty’s happiness for professional success because there is an interplay between what you teach and what you research. Some of the courses that I assign faculty will inform their research, scholarly and artistic work (RSAW). (David)

Another crucial factor that department heads considered was the timetable of faculty members. Anna preferred to distribute teaching across two or three days, rather than scheduling someone to teach all five days of the week. Also, she was struggling with assigning which sections of courses faculty members were going to teach. In the collective agreement, faculty members are only required to teach two out of the three terms. Some prefer to distribute their teaching load evenly across terms, opting for two classes in the fall and winter term respectively, and one in the spring. Others may choose to focus on teaching in fall, allowing more time for research and writing in winter. In light of the faculty members’ evolving family obligations, including situations where individuals have recently become parents, Tina was committed to aligning with the schedules of faculty members.

Some faculty may find themselves scheduled to teach classes as early as 8 a.m. in the morning due to the timing of their children's school drop-offs. Recognizing the need for flexibility, we actively engage in exploring various options to adjust class times. (Tina)

This reflects the flexible leadership of department heads. They explored various options to adjust class times, ensuring that faculty can effectively manage their work-life balance. By doing so, they created an inclusive environment where faculty members can thrive both personally and professionally.
Figure 5.1 illustrates the frequency of factors influencing department heads’ decisions on faculty teaching assignments as identified across all interview transcripts. The term “reference” denotes the number of times a specific factor was mentioned throughout all eight interviews, while “files” indicates how many participants referenced the particular factor in their responses. In addition to faculty members’ knowledge and expertise, which serves as the first consideration for department heads, faculty teaching preferences and interests are also crucial factors in making teaching assignments. Meanwhile, department heads attach much importance to equity issues to prevent conflicts among faculty members and promote a collegial atmosphere within the department. This ensures that teaching assignments are not only aligned with faculty strengths and interests but also contribute to a positive working environment conducive to collaboration and mutual respect.
**Student-Centered Education**

Cultivating a supportive student-centered education is the third theme. Of all the respondents, 87.5% actively sought ways to enhance the learning experience for students. This emphasis on skill development, career preparation, and adaptability to social changes underscores the importance placed on nurturing students’ holistic growth and success beyond academic achievement. By prioritizing these aspects, department heads aimed to increase students’ competence and readiness for the challenges they might face in their future professional lives.

**Skill Development**

What department heads prioritize is ensuring that students acquire a diverse range of knowledge and skills. Knowledge dissemination is a crucial tool in helping students absorb information effectively.

To stay updated with best practices and changes, such as advancements in AI, we now invite our graduate students to attend seminars. This ensures they remain up-to-date on potential challenges in teaching and learning. Additionally, we regularly host guest speakers from sectors like industries and private companies to provide diverse insights.

(Tina)

When considering Ph.D. students who are eager to become future professors, Tina’s department offered abundant opportunities for engagement in classroom instruction, student collaboration, mentoring, and research endeavors. This structured approach embodies the most formal method of student pedagogical development.

Universities have increasingly embraced a dual mission focused on research and knowledge creation. Eric underscored the necessity of cultivating students who can contribute to disciplines, economies, and societies through research, while also emphasizing the need to develop essential social skills.

Something is missing here is equipping their students with knowledge, understanding about the nature, the functioning of social institutions so that they can contribute to a public discussion. By nurturing critical thinking and communication skills, students can
actively engage in discussions about societal issues, identify problems, and propose solutions, thereby enhancing the quality of public discourse, that are, social citizenship skills. (Eric)

Recently, students in David’s department expressed a desire for a specific course, which had not been offered due to a retired specialized professor. Upon their request, David substituted a similar course, demonstrating the commitment to meeting student needs. David prioritized dialogue with students and considered their input vital to the mission of facilitating quality teaching. While administration serves as a tool to achieve these goals, the primary focus of department heads remains on serving students and advancing knowledge and scholarship.

**Career Preparation**

The department heads actively sought to establish and maintain connections with students for guiding and supporting their post-graduation goals and aspirations. To better meet the real-world needs of students, department heads have responded by curriculum and program design. In Natural Science colleges, all of students are required to engage with real-world experiences by participating in fieldwork, cultivating skills through contexts of practice. They must take field courses as part of their curriculum, totaling 21 credit units. Two years ago, and once again this term, Tina developed, introduced, and taught a new course that falls under the umbrella of experiential learning.

Our teaching approach is more organic, exemplified by courses like “Follow the D,” where students trace a specific D through the supply chain. These elements are integrated into our curriculum, reflecting our teaching philosophy and the specific areas we focus on. We aren't obligated to do this, and it's just how we teach and the particular area that we're working in. (Tina)

This practical approach ensures that students gain valuable hands-on experience and hone student practical skills in their respective fields. Tina also incorporated authentic learning into classes, exposing students to current global information and better preparing them for their future careers.
While our department traditionally focuses on theoretical concepts, we recognize the importance of practical application. Therefore, we have integrated authentic learning experiences into our curriculum, leveraging current events and real-world scenarios to provide meaningful teaching moments. By incorporating news and significant global events, we enhance the relevance and applicability of our courses, preparing students for success beyond academia. (Tina)

Study abroad programs are beneficial for students to gain cross-cultural understanding, improve language skills, and develop independence and adaptability, and get valuable networking opportunities, making them more competitive in the global job market. In collaboration with community and campus partners, particularly outside the disciplinary context, Eric had been actively involved in initiatives as a head for the development of a 2 + 2 Honors program with a University in China. As part of this arrangement, students in China complete the initial two years of their degree at their home University, followed by transferring to this institution to complete the remaining two years. Upon successful completion, they receive dual degrees—one from their home University and another from our university.

In addition to develop professional skills of students, department heads also supported students’ further studies. For instance, Tina encouraged undergraduates to get into master’s degrees by inviting them specifically based on their grades and their interests.

**Adaptation of Social Changes**

“Times are changing”, stated by Eric who agreed the researcher’s opinion that teaching quality was important for cultivating well-rounded students rather than merely achieving a research mission, reflecting a shift in societal expectations placed on higher education institutions.

There's a growing expectation from senior administration, governments, stakeholders in the broader community, business parents of students, and students themselves for universities, departments, academics, and professors to focus on preparing students for careers and for success as contributing members of society. (Eric)

Eric indicated that the change brought about anxiety and uncertainty for many educators
who were not trained to provide a vocational education. However, he was on the other side of the table on that argument. He believed it is a legitimate request for them to contribute to preparing students for the workforce. Faculty members were expected to update their pedagogy by seeking guidance from industry professionals, utilizing employment services, and exploring experiential learning opportunities offered by the university. He stated, “adaptation is crucial, and failure to do so could render us obsolete.” Therefore, academics must recognize the importance of providing relevant knowledge, skills, and competencies for students to meet the evolving needs of society.

In order to help students to adapt to social changes, from year to year, department heads worked on courses changes, notwithstanding the foundational content and theory remained consistent. This practice keeps the course content dynamic and fresh and that is why students are able to learn as see how these theories are applied.

The application and comprehension of these lessons evolve annually in response to global events. We invite experts from industry and government to discuss current and highly relevant situations with students. (Tina)

In addition, it is essential to empower students with a deeper understanding of sustainability issues, enabling them to participate in discussions and potentially contribute to problem-solving in this field.

We need to address resilience within our curriculum, teaching, and students, especially prevalent mental health concerns like anxiety and stress. Our rapidly changing environment brings about uncertainty due to social, cultural, economic, political, and technological shifts. (Eric)

Thus, department heads must assist students in understanding and developing resilience in the face of such uncertainties. Simply teaching the fundamentals of a discipline is not enough anymore as reported by several of the heads in this study.
Curriculum Review and Innovation

Department heads play a vital role in curriculum and program development and revision by facilitating collaborations, and monitoring quality, and resolving challenges. It should, however, be noticed that there is no curriculum development initiative in a department of a Natural Science college due to budget and faculty member constraints.

Demand Identification

The curriculum development started from demand identification, followed by learning objectives setting. Department heads collected curriculum need data through student evaluations, annual program reviews, and input from associations to assess their performance and address concerns.

We undergo academic program review where we had reviewers who spoke with our students. They included students feedback in our academic program review report. We have two student organizations, the Association of Student B and then the other one is the Undergraduate Association of Students which stands for undergraduate student and B Society. I meet with those groups or we have a faculty liaison. (David)

Alongside student feedback, Tina collected curriculum feedback by consulting potential employers to anticipate the skills needed in a next couple of years, especially from those indicating dissatisfaction with programs.

If the curriculum was not sufficient or not preparing students, we would probably see problems and we would hear from employers saying that your program sucks. We talk to employers. I think it's more informal. Our employers, the government, AG companies and such, students who have gone through the program appear to be successfully employed. (Tina)

By engaging with employers and other relevant parties, department heads ensure that the curriculum remains relevant and effective in preparing students for success in their future careers. This approach reflects their commitment to build strong connections between academia and the professional world, ultimately enhancing the employability rates of students.
Collaboration

Working with stakeholders in and out of the department is essential for curriculum development. Faculty members, experts, and students were often targeted collaboration populations in innovating new curricula. Anna had supported faculty members who are engaged in such an initiative, following a relatively straightforward procedure.

Typically, the university provides a template that must be completed. Once filled out, it undergoes departmental approval. Courses can be offered twice with departmental approval, after which they must be regularized to receive a course number other than a test course. Then it goes to the university programs committee for further consideration.

(Anna)

In fact, a few years ago, Linda launched an program revision aimed at fostering a more collaborative atmosphere within the department. One significant feature of this initiative was strategically integrating ideas and opinions from an undergraduate committee, which comprised both faculty members and students.

We worked very closely with them on a daily basis to come up with proposed revisions and then those came to the department and the whole department worked on them. Last department head was very top down and there was no collaboration on anything. So I'm trying to bring that back.

When it comes to course revisions, department heads typically directed faculty members updates to content, with occasional major overhauls, although these were not frequent. Amy’s department is in the initial stages of contemplating a broader revision of program.

While we haven’t commenced this process formally, we’re actively identifying areas that require improvement. Once we’ve pointed out these issues, our next step will be devising solutions. (Amy)

Over the past few years, Amy has introduced several new courses, primarily stemming from collaborative efforts within her department. Faculty members expressed interest in offering a specific certificate, which prompted her to develop a compelling course to support it. Presently,
they are waiting to obtain approval for a Capstone course to complement this certificate.

We've created a few courses over the last few years and most of programs that we were the part of developing. So there is one certificate that the our department wanted to offer...We’re currently in the process of getting a certificate approved a Capstone course...As I said we're fairly small department, we don't do things very formally. So frequently, there's one person who leads that and everybody can contribute. When suggesting specific modules or readings, it's uncommon for one person to develop them without input or review from others. (Amy)

This collaborative approach extends to all aspects of course development, including the creation of modules and selection of readings, ensuring that input and review from multiple sources are integral to the process.

The quality of the curriculum is reflected in the success of students in their projects and the satisfaction of community partners through the working relationship developed and the reports produced in collaboration. Eric and his colleague implemented a version of the same course described two years ago but encountered several issues. However, they decided to try it again after addressing quality control and logistical concerns, encouraged by the enthusiasm of their community partners. This experience emphasizes the importance of adaptability and resilience. Recognizing that there is not necessarily a single correct approach, they must remain open to different strategies. What worked well in the past may not be as effective in a changing environment. It is essential to be reflexive and continuously attentive to evolving circumstances and committed to lifelong and wide-ranging learning processes.

**Quality Assurance**

After curriculum or program development, department heads are in charge of ensuring its quality such as reviewing the content, objectives, and overall effectiveness of the curriculum or program, making sure it meets the standards and goals set by the department. As for new courses, department heads do not know the learning outcomes until students get into the higher-level courses.
And we expect that once they get into those higher-level courses, the faculty members who teach them will be able to report back that the students have the knowledge necessary to operate at the 300 and 400 level (Tina).

Anna ensured course quality by testing new courses. She initially developed a course and included it as part of the regular program, making it available to all interested students. With a notable increase in student enrollment, she offered it again, garnering even more interest. Subsequently, it underwent the process of regularization, transitioning from a test course number to formal number.

It was available to as many students as wanted to register in it. And that it had significant uptake, then I offered it a second time and had more students taking it. And it then went forward for regularization that moved from being an 890, to being an 815. So saving the course number and now it can just be taught whenever. So that the 898 is a process whereby new courses can be developed and tested and then become regular courses.

(Anna)

This process serves as a pathway for developing, testing, and eventually integrating new courses into the program as regular offerings. Getting the feedback from student, faculty members and TAs on how new structure is working is crucial for assessing curriculum quality. David encouraged faculty members’ input as they collectively own the curriculum, especially for revising an existing one.

I view curriculum development as an ongoing process aimed at continual improvement. Connecting faculty and fostering ongoing discussions about curricular revisions is crucial...part of my role is to encourage faculty to remain engaged in this process, recognizing that while some may embrace change readily, others may require more encouragement. (David)

Some department heads evaluate curriculum by themselves as they are extremely experienced.

I use the knowledge I have about academic standards, the ethics of teaching and doing
collaborative research, making all of these issues very explicit with the students. If I see an issue, I raise this issue, we discuss it and we resolve it. (Eric)

In this way, potential issues can be raised, discussed, and resolved promptly and effectively. Ultimately, this reflects Eric’s dedication to upholding academic standards and promoting ethical practices for the continual improvement of the curriculum within the department.

**Program Development and Revision**

As a department head developing programs, Linda was thrilled to share that they have successfully implemented an undergraduate online program in response to the challenges posed by the pandemic of Covid-19. They have formally established both three-year and four-year degree paths, entirely accessible online. This achievement is a source of pride for her department as it significantly expands access to education for a more diverse range of student population.

Whether individuals are unable to relocate to campus, reside in remote northern communities, or face challenges attending traditional classes due to family commitments, our online programs cater to a broader demographic, making higher education more accessible and inclusive. (Linda)

Amy’s department is in the initial stages of contemplating a broader revision of their program. While this process was not been commenced formally, her department had identified areas that require improvement. She planned to propose a process of devising solutions once these issues have been completely listed.

Recently, Linda has undertaken a comprehensive final-year program revision due to the changes of faculty members and student numbers. This overhaul was aimed at streamlining the path for students, making it significantly easier for them to progress through their studies.

Probably the biggest driving force for this revision was our faculty numbers are decreasing and our class sizes are increasing. We had to change our third and fourth year structure in order to meet that demand with fewer resources and still provide a good learning environment. (Linda)
One of the primary motivations behind this revision stemmed from the shifting dynamics within the department, reflecting broader trends in higher education. Specifically, there is a growing student population whereas there is a declining number of faculty members available to meet the demand. This imbalance between student enrollment and faculty resources highlights the urgent need for strategically reevaluate and redesign the curriculum, addressing this disparity and ensure a quality educational experience for all students.

**Challenges**

During the process of curriculum development and revision, department heads were facing with a series of challenges. Linda identified the primary challenge as the resistance to change among department members. She commented that this is human nature to fear changes due to the fact that many faculty members within the department were accustomed to the curriculum as it had been for the past 20 years.

Some faculty are very dynamic and wish and work hard to change. Some are in the middle of the road. Some are very slow to change. Generally, people don’t get up in the morning and say I can hardly wait to go work on curricula revision. (David)

Overcoming this reluctance to change and acknowledging the necessity for adaptation, given the resources available, proved to be the most significant obstacle. In this context, the existence of the department head position is meaningful. If there is no department leader motivating faculty members to think about curricular revisions, they tend to stagnate (David).

Moreover, administrative obstacles demonstrated to be another challenge by Tina. She faced structural challenges related to specialized statistics courses tailored to various disciplines, such as mathematics, medicine, veterinary medicine, economics, and scientific experimentation. The uniqueness of her statistics courses stemmed from differences in data sources and terminology across disciplines. However, when proposing a new course, another department contested it, claiming they had already taught a similar course. Despite her insistence on the distinctiveness of the courses, her proposal was initially refused to be supported. Resolving this administrative hurdle required numerous meetings to clearly demonstrate the differences between
the classes. Fortunately, she succeeded in passing the proposal after considerable effort.

**Inclusion and Empowerment**

Foregrounding inclusion and empowerment in leading teaching and learning is the fifth theme uncovered. Of all participants, 87.5% emphasized equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), not just symbolically, but in practice with regard to academic freedom, anti-racism and anti-oppressive perspectives, inclusion and empowerment.

**Academic Freedom**

Faculty members do possess academic freedom, which allows them to have autonomy in their course content, teaching methods, and assessment modes. This freedom enables them to explore their subject matter in innovative ways, incorporate their own expertise and experiences into their teaching, and engage students effectively. Steven claimed that faculty members “do whatever they want because I don’t have any mechanism to force them to do anything.” Jack asserted “faculty members and instructors are just required to provide the minimal accepted quality of teaching.” Although Anna required all faculty members to submit their course syllabi, she allowed them the freedom to “determine how they would achieve the specified learning outcomes.” Eric rarely delved into the content of faculty members’ teaching because he perceived faculty members as experts in their respective courses.

While I occasionally offer opinions, particularly regarding theory, an area of my expertise or introductory courses where everyone should have some insights, my suggestions are typically gentle. However, I have indicated that further consideration of certain issues might be warranted, and faculty members sometimes accept this advice. Other times, they do not. If the issue is not particularly significant or profoundly important, I suggest that there are many ways to reach Beijing. (Eric)

Eric’s approach to academic freedom and faculty autonomy was grounded in a deep respect for the expertise and competence of faculty members within their respective fields. He believed that granting faculty members the autonomy to explore their teaching interests and develop their teaching methodologies without undue interference was paramount to maintaining
the integrity and vitality of the academic enterprise.

**Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppressive Education**

Department leaders spoke about incorporating anti-racism and anti-oppressive education, by doing whatever is required to create more supportive, inclusive, and diverse environments for all faculty members and students. Considering department heads have the privilege to access to university resources, Amy critically introspected herself to ensure she did not inadvertently perpetuate racist or oppressive ideologies.

Tina holds the belief that valuable lessons can be gleaned from individuals regardless of their background, status, or identity. She commends her group for their collective recognition of this principle. In the hiring and acceptance processes, she prioritizes applicants’ interests and willingness to learn, rather than focusing on their origins or potential challenges. To promote Indigenous voices and knowledge, Anna’s department employed three faculty members who are Indigenous. Linda has taken steps to implement courses specifically focusing on Indigenous knowledge systems within the department, reflecting her efforts in anti-racism education.

It is crucial for department heads to navigate conversations with empathy and understanding due to the fact that faculty members might feel offended during serious discussions (Jack). Jack tried to have respectful conversations with faculty members and prioritize constructive dialogue over actions that might cause offense.

Criticism to me is about addressing actions or behaviors without being aggressive or insulting. It's essential to maintain mutual respect while engaging in serious conversations, even if criticism is involved. Some may mistake criticism for offense, but it’s important to clarify that criticism is about actions or products, not personal attacks. (Jack)

Empowerment faculty members is one of the central tenets of anti-oppression. One of Eric’s objectives of working as the department head is to prepare junior faculty members for leadership roles and train their decision-making capacity throughout his term.

One of my objectives was to facilitate a transition of departmental leadership, preparing more junior faculty members to become the head and to give them a number of different
types of decision-making experiences over the course of my headship. I’ve done that. I
initiated a process of revisiting the terms of reference for our standing committees,
involving everyone in the discussion. Also, I’ve asked them when a decision or an
activity comes to my desk that I need to respond to. (Eric)

To achieve his objective, Eric established a curriculum review and renewal committee and
appointed a junior faculty member as its chair. He suggested the committee chair to address
specific issues within their committees and often requested recommendations from him on how to
proceed with certain matters.

A vital principle of anti-oppression is minimal intervention. David and Eric implemented
democratic strategies as they regarded their role as “facilitation” instead of “leadership”.

It’s really a matter of sharing information more than providing leadership. I think
academic department heads will not survive very long if they use a command and control
leadership style (Eric).

Eric also thought his opinion in department meetings holds no more weight than other
faculty members’ unless they agree that it does. While he does not impose his opinion, he also
never hesitates to denote it. Building consensus among faculty members is important for
department heads when facilitating discussions and planning regarding changes or additions to
their curricula.

There’s a lot of consensus building as a department head, and then at some point, we
would call a full faculty meeting in which we would share with the full faculty
members what the curriculum revision issue is. By the time it gets to that point,
hopefully, many questions have been posed, and problems have usually been
addressed and resolved within the process...A much more user-friendly way is to be
working behind the scenes in small groups of people, to be building consensus, and to
be asking questions to other individuals. (David)

Inclusion

To cultivate an inclusive environment in the university, it’s crucial to recognize and
respect the diversity of all students and faculty members, promoting diverse perspectives on race, ethnicity, systemic racism, and other structural inequities in education, ensuring equitable treatment and opportunities for everyone, and involving them in decision-making processes that affect their experiences (Arellanes & Hendricks, 2021; Lee, 2020)

Inclusion, in this context, emphasizes department heads’ dedication to create a supportive and equitable environment where all individuals feel respected, valued, and empowered to contribute and participate fully. Eric enacted discursive leadership style to appear more approachable and amenable, encouraging faculty members to express their disagreement and concerns. In department meetings, he facilitated faculty participation in discourse rather than being perceived as a barrier to open and free exchange of ideas, to enhance inclusion and active engagement. This is partly because he recognized that some faculty members have remained silent, possibly awaiting his invitation to join the discussion.

I try to create an environment where open discourse and civil and rational disagreements are encouraged, facilitated, and supported, trying to come to mutual understanding and maybe even agreement. I make sure that we are talking about a topic that embraces all of our interests and concerns that everybody in the meeting is invited specifically to contribute. (Eric)

His inclusive approach has come into effect, illustrated by an example of the recent department meeting that decided on procedures for lecturers’ recruitment. He began by outlining the agenda and inviting faculty members to start the conversation until came to a consensus. He was pleased to see that the faculty members did not mind investing their time because “they felt engaged, listened to, respected, and valued for their contributions to the discussion and decision-making process”. Disagreements are openly addressed and responded to respectfully and rationally, ensuring that no one feels sidelined or excluded, and everyone knows their input is valued and welcomed.
Obstructive factors

There are a variety of factors that influence department head leadership of teaching and learning. Tina felt fortunate as her department did not need many labs since most students had laptops with software like Excel. However, various obstructive factors often impede most department heads’ endeavors of teaching and learning, despite their aspirations to pursue department educational excellence. From budget constraints to resource restrictions and faculty limitations, department heads need innovative solutions and strategic approaches to address them.

Budget Constraints

One of the most prevalent hurdles encountered by department heads is budget constraints. The allocation of financial resources plays a crucial role in curriculum development, faculty recruitment, and the overall enhancement of educational environments. Yet, many department heads found themselves navigating within the limited budgets, which did not allow to them to fully realize their vision for delving into the academic landscape. For example, Anna also expected to develop more effective teaching strategies, but she was concerned that “there are financial constraints.” Likewise, David is dedicated to curriculum development and aims to deliver the highest quality education, despite not having the freedom to choose the budget. In the absence of sufficient funding to hire temporary replacements or redistribute workload among existing faculty members, Amy faced a challenging situation. While prioritizing the maintenance of high-quality education, she found it difficult to work out ideal solutions.

Resource Limitations

Coupled with budgetary constraints, there are resource limitations that further exacerbate the challenges faced by department heads. The scarcity of resources such as materials and infrastructure pose significant challenges in expanding course offerings and innovating teaching methods, as shrinking resources hinder their ability to meet growing demands and maintain educational standards.

David acknowledged the limited resource was the paramount challenge in curriculum development. He argued that addressing this barrier necessitates a multifaceted approach that
included both structural and cultural dimensions.

We cross-list undergraduate and graduate level courses to maximize teaching opportunities and space, and bring the level of undergrads up by working grad students. But I would say the biggest problem is not lack of ideas. It's resources. People are not willing to give anything up. (David)

While Anna did not have ample materials and resources at her disposal, she empowered her faculty members to leverage existing support systems, such as the Teaching and Learning Center, to address any pedagogical challenges that may arise in their teaching practices. I don’t know what materials and resources that I make available. I encourage them to use the Learning Center if there are issues that arise in their teaching that needs additional support to address them, but beyond that, I would not provide a lot of materials and resources. (Anna)

**Faculty Shortages**

The limited number of faculty members made department heads felt extremely constrained in achieving equity when assigning the teaching duties of faculty members. There’s no such thing as equity. I often negotiate with instructors to exceed credit unit limits, allowing them to teach additional credit units beyond their contractual agreements. For some departments, the credit units extend to 7.5 credit units, but the maximum credit units are up to 21 for two professors in our department. (Steven)

This department housed in a Natural Science College was confronted with a severe shortage of faculty members available to fulfill teaching roles effectively. This predicament left the department head with little choice but to actively implore existing faculty members to take on additional teaching assignments. Failure to do so would have posed significant challenges on students within the department, rendering it exceedingly difficult for them to register for essential courses and meet all graduation requirements within the stipulated time frame.

**Surprising Findings**

Some of the findings from the research deviated from my initial expectations. The
purpose of this study is to explore how department heads lead teaching and learning at a Canadian research-intensive university. Contrary to expectations, participants in the interviews predominantly described their role as “facilitators” rather than “leaders”, underscoring a supportive approach rather than a controlling one. For example, there was a reluctance among participants to mentor teaching effectiveness, given the need to respect the academic freedom of faculty members.

Moreover, participants highlighted that teaching and learning enhancement is a collective responsibility that extends beyond the efforts of department heads. Faculty members, deans, university communities, and policymakers all have pivotal roles to play in this endeavor.

In addition, a notable emphasis was placed on research productivity over faculty instructional effectiveness by both department heads and the university. This emphasis was further reflected in the limited availability of resources to support faculty pedagogical development and the absence of a structured mentoring program focused on enhancing the teaching efficiency of faculty members and instructors.

Interestingly, despite assumptions that Natural Science colleges might have greater financial resources than Social Science colleges due to extensive grant applications and university prioritization, budget constraints were more acute in these colleges. This financial limitation posed challenges for department heads in Natural Science colleges, particularly in ensuring equitable distribution of teaching duties among faculty members due to constraints in hiring additional faculty members or sessional lecturers.

While department heads acknowledged that people are interdisciplinary creatures, they tended to focus more on maintaining discipline specific expertise and training, because they believed if they dabbled in interdisciplinary work throughout their academic journey, they would be generalists, potentially undermining their status as experts in their specific disciplines.

Lastly, despite recognizing the critical importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in higher education, participants acknowledged a significant gap in the integration of EDI principles into classroom practices and curriculum development. This oversight suggests a
missed opportunity to leverage EDI principles as a means to foster student learning and create more inclusive educational environments.

Synthesis

The middle leadership of teaching and learning has been underscored throughout this chapter by presenting the strategies and challenges of university department heads in leading learning improvement. The participants from eight departments, housed in both Social and Natural Science Colleges, frequently play “facilitation” and “support” roles, satisfying faculty teaching needs and promoting student learning experience. The headship is regarded as the role of providing consultation, coordinating relationships, and supplying resources. Given the limited power of the position, department heads face a variety of obstacles in navigating challenging situations to facilitate teaching and learning activities with academic communities. Yet, Eric recognized the necessity to put these hard conversations on the agenda.

Within the higher education context, teaching and learning is a process in which faculty members transfer knowledge to students through the carrier of curricula and programs. Department heads mentor, evaluate and supervise the instructional effectiveness of faculty members while allocating faculty teaching assignments. However, it is exceptionally challenging to achieve absolute equity during the process. Heads also take student learning interests and career development into consideration when engaging in curriculum development and program revision, thereby ensuring that course offerings are relevant and responsive to changeable industry demands.

While the primary function of department heads is enhancing educational outcomes within the department, fostering good relationships and a harmonious atmosphere is equally crucial. Integrating communication methods, they address student and peer feedback through one-on-one conversations, revise curriculum collaboratively in group discussions, and assign teaching duties in department meetings. In addition, department heads mobilize their leadership to ensure the teaching and learning reflect the values of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and taking action to share responsibilities.
It is true that department heads are confronted with challenges when leading teaching and learning for their academic units. All of department heads agreed that there is not a lack of innovative ideas for developing curricular and teaching methods, instead, it is budget or resource constraints. They indicated that they need further budget support to hire more faculty members to undertake department teaching assignments in the upcoming years, thus releasing the workloads of existing faculty members. Given the diverse interests, preferences, and priorities among faculty members and students, some department heads find it difficult to support everyone’s requests or expectations completely. Through effective communication, collaboration, and negotiation, compromises can be reached that uphold fairness and maintain harmony within the department, fostering a supportive and collaborative learning community.
CHAPTER SIX – Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to gain insights into the leadership practices and strategies employed by department heads in fostering a positive culture of teaching and learning at a Canadian public university. This chapter summarizes findings of document analysis and semi-structured interviews, followed by interpretation of these findings by answering research questions. Then, the conclusion of this research is drawn by discussing implications for theory, policy, and practice and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

This study captured a contemporary higher educational landscape of department head roles, middle leadership practices, and leadership of teaching and learning. This empirical study has identified several university policies, procedures, and measures related to department heads’ academic governance, faculty promotion and tenure, curriculum and program quality assurance, academic conflict resolution, and learning community building. Input from interview participants indicated they took additional roles in assigning faculty teaching duties and meeting student learning needs.

This study supports prior research that has revealed heads’ leadership for learning and teaching is an important factor for learning improvement (Marshall et al., 2011) and for educational change, particularly for students (Maddock, 2023). This study extends prior work by suggesting that beyond student benefits, heads seek to support faculty in championing their instructional effectiveness, contributing to their professional development. Regardless of obstacles and hurdles participants faced as the department head, they were unwavering in their dedication to effecting positive reform for their colleagues, students, programs, and departments.
(Kruse, 2022). They tirelessly pursued initiatives aimed at enhancing teaching quality, fostering a supportive environment for their colleagues, and providing high-quality educational experiences for their students. Their commitment to excellence transcended mere professional obligation. It was further fueled by a deep-seated belief in the transformative power of education and the profound impact it could have on individuals and communities.

It is no surprise that heads indeed are in charge of leading teaching and learning for their academic departments through faculty development, curriculum development and creating a collegial climate. Still, this study does not indicate they have to be superheroes who can control everything about teaching and learning. The factors influencing leadership of learning and teaching practice within higher education institutions are recognized to be distributed across six distinct levels, involving society, universities, colleges, departments, faculty, and students.

The study uncovered a scarcity of research focusing on department head leadership within the higher education literature, supporting prior research highlighting a deficiency in studies examining middle leadership practices related to faculty development and curriculum development (Maddock, 2023). Yet, this study contributed to the broader trend of increasing interest in educational leadership research across various sectors, as evidenced by a gradual rise in the number of articles over time. This trend may be associated with strategies for assigning teaching duties, frameworks for teaching excellence and quality, the promotion of student-centered learning, and initiatives related to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI).

**Interpretation of Findings**

The findings of this study closely mirrored most viewpoints presented in the existing literature, notwithstanding there were some conflicting perspectives as well. This section presents interpretation of the findings from document analysis and semi-structured interviews by answering research questions, followed by outlining additional findings and drawing connections to the literature.
Revisiting Research Questions

Through the systematic review and thematic analysis of five series of University Policy Documents: *Job Profile of Department Head, University Standards for Promotion and Tenure, Guidelines of Learning, Course Policy, and Student Learning Experience Assessment Survey (SLEAS)*, this research-intensive university highlighted various initiatives aimed at empowering department heads to lead teaching and learning, as detailed in the tables of Chapter 4. Interviewed participants confirmed their adoption of most strategies outlined in the university's policy documents. However, it's worth noting that not all provisions within these documents equally impact department head leadership in teaching and learning.

Sub-Q1: *In what ways do department heads support faculty in developing their teaching practice?*

Faculty development overseen by department heads is a topic extensively addressed in educational leadership literature. However, this study offers a specific emphasis on faculty pedagogical development. All participants expressed the necessity of departmental support of faculty teaching practices through mentoring, evaluating, and assigning faculty teaching responsibilities.

Several individuals tasked with supervising the teaching quality of faculty members highlighted the advantages of peer mentorship. For example, the intimate bonds formed between mentors and mentees enabled them to navigate adjustment challenges and address issues in real time with a trusted confidant, which is in line with the finding of Bourgeois and Zare (2023). They also observed that this informal program was inadequate in effectively addressing all the teaching-related challenges, notwithstanding it offered certain benefits. This could be owing to their limited availability of mentoring materials, resources, and time required to adequately monitor the progress of the program’s implementation. There were department heads who encouraged faculty to seek additional teaching support from the Teaching and Learning Center if necessary. According to the department heads’ perspective, their reluctance of providing mentoring may derive their belief that faculty members possess greater teaching experience than
themselves, and the importance of prioritizing respect for faculty academic freedom in selecting course materials and content. However, Burleigh et al. (2022) suggested the biggest hurdle of mentoring is a prevailing culture of reluctance to seek external advice among faculty members, which is consistent with participants’ opinion in the interview.

While much of literature highlights the immensely vital role in mentoring initiatives through informal interactions (Pifer et al., 2015), only a few university policy documents point out how department heads mentor faculty members’ teaching. Participants described generally mentoring forms but were unable to offer other examples of contents beyond syllabus and rubric check, technology use, and resource sharing. This finding echoes the idea of Marshall et al. (2010) who noted that department heads mentored faculty members in comprehending what is expected of them, how to evaluate student course assignments, and how to set guidelines of student examinations. In addition to grade approval, heads in this research described they were not in charge of other examination management affairs, though it was stipulated in the document of *Course Policy* that they are responsible for such as providing invigilators, approving examination time and class assessment changes, and confirming exam methods and relative weighting. One possible explanation for this phenomenon could be attributed to the constraints imposed by the limited sample size in this case study.

With the influence of resource constraints, the study explored factors department heads considered when assigning teaching duties for faculty members. Most important were equity of teaching assignments issues reported by participants. Teaching assignment inequities can lower productivity and trigger burnout (Lebovitz et al., 2023). As witnessed in the study, department heads encountered difficulties in achieving equity in teaching assignments, despite the straightforward guidelines outlined in employment contracts for allocating equitable teaching loads. In their pursuit of equity, heads balanced teaching loads among faculty members by releasing teaching duties for research-active faculty members or those with administrative tasks. This deliberate effort aimed to ensure that each faculty member had an equitable opportunity to engage in research projects, administrative affairs, and teaching duties.
It is suggested that departments believe they have been already done a good job in other issues such as teaching diversity and inclusion (American Political Science Association, 2011), which has been confirmed by the findings of this study. Unsurprisingly, all the department heads demonstrated a commitment to tailoring teaching assignments to accommodate various factors, including faculty members’ teaching preferences and interests, program requirements, alongside coordinating teaching timetables to meet their needs such as sabbatical leaves and parental leave requests. The student population is becoming increasingly heterogeneous, as highlighted by Mcclellan et al. (2023). This diversity encompasses various backgrounds, including cultural heritage, language proficiency, and learning interests, suggesting a need for varied educational approaches to cater to these differences. In response to this growing diversity among students, approximately half of the department heads had opted to rotate instructors across different courses on an annual basis. The goal of this initiative is to expose students to a diverse array of teaching styles, perspectives, and expertise, thereby enriching their learning experience and better addressing their diverse needs and interests.

Amidst the rising professional pressures within the academic landscape, faculty members often find themselves compelled to teach subjects beyond their specialized areas (Zaid, 2020). However, contrary to the findings of previous research, the current study did not detect any evidence supporting this practice. Instead, teaching knowledge and expertise emerged as the predominant consideration for assigning teaching duties, ultimately shaping instructional effectiveness.

In this study, the primary characteristic of department heads’ role in assigning teaching tasks to faculty members is the emphasis on “flexibility”. Lebovitz et al. (2023) stressed the significance of communicating workload expectations transparently and clearly, a principle that aligns with the practices observed in this study where heads consistently sought input from faculty members regarding their teaching preferences before making formal decisions during department meetings.

Another key finding among participants was evident in the frequent citation of teaching
evaluation which impacted the decisions of faculty promotion and tenure (Radchenko, 2020). The regular teaching evaluations from students and peers served as a means for department heads to recognize faculty past teaching accomplishments and to formulate future directions (Burleigh et al., 2022; Franken et al., 2015). Participants had varying opinions on the reliability of student evaluations versus peer evaluations. Some believed student evaluations were more dependable as they provided direct feedback from recipients of instruction, offering insights into teaching effectiveness, clarity, and engagement. Others favored peer evaluations, especially through classroom observation, arguing that colleagues with professional expertise in the same discipline could offer deeper insights into instructional techniques and subject matter (Uttl & Smibert, 2017). Concerns had been raised regarding biases based on gender and race in both student and peer evaluation methods in this study, which was aligned with the findings of other recent studies (e.g., Boring, 2016; Dee, 2005; Mengel et al., 2019; Mitchell & Martin, 2018). These studies highlight the potential risks of biases in evaluation processes and emphasize the need for awareness, scrutiny, and corrective measures to ensure fairness and equity in assessments.

The findings showed that a few of department heads were only concerned that faculty members maintained a minimal level of teaching quality, which might be owing to the fact research productivity is more valued than teaching efficiency in research-focused universities (Cervino, 2018). However, most heads encouraged faculty members to strive for teaching excellence in annual reviews. This is possibly due to the fact that fostering a departmental culture where teaching performance is recognized and rewarded is vital for student learning improvement (Marshall et al., 2011). Honeycutt et al. (2010) argued that department heads provided financial incentives to encourage faculty members’ instructional improvement. But participants in interviews emphasized that they lacked resources to formally acknowledge faculty members' outstanding teaching performance due to budgetary constraints. In the absence of funding, it was common for participants in this study to provide verbal commendations and draft written letters in support of faculty members’ nominations for teaching prizes and awards. In addition, the inclusion of teaching ability and performance as a category in the University
Standards for Promotion and Tenure reflects how the institution recognizes and values faculty members’ exceptional teaching contributions. This acknowledgment is crucial for fostering the ongoing professional development of faculty members within the university. Although the Standards recognize teaching, research remains the most important consideration for merit, tenure and promotion. This finding was consistent with Schimanski and Alperin (2018) who were concerned that promotion and tenure procedures typically prioritize research over teaching and service, leading to a situation where faculty member’s time allocation may not align with the criteria used for their evaluation, creating a mismatch between actual activities and evaluation standards.

Sub-Q2: How do department heads initiate and oversee curriculum and program development?

As illustrated in the document of Job Profile of Department Head, the department head has been instrumental in driving curriculum and program initiatives. Over one-half department heads have engaged in developing and restructuring the undergraduate and graduate curricula and programs in the past five years. Half of the department heads in this study led curriculum development and 12.5% of them revised a curriculum, whereas 25% innovated a program and 37.5% adjusted program structures. 62.5% recognized the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of curriculum and programs reform. These initiatives and oversight reflect the fact that curriculum and development is “one of the principal departmental responses to the turbulent environment of higher education” (Mcclellan et al., 2023, p. 590). Surprisingly, only 25% had formal evaluation mechanism to ensure quality of curricula and programs.

The present study supports previous research that department heads initiate curriculum and program activities by collaborating with stakeholders in and out of the university (Ackerman et al., 2020; Aggarwal et al., 2008; Mcclellan et al., 2023). It may be that, as observed by Cervino (2018), one of the pivotal roles of department heads is orchestrating events and maintaining relationships with faculty member, students, upper-administration, and external bodies beyond the university. Collaboration primarily occurred during the identification of student learning needs, development of new curricula, program revisions, provision of professional certificates,
and maintenance of quality standards. According to *Teaching and Learning* documents, the mission of the Teaching and Learning Center is involved in supporting leaders engaged in curriculum development and renewal projects. Despite this overarching goal, participants in the study had little interest in cooperating with specialists from the Center. Instead, they showed a preference for collaborating with students and faculty members within their own department.

Since department heads play a crucial role as change agents and facilitators of curriculum development initiatives, effective communication is pivotal. The study’s findings corroborate Ackerman et al.’s (2020) view that strategic planning and clear communication by the head were fundamental in the successful implementation of new programs while mitigating conflicts. Participants emphasized the importance of department meetings as a platform for open dialogue, where ideas could be freely exchanged, issues could be addressed in a timely manner, and decisions could be made collaboratively. This observation reflects the notion that faculty members remain the principal instigators for updating course content and refining program structures (Bens et al., 2020). This finding has implications for the importance providing collegial spaces for faculty members to voice their concerns, offer suggestions, collectively determine ways to improve program design, refine curriculum content, and address emerging challenges in development processes. Occasionally, department heads communicated with counterparts from other departments to address conflicts regarding curriculum issues, mirroring Ackerman et al.’s (2020) findings on similar coordination among department heads for resolving disputes over program placement.

Curriculum and program development led by department heads are affected by changeable social and educational trends. The most important relevant finding was that satisfying student learning needs was the most frequently mentioned reason for curriculum development, which was consistent with Mcclellan et al.’s (2023) perspective that the reforms should be “geared to the educational marketplace, defined as demands from employers, families, and prospective and enrolled students (p. 583). The prevailing response among participants was their proactive integration of student career development within program design. This approach aligns
a concept of “high impact practices” proposed by Weaver et al. (2019), which includes faculty members guided research, capstone experiences, and simulations, and internship opportunities. This finding confirms that a key motivation for curriculum revisions is to “increase student engagement in a subfield, special topic, or issue” (Mcclellan et al, 2023, p. 591). It can thus be signaled a departure from content-guided models in traditional curriculum development. The provisions of AI courses, authentic learning, and exchanging programs by participants aligns with the goal of developing well-rounded students in the university. This trend reflects an increasing focus on cultivating skills in machine learning, data analysis, and hands-on practices while fostering intercultural competence, adaptability, and a global mindset – all of which are essential attributes for the student success in an increasingly interconnected world. Aside from taking student career preparation into account, some heads included sustainability issues into curricula to help students understand and navigate the development of resilience in the face of pervasive uncertainty and rapid change.

However, a minority of participants refuted the idea that universities are transitioning toward a model resembling vocational colleges, where the expectation is to secure a job directly after education. They were concerned about the inability of departments to guarantee job opportunities for students and that, this departure from traditional university functions is not in line with historical practices. Conversely, others pointed out that this concern is not new and has been a longstanding issue within higher education, and heads had to deal with such challenge by re-educating themselves to gain new knowledge, skills and perspectives for curricula as well as teaching methods.

Ironically, a remarkable interview finding illustrated a notable lack of enthusiasm among departments heads in innovating curricula. The rationale probably could be the inclination of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) research to prioritize the enhancement of pedagogical methods and instructional techniques over curriculum-related issues (Craig 2014), which differs from this study’s finding that the inertia of faculty members was the main factor that kept them from deviating from current curricular structures. Another important finding in the
interview highlighted that bureaucratic hurdles can impede efforts to introduce diverse perspectives and content into curricula, making it challenging to integrate newest knowledge or accommodate diverse learners effectively. This accords with Hurlimann et al. (2013)’s idea that “the existence of cumbersome, inflexible and lengthy administrative processes” can hinder curriculum innovation (p. 639). For example, participants argued that decision-making processes for curriculum approval at the university-level was slow-moving, hindering the swift adoption of inclusive curriculum reforms.

In addition, department heads claimed they were compelled to revise programs due to the correlation between the loss of faculty members and an increase in student numbers, primarily focused on the refinement of existing frameworks. This finding corroborates the idea of Mcclellan et al. (2023) who suggested program changes were “extensive but not transformative” (p. 592). Departments heads in the study perceived less urgency in dedicating resources to program development. Six interview participants (75% of the total) suggested the hurdle of developing new curricula was due to insufficient support from institutions, especially for budgetary. However, Mcclellan et al. (2023) assumed a possible explanation for departmental inaction might be that heads are concerned that curricular change may impact faculty timetable and workload.

Typical curricular development activities reported by participants included creating new courses, adding course sections, and program structure revisions based on changeable educational trends. The purpose of these actions is to support students acquiring knowledge and skills to address complex challenges and make informed decisions that consider environmental, social, and economic factors. This not only prepares students for future career opportunities but also fosters a mindset of responsible citizenship and lifelong learning, which reflects growing interest in addressing sustainability in university teaching and learning activities. Participants in the study did not report EDI as a key driver for curricular reform. This result is in agreement with the findings of Maddock (2023) and Mcclellan et al. (2023), which indicated a lack of acknowledgment of concerns within the profession regarding EDI. It is interesting to notice that
some participants had department conversations about the ways of incorporating EDI in teaching and assessment with faculty members; however no evidence was provided on the operation of EDI perspectives in curricular or pedagogical reform in the departments studied.

**Sub-Q3: How do department heads address student and peer feedback for the improvement of teaching?**

Student and peer feedback serve as valuable indicators for enhancing departmental teaching performance. The document of *Student Learning Experience Assessment Survey (SLEAS)* is a widely used survey tool for gathering student feedback on learning experiences and needs. This questionnaire was utilized by all participants from interviews during mid and final term to gather insights into students' perceptions of faculty teaching performance, enabling them to reflect on feedback and promptly address any issues with faculty members (Arthur, 2009). Although the literature acknowledged the importance of this evaluation mechanisms (Marshall et al., 2011), a participant in the interview highlighted the necessity for department heads to approach it objectively, as it may not be flawless. This result was in line with the research of Mandouit (2018) who suggested that further research is needed to determine whether this practice indeed enhances the quality of teaching. In addition, participants emphasized the necessity of analyzing the trends of feedback and checking one-off comments carefully.

The extant literature argues that communication is a multi-functional tool for department head leading practices such as decision-making, collaboration facilitation, mentoring faculty, etc. (Weaver et al., 2019). More importantly, it is a common strategy in addressing student and peer feedback for heads. In terms of addressing the issues of faculty instructional effectiveness, department heads in the interviews reported that they held a formal meeting with faculty members to discuss their teaching performance. Advising and counseling students are pivotal duties of department heads, as illustrated in the document of *Academic Courses Policy on Class Delivery, Examinations, and Assessment of Student Learning*. This document communicates the expectation that department heads to attentively listen to students’ concerns and feedback and communicate with them using ethical language. In handling student academic appeals, the
interviewed department heads proactively communicated with students and addressed faculty members' concerns through meetings, seeking to resolve conflicts internally initially. If these efforts were unsuccessful, the heads then sought input or approval from the dean. This echoes Weaver et al.’s (2019) findings regarding the crucial role of department heads in conveying departmental needs to upper-level administrators.

Respecting faculty members’ academic freedom is a basic principle guiding the work of department heads. This study unveiled a significant insight into “human nature”, revealing the innate tendency of faculty members to resist changes. In light of this observation, it became apparent that motivating faculty members to embrace necessary changes is essential, particularly when addressing areas of poor teaching performance based on feedback. Bijlsma et al. (2019) discovered that receiving feedback, to some degree, could improve the teaching efficiency of faculty members. However, they noted that this improvement was not sustainable without reflecting on teaching quality. This was emphasized in this research as participants identified reflective feedback sessions as a key strategy for faculty introspection through constructive dialogue (Mandouit, 2018). Moreover, the study highlighted providing additional resources to support faculty members for enhanced teaching quality and the pursuit of teaching excellence. Such resources may include professional development opportunities, access to educational technology, or teaching assistants, tailored to address specific needs and challenges faced by faculty members.

**Sub-Q4: What background and experiences do department heads have that inform their practices in support of teaching and learning?**

Although document analysis did not provide extensive data on the backdrop experience of department heads in leading teaching and learning, the results of this study suggest universities should pay attention to the teaching training need of department heads and other faculty members, as their degrees, training opportunities, and teaching experiences undoubtedly influence their efficiency and effectiveness of promoting teaching and learning.

The majority of participants in this study possess doctoral degrees, with only one having a
master's degree. This finding resonates with Cipriano and Riccardi's (2016) observation that department heads commonly have doctoral qualifications and extensive expertise in both teaching and research. While the findings of this study highlighted that a significant number of department heads hold teaching degrees and certificates, it is striking that there is limited existing research dedicated to this aspect. Such qualifications are crucial for their middle leadership roles in teaching and learning.

Literature illustrated university department heads received little training for their transition from the position of faculty members to department heads (Kruse, 2022; Paape et al., 2021; Pepper & Giles, 2015; Riley & Russell, 2013; Thornton et al., 2018). In the study of Weaver et al., (2019), Graduate school programs typically centered on cultivating department heads as scholars within their specific research interests (Weaver et al., 2019). Nonetheless, there remains a dearth of understanding specifically targeting teaching training opportunities available to department heads, let alone their strategies for leading the teaching improvement for their academic units. Participants during the interviews recalled their efforts to address pedagogical issues by engaging in conferences and workshops, along with seeking mentorship from others as they gained almost no formal training from the university. The lack of teaching training for department heads and their colleagues may be attributed to the prevailing emphasis within academia on research over teaching quality in research-intensive universities (Taggart, 2015). As a result, scholars have emphasized the importance of valuing teaching quality in the university setting (Maddock, 2023; Preston & Price, 2012).

While department heads have the desire for quality teaching (Taggart, 2015), there is a significant gap in the existing literature regarding their teaching experience. Undertaking teaching assignments was an essential experience that department heads have, which was a vital evaluation criterion for their promotion and tenure, as delineated in the document of University Standards for Promotion and Tenure (2011). This policy placed the expectations on all faculty for teaching excellence. Given that department heads are in-scope of University Collective Agreement, they are also required to “demonstrate mastery of their subject area(s) or discipline(s),
to make thorough preparation for their classes, to communicate effectively with their students, to show a willingness to respond to students’ questions and concerns, and to exhibit fairness in evaluating students” in the same way as other faculty members (p. 3). In the interviews, all participants had rich teaching experience in their past professional career, which deepened the understandings of respective disciplines, directly influencing their ways of mentoring the instructional effectiveness of new and junior faculty members. For example, Anna and Linda communicated their solutions to teaching challenges to faculty members, significantly benefiting faculty members’ teaching practices. Steven and Tina leveraged their extensive teaching experiences to mentor fellow faculty members, ultimately assisting them in winning teaching awards. Through department heads’ accumulated knowledge and expertise gained from years of instructing, the overall quality of teaching was indirectly influenced within the university.

Department heads, although they may have significant experience as a university teacher, are not well equipped to function as learning leaders due to a lack of formal leadership training, limited experience in strategic planning, time constraints from balancing multiple responsibilities, and communication barriers and conflicts of interest with stakeholders.

**Additional Findings**

Many findings gathered from department heads during interviews has been used to address sub-research questions. However, unexpected data provided by heads can also answer the primary research question, even if they do not only align with specific research objectives.

**Challenges**

The results of this study suggested that the primary hinderance for department heads in implementing leadership is a lack of power, a notion aligned with Kruse’s (2022) observations that they possess “limited institutional authority” under university regulatory pressures in curriculum development, collaborating with others, and striving to be inclusive in significant decision-making processes. Many researchers have highlighted the difficulties department heads face due to budget and resource constraints (Weaver et al., 2019), a key finding reiterated in this
study. Yet, this study also sheds light on a less explored challenge—the negative influence of faculty shortage in teaching assignments. One of the challenges associated with this is the increased reliance on contract or adjunct faculty to fill these roles. While they can provide valuable expertise for student learning, it can also introduce several challenges. For one thing, they may not receive the same level of institutional support, professional development opportunities, or resources as permanent faculty members, which can affect their ability to deliver high-quality teaching. For another, the frequent turnover and lack of continuity among contract faculty can impact the student learning experience, as students may not receive consistent support, mentorship, or guidance throughout their academic journey. Interestingly, participants did not mention challenges related to their work-life balance, which have been previously identified in studies by Armstrong and Woloshyn (2017), Berdrow (2010), and Kruse (2022).

**Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)**

The findings showed that fewer department heads had an interest in mobilizing leadership to ensure teaching that reflects the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion. In addition to advancing global and intercultural education, a limited number of departments heads implemented adjustments to engage students in discussions regarding diversity, social justice issues, or moral and ethical decision-making (Mcclellan et al., 2023). Why they were less likely to do that could be they may find it challenging to access to professors willing and trained to teach courses in relation to EDI. It might be that they considered lecture discussions on topics such as race, politics, and educational inequalities as sensitive so that students may feel awkward to share opinions openly, leading to their hesitation in incorporating them into curriculum design (Arellanes & Hendricks, 2021). It is true that this situation would be improved if department heads advocated a cultural humility as a way to gain a better understanding of cultural gaps with students and in promoting inclusion (Davis et al., 2018). They were also suggested to prioritize the understanding of the nature and implications of ethnicity, gender, and religion, alongside the international and transnational aspects of specific issues and policies across all pertinent courses (Wahlke, 1991).
**Compromise**

This study has revealed that the tensions of department heads are articulated as challenges involving tasks, organization, roles, and interpersonal relationships that they must reconcile to achieve success (Kruse, 2022). Instead of seeking outright resolution, effective heads aim to reconcile these tensions through strategic leadership (Marshall et al., 2011). Compromise often arises in allocating teaching assignments, particularly when there is a shortage of available instructors for certain courses. Department heads may need to redistribute responsibilities or seek external resources to ensure essential courses are adequately covered. This requires creative problem-solving and flexibility to meet the needs of faculty and students while maintaining academic program integrity. Reconciliation is also necessary when addressing conflicts among faculty or between faculty and students. Instead of simply resolving conflicts, heads must proactively foster understanding, communication, and collaboration. This might involve mediating disputes, facilitating dialogue, and implementing policies to promote a collegial environment.

**The In-Scope Status of Department Heads**

The status of department heads is “in-scope” within the Faculty Association, which offers several madvantages for leading teaching and learning for their academic units in spite of their limited power and authority. To begin with, this status enables department heads to effectively collaborate with other colleagues within the department to implement pedagogical and curriculum initiatives. Within a department, there is a wealth of collective expertise among faculty members in diverse domains. Department heads can leverage this expertise to generate ideas, share best practices, and coordinate peer review and feedback to ensure the quality of teaching, curricular, and programs. In addition, department heads can foster communities of practice within the department, where faculty members with similar teaching interests or challenges come together to discuss, share resources, and support each other. Moreover, the “in-scope” status allows department heads ensures that academic concerns and perspectives are prioritized in and communicated to out-of-scope administrators. Finally, department heads as first
among equals are more likely to engage in cooperative and collaborative activity with faculty members due to the low power differential that exists.

**Implications of the Study**

The implications of the study are discussed in three levels. To start with, this section introduces theoretical implications in academic middle leadership and educational leadership. Then, discussed will discuss the implications for policy. Subsequently, I outline implications for practice from institutional, departmental, individual, and network levels. Finally, I recommend future research directions in terms of department head leading practices for teaching and learning.

**Theoretical Implications**

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is closely connected with student learning. Webb and Tierney (2020) call for "... a department, school, faculty and university that values the SoTL equally to disciplinary research" (p. 60). While the SoTL has focused on the role of faculty’s teaching practice in student learning improvement, the discipline has not necessarily explored the contributions of those within formal leadership roles (Miller-Young et al., 2017). Simmons and Taylor (2019) suggested that this perspective identifies a gap in institutional leadership for teaching practice. This study has successfully addressed the gap in research pertaining to department head leadership in teaching and learning. It has also shed light on the discourse on the ways in which middle leadership can be leveraged to improve educational outcomes for post-secondary students. For instance, associate deanship roles, situated above department heads and below the level of deans (Pepper & Giles, 2015), may have influence on effective teaching and learning processes.

Educational leadership has been regarded as an organizational development approach. Instructional leadership (IL) and Leadership for learning (LfL) play a critical role in educational practices in PK-12 education settings (Munna, 2021). The findings of this study also suggested that IL and LfL have been influencers on student academic performance in higher education institutions by mentoring faculty instructional effectiveness, innovating curricula and programs,
and creating collegial and inclusive organizations. Scholars acknowledged that all instructional leaders affect learning outcomes in both the PK-12 and higher education sectors, especially in English-speaking countries (Maddock, 2023; Nixon, 2015; Pifer et al., 2015; Wolverton et al., 2005), but there are significant contextual differences when considering leading in higher education. Faculty academic freedom, including the freedom to make pedagogical and curricular decisions, is quite different from the autonomy possessed by PK-12 teachers. This factor may limit the influence that department heads have to lead the learning program. On the other hand, the influence that department heads have on tenure, promotion and other human resources processes is greater than the influence wielded by school principals (dependent on the province and labour context for principals) in these types of processes. Understanding how these contextual factors influence department heads’ ability to employ learning improvement models is important for future research.

The Conceptual Framework developed in Figure 2.6 in Chapter Two explored department heads leadership for learning through the perspectives of mentoring, curriculum development, teaching assignments, background and experiences, student and peer feedback, guided by university policies on teaching and learning. Although these components are undeniably vital aspects of the phenomenon under investigation, the results of this study suggest that they offer only a partial understanding. Departments function as integral units within the university structure, but their leadership alone may not strong enough for achieving optimal educational outcomes. Effective collaboration with other academic units, administrative bodies, and external stakeholders is imperative for maximizing impact and fostering success in the university context. The framework was re-organized to better reflect department head leading practice for teaching and learning (Figure 6.1).

**Figure 6.1**

*Teaching and Learning Practices in Higher Education*
In line with the Instructional Leadership (IL) framework in the PK-12 setting, university department heads are responsible for promoting professional development, providing incentive for instructors, and supervising teaching and curriculum. However, unlike in PK-12 settings, the influence of department head leadership on student learning appears indirect, as this study did not indicate direct monitoring of student progress or provision of student incentives. The concept of shared responsibility is a fundamental aspect of university department head leadership, mirroring a key element observed in the Leadership for Learning (LfL) framework commonly found in the PK-12 sector. In both settings, effective leadership entails the collaborative effort of various stakeholders towards common goals. University department heads, like their counterparts in PK-12 education, understand the importance of working collaboratively with faculty, staff, administrators, and other stakeholders in curriculum and program development, peer mentoring, and teaching duty assignment. This shared responsibility approach ensures that decision-making processes are inclusive, perspectives are valued, and efforts are collectively directed towards enhancing teaching, learning, and overall academic excellence within the university.

**Policy Implications**

This research reveals the limited authority shouldered by department heads, which
constrains their career advancement, restricts their dedication to teaching and learning activities, and leads to them into a dilemma. Participants spoke about a lack of professional training opportunities and mechanisms of resource support while navigating intricate situations into their leadership positions within departments. Universities may embrace these results to inform their policy decision-making pertaining to leadership development support and resource allocation for academic departments.

A deeper understanding of how department heads utilize strategies to foster excellence in teaching and learning, as revealed through document analysis, can offer valuable insights for post-secondary policy makers seeking to comprehend the leadership dynamics within academic units. However, it is important to note that certain university policy documents may be outdated and fail to align with contemporary educational trends. By updating, revising, and adjusting articles in those documents according to input from the study participants obtained through semi-structured interviews, policymakers can develop best practices aimed at providing robust support for faculty in their teaching endeavors and for students with high-quality learning experiences. This combined approach may also spark innovation in the methods by which department heads enhance the overall education quality within their respective departments.

The findings of this study suggest an urgent need for universities to call for academic departments to implement a comprehensive Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) action plan. These plans should include initiatives aimed at raising awareness and understanding of EDI principles among faculty, staff, and students. Training sessions and workshops on EDI definitions, principles, and practices in teaching and learning can be organized to provide participants with the necessary knowledge and skills to foster an inclusive environment within the university community.

Moreover, universities should embed EDI into the strategies, practices and cultures of teaching and learning in universities, which has been widely acknowledged by researchers and scholars as important to improving institutional responses to EDI (Riedel et al., 2023). For example, Hartwell et al. (2017) focused on four core objectives for teaching EDI: awareness,
knowledge, skills, and action and achieved these objectives by providing opportunities in their classrooms for the following: (1) experiential learning, (2) activation of students’ prior knowledge, (3) repositioning the role of the instructor, (4) community-based learning, and (5) reflection. This may ensure the fulfillment of unique student learning needs, the provision of high-quality programs, and alignment with contemporary educational trends and objectives.

Department heads in Social Science colleges perceived achieving Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) as less challenging compared to Natural Science colleges due to several factors. Social Science disciplines often inherently involve the study of human behavior, societies, and cultures such as anti-oppression and racism, which may naturally align with EDI principles. Additionally, Social Science departments have more flexibility in curriculum design and teaching methodologies that allow for the integration of diverse perspectives and topics related to equity and social justice. Conversely, Natural Science colleges faced more significant challenges in implementing EDI, including limited budgets, resource allocations, and structural barriers within the discipline itself. Budget constraints may limit the recruitment of new faculty members, making it challenging to distribute equitable teaching duties among existing faculty members. This can lead to workload disparities and impede the implementation of inclusive teaching practices. Moreover, constrained resources limit the development of diverse new curricular and programs that reflect a broad range of perspectives, experiences, and methodologies within Natural Science disciplines. What heads in Natural Science colleges can do is encouraging faculty members to adopt inclusive teaching practices, collaborating with other departments for shared EDI initiatives, and engaging students in discussions to foster ownership and advocacy for inclusion.

Additionally, universities should establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of their EDI action plans implemented in academic units. This can include regular assessments of campus climate, collecting feedback from stakeholders, and tracking progress towards EDI goals and objectives. By committing to EDI action plans, universities can create a more equitable and inclusive learning and working environment for all members of the university
community.

Implications for Practice

Participants recognized the value of support for various aspects throughout their journey, especially in contexts with far-reaching implications with respect to their learning leader roles. Support from diverse channels, whether structured or unstructured, formal or informal was vital in improving university teaching and learning (Maddock, 2023). While some participants received resources to aid their growth in or out the institution, especially in Arts and Social Science Colleges, the majority found an obvious absence of well-organized support systems from universities. Due to the lack of such social and professional networks, faculty members depended on self-reliance and reflection to enhance teaching quality, while students focused on developing skills for their future careers (Bourgeois & Zare, 2023).

Institutional support

This study advocates for universities to prioritize learning and teaching (Maddock, 2023; Munna, 2021; Preston & Price, 2012) and to offer increased institutional support for department heads in order to prepare them for their roles as learning leaders, given that they are challenged with balancing responsibilities in both academic and administration fields. The importance of tailored professional learning and development programs for department head has been highlighted in this research (Aziz et al., 2005; Brinkley-Etzkorn & Lane, 2019). If they could absorb rich knowledge and acquire ample information for leading department advancement, their working efficiency and effectiveness would be largely enhanced (Kruse, 2022). For instance, strengthening their leadership abilities can support their growth as learning leaders through the implementation of explicit, systematic, grounded, and sustained decision-making processes. Another recommendation is that the president, provosts, and deans should provide sufficient budgetary and resources, allocate appropriate workloads, and designate faculty and staff to alleviate department heads’ tensions and pressure (Armstrong & Woloshyn, 2017; Kruse, 2022; Maddock, 2023). Last but not least, I argue for universities to develop a deliberate strategy aimed
at identifying and mitigating any restrictive working conditions that may have the potential to negatively impact the physical, emotional, and mental of department heads (Afzalur Rahim et al., 2015; Cowley, 2019; Maddock, 2023; Morris & Laipple, 2015).

Teaching and learning institutes at Canadian universities could consider advocating for institutional support and recognition of the crucial role of department heads in advancing teaching and learning excellence. This could involve highlighting departmental successes, showcasing leadership practices, and advocating for institutional policies that prioritize teaching and learning improvement. Teaching and learning institutes could serve as a hub for resource sharing for department heads to support faculty instructional effectiveness, providing access to educational materials, best practices guides, and online repositories of teaching resources. Teaching and learning institutes can support department heads in making data-informed decisions about teaching and learning improvement, thus empowering them to identify areas for improvement and implement targeted interventions. Department heads can serve as a key point of leverage for teaching and learning institutes to impact broader teaching and learning improvements. By focusing on the development of department heads as learning leaders, the reach and effectiveness of teaching and learning institutes can potentially enhance teaching and learning across a large number of faculty and instructors.

**Departmental support**

Although it is less likely for department heads gain sufficient budget and resource support from the university or government in a short-term to develop new teaching methods and curricula, there is still space for them to make changes within extant circumstances, such as refining faculty members’ pedagogical strategies, equip students with updated knowledge and skills, and optimizing program structures. Furthermore, exploring faculty and student concerns and navigating complex situations related to the priorities placed on academic units facilitates the delivery of high-quality programs that meet the needs of domestic, international, and Indigenous learners. Most importantly, transparent communication regarding the availability of resources benefits collegial culture cultivation within departments, thus contributing to high-quality
learning experiences and productive educational outcomes.

**Self-Reliance**

Given the limited power and resources department heads have, faculty members and students are not well supported by the department heads. Within this context, they are compelled to become more self-reliant, taking initiative to devise their own strategies for coping and adapting to the various challenges they face in teaching and learning. Specifically, faculty members, adjunct faculty as well as sessional lecturers should: a) optimize their decisions with respect to improving both academic performance and equitable outcomes; b) take ownership of their solutions; and c) become more accountable and committed to educational practices that lead to teaching excellence. Their sense of self-reliance was seen as a vital attribute nurtured by their active participation in conferences, workshops and seminars. Furthermore, students need to have a sense of ownership of their learning, continuously develop their communication skills, adapt to emerging technologies, and gain practical experience. The way to achieve this is through participation in experimental training programs and internship, where students have the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings. This holistic approach to learning not only strengthens their skill sets but also fosters a sense of confidence, competence, self-discipline, and ownership over their educational journey. Ultimately, it equips them with the necessary tools and capabilities to succeed in their academic and professional pursuits.

**Formal networks of support**

The study revealed that there is no formal mentoring program for the improvement of instructional effectiveness within this university. Still, as suggested in existing literature on pedagogical development in higher education, faculty members and sessional lecturers could gain benefits from cross-department mentoring programs (Bourgeois & Zare, 2023). The implementation of such initiatives allows them to access guidance from seasoned instructors and fellow faculty members by engaging in conversations, seeking advice of processing teaching challenges, and reflecting on their teaching practices within diverse disciplinary contexts. By interacting with mentors who have diverse backgrounds and experiences, they can gain fresh
perspectives and insights that may not be readily available within their own departments. This exchange of ideas fosters a collaborative learning environment where successful teaching strategies from various disciplines can be shared and adapted to suit different teaching contexts. This would cultivate adaptability, enabling department heads to respond effectively to changes in educational trends. The enhanced collaboration skills gained from these interactions facilitate teamwork and knowledge-sharing within the department, fostering a culture of continuous learning and professional development. Overall, these experiences help department heads to be proactive, resourceful, and forward-thinking learning leaders who can inspire and support their teams in achieving educational excellence.

**Implication of the Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework in Chapter 2 provides guidance for understanding the roles of department heads in leading teaching and learning within academic units. It outlines key concepts and relationships that help researchers and practitioners navigate the complex landscape of teaching and learning within the higher education context. By outlining specific roles and functions, the framework helps universities evaluate whether department heads are held accountable for their contributions to educational excellence. The framework also encourages department heads to engage in reflective practice and self-assessment by evaluating the implications of their leadership actions, seeking feedback from stakeholders, and refining their approaches to meet the evolving needs of faculty members and students. From a research perspective, the framework can serve as a foundation for research inquiry into department heads’ leadership of teaching and learning. Researchers can use the framework to guide their studies, develop research questions, and conceptualize hypotheses related to educational leadership.

**The Tension between Policy and Practice**

The policy and practice of department heads generally appear aligned, but there were some areas where department heads’ experience differs from policy framework. Many of the policy
documents represent employers’ expectations for department heads, which might be different from the practice and expectations of faculty members. For example, while the university policy suggests that department heads have power to establish extra regulations for facilitating teaching and learning activities, department heads expressed their concern that they need to respect faculty academic freedom and foster a collegial atmosphere within departments. Policy documents encourage department heads to motivate faculty members to pursue teaching excellence, but the expectation department heads placed on faculty members was maintaining minimum level of teaching quality due to the university research-oriented mission. The evaluation of teaching is equal to that in research in policy documents for faculty promotion and tenure, whereas department heads in this study appeared to value research over teaching. The majority of the policy documents analyzed in this study were administrative policies. Department head practices were also directed by academic values and priorities as articulated in the faculty association collective agreement. The source of the tension between policy and practice might be attributed to subtle differences in the interpretations of policy in the context university governance between academic and administrative priorities.

Closing Comments

Embarking the journey of this study, I have shown a keen interest in investigating the status and function of department heads within Canadian research-intensive universities, particularly in understanding whether their position aligns with my initial assumptions. After being immersed in literature reviews, I gained a range of insights from extant studies pertaining to the role and tensions of department heads and their impact on students, faculty, staff, and the university. More importantly, I was surprised that little is known about how department heads lead teaching and learning for their academic units. Having experienced an academic journey in higher education myself, I, as a professional beginning a career in educational administration, felt the urgency to examine this overlooked aspect of educational leadership, aimed at enhancing student academic performance and promoting faculty instructional effectiveness across campus.

To achieve this objective, I investigated department heads’ perspectives, values, and
strategies using document analysis and interviews. A series of teaching and learning documents were reviewed, equipping me with a framework through which I could analyze and understand the intricacies of instructional supervision, curriculum development, and academic conflict resolution within university settings. Despite fragmentary research investigating these aspects individually, there has been a lack of empirical studies systematically exploring the role of department heads as learning leaders in Canadian higher education institutions. By addressing this gap, I interviewed eight department heads, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities and challenges inherent in departmental leadership of teaching and learning, ultimately informing policy and practice for increasing education outcomes in the university.

At the outset of my study, I had predicted that I may be confronted with potential challenges in carrying out the study and completing the thesis. Firstly, obtaining access to relevant documents can prove to be a formidable task. Navigating through institutional bureaucracies, securing permissions, and overcoming potential barriers to information disclosure required persistence and strategic negotiation. Email communication is not as straightforward as a face-to-face meeting, and since administrators may receive a high volume of emails daily, I anticipated it would be challenging for my participants to prioritize and respond to every message promptly. As a result, emails from individuals outside their immediate unit may not receive the same level of attention or responsiveness. This lesson I learned in this scenario was valuable when recruiting interview participants, which highly enhanced my working efficiency. Secondly, I realized that participants had some hesitancy to talk about their role in leading for learning as they primarily perceived themselves as administrators instead of instructional leaders—a distinction from the dynamics observed in PK-12 sectors. I empathized with their potential discomfort, especially when facing unfamiliar topics such as leadership styles in supporting teaching and learning and their understanding of EDI principles impeding their ability to provide detailed information and engage meaningfully in discussions.

In comprehending how department head leadership influences faculty pedagogical
development and student learning experience, the understandings of this position might be improved to emphasize the important role of department heads in the learning program. According to the findings, heads appeared to be significant individuals in supporting, facilitating, and leading faculty teaching quality. By addressing feedback from students and peers, satisfying student learning needs in curriculum development, and facilitating departmental collaboration, heads foster inclusion and collegiality within the department. Participants in this study also revealed the limited resource, budget, and faculty members for teaching assignments and curriculum development. The study proposed that department heads rethink thoroughly the content, purpose, and effectiveness of their educational practices in serving students. The findings unveiled in this study suggest that some discussions remained superficial, therefore, the stakeholders such as university administrators and policy makers need to consider whether the teaching and curriculum is sufficiently resourced and that department heads are adequately prepared to enact leadership practices that can lead to better teaching and learning experiences for faculty members and students.

Finally, I would like to thank my participants who gave of their time to participate in this study. Department heads’ roles are complex and extremely busy. I am grateful for their willingness to contribute to this research and for their support of graduate student research.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Course Certificate of Completion

Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Yu Zan

successfully completed the Course on Research Ethics based on the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2: CORE 2022)

Certificate # 0000885794  26 December, 2022
Appendix B: Certificate of Approval

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CERTIFICATION
The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans TCPS 2 (2022). The University of Saskatchewan Beh-REB has reviewed the above-named project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this project, and for ensuring that the authorized project is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the current approved protocol. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS
Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures must be reported to the Chair through submission of an amendment for Beh-REB consideration in advance of implementation.

To remain in compliance, a status report (renewal of closure form) must be submitted to the Beh-REB Chair for consideration within one month prior to the current expiry date each year the project remains open, and upon project completion. Please refer to the Research Ethics Office website for further instructions and current forms.

Digitally Approved by Pammla Petrucka
Chair, Behavioural Research Ethics Board
University of Saskatchewan
Appendix C: Recruitment Letter

Dear Department Head,

My name is Yu Zan, a master’s student in the Department of Educational Administration in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan. I am conducting a study for my thesis, Leading for Learning: Unveiling the Role of Department Heads at a Canadian Research-Intensive University. I am actively seeking to collect data from department heads who are leading academic units for learning at a Canadian university. Your involvement in my research would be highly valuable and greatly appreciated.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore your role as a department head in leading teaching and learning at a Canadian university. An exploratory case study will be conducted, where your real experiences with respect to supporting faculty’s instructional effectiveness, mentoring new faculty, developing curriculum and programs, using background and experiences that inform your practices in support of teaching and learning, and utilizing student and peer feedback for the improvement of teaching will be thoroughly investigated.

If you agree to participate, I will kindly request a one-on-one interview through Zoom at a time that is convenient for you. The interview is expected to last 40 to 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded with your permission to ensure accurate documentation of your responses. You are encouraged to share your point of view freely, and all information you provided will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous in the final report. Also, you can withdraw at any time without providing any justification for your decision.

I believe that your valuable knowledge and experiences would greatly contribute to the richness and depth of this study. Your participation would help us gain pivotal insights into your views, values, and experiences as a department head when leading for learning, and how your leadership impacts the professional satisfaction of faculty and the academic and professional accomplishments of students.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board (# 4360).

Thank you for your time and support for this study. If you have any questions with respect to participating in the research, please contact us without hesitation:

Dr. Paul Newton (Supervisor) or Yu Zan
Professor M.Ed. Student
Department of Educational Administration Department of Educational Administration
University of Saskatchewan University of Saskatchewan
Phone: +1(306) 966-7620 Email: wjk672@usask.ca
Email: paul.newton@usask.ca
Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Educational Administration

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled: Leading for Learning: Unveiling the Role of Department Heads at a Canadian Research-Intensive University

Student Researcher(s):
Yu Zan
M.Ed. Student
Department of Educational Administration
University of Saskatchewan
Email: wjk672@usask.ca

Supervisor:
Dr. Paul Newton
Professor & Department Head
Department of Educational Administration
University of Saskatchewan
Phone: +1(306) 966-7620
Email: paul.newton@usask.ca

Purpose and Objective of the Research:
The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the function and role of department heads in leading teaching and learning at a Canadian university. This study will be an exploratory case study, where department heads’ real experiences regarding supporting faculty members’ instructional effectiveness, mentoring new faculty, developing curriculum and programs, using background and experiences that inform their practices in support of teaching and learning, and utilizing student and peer feedback for the improvement of teaching are thoroughly investigated. The study will be conducive to gaining a better understanding of how university department heads contribute to teaching and learning in their academic unit, thereby maximizing the professional satisfaction of faculty and the academic and professional accomplishments of students.

Procedures:
I intend to explore the real experiences of university department heads in leading teaching and learning activities for their academic units. The semi-structured interview will be conducted through Zoom with department heads. I will ask you several basic questions but also follow up the given responses with additional questions, probes, and comments that encourage you to explain your unique insights. The interview will be scheduled within university office hours, lasting 40 to 60 minutes.

Interviews will be recorded through the Zoom platform with your permission. You have the right to ask to turn off the recording any time without giving a reason at which time you will be asked if you wish to continue or if you wish to end your participation in the study and withdraw all data collected. The interview recording will be transcribed by the student researcher. Only the research team will have access to the audio recording.

After your interview, and before incorporating the data into the final report, you will have the chance to review the transcript of your interview. During this review, you can add, alter, or delete information to ensure the accuracy of the transcript. To indicate your agreement with the transcript, you will be provided with a transcript release form that you need to sign and return. If the researcher does not receive a signed copy of the form or an email confirming your agreement within two weeks, the transcript will be considered final as is. Also, pseudonyms will be assigned to both the participant and the institution in the transcripts to ensure anonymity.

You are welcome to inquire about any aspects of the study's procedures, objectives, or your involvement.

**Funded by:**
There is no funding for this study.

**Potential Risks:**
There are no known or anticipated risks for you to participate in this study. All your private information such as specific locations or demographic details will be held confidential. You are permitted to avoid answering questions that you are uncomfortable with.

**Potential Benefits:**
- This study will have practical implications for university administrators, particularly for the department head who plays a pivotal role in enhancing teaching and learning quality. I will share a summary of the interpretation with you, which will be beneficial for comprehending how other colleagues address the issues of improving instructional effectiveness. This summary should be ready for distribution to participants by June 2024.
- You will not receive direct benefits from participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to filling literature gaps in the area of department heads supporting teaching and learning improvement practice within higher education settings.
- The insights derived from this study may inform educational policy, practice, and leadership development.
This study has implications for Canadian universities in dealing with social changes. The findings of this research may help academic units optimize organizational strategies by deepening an understanding of how department heads support teaching and learning thereby responding to political, economic, and cultural changes.

**Compensation:**
Participants in this research will not receive any form of compensation.

**Confidentiality:**
- An individual interview will be conducted through a private Zoom link. Only the student researcher and supervisor will know your identity. I will give you a pseudonym in the procedure of data collection and report to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. While direct quotations may be used in the report, all trait information that potentially exposes your identities will be removed or redacted manually.
- While the data from this study will be disseminated through my Master’s thesis, published in academic journals and reports, and presented at conferences or public meetings. The data will be reported in a summarized form so that your identity cannot be identified based on the reported information. In addition, the consent forms and all email correspondence will be stored separately from the data. Therefore, it will be unlikely to connect a name with any given response.
- You are allowed to edit, review, or remove information for transcripts that you prefer not to include in the study's final results. Your input and preferences regarding the content of the transcripts will be respected.
- All recordings of interviews will be stored securely and only the principal investigator and I will have access to the recordings.
- To further maintain confidentiality, I will transcribe the recordings myself.

**Storage of Data:**
- The data gathered will be temporarily stored on my U of S managed laptop, which is secured with a password. Access to this laptop will be limited to the student researcher, ensuring that participants’ data will not be accessed by others.
- I will digitally transfer the data to the designated University of Saskatchewan (Usask) OneDrive account owned by my supervisor. This password-protected platform will serve as the long-term storage and backup for the data. Only my supervisor and I will have access to them. Once the study is complete, the PI will remove the student researcher access to the OneDrive file.
- Once uploaded the data to Usask OneDrive, I will proceed to permanently delete all electronic data from my laptop. This step is taken to ensure that no traces of the data remain on the laptop and prevent any possibility of recovery.
- I will maintain a master list that links pseudonyms to participants’ actual identities. However, to ensure confidentiality and data protection, this master list will be stored
separately from the collected data. Additionally, any files that contain oral consent will be stored separately from the research data. Once the data is collected and analyzed, the master list will be deleted.

- After completing the study, all data collected for this research will be stored by the PI for five years post-publication and then will be securely destroyed beyond recovery.

**Right to Withdraw:**

- Your participation is voluntary and you can refuse to answer those questions that you are uncomfortable with. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason at any time without explanation or penalty. Moreover, your participation or non-participation will not affect your position or how you will be treated.
- Your decision to withdraw will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and respect. Your voluntary participation in the study grants you the freedom to choose whether to be involved or not, while ensuring the confidentiality of the research process.
- Should you wish to withdraw, contact Yu Zan at wjk672@usask.ca. If you decide to withdraw from the study, all data collected from you will be promptly deleted from the research project and subsequently destroyed. Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply for two weeks following your approval of the transcripts. After the expiration of two weeks, it is possible that some form of data analysis will have taken place and it may not be possible to withdraw your data.

**Follow up:**

If any information arising from this research is needed, please kindly reach out to Yu Zan via email at wjk672@usask.ca. The findings of this study will be shared with all participants via email by approximately June, 2024.

**Questions or Concerns:**

This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office: ethics.office@usask.ca; 306-966-2975; out of town participants may call toll free 1-888-966-2975.

**Consent:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

_________________________  ______________________  ____________
Name of Participant               Signature               Date
**Verbal Consent**

I read and explained this consent form to the participant before receiving the participant’s consent, and the participant had knowledge of its contents and appeared to understand it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Participant</th>
<th>Researcher’s Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

* A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher (Yu Zan).*
Appendix E: Interview Guide and Questions

Thank you for accepting to participate in this study and sharing your experiences and practices in leading your academic unit to improve teaching and learning. The purpose of this study is to explore the function and role of department heads in leading teaching and learning at a Canadian university. This study will investigate your real experiences regarding supporting faculty’s teaching assignments, mentoring new faculty, developing curriculum and programs, using your background and experiences to inform the practices that support teaching and learning, and utilizing student and peer feedback for the improvement of instructional effectiveness.

I will kindly remind you of some key points for this interview:
- Your participation is voluntary.
- You have the right to withdraw at any point with no penalty; however, if you withdraw after the beginning of data analysis, data reporting, and dissemination of findings which will be two weeks after the approval of transcripts, it will not be possible to remove your data from the analysis.
- The interview is expected to last 40 to 60 minutes.
- You can decline to answer questions that you are uncomfortable with.
- I will record the interview with your permission.
- You can ask me to stop the recording at any point without giving a reason.
- Your identity will be kept confidential, and your real names will be replaced with pseudonyms.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Background Questions:
1. How long have you been a department head in the current university?
   - 0-3 years
   - 4-7 years
   - 8-10 years
   - More than 10 years

2. What’s your age?
   - 35 or under
   - 36-45
   - 46-55
   - 56 or greater

3. How long have you been in your current position in the current university?
   - 0-3 years
   - 4-7 years
   - 8-10 years
   - More than 10 years
4. What is your number of years in administration position in the current university?
   - 0-3 years □
   - 4-7 years □
   - 8-10 years □
   - More than 10 years □

5. What is your teaching duration in the current university?
   - 0-3 years □
   - 4-7 years □
   - 8-10 years □
   - More than 10 years □

Central Question:
In what ways do university department heads lead learning for their academic units?

Sub-Questions:
Part 1: Support and Development of Faculty Teaching Practice
1. In what ways do department heads support faculty in developing their teaching practice?
   a) What types of materials and resources do you make available to faculty members to help them in enhancing their teaching strategies and methods?
   b) Have you ever facilitated collaboration among faculty members to support the development of their teaching practice? Can you describe the process?
2. How do department heads mentor new faculty to enhance their teaching skills?
   a) What specific guidance and support do you provide to new faculty members regarding their teaching techniques and approaches?
   b) Are there any formal mentoring programs in place to support new faculty members in their teaching development, and if so, what are their critical elements and goals?
   c) How do you evaluate the progress and effectiveness of the mentoring process for new faculty members' teaching improvement?
3. What background and experiences do you have that inform your practices in support of teaching and learning?
   a) Tell me your academic background and teaching-related experience (eg. pedagogy development experience and teaching training experience) that have influenced you in supporting faculty’s instructional effectiveness.
4. How do department heads use student and peer feedback for the improvement of teaching?
   What processes are in place to work with faculty to address feedback in teaching?
   a) What specific guidelines or criteria have you utilized to assess and analyze student and peer feedback for teaching improvement?
   b) Are there formal procedures or platforms in place for faculty and you to discuss and address feedback received from students and peers?
   c) How do you encourage faculty members to reflect on feedback and support them in implementing adjustments or improvements in teaching?
Part 2: Assignment of Teaching
5. How do department heads consider the assignment of teaching? What considerations are important for developing a faculty member’s assignment to teach?
   a) How do you take into account the workload of faculty to ensure equitable distribution of teaching assignments among faculty members?
   b) How do you integrate faculty members' previous teaching and research experience, qualifications, and professional development goals into their teaching assignments?
   c) What processes are in place for faculty members to provide input or express preferences regarding their teaching assignments?
   d) What factors do you consider most when assigning teaching duties to faculty members?

Part 3: Curriculum Development
6. How do department heads initiate and oversee curriculum and program development?
   a) Describe an experience in which you designed and developed a course or program.
   b) Have you ever cooperated with faculty to design or revise the curriculum? If so, in what ways?
   c) How do you ensure the curriculum can meet the diverse demands of students, pedagogical practices, and current educational trends and objectives?
Appendix F: Transcript Release Form

Research Ethics Boards (Behavioural and Biomedical)
TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM

Title: Leading for Learning: Unveiling the Role of Department Heads at a Canadian Research-Intensive University

I, ____________________________________________, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with Yu Zan. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Yu Zan to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

_________________________________________  _________________
Name of Participant                              Date

_________________________________________  _______________________
Signature of Participant                         Signature of Researcher