

# Barriers Preventing Professional Development Knowledge Transfer in Literacy Instruction

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative multi-perspective case study investigated the systemic, organizational, cultural, and contextual barriers that prevented the transfer of literacy strategies from professional development (PD) to classroom practice in the Paniqui West District. Participants were purposively selected classroom teachers who had recently attended literacy-focused PD and the school heads responsible for supporting their implementation. Data were generated through confidential, in-depth semi-structured interviews, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using within-group and cross-group comparative thematic analysis. Findings showed that teachers initially approached new strategies with enthusiasm but encountered an immediate “Time Debt,” “Material Mismatch,” peer resistance, and weak instructional follow-up. School heads recognized these barriers but were constrained by

the “Scarcity Dilemma,” inflexible budgets, the “Report Tsunami” of administrative requirements, difficulty protecting collaborative time, and the absence of non-evaluative coaching tools. Teachers also described PD as decontextualized because model lessons assumed small classes, English-dominant settings, uniform prerequisite skills, and uninterrupted instructional blocks. Implementation consequently followed a predictable decline from an excited but clumsy first attempt, to isolation and scaling back, and eventually to reversion to traditional practices; lasting change occurred only through small, feasible adaptations. The study concludes that PD knowledge transfer is not primarily a problem of teacher unwillingness but an implementation-fidelity problem produced by structural and design conditions. Sustainable transfer requires reduced administrative burden, protected collaborative time, flexible resource support, job-embedded coaching, and literacy PD designed for large, multilingual, and time-constrained classrooms.

**Keywords:** *knowledge transfer, professional development, literacy instruction, instructional coaching, organizational barriers, implementation fidelity*

## INTRODUCTION

Professional development is a central mechanism for improving literacy instruction because it exposes teachers to research-informed strategies, updated content knowledge, and collaborative ways of solving classroom problems. However, attendance at a seminar does not guarantee that teachers will use what they learned. Knowledge transfer occurs only when new ideas are interpreted, adapted, supported, and sustained in the setting where instruction actually takes place. When the post-training environment lacks time, materials, coaching, or psychological safety, even a well-designed learning experience may produce little lasting change (Adams & Sawchuk, 2021; van Houten, 2023).

The transfer problem is especially consequential in literacy education. Reading and language instruction require responsive decisions about learner readiness, text difficulty, language background, grouping, feedback, and intervention. Professional development may introduce differentiated reading, close reading, scaffolded

writing, or collaborative analysis, but these approaches are difficult to enact when classrooms are large, materials are scarce, and instructional time is fragmented. Research on teacher learning has therefore emphasized that effective professional development must be context-sensitive, sustained, and closely linked to practice rather than treated as a one-time compliance activity (Bates & Wright, 2019; Miller & Svrcek, 2020; Shilling et al., 2025).

A further challenge is that knowledge transfer is shaped by school organization and culture. Teachers may value a strategy yet hesitate to use it when colleagues dismiss innovation, leaders focus only on completion reports, or the school provides no protected time for collaboration. School heads may also support instructional improvement in principle but remain unable to coach teachers because administrative reporting, budget restrictions, and operational demands consume their attention. In this sense, the gap between training and practice is produced jointly by teacher beliefs, peer norms, perceived control, institutional structures, and the design of the professional development itself.

These issues are particularly relevant in the Paniqui West District, where teachers regularly participate in district- and division-level literacy initiatives but work across schools with varying class sizes, resource levels, and learner profiles. Existing research has discussed professional learning, mentoring, knowledge sharing, and teacher agency, yet localized evidence remains limited on how teachers and school heads jointly explain the failure to sustain new literacy practices. A multi-perspective inquiry was needed to examine not only what barriers existed but how these barriers interacted after teachers returned to their classrooms.

Accordingly, this study investigated the organizational and cultural barriers perceived by classroom teachers, the challenges school heads experienced in providing support and resources, the misalignments between professional development theory and classroom realities, and teachers' narratives of implementation in the months following a literacy-focused PD initiative. The study aimed to clarify the theory-practice gap and provide an evidence-based foundation for professional learning systems that make instructional innovation feasible, supported, and sustainable.

## Literature Review

### *Knowledge Transfer and Implementation Fidelity in Professional Development*

Knowledge transfer involves applying or adapting learning acquired in one context to another. In teacher professional development, transfer is demonstrated when educators incorporate new pedagogical knowledge into routine planning, instruction, assessment, and reflection. The challenge is that professional knowledge is not transferred mechanically. Teachers interpret new ideas through prior experience, curriculum expectations, student needs, and organizational conditions. Adams and Sawchuk (2021) described professional knowledge as shaped by organizational contradictions, while Khalloufi-Mouha (2024) showed that teacher learning develops iteratively through interaction with tools and classroom practice.

Implementation fidelity provides a useful way to understand why training can fail even when participants initially respond positively. Fidelity refers to the extent to which the central features of an intervention are enacted as intended. In literacy PD, fidelity may weaken when teachers shorten activities, omit resource-intensive components, or replace new strategies with familiar whole-class routines. These adaptations are not always evidence of resistance; they can be rational responses to limited time, materials, learner readiness, or instructional support. Chen et al. (2023) demonstrated the value of staged professional learning, while Ormeño and Rosas (2023) emphasized that practical contexts strongly shape the enactment of pedagogical knowledge.

The literature therefore suggests that professional development should be designed as a cycle of learning, trial, feedback, and refinement rather than a single event. Without post-training support, initial intentions may weaken and the implementation gap may widen. Cross-disciplinary research similarly shows that specialized practice depends on relevant preparation and opportunities to convert knowledge into action (Kern et al., 2024; Woods et al., 2023). This supports examining not only whether teachers attended PD but also what happened during the weeks and months after training.

### ***Organizational Culture, Psychological Safety, and Knowledge Sharing***

Knowledge sharing is strongly influenced by interpersonal relationships and professional culture. Van Houten (2023) found that status, discretion, reciprocity, and psychological safety affect whether educators openly exchange knowledge. When teachers fear judgment or anticipate that colleagues will dismiss a new approach, they may conceal uncertainty, avoid requesting help, or abandon experimentation. A culture that treats innovation as unnecessary additional work can therefore function as an informal veto on professional learning.

Teacher agency also depends on whether professional development is experienced as meaningful learning or administrative compliance. Bates and Wright (2019) argued that educators interpret professional experiences through both past practice and future aspirations. Parhamnia and Farahian (2023) further found that knowledge sharing and reflective teaching predict professional development. These studies imply that schools need norms that reward inquiry, acknowledge imperfect first attempts, and allow teachers to discuss unsuccessful lessons without fear of punitive evaluation.

Equity-centered professional learning additionally requires attention to whose knowledge is represented. Miller and Svrcek (2020) warned that literacy PD can reproduce narrow textual hierarchies and dominant perspectives. Haynes et al. (2025) showed that culturally responsive and trauma-informed attitudes can be strengthened when professional learning is intentionally participatory. A supportive professional culture must therefore combine psychological safety with substantive responsiveness to the linguistic, cultural, and social realities of learners.

### ***Instructional Coaching, Peer Learning, and Reflective Practice***

Mentoring and peer-assisted learning can strengthen the transition from training to practice because teachers are able to observe, discuss, rehearse, and revise strategies with others. Aguilar et al. (2023) found that dyadic peer learning supported collaborative problem-solving and reflective practice. Atenas et al. (2023) similarly emphasized co-creation, transparency, and open educational practices in mentorship. Such arrangements make professional knowledge visible and allow teachers to seek help while the implementation problem is still manageable.

Professional communities are most effective when collaboration is regular, structured, and connected to actual classroom work. Pasquini and Eaton (2019) demonstrated how networked communities can sustain continuing knowledge exchange, while Orchard and Bowen (2024) illustrated the value of a fellowship model that supports deeper academic and professional understanding. In schools, comparable structures may include professional learning communities, peer observation, lesson study, coaching conferences, and collaborative analysis of learner work.

However, collaboration cannot be sustained by goodwill alone. Teachers require protected time, school-level coordination, and non-evaluative processes. When collaboration is added after working hours or when observations are perceived as performance inspection, the intended support may create further stress. Effective coaching should therefore be separated from punitive appraisal, focused on a specific instructional problem, and supported by resources that allow teachers to test recommendations in realistic conditions.

### ***Contextual Relevance, Resources, and Teacher Agency***

Professional development becomes difficult to transfer when it models ideal conditions that do not resemble participants' classrooms. Shilling et al. (2025) reported dissatisfaction when professional development lacked disciplinary relevance. Teachers are similarly likely to reject literacy strategies that assume small classes, uninterrupted time, ready access to leveled texts, or uniform language proficiency. The more distant the training scenario is from classroom reality, the greater the adaptation burden placed on individual teachers.

Resources and workload affect perceived behavioral control. Teachers may hold favorable attitudes toward a strategy but conclude that they cannot implement it because planning time, materials, or leadership support are unavailable. Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior explains that intention is shaped by attitudes,

subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. This model is relevant to PD knowledge transfer because it links teacher willingness with the social and practical conditions that enable or constrain action.

Context-sensitive professional learning should therefore include adaptable materials, examples from multilingual and high-enrollment classrooms, explicit differentiation for varied reading levels, and guidance for fragmented schedules. It should also protect teacher agency by allowing principled adaptation rather than demanding unmodified reproduction of model lessons. The objective is not mechanical compliance but preservation of the strategy's essential purpose while making it feasible in the local setting.

### ***Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations***

The study was anchored in the Theory of Planned Behavior. Teachers' attitudes toward PD influenced whether they regarded new literacy strategies as useful or impractical. Subjective norms were reflected in peer expectations and school culture, while perceived behavioral control was shaped by time, materials, autonomy, and access to coaching. These three conditions influenced teachers' intentions to implement new strategies and helped explain why positive initial enthusiasm did not always lead to sustained practice (Ajzen, 1991).

The conceptual lens of the Implementation Fidelity Gap complemented the behavioral perspective. It directed attention to the distance between the design of a literacy strategy and its actual enactment. The gap could emerge through omission, dilution, premature abandonment, or adaptations that removed essential features. Importantly, the framework treated implementation failure as the result of interacting teacher, school, and PD-design conditions rather than attributing failure solely to individual resistance.

The study's paradigm integrated teacher and school-head perspectives. Teacher accounts identified organizational and cultural barriers, classroom misalignments, and post-PD implementation experiences. School-head accounts explained the challenges in providing resources and instructional support. Together, these perspectives converged on the theory-practice gap in literacy PD implementation, as illustrated in Figure 1.

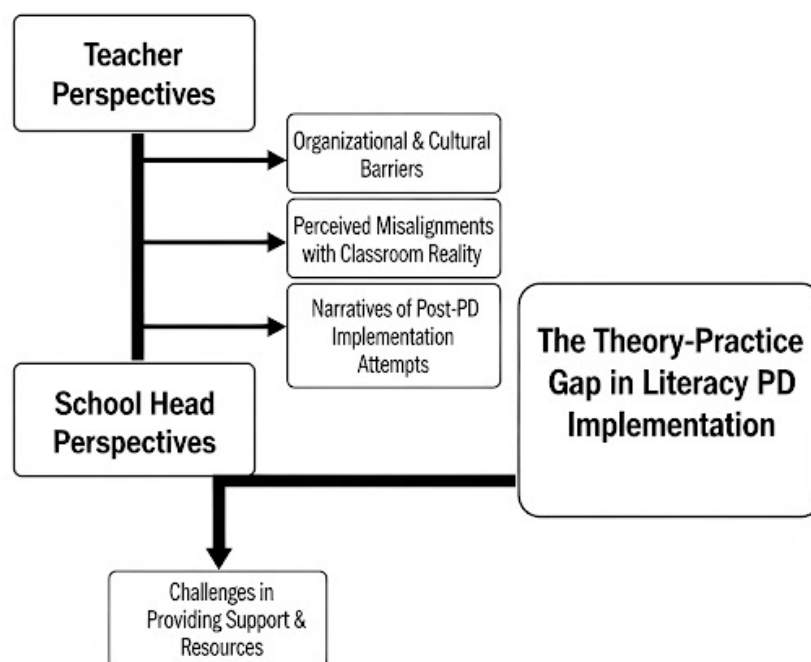


Figure 1. *Paradigm of the study*

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

The study used a qualitative multi-perspective case-study design to examine the barriers to professional development knowledge transfer within a bounded educational setting. The design enabled an in-depth analysis of the same implementation problem from the perspectives of classroom teachers and school heads. It was appropriate for identifying organizational, cultural, contextual, and leadership conditions that could not be adequately represented through numerical measures alone.

### **Research Locale**

The study was conducted in public elementary and secondary schools in the Paniqui West District. The district included schools with varied enrollment, resource levels, and instructional conditions and regularly participated in district- and division-level professional development, particularly in literacy. These characteristics made the locale an information-rich setting for examining what occurred after teachers returned from literacy-focused training.

### **Participants and Sampling Technique**

Participants were selected through purposive criterion-based sampling. Eligible classroom teachers had attended a district- or division-level literacy professional development program within the previous six to twelve months. Teachers were drawn from varied grade levels and years of experience. School heads or head teachers who supervised the participating educators were also included to provide the leadership perspective. The source methodology targeted approximately 10 to 12 classroom teachers and four to five school heads, with participation determined by the eligibility criteria and willingness to provide detailed accounts.

### **Research Instrument**

Two parallel semi-structured interview protocols served as the research instruments. The teacher protocol used open-ended, narrative prompts concerning organizational and cultural barriers, perceived misalignments between PD content and classroom conditions, and experiences of attempting to implement new literacy strategies. The school-head protocol focused on resource allocation, follow-up support, coaching, time protection, monitoring, and the challenges of sustaining teacher implementation. The semi-structured format ensured consistency across interviews while allowing participants to elaborate on experiences that were important to them.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

After obtaining permission from the district and participating schools, the researcher identified eligible participants and explained the study's purpose, procedures, and confidentiality protections. Individual interviews were scheduled in private settings. With consent, conversations were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. The researcher maintained organized files for teacher and school-head data so that each group could first be analyzed independently before comparison.

### **Data Analysis**

The interview data were analyzed using comparative thematic analysis. The researcher repeatedly read the transcripts, applied inductive open codes, clustered related codes, and developed themes within the teacher dataset and the school-head dataset. A cross-group comparison was then conducted to identify convergence, divergence, and complementary explanations. This process generated the four results domains: teacher-perceived organizational and cultural barriers, school-head support challenges, PD-classroom misalignments, and the implementation trajectory after training.

### **Ethical Consideration**

Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Participants were informed that they could decline questions or withdraw without penalty. Teachers, school heads, and schools were assigned pseudonyms,

and identifying details were removed from transcripts and reports. Interviews were conducted respectfully and without judgment because participants discussed organizational culture and professional difficulties. Audio files and transcripts were stored in password-protected files and were used solely for the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Organizational and Cultural Barriers Identified by Classroom Teachers

Table 1. *Classroom teachers' perceptions of barriers to implementing new literacy strategies*

| Barrier Category           | Dominant Narrative  | Specific Manifestation                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Organizational: Time       | "Time Debt"         | Rigid schedules left no protected time for lesson redesign, material preparation, or collaboration; post-PD work was displaced to unpaid personal time.                     |
| Organizational: Resources  | "Material Mismatch" | Strategies required leveled readers, manipulatives, or other costly materials that schools could not consistently provide, leading to teacher self-funding and abandonment. |
| Cultural: Peer Environment | "Status Quo" Veto   | Some colleagues treated new strategies as temporary trends or unnecessary work, reducing encouragement for experimentation and sharing.                                     |
| Cultural: Leadership Focus | "Compliance Check"  | PD participation was documented, but teachers perceived limited follow-up, risk-taking support, and non-judgmental instructional coaching.                                  |

Teachers described the post-PD environment as structurally hostile to implementation. The "Time Debt" was not simply a complaint about workload; it represented the accumulation of planning, preparation, and collaborative tasks required by a new strategy without any corresponding adjustment to the school schedule. This finding is consistent with Adams and Sawchuk's (2021) account of organizational contradictions and with Shilling et al. (2025), who emphasized the importance of relevant and adequately supported professional learning.

The "Material Mismatch" showed how resource-intensive designs shifted the cost of reform to individual teachers. When educators were expected to purchase materials, implementation became dependent on personal financial capacity rather than institutional commitment. Peer resistance and the "Compliance Check" further weakened subjective norms supporting change. Van Houten (2023) explained that psychological safety and professional discretion influence knowledge sharing, while Parhamnia and Farahian (2023) linked reflection and sharing with continued professional growth. The results indicate that teachers' willingness was present, but the surrounding norms and resources made sustained action difficult.

### Challenges Experienced by School Heads in Sustaining Implementation

Table 2. *School heads' descriptions of challenges in providing support and resources*

| Challenge Theme         | School-Head Narrative    | Systemic Root Cause                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Resource Competition    | "Scarcity Dilemma"       | Limited and inflexible MOOE allocations were prioritized for utilities, repairs, and mandated needs, leaving little discretion for targeted literacy materials. |
| Administrative Overload | "Report Tsunami"         | DepEd forms, reports, and deadlines consumed time that could otherwise be used for classroom visits, coaching, and instructional leadership.                    |
| Time Protection         | "Substitute Teacher Gap" | Teachers could not be released for peer observation or collaborative planning because temporary substitutes and banked collaboration time were unavailable.     |

|                           |                              |                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Supportive Accountability | Lack of Non-Evaluative Tools | School heads found it difficult to monitor implementation without making teachers feel judged because coaching and formal evaluation were not clearly separated. |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

School heads did not deny the need for instructional coaching; rather, they described being structurally incapacitated from providing it. Budget restrictions limited their ability to procure strategy-specific resources, while administrative reporting displaced instructional leadership. The “Report Tsunami” is particularly significant because it breaks the follow-up link at the point when teachers need troubleshooting, encouragement, and feedback. Without this link, PD remains separate from daily teaching.

The absence of protected collaboration and non-evaluative tools also constrained support. Coaching is most useful when teachers can reveal uncertainty and receive focused assistance without fearing appraisal consequences. Aguilar et al. (2023), Atenas et al. (2023), and Orchard and Bowen (2024) each demonstrated the value of collaborative and mentoring structures. The findings suggest that school heads require not only leadership commitment but also administrative support, scheduling authority, budget flexibility, and coaching systems that make instructional follow-up possible.

### Misalignments Between Professional Development and Classroom Reality

Table 3. *Teachers’ perceptions of PD-classroom misalignment*

| Misalignment Theme              | Teacher Narrative          | Classroom Reality Ignored by PD                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Class Size and Setting          | “Designed for 20 Students” | PD demonstrations assumed small groups, whereas teachers managed classes of approximately 45 learners in overcrowded rooms.                         |
| Linguistic and Cultural Context | “English-First Mindset”    | Examples and terminology did not sufficiently address multilingual classrooms requiring Filipino, English, and local-language mediation.            |
| Prerequisite Skills             | “Skipping the Basics”      | Advanced strategies assumed decoding and fluency that many learners had not yet mastered, requiring wider differentiation than the PD demonstrated. |
| Ideal vs. Real Time             | “Hour-Long Fantasy”        | Model lessons required uninterrupted time, but actual reading blocks were fragmented by schedules, interruptions, and administrative tasks.         |

Teachers viewed PD as decontextualized because the modeled conditions did not represent the environments in which the strategies had to be used. Large classes changed the feasibility of movement, individual feedback, and small-group instruction. Multilingual settings required code-switching and cultural adaptation that were not embedded in the examples. Wide differences in reading readiness also meant that a single advanced strategy could not be applied uniformly.

These findings support the argument that literacy professional development must challenge narrow perspectives and provide usable forms of adaptation (Miller & Svrcek, 2020). They also reinforce Ajzen’s (1991) concept of perceived behavioral control: a strategy may be valued, but intention weakens when teachers believe the actual conditions make implementation impossible. Context-responsive PD should therefore model variations for high-enrollment classrooms, multilingual learners, uneven prerequisite skills, and interrupted schedules rather than presenting one ideal lesson.

### The Post-Professional-Development Implementation Trajectory

Table 4. *Teachers’ narratives of implementation after professional development*

| Implementation Phase              | Dominant Narrative   | Outcome or Shift in Practice                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Phase 1: Initial Attempt (Week 1) | “Excited but Clumsy” | Teachers tried the strategy with high enthusiasm but felt awkward; student confusion sometimes led to abandonment during the lesson. |

|                                      |                                   |                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Phase 2: The Struggle<br>(Weeks 2-4) | “Overwhelmed and<br>Isolated”     | Preparation demands increased, help was difficult to access, and teachers scaled the strategy back to one manageable element.                       |
| Phase 3: Reversion<br>(Month 2)      | “Relief in Retreat”               | Teachers returned to familiar methods that required less time and fewer materials; the new strategy was retained only as an unrealized “good idea.” |
| Phase 4: Lasting Change<br>(Rare)    | “Small, Successful<br>Adaptation” | Sustained change occurred when one culturally and logistically feasible element was integrated into an existing routine.                            |

The implementation process followed a predictable decline from enthusiasm to reversion. During the first week, teachers demonstrated positive attitudes and intention but had insufficient fluency with the new practice. By the second to fourth weeks, the absence of coaching and peer use intensified isolation. Teachers reduced the strategy to manageable fragments, which sometimes removed its essential features. By the second month, familiar methods offered emotional and logistical relief.

This trajectory demonstrates the Implementation Fidelity Gap. The failure was not immediate rejection; it emerged through accumulated friction between the strategy and the post-PD environment. Chen et al. (2023) emphasized staged professional development, and Pasquini and Eaton (2019) showed the value of continuing professional networks. Lasting change in the present study was rare but informative: teachers sustained small adaptations that fit their setting. This suggests that implementation support should validate incremental improvement while helping teachers preserve the strategy’s central purpose.

### **Integrated Interpretation: The Theory-Practice Gap**

Across the four result domains, teacher and school-head accounts converged. Teachers experienced time, resource, peer, and follow-up barriers; school heads described the administrative and fiscal structures that produced those barriers. PD design then intensified the problem by assuming classroom conditions that did not exist. The resulting transfer failure was systemic and predictable rather than an isolated matter of motivation.

The Theory of Planned Behavior helps explain the sequence. Teachers began with favorable attitudes, but unsupportive peer norms and low perceived control weakened intention and persistence. The fidelity lens explains what followed: core elements were simplified, omitted, or abandoned as teachers attempted to make the strategy fit. Sustainable knowledge transfer therefore requires simultaneous reform of PD design, school organization, instructional leadership, and the social conditions of teacher learning.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study concludes that barriers to professional development knowledge transfer in literacy instruction are systemic, interconnected, and predictable. Teachers did not fail to implement because they lacked initial enthusiasm. They encountered a post-PD environment characterized by protected-time deficits, material mismatch, teacher self-funding, peer resistance, and limited instructional coaching. School heads were aware of these problems but were constrained by inflexible budgets, administrative overload, rigid schedules, and the absence of non-evaluative monitoring tools.

The design of professional development also contributed to transfer failure by modeling idealized conditions that overlooked large classes, multilingual learners, varied prerequisite skills, and fragmented instructional time. As these barriers accumulated, implementation moved from early experimentation to isolation, scaling back, and eventual reversion to traditional methods. The study’s principal contribution is its explanation of the theory-practice gap as an implementation-fidelity problem requiring changes not only in teacher behavior but also in professional development design, school structures, leadership capacity, and resource policy.

## Recommendation

The Department of Education, district offices, school leaders, and professional development providers should establish a coordinated transfer-support system. Literacy PD should include protected collaborative time, post-training coaching during the critical first month, context-specific lesson variants, flexible resource support, and non-punitive implementation review. School heads should be given administrative assistance and greater discretion to use available funds for essential literacy resources. Professional learning communities should recognize small, well-justified adaptations while supporting teachers in preserving the core intent of each strategy.

Table 5. *Proposed professional development knowledge-transfer support plan*

| Priority Area                | Recommended Action                                                                                     | Responsible Units                               | Success Indicator                                                   |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Protected Collaborative Time | Embed scheduled planning, peer discussion, and lesson adaptation within the school day.                | District and school heads                       | Regular collaboration sessions and documented implementation plans  |
| Job-Embedded Coaching        | Provide non-evaluative coaching, demonstration, and troubleshooting during Weeks 1-4 after PD.         | Master teachers, literacy coaches, school heads | Coaching logs, reflective notes, and improved strategy fidelity     |
| Context-Responsive PD Design | Model large-class, multilingual, mixed-readiness, and fragmented-time versions of literacy strategies. | PD providers and curriculum specialists         | Training materials containing realistic adaptations                 |
| Flexible Resource Support    | Create ready-to-use material kits and permit targeted use of school funds for literacy resources.      | DepEd, division office, school heads            | Reduced teacher self-funding and increased material availability    |
| Supportive Monitoring        | Separate coaching from performance appraisal and use reflective implementation tools.                  | School heads and supervisors                    | Higher psychological safety and sustained classroom experimentation |

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