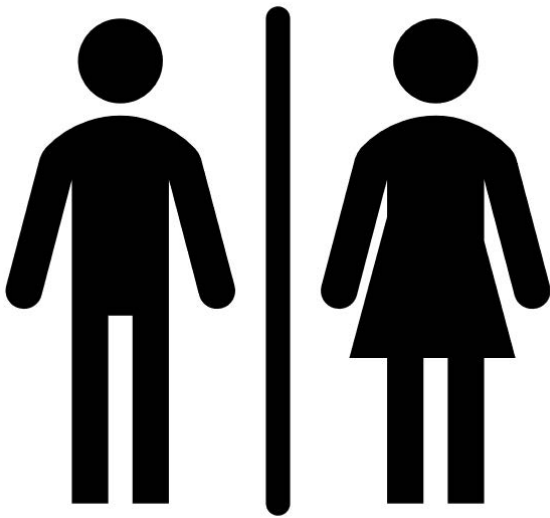


Male Managers, Female Teachers

The South African case of gender imbalances in school leadership and management

Gabrielle Wills & Bianca Böhmer (10 July 2023)



Globally, there are well-documented gender imbalances in education in the appointment of school managers. South Africa is no exception in this regard.ⁱ Previous research using South African payroll data^{ii-iv} and large-scale surveys^{i,v} has highlighted the extent to which women are underrepresented in school leadership positions.

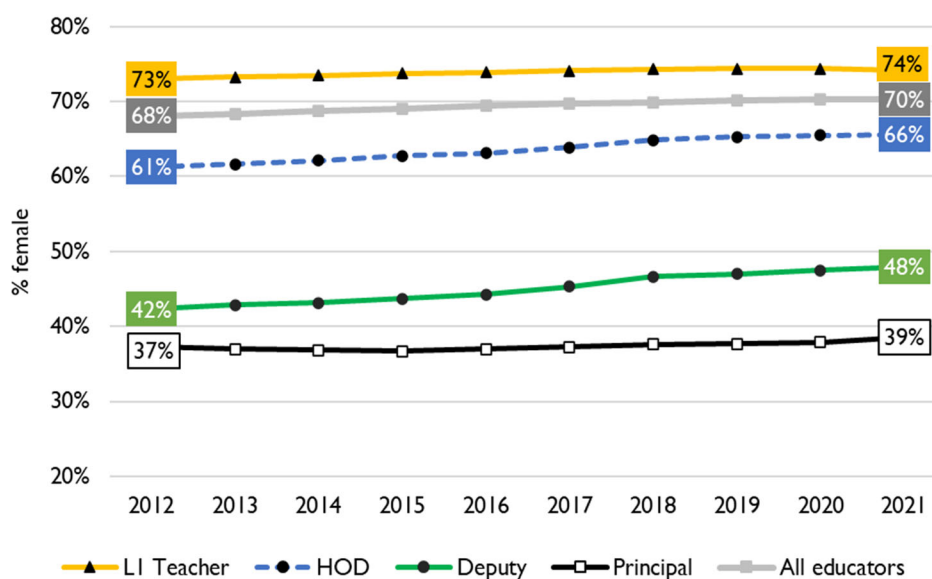
In this note, we use anonymised public payroll data from 2012 to 2021 to provide updated evidence on persistent gender imbalances in school management positions in South African public schools. We also examine gender gaps in school management by comparing the percentage of educators that are women to the percentage of heads of department (HODs), deputy principals or principals that are women.

At a high level, we find that in 2021, 70% of educators in South Africa were women, while only 39% of principals were women. There has been practically no improvement in the principal gender gap in the last decade.

In this note, we highlight five key findings emerging from the analysis.

1. Gender imbalances exist at all school management levels but are very large and persistent at the principal level.

Figure 1: Percentage of all educators, teachers (Level 1) and school managers that are female, PERSAL 2012-2021



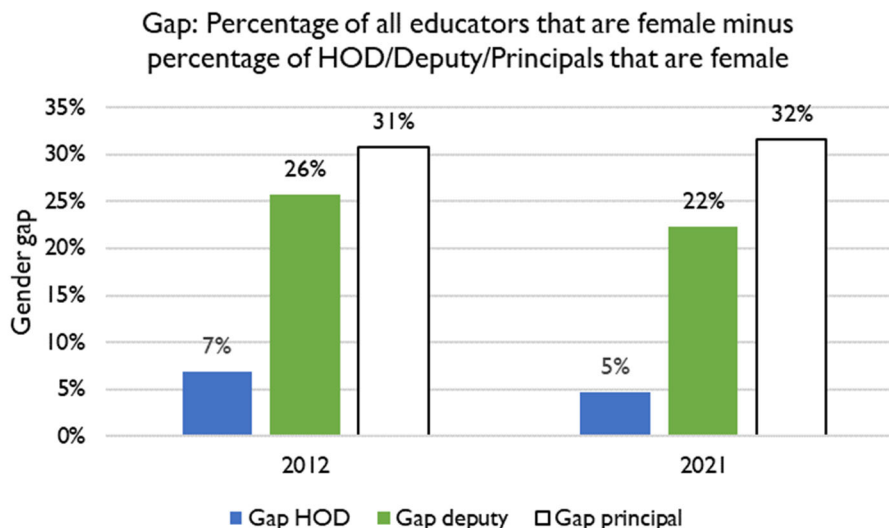
Source: Anonymised PERSAL data (2012 to 2021). Only educators that are level 1 teachers, HODs, deputy principals or principals are included. ECD practitioners, examination reviewers, ABET teachers and TVET lecturers were also removed. The sample size for each year ranges from 383 548 to 397 596.

In 2021, 70% of all publicly paid educators¹ were women. Gender equality in school promotion would be achieved if the same percentage of school management posts were filled by women i.e. 70% of school managers were women. Unfortunately, the preferential appointment of men into management positions, particularly principal posts, has remained firmly entrenched in the South African education system over the past decade (see Figure 1).

¹ In this analysis 'All educators' only refers to level 1 teachers, HODs, deputy principals and principals. Other educators including office-based educators and education specialists are not considered.

In 2021, women were severely underrepresented in senior management posts. Just 48% of deputy principals were women, and only 39% of principals were women. The gender gap in favour of men at the deputy principal level has reduced by 4 percentage points from 26% in 2012 to 22% in 2021 (see Figure 2). However, the gender gap at the principal level remained stubbornly static for over a decade at around 31-32 percentage points, despite this period reflecting a window of opportunity to rectify gender imbalances in principal appointments with a wave of principal retirements occurring over this period. Relative to 2004, when 34% of principals were womenⁱⁱⁱ there has only been a 5 percentage point increase to 39% in 2021 in the percentage of principals that are women.

Figure 2: Gender gap in public school management, PERSAL 2012 & 2021



Source: Anonymised PERSAL data (2012 to 2021). Only educators that are level 1 teachers, HODs, deputy principals or principals are included. ECD practitioners, examination reviewers, ABET teachers and TVET lecturers were also removed. The sample size for each year ranges from 383 548 to 397 596.

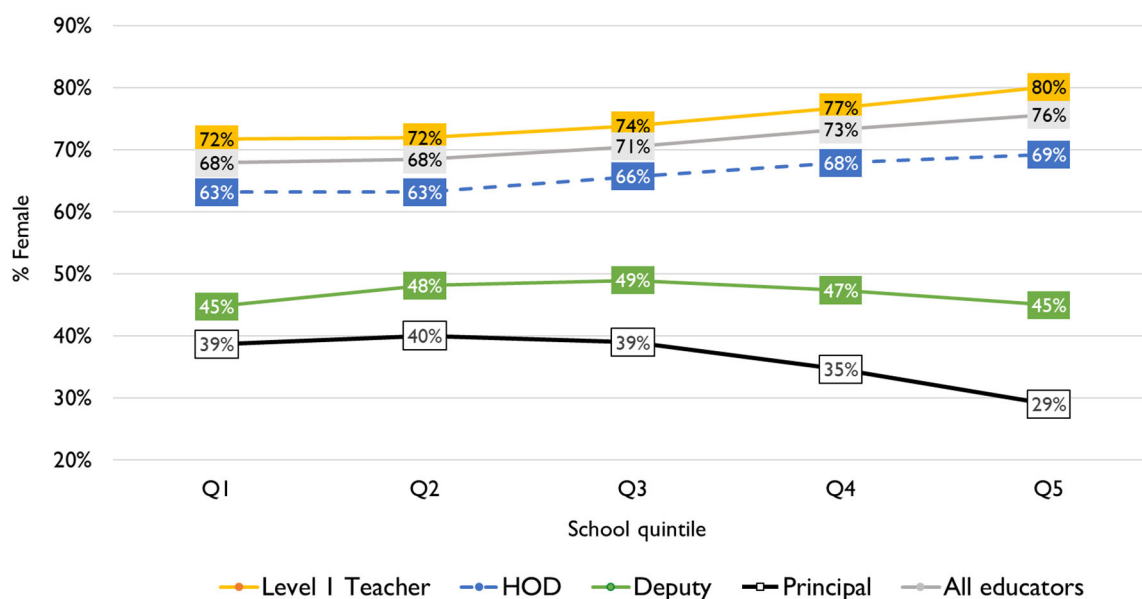
2. In schools, women are better represented in middle management than senior management posts, reflecting improvements in gender equality in middle management.

In 2012, 61% of middle managers, known as heads of department (HODs), were women increasing to 66% in 2021, as seen in Figure 1. This reflects a reduction in the gender gap of HODs to all educators from 7 percentage points in 2012 to 5 percentage points in 2021 – a substantial shift. The deputy principal gender gap also narrowed from 26 to 22 percentage points. With slightly more women represented in middle-management and deputy principal positions in 2021 compared to 2012, this improves the representation of women in a pool of future applicants for principal posts. This is a move in the right direction.

3. Gender imbalances in principal appointments in 2021 were most pronounced in the wealthiest Quintile 5 schools but have improved since 2012.

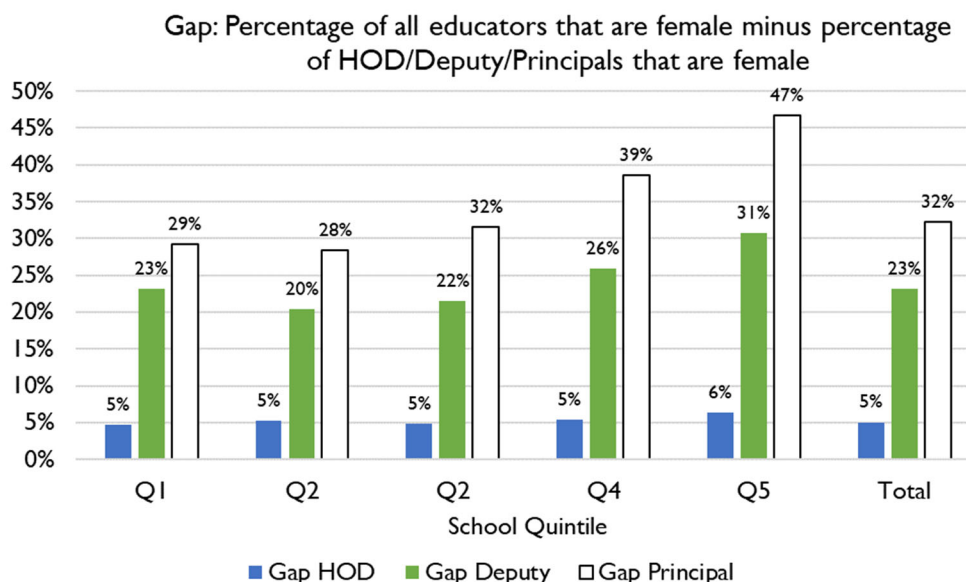
Women are particularly underrepresented in deputy or principal management posts in Quintile 5 schools. This is seen in Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3: Percentage of teachers and school managers that are female, by school quintile, PERSAL 2021



Source: Anonymised PERSAL data from 2021. Only 396 821 educators that are level 1 teachers, HODs, deputy principals or principals are included. ECD practitioners, examination reviewers, ABET teachers and TVET lecturers were also removed.

Figure 4: Gender gap in public school management across school Quintiles, PERSAL 2021



Source: Anonymised PERSAL data from 2021. Only 396 821 educators that are level 1 teachers, HODs, deputy principals or principals are included. ECD practitioners, examination reviewers, ABET teachers and TVET lecturers were also removed.

Across the school quintiles, women comprise a larger percentage of all educators in Quintile 5 schools compared to Quintile 1-3 or even Quintile 4 schools. About 76% of all educators in Quintile 5 schools were women in 2021 while 68%-71% of educators in Quintile 1-3 schools were women. Yet in 2021 just 29% of principals in Quintile 5 schools are women. The gender gap in favour of men in principal

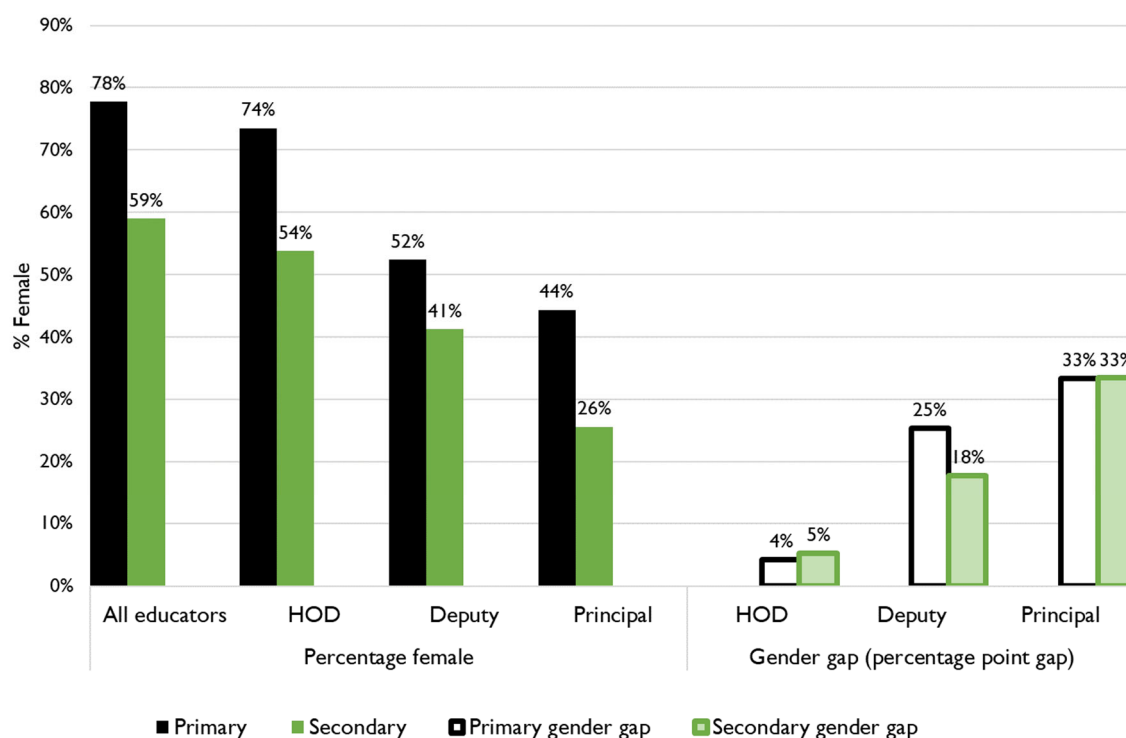
positions is as much as 47 percentage points in Quintile 5 schools compared to 28-32 percentage points in Quintile 1-3 schools (Figure 4). At the deputy principal level, the gender gap is also larger in Quintile 5 schools compared to Quintiles 1-4. At the middle-management level, there are few differences in gender gaps across school quintiles.

Although gender gaps in senior management in 2021 were larger in Quintile 5 schools relative to Quintile 1-4 schools, Quintile 5 schools have demonstrated relatively larger improvements in gender equality in school management. This is reflected in a four-percentage point reduction in Quintile 5 schools in HOD and principal gender gaps between 2012 and 2021 (see Table 1 and 2 in the addendum).

4. Gender imbalances in management appointments are slightly *more* pronounced in primary schools than in secondary schools.

Even though a larger percentage of school managers in primary schools are women compared to secondary schools, there is somewhat *less* gender inequality in school promotions at the deputy principal level in primary schools compared to secondary schools (see Figure 5). This is possible because a larger percentage of educators in primary schools (78%) are women than in secondary schools (59%). Gender gaps at the HOD and principal levels are similar across primary and secondary schools, but the deputy principal gender gap is larger in primary schools. There is a gender gap at the deputy level of 25 percentage points in primary schools compared to 18 percentage points in secondary schools. Even though a much larger percentage of principals in primary schools are women compared to secondary schools (44% vs 26%), the principal gender gap in 2021 was the same across these school phases.

Figure 5: Percentage of all educators and school managers that are female in primary and secondary schools (gender gaps also shown), PERSAL 2021

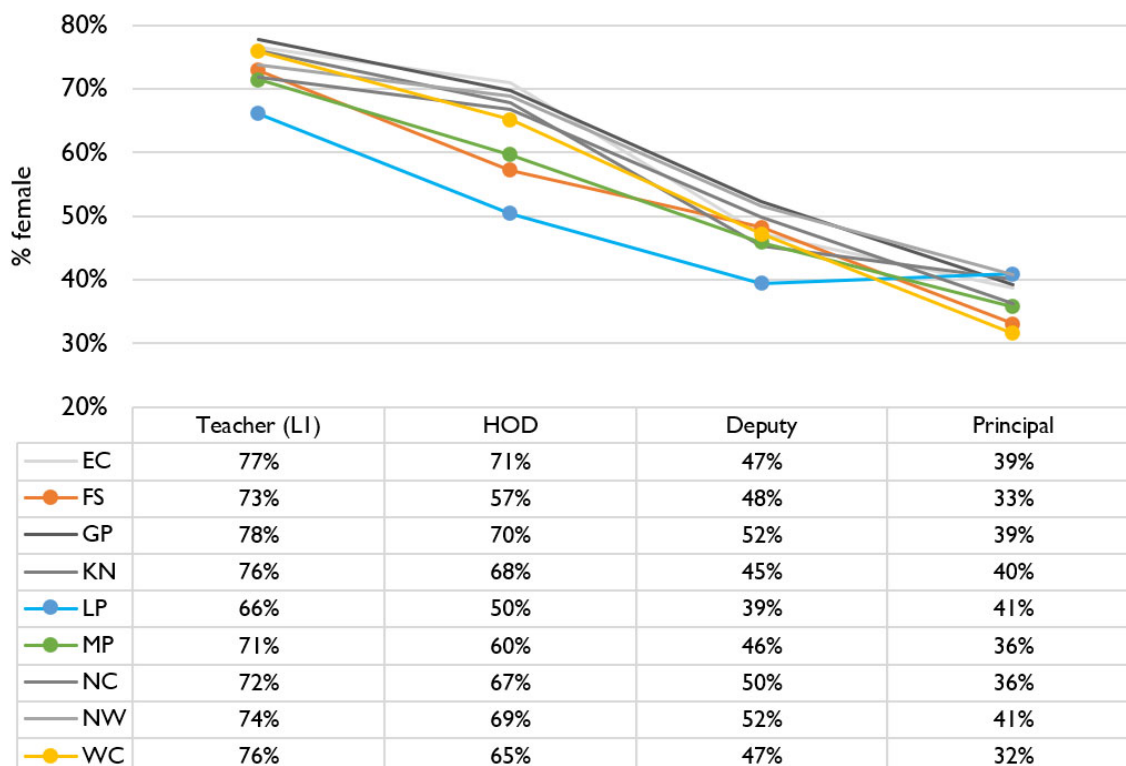


Source: Anonymised PERSAL data from 2021. Only 396 821 educators that are level 1 teachers, HODs, deputy principals or principals are included. ECD practitioners, examination reviewers, ABET teachers and TVET lecturers were removed. Primary schools are those with component type 61 and secondary schools 63. Intermediate schools, combined schools (employing 6% of educators) and other special schools are not shown here.

5. Female representation in school management is relatively similar across provinces, with some exceptions.

In 2021, across provinces 66-78% of level 1 teachers were female. Relative to these level 1 teacher positions, the decline in the representation of women in management posts is quite similar across provinces with some exceptions (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Percentage of teachers and school managers that are female by province, PERSAL 2021



Source: Anonymised PERSAL data from 2021. Only 396 821 educators that are level 1 teachers, HODs, deputy principals or principals are included. ECD practitioners, examination reviewers, ABET teachers and TVET lecturers were removed.

The representation of women in senior management positions is worst in the Western Cape. They have one of the highest percentages of female level 1 teachers (76%) and the lowest percentage of principals (32%) that are female. The principal gender gap is 40 percentage points in the Western Cape compared to between 22-36 percentage points in eight other provinces.

Limpopo stands out as an interesting exception; they have the highest percentage of male educators in all provinces (63% female compared to 71% female nationally) and the highest percentage of female principals (41%) in the country. Conversely, Limpopo has the lowest percentage of female HODs (50%), with the highest gender gap at the HOD level at 13 percentage points. Promotions into middle management in Limpopo have been severely restricted or stopped entirely² over the last decade due to budget considerations.^v This large change to the school management structure in the province is likely a significant contributing factor to low HOD but high principal female representation in the province.

² The number of HODs in Limpopo decreased by 38% from 2012 to 2021 and the number of Deputy principals halved over this period.

There are also significant gender gaps at the HOD level in the Free State (11 percentage points) and Mpumalanga (8 percentage points).³

Moving forward

Significant action needs to be taken if gender equality is to be improved in the promotion of teachers into school management positions, particularly at the principal level. By international comparison, the principal gender gap in favour of men in 2018 was larger in South Africa than the average across OECD countriesⁱ and the average across other Southern and Eastern African countries participating in SACMEQ.^{vii}

The main promotion opportunity available within the education system is an appointment into a school management team (SMT) position. Gender inequality in appointments to these positions reduces the available promotion opportunities for women and has implications for gender equality in pay in the education system. SMT appointments are associated with significant pay increases (e.g. the total pay of an HOD is on average 35% higher than that of a level 1 teacher, and when a teacher becomes an HOD, they receive an immediate pay increase of 20% on average).^{viii}

Gender inequalities occur despite existing affirmative action policies that should give preference to women over men in selection processes in management appointments. However, the law does not tackle the stereotypes and practices of discrimination women experience in the workplace and at home.^{ix} It is necessary to understand and target the reasons for why gender imbalances in school management occur and persist. Is the problem that proportionally fewer women than men apply for management positions, and/or is there discrimination in the selection process for school managers? Both issues are likely at play. Gustafsson (2017) identifies that in all provinces women are less likely to be appointed as HODs even after controlling for their age, race, experience, the gender of the principal, union affiliation and indicators of quality as represented in Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) scores.^{viii}

Four recommendations are provided for tackling the gender inequality issue in school management, requiring efforts and collaboration across various stakeholders:

- i. **Systematic data collection to track who applies, who is shortlisted and who is finally appointed to promotion posts.** This data, which should be collected at a provincial level, could provide key information to understand the source of the gender imbalance in school management hiring. It also would provide a useful metric to monitor irregular appointments in general and problems in implementing existing affirmative action policy, favouring the hiring of women.
- ii. **Annual reporting to the national Department of Basic Education (DBE).** Provincial education departments should report on these metrics to the DBE on an annual basis, identifying the number and proportion of women that apply and those that are appointed to posts within each province.

³ This may be because of school rationalisation (closing large numbers of small, largely rural schools) that has taken place over the last decade, which would have influenced promotion patterns and reduced the number of promotion posts available.

- iii. **Academic research on gendered cultural factors affecting the hiring of school managers.** Qualitative work is needed to understand what factors are contributing to gender discrimination in the selection of candidates for promotion positions. Additionally, research is needed to understand what factors inhibit female teachers' decisions to apply for promotion positions.^x Which gendered cultural factors substantially impact the implementation of the anti-discriminatory mandate of the law?^{ix} Which gendered cultural factors substantially impact women's sense of legitimacy as potential school leaders?

- iv. **Female mentorship programmes to promote the growth of a pool of female teacher candidates for management positions.** Policies should target the preparation of female teachers for leadership through organised networking and formalised mentorship programmes, and targeted career development coaching.

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Addendum

Table 1: Percentage of teachers and school managers that are female, by school quintile over time, PERSAL 2012, 2016 and 2021

Quintile	Level I Teacher			HOD			Deputy			Principal		
	2012	2016	2021	2012	2016	2021	2012	2016	2021	2012	2016	2021
Quintile 1	71%	71%	72%	60%	61%	63%	42%	43%	45%	38%	38%	39%
Quintile 2	71%	72%	72%	60%	61%	63%	41%	43%	48%	36%	37%	40%
Quintile 3	72%	74%	74%	62%	64%	66%	44%	46%	49%	38%	37%	39%
Quintile 4	75%	76%	77%	62%	65%	68%	43%	44%	47%	28%	30%	35%
Quintile 5	79%	80%	80%	62%	65%	69%	38%	42%	45%	22%	24%	29%
Total	73%	74%	74%	61%	63%	65%	42%	44%	47%	35%	36%	38%

Source: Anonymised PERSAL data from 2012, 2016 and 2021. Only educators that are teachers, HODS, deputy principals or principals are included. ECD practitioners, examination reviewers, ABET teachers and TVET lecturers were removed. Sample sizes are 396 755 (2012), 385 041 (2016) and 396 821 (2021).

Table 2: Gender gap – percentage of all educators that are female minus percentage that are HOD/ Deputy Principals or Principals, PERSAL 2012 and 2021

Quintile	Gap HOD			Gap Deputy			Gap Principal		
	2012	2021	Change 2021-2012	2012	2021	Change 2021-2012	2012	2021	Change 2021-2012
Quintile 1	7%	5%	-2%	25%	23%	-1%	29%	29%	1%
Quintile 2	7%	5%	-1%	26%	20%	-5%	30%	28%	-2%
Quintile 3	6%	5%	-1%	24%	22%	-3%	31%	32%	1%
Quintile 4	9%	5%	-3%	27%	26%	-1%	42%	39%	-3%
Quintile 5	11%	6%	-4%	35%	31%	-4%	51%	47%	-4%
Total	7%	5%	-2%	26%	23%	-3%	33%	32%	0%

Notes: See Table 1.

Table 3: Percentage of teachers and school managers that are female by province, PERSAL 2012, 2016 & 2021

Province	Level I Teacher			HOD			Deputy			Principal		
	2012	2016	2021	2012	2016	2021	2012	2016	2021	2012	2016	2021
EC	76%	77%	77%	70%	70%	71%	46%	43%	47%	42%	40%	39%
FS	71%	73%	73%	49%	53%	57%	38%	45%	48%	38%	31%	33%
GP	77%	78%	78%	66%	68%	70%	48%	51%	52%	34%	35%	39%
KN	74%	75%	76%	66%	67%	68%	42%	43%	45%	42%	41%	40%
LP	64%	65%	66%	47%	48%	50%	33%	33%	39%	29%	33%	41%
MP	70%	71%	71%	56%	59%	60%	43%	45%	46%	36%	35%	36%
NC	73%	74%	72%	59%	64%	67%	39%	41%	50%	32%	33%	36%
NW	76%	75%	74%	63%	66%	69%	45%	47%	52%	39%	38%	41%
WC	73%	75%	76%	59%	60%	65%	40%	43%	47%	29%	29%	32%
Total	73%	74%	74%	61%	63%	66%	42%	44%	48%	37%	37%	39%

Source: Anonymised PERSAL data from 2012, 2016 and 2021. Only educators that are teachers, HODS, deputy principals or principals are included. ECD practitioners, examination reviewers, ABET teachers and TVET lecturers were removed. Sample sizes are 396 755 (2012), 385 041 (2016) and 396 821 (2021).