Motivation and Change-Efficacy of Teachers in the Adoption of Literacy Interventions

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Abstract

This paper examines factors influencing teacher readiness to adopt a literacy intervention, *Inkhulumo* (adapted Quality Talk), in a rural South African high school. Guided by the Active Implementation Framework and Weiner's Theory of Organisational Readiness for Change, the research focuses on the exploration and installation stages of implementation, emphasising the interplay between teacher motivation and change-efficacy. An integrative mixed-method design combined structured classroom observations, participatory sessions, interviews, and document analysis. Findings reveal that teacher motivation was driven by recognised student literacy needs, shared stakeholder acknowledgment, perceived intervention appropriateness, perceived academic and life benefits. Change-efficacy was initially strengthened by professional qualifications, teaching experience, prior collaborative projects, leadership support, and collegial planning, but fluctuated when practical challenges arose during installation. The results highlight that while strong motivation is necessary for adoption, sustaining implementation in challenged contexts requires reinforcing teacher efficacy through targeted professional development, peer collaboration, and ongoing leadership engagement. These findings contribute to informing intervention design and developing contextually relevant intervention strategies for improving literacy outcomes in LMICs.

Keywords

Implementation science; literacy intervention; pre-implementation phase; low- and middle-income country; challenged space; teacher motivation; change-efficacy

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1. Introduction

Challenged educational contexts are characterised by systemic barriers that prevent equitable access to quality education. These barriers often occur in regions experiencing political instability, inadequate infrastructure, and limited educational resources [UNESCO, 2018]. In low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), such as in South Africa, these barriers are particularly acute in rural schools. Socioeconomic disparities exacerbate these barriers, resulting in underfunded schools, overcrowded classrooms, and a shortage of qualified teachers [Spaull, 2022]. Students in such educational environments frequently have limited access to technology-enhanced learning [Adeleye, Eden, Adeniyi, 2024]. Linguistic diversity and inconsistencies in policy implementation further reduce access to quality education, particularly where the language of instruction differs from the student's home language [Heugh, 2021]. As a result, educational outcomes remain low, with large proportions of students in these contexts remaining functionally illiterate [World Bank et al., 2022].

Evidence-based literacy interventions have demonstrated potential to improve students' foundational skills in such contexts in LMICs [Kim, Lee, Zuilkowski, 2020]. However, the gap between research and practice persists, with many teachers continuing to rely on rote learning strategies that do not adequately develop comprehension or higher-order thinking [Kim, Lee, Zuilkowski, 2020; Mlachila, Moeletsi, 2019]. The successful adoption and implementation of evidence-based literacy interventions often depend on the readiness of teachers and schools to integrate them into practice. Readiness, as described by Weiner [2009], is a shared psychological state consisting of two elements: motivation and change-efficacy.

This paper looks at the factors that influence teacher readiness in the adoption of Quality Talk, a structured approach to small-group, text-based discussion designed to improve comprehension [Croninger et al., 2017]. Quality Talk was culturally and contextually adapted for use in a rural, South African high school in partnership with local teachers and termed Inkhulumo (siSwati for 'talk'). The paper poses the following question: Which factors influence the adoption of a literacy intervention by teachers during pre-implementation (exploration and installation) stages in a challenged context such as rural South Africa?

While research has identified the importance of readiness for intervention adoption and sustainability [Domitrovich et al., 2015; Hunter, Bierman, 2021] a gap remains in understanding how teacher motivation and change-efficacy influence the adoption of literacy interventions in challenged contexts, such as rural South Africa. By addressing the research question, the paper aims to inform the design of implementation strategies that ensure evidence-based practices are not only adopted but also sustained in challenged educational contexts, thereby improving student outcomes.

Implementation science provides a conceptual framework for understanding how evidence-based practices (EBP) are integrated into educational settings [Humphrey et al., 2016; Nilsen, 2015]. In particular, this paper draws on the Active Implementation Framework, which views implementation as a dynamic, multi-phase process influenced by the characteristics of the intervention, the implementers, and the context. The implementation process consists of four stages: exploration, installation, initial implementation, and full implementation [Fixsen et al., 2005]. This paper focuses on the exploration and installation stages, critical stages in which implementation readiness is established [Domitrovich et al., 2008].

The exploration stage involves gathering relevant data and engaging with the key stakeholders. During this stage, stakeholders assess the need for an intervention, the fit or appropriateness of the intervention in addressing the need, and potential barriers and enablers for successful adoption and implementation [Fixsen et al., 2005]. While the installation stage focuses on how the intervention will be practically implemented [Fixsen, Blase, Van Dyke, 2019]. The key activities during this stage include creating the necessary infrastructure, developing capacities, and adapting the intervention for successful implementation [Hanson et al., 2016; Fixsen, Blase, Van Dyke, 2019]. Within the exploration and installation stages of implementation, teacher motivation establishes the initial commitment to adopt an intervention, while change-efficacy determines their confidence and capacity to translate that commitment into concrete instructional practices [Weiner, 2009].

Teacher motivation is central to the successful adoption of interventions. According to Weiner [2009], motivation reflects the belief among organisational members that a change is necessary, emphasising that collective recognition of the problem across stakeholders (teachers, school leaders, and students) fosters a shared sense of purpose, which in turn drives adoption. However, perceiving a need is insufficient unless the teacher believes the change is achievable, worthwhile, and beneficial to future student outcomes [Domitrovich et al., 2015; Merle et al., 2023]. Durlak and DuPre [2008] also include the teacher's assessment of the appropriateness of the intervention to address that need. Teachers are more likely to commit to interventions that align with their instructional goals [Domitrovich et al., 2015].

Change-efficacy refers to the collective belief that an intervention can be successfully implemented [Weiner, 2009]. Teacher change-efficacy is closely related to self-efficacy, which refers to teachers' confidence in their ability to implement an intervention successfully [Han, Weiss, 2005]. However, it is also a future-oriented belief about being able to implement the change in order to achieve a specific outcome [Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, 2001]. Change-efficacy, therefore, involves a perceived ability and support needed by the teachers to implement the intervention.

Teacher self-efficacy is shaped by formal educational background, qualifications and experience. Research consistently shows that teachers with content knowledge and understanding of linguistic processing show greater ability to integrate new instructional approaches [Dyssegaard, Egelund, Sommersel, 2017]. Furthermore, teachers who are committed to professional development are more likely to successfully implement the intervention [Ibid.].

In addition, prior experiences with interventions shape teachers' perceptions and openness to adopting new instructional approaches [Domitrovich et al., 2008]. Research suggests that teachers who have successfully implemented interventions in the past tend to have higher self-efficacy beliefs, which makes them more confident about adopting new interventions. Furthermore, positive early experiences of the intervention during initial implementation can increase the likelihood of sustained use [Lochman et al., 2015].

However, teacher change-efficacy is also shaped by collective change-efficacy, the perceived support available to implement an intervention successfully [Domitrovich et al., 2008]. This perceived implementation support for teachers implementing an intervention takes various forms: leadership, resource, collaboration and professional development. School leadership plays an important role in creating a positive school culture that is open to learning and supportive of change [Aarons et al., 2016]. Intervention implementation requires access to material, time, as well as financial and human resources [Murphy, 2015]. Collaborative support is present when teachers feel connected to and work together with colleagues [Johnson et al., 2017]. It occurs when teachers are able to contribute to the adaptation and implementation process [Ebersöhn, 2015]. Targeted professional development during intervention implementation has been shown to strengthen teacher self-efficacy [Conroy et al., 2019]. By providing context-specific training, ongoing support, and professional development, school authorities can address barriers to implementation and enhance teachers' confidence in adopting new instructional strategies.

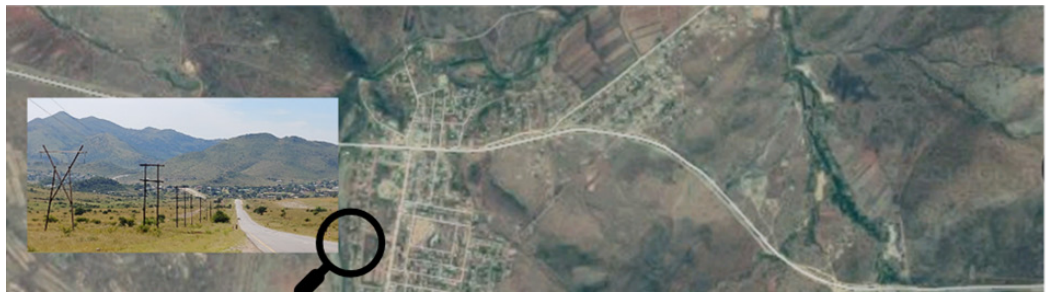
2. Method

An integrative mixed-method research design was employed to investigate the implementation of *Inkhulumo* (adapted Quality Talk) in a high school in rural South Africa to improve English proficiency in Grade 8 and Grade 9 students. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to examine the overlapping but distinct factors influencing implementation. This approach facilitated well-validated conclusions enriched by complementary insights [Plano Clark, Ivankova, 2016]. By integrating data during both collection and analysis phases over a three-year period, the study achieved a comprehensive understanding of the complex social phenomena surrounding the implementation of evidence-based practices in challenged educational contexts.

2.1. Context and participants

The study took place in a rural high school in Mpumalanga, South Africa (Fig. 1). The site was purposefully selected as representative of a challenged educational environment, characterised by inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, and socioeconomic hardship. The school had no library and very few English textbooks, which students were not permitted to take home. English, taught as a First Additional Language, was neither the home language of students nor of teachers.

Fig. 1. **Rural area where the school is situated** (www.google.com/maps)



Participants, all of whom were siSwati-speaking Black Africans, included one Grade 8 teacher, one Grade 9 teacher (both female), the Head of Department (male), and 94 students. Of these students, 45 were in Grade 8 (female: n = 27, male: n = 18) and 49 in Grade 9 (female: n = 24, male: n = 25). Class sizes were large, with a student-teacher ratio of approximately 1:42 in Grade 8 and 1:47 in Grade 9. The teachers nominated student leaders to assist with the small-group discussion in each grade, with seven leaders in Grade 8 and six in Grade 9. Each teacher divided their class into mixed-ability discussion groups, with student leaders assigned to facilitate these groups.

Both teachers held a Higher Diploma in Education and were qualified to teach English as a First Additional Language in the Senior Phase. The Grade 8 teacher had 22 years of teaching experience (including three years in the Senior Phase), while the Grade 9 teacher had seven years of experience (including six in Senior Phase).

2.2. Implementation process and data collection

The *Inkhulumo*-implementation process began with a Participatory Rural Approach (PRA) session [Ebersöhn, 2015] to assess the fit or appropriateness of the intervention with local needs and to secure buy-in from teachers and other stakeholders. Following confirmation of alignment with the original Quality Talk principles, stakeholders agreed to collect baseline data, adapt the intervention, and implement it.

The data were collected from observations, interviews, and documents. Structured classroom observations on classroom interactions, teaching practices, and student engagement were conducted

during 12 school visits (48 hours in total). Observations during school visits, PRA sessions, and workshops (10 hours) were documented using field notes and photographs. Structured individual interviews were conducted with the teachers, student leaders, and the Head of Department (n = 16), as well as unstructured follow-up interviews with the teachers (n = 2). These were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Various documents, including teacher manuals, policy documents, lesson plans, and student workbooks, were collected and analysed.

2.3. Data analysis

In analysing data, we adopted an integrative mixed-method approach. Qualitative data was analysed using a combination of inductive and deductive coding to identify patterns and themes described in literature and participants. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse student comprehension test results, while text analysis examined student performance. Data transformation techniques were employed, including 'qualitising' observational findings and 'quantitising' student leader interview responses. Teacher manuals, policy documents, and lesson plans were analysed to triangulate findings from observation and interview data. The integrated data were grouped into themes describing the intervention, teacher factors, and school context. This paper reports findings relevant to readiness, teacher motivation and change-efficacy, to implement the intervention.

2.4. Quality criteria

The study employed a combination of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method strategies to ensure scientific rigour. Quantitative criteria focused on validity, achieved through a comprehensive literature review and the use of multiple data sources [Maree, Pietersen, 2020]. Qualitative trustworthiness was supported by credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability [Clark, Ivankova, 2016]. Credibility was reinforced through member checking, peer debriefing, and prolonged engagement in the research site [Teddlie, Tashakkori, 2008]. Transferability was enhanced by detailed contextual descriptions. Dependability was addressed by providing an audit trail of the methodological process [Rule, John, 2011], while confirmability was supported by researcher reflexivity and data triangulation. Mixed-method quality was addressed through design coherence, inferential consistency, and inferential quality [O'Cathain, 2010], with theoretical grounding drawn from multiple disciplines [Teddlie, Tashakkori, 2008].

2.5. Ethical considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards in research, both procedural and through reporting standards [Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2002]. Procedural ethics were ensured through consultation with The

Pennsylvania State University, the University of Pretoria, and the Mpumalanga Department of Basic Education. Informed consent was secured from teachers, parents of students, and school leadership, with participants fully briefed on the study's purpose and procedures. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and all interviews and observations were conducted respectfully. Ethical reporting included the use of verified data, neutrality in interpretation, and mitigation of bias through reflective journaling and debriefing sessions. All data were stored on password-protected systems and archived with restricted access to protect participant confidentiality.

3. Results

The results focus on two key factors influencing teacher readiness to adopt the *Inkhulumo* intervention during the pre-implementation stages: motivation and change-efficacy.

3.1. Teacher motivation

Teachers collectively identified the development of English literacy as a critical need requiring intervention. Both Grade 8 and 9 teachers described significant challenges that their students faced with comprehension and writing, which negatively affected academic performance across all subjects. As the Grade 8 teacher explained:

> …half of the learners in that particular class they cannot write they cannot read and in that particular class you can see that those learners they are silence, they cannot say anything. Whether homework, no homework. Otherwise one will write the homework and give it to them. They copy. Even where they have copied you cannot read some of them (TINV-88).

This recognition extended beyond isolated language skills to include the broader educational implications of limited English proficiency. During professional development sessions, teachers from other subject areas corroborated these concerns, with the Science teacher noting:

> Students just do the basic questions to pass the tests and struggle with the questions that require long answers or essay type response (FN-52).

Quantitative data from comprehension tests corroborated these perceptions, for example, in one assessment, 95% of students answered factual questions correctly, yet only 9% responded successfully to questions requiring deeper analysis and interpretation (FN-16&17).

The need for implementing a literacy intervention was also recognised by Head of Department (HOD) and student leaders. The HOD

expressed concern about the lack of confidence in students and the limited participation of students during English lessons. Similarly, student leaders reported difficulties engaging peers in meaningful classroom discussions, with one stating:

> Eish, being a student-leader is difficult, you face many challenges in our members because some others can't talk, you need to convince them to talk and that is a hard job (SLINV-290). The Grade 9 teacher added that some students were so anxious about speaking in class that they would "miss school rather than talk in the class" (TINV-331). This shared recognition of students' literacy challenges among teachers, student leaders, and other stakeholders created a collective sense of urgency to address the literacy gap.

Teachers viewed the intervention to be well-aligned with addressing their identified need of improving English literacy among students. Implementing the intervention could benefit students by encouraging "*ownership of learning*", "*improving motivation*", and "*enhancing interpretive skills*" (Excerpt from PRA session on 18 July 2015). They also anticipated broader benefits, including improved academic performance, access to bursaries, and increased employment opportunities:

> By students improving their marks they would have access to bursaries. Improving their communication skills in English could also help them to secure better work opportunities (FN-1).

Teachers also acknowledged systemic obstacles, as highlighted by the Grade 9 teacher:

> We do have a lot of shortages of short of textbooks in our school. Uhh sometimes uhh our principal and our head of departments they go and borrow these textbooks from other schools. Sometimes in other subjects we do and in other we don't get them. We make copies (TINV-282).

3.2. Teacher change-efficacy

Biographical data confirmed that both teachers were qualified to teach English as a First Additional Language, holding Higher Diplomas in Education. The Grade 8 teacher had 22 years of experience (three in the Senior Phase) and the Grade 9 teacher had seven years (six in the Senior Phase). This professional background contributed to their initial confidence in being able to implement the intervention.

Their openness to *Inkhulumo* was also shaped by previous positive collaborations with the University of Pretoria on projects such as

the *Supportive Teachers Assets and Resilience (STAR)* and *Flourishing Learning Youth (FLY)* studies (FN-4). These relationships fostered trust and willingness to engage with the new intervention.

During PRA sessions, both teachers expressed confidence that the instructional changes required were manageable and consistent with curriculum expectations (DBE, 2011). The teachers noted that the implementation was "*doable and did not require that they learn additional competencies*" (FN-8).

Additionally, several support structures reinforced this confidence. School leadership initiated contact with the University of Pretoria and committed to teacher training for the intervention (FN-73). The collaboration between the Grade 8 and 9 teachers emerged as a significant factor in sustaining change-efficacy. Having worked together for over seven years, the teachers had developed a strong relationship, which was evident in the PRA session (FN-2). This collegial collaboration enabled joint planning, and the teachers worked together on adapting the intervention to their instructional practices (FN-12). The involvement of student leaders in training workshops provided additional collaborative support.

However, during the installation stage, teachers' change-efficacy fluctuated. Implementation took longer than anticipated, and both teachers reported being "*afraid, but we gradually adapting, bit by bit*" (TINV-71).

The results presented in Table 1 summarise the factors that shaped teacher motivation and change-efficacy during the pre-implementation stages. Teachers were motivated to implement the intervention based on the perceived needs, multi-stakeholder agreement, appropriateness of the intervention and anticipated benefits. Change-efficacy was influenced by the teachers' professional qualifications, teaching experience, previous intervention experience, support from school authorities, collaborative relationships, stakeholder involvement and implementation challenges.

Table 1. **Factors influencing motivation and change efficacy**

Factor	Indicator
Teacher Motivation	
Recognition of literacy needs	The teachers identified English literacy development as a critical need due to students' struggles with comprehension and writing, impacting academic performance
Multi-stakeholder agreement	The student leaders and other teachers reported difficulties engaging peers in discussions
Appropriateness of intervention	The intervention was deemed doable as it did not require additional competencies and was in line with the curriculum
Anticipated benefits	Improved academic performance and better employment opportunities

Factor	Indicator
Teacher Change-efficacy	
Teaching qualifications	Both teachers held Higher Diplomas in Education to teach English as a First Additional Language
Teaching experience	The Grade 8 teacher: 22 years total (3 years in the Senior Phase); The Grade 9 teacher: 7 years total (6 years in the Senior Phase)
Intervention experience	The teachers had prior positive experiences collaborating with the University of Pretoria on other research projects
Support from school authorities	The school authorities initiated interaction with the University of Pretoria and committed to teacher training for the intervention
Collaborative relationships	The Grade 8 and 9 teachers had worked together for over seven years, developed a strong relationship and collaborated on the implementation process
Stakeholder involvement	The student leaders were included in training workshops and provided input
Implementation challenges	The teachers became apprehensive during the installation stage about their ability to implement the intervention

4. Discussion

This study examined the factors influencing teachers' adoption of a literacy intervention during the pre-implementation stages (exploration and installation) in a challenged context such as rural South Africa. The findings highlight the interplay between teachers' motivation and change-efficacy in implementing evidence-based literacy interventions in low-resource settings. This discussion interprets the findings through the lens of implementation science, with particular attention to implications for intervention design and implementation strategies in LMICs.

Recognition of students' literacy needs emerged as a strong motivational driver for adopting the intervention. This is consistent with Harvey and Kitson's [2015] assertion that teachers' motivation increases when participants personally identify the need for change. In this study, both Grade 8 and Grade 9 teachers described how low literacy levels affected students' reading comprehension, writing, classroom participation, and academic performance across the curriculum.

Importantly, this perceived need extended beyond the individual teachers to include their colleagues, the HOD and student leaders, creating a shared understanding of the literacy challenges within the school. This collective recognition aligns with Weiner's [2009] finding that motivation is strengthened when the need for change is acknowledged across stakeholder groups. As Durlak and DuPre [2008] argue, such shared purpose reinforces commitment to implementation.

Teachers also perceived literacy improvement as within their control to change and directly relevant to student outcomes, both academic and beyond. They linked literacy to increased opportunities, such as access to bursaries and enhanced employment prospects.

This resonates with Hanson et al. [2016] emphasis on the perceived value of interventions for adoption and is particularly salient in LMIC contexts, where, as UNESCO [2024] notes, education is often seen as a pathway out of poverty.

The appropriateness further strengthened motivation to adopt the intervention. Teachers regarded *Inkhulumo* as well-aligned with addressing their identified needs, particularly for enhancing interpretive skills, independent engagement with texts and improved academic outcomes. This perception of appropriateness supports Fixsen et al.'s [2005] conclusion that alignment between intervention design and contextual needs is central to readiness during the exploration stage.

Initially, the teachers expressed high change-efficacy, viewing the required instructional adjustments as "doable". Their confidence was grounded in their qualifications, content knowledge, and teaching experience, factors identified by Dyssegaard, Egelund & Sommersel [2017] as enabling the integration of new instructional approaches.

The teachers' openness to adopting Inkhulumo supports Ebersöhn and Loots [2017] finding that teachers with positive previous intervention experiences tend to have higher self-efficacy beliefs, making them more confident about adopting future interventions.

Multiple support structures influenced teacher change-efficacy. The prioritising of literacy development and initiation of a collaboration with the University of Pretoria showed teachers that the implementation of *Inkhulumo* was supported by school authorities. This echoes findings by Leithwood [2021] and Pretorius & Spaull [2022] on the importance of creating a culture open to change and direct leadership engagement in change.

The collaborative support between the Grade 8 and 9 teachers in planning, adapting, and addressing the implementation challenges reflects Johnson et al.'s [2017] conclusion about the value of peer support in intervention adoption. The inclusion of student leaders in training workshops added another layer of stakeholder engagement, reinforcing the collaborative nature of the implementation. In contexts where external resources are scarce, fostering strong networks is particularly valuable for sustaining implementation [Versfeld, Graham, Ebersöhn, 2023].

However, change-efficacy is not constant. As Tschannen-Moran and Johnson [2011] note, fluctuations in change-efficacy are common during implementation. While professional expertise provided a strong foundation, it was insufficient on its own to sustain confidence when practical challenges emerged during the installation stage. This aligns with Lochman et al.'s [2015] observation that moving from conceptual understanding to practical application often reveals unanticipated difficulties that affect teacher confidence.

Furthermore, our findings confirm research on the importance of targeted professional development and continuous coaching in sustain-

ing teachers' confidence and effectiveness throughout the implementation process [Conroy et al., 2019]. These observations support studies indicating that intervention implementation requires specific skills and ongoing support beyond general pedagogical knowledge [Domitrovich et al., 2008]. This is particularly relevant in LMIC contexts, where teacher preparation may not have adequately addressed the specific competencies required for implementing evidence-based literacy practices.

Finally, consistent with Conroy et al. [2019] and Domitrovich et al. [2008], targeted professional development and ongoing coaching were essential in maintaining teacher motivation and change-efficacy. This is particularly relevant in LMIC contexts, where initial teacher preparation programmes and in-service professional development may not fully address the specific competencies required for implementing evidence-based literacy practices in challenged contexts [McLoughlin et al., 2020; Popova et al., 2021].

5. Limitations and future research

This paper provides valuable insights into factors influencing teachers' adoption of evidence-based literacy interventions in a challenged educational context. However, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the single-school case study design constrains the generalisability of the findings to other settings. Nonetheless, the detailed description of contextual factors supports the potential for transferability. Second, the study focuses exclusively on the exploration and installation stages of implementation, examining how these stages influence teachers' motivation and change-efficacy. While this provides an in-depth perspective on early adoption, it offers only a partial view of the overall implementation process. Future research should extend the analysis to the initial and full implementation stages, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of how teacher motivation and change-efficacy evolve over time and influence the sustainability of literacy interventions.

6. Conclusion

This study advances understanding of how teachers adopt evidence-based literacy interventions in challenged educational contexts by examining the interplay between motivation and change-efficacy during the exploration and installation stages. The findings highlight that while recognition of literacy needs by teachers provides a strong foundation for intervention adoption, sustained implementation requires comprehensive support structures that address the practical challenges of implementation in resource-constrained settings.

By confirming the factors that influence teachers' motivation and change-efficacy to adopt intervention, this study contributes to more contextually relevant intervention strategies for improving literacy outcomes in LMICs. In the BRICS context, where rural and underserved schools often face systemic resource shortages, linguistic diversi-

ty, and large class sizes, the findings emphasise the importance of aligning interventions with locally identified needs, fostering collective stakeholder readiness, and ensuring sustained leadership, peer, and professional development support.

As the global education community continues to respond to the literacy crisis, strengthening teachers' adoption of evidence-based literacy interventions represents a critical pathway for improving learning outcomes in disadvantaged contexts. By operationalising principles from implementation science and Weiner's Theory of Organisational Readiness for Change in a rural South African setting, this study offers insights with broader applicability across the BRICS landscape, contributing to international efforts to bridge the gap between research and practice in education.

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