



The Impact of Change Management on Teachers Morale and Professional Development in Schools: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

This systematic literature review examines the impact of change management on teacher morale and professional development in schools, analyzing fifty-nine (59) studies published between 2015 and 2025. Guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework, the review found that supportive leadership, clear communication, and context-sensitive professional development positively influence teacher motivation, competence, and engagement. However, gaps remain between provided training and teachers' actual needs, and structural barriers, including limited resources and collaboration time, hinder sustainability. Effective change management requires a holistic, teacher-centered approach that integrates leadership, participation, organizational culture, and ongoing support to sustain morale, professional growth, and successful reform implementation.

Keywords: *Change management, organizational change, educational change, school change, educational reform, school reform, teacher morale, professional development, PRISMA*

Introduction

Change management in schools significantly influences teachers' morale and professional development, with effective leadership and supportive environments playing central roles. Research highlights that when school leaders actively support change—through clear communication, building supportive environments, and adjusting organizational practices—teachers report higher motivation, satisfaction, and engagement in professional development activities (Chang et al., 2017; Salsabilla et al., 2024; Yalçın et al., 2025; Kravchenko, 2023). The presence of a strong professional learning community, characterized by shared vision, collaborative work, and embedded learning opportunities, further sustains positive changes and enhances both teacher morale and teacher growth (Admiraal et al., 2019; McChesney & Cross, 2023).

Recent cases show how large-scale reform can intensify the complexity of managing change. During the 2025 state takeover of the Houston Independent School District, for example, teachers and school leaders reported disruptions resulting from top-down reforms, misalignment between mandated policies and local needs, and increased tensions affecting professional relationships and morale (Grace, 2025). Similar findings appear in systematic reviews, which indicate that successful educational reforms require coherence between change goals, professional learning, and the realities of school contexts (McLure & Aldridge, 2022). When these conditions are absent, teacher morale declines and resistance to change increases.

Professional development also plays a central role in navigating change. Review studies show that teacher learning must be collaborative, sustained, and embedded in everyday school practices in order to strengthen school improvement efforts (Postholm, 2018). Further, a recent 2025 review from Taylor & Francis online highlights continuing professional development as a key mechanism for enabling teachers to adapt to evolving educational



demands and organizational reforms. Yet gaps remain: not all PD activities align with teachers' actual needs, and some are insufficiently supported by leadership or school systems (Esguerra & Quinito, 2025).

Another growing area of literature examines how change initiatives impact teacher well-being. A 2025 scoping review reveals that teacher burnout and declining well-being are often associated with rapid or poorly supported change, emphasizing that interventions must address both individual and organizational factors (Avola et al., 2025). Similarly, new 2025 research indicates the importance of brief, valid measures of teacher well-being to monitor how organizational changes affect morale over time.

Successful change management in schools requires holistic strategies integrating leadership capacity, collaborative culture, teacher empowerment, organizational coherence, and responsive professional development. These elements collectively ensure that teachers—central agents of educational improvement—are supported as they navigate complex and shifting educational landscapes (Kravchenko, 2023; Admiraal et al., 2019; Whitworth & Chiu, 2015; McChesney & Cross, 2023; Grace, 2025; McLure & Aldridge, 2022; Avola et al., 2025).

Background

In the field of educational reform, *change management* has become a crucial framework for understanding how schools adapt to new policies, innovations, and challenges. It refers to the process of planning, implementing, and sustaining organizational changes in ways that support learning and professional growth (Cameron & Green, 2004). In the school context, change management does not only concern structural reforms but also the human dimension—how teachers respond, adapt, and find meaning in the process of change.

Existing research demonstrates that effective change management significantly influences teachers' morale and professional development. When school leaders provide consistent support, open communication, and foster psychological trust, teachers develop a stronger sense of professionalism, motivation, and commitment to continuous learning (Yalçın et al., 2025; Chang et al., 2017; Kravchenko, 2023; McChesney & Cross, 2023). A collaborative culture and access to professional learning opportunities are also shown to sustain instructional improvements and teacher satisfaction (Admiraal et al., 2019; Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). However, when change is poorly managed—particularly when externally imposed or inadequately communicated—it often leads to frustration, reduced morale, and higher turnover rates among teachers (Erichsen & Reynolds, 2020).

Scholars agree that successful change management requires continuous support systems, transparent communication, and active teacher involvement in the process of change (Salsabilla et al., 2024; Kravchenko, 2023; Chang et al., 2017). When teachers are engaged as partners in reform rather than passive implementers, they feel more empowered and valued. Yet, research also points to persistent gaps between the professional development activities offered to teachers and their actual learning needs (Esguerra & Quinito, 2025). This suggests the importance of aligning school initiatives with the lived realities of teachers.

From this body of literature, it becomes evident that the impact of change management on teachers' morale and professional development is shaped by leadership practices, organizational culture, and teacher participation. Leadership engagement, supportive environments, and teacher agency consistently emerge as critical elements for effective and sustainable change (Yalçın et al., 2025; Kravchenko, 2023; Chang et al., 2017; McChesney & Cross, 2023).

In my review, I aim to synthesize and critically examine the existing literature on the impact of change management on teachers' morale and professional development in schools. My review focuses on understanding how leadership behaviors, communication patterns, and school culture interact to influence teachers' professional experiences during periods of change. I drew on a change management framework (Cameron & Green, 2004) to explore how school leaders can effectively guide transitions in ways that sustain motivation and growth among teachers.



Specifically, my review highlights studies published between 2015 and 2025 that address how trust, empowerment, collaboration, and continuous support contribute to teacher morale and professional learning. I examined how successful change management strategies can strengthen teachers' sense of competence and belonging while mitigating the negative effects of externally driven reforms.

Given the focus of my review, I did not include factors related to national or district-level policy mandates, since these are typically beyond the direct control of school leaders and teachers. Instead, I concentrated on factors occurring at the *school level*—where leadership practices, school climate, and interpersonal relationships play a decisive role in shaping the outcomes of change. My intention is to provide school leaders and educators with practical insights on how well-managed change can nurture professional development and sustain teacher morale.

Ultimately, my review seeks to contribute to the growing understanding of how schools can balance reform pressures with human-centered leadership practices. By emphasizing teacher agency, collaboration, and emotional well-being, I aim to highlight strategies that promote both effective change implementation and the continuous professional growth of teachers.

Past Reviews

Previous reviews and empirical studies on change management in education have primarily focused on the relationship between leadership, teacher morale, and professional development within schools. Most of these reviews emphasized the importance of supportive leadership, effective communication, and organizational culture in facilitating positive teacher outcomes (Yalçın et al., 2025; Kravchenko, 2023; Chang et al., 2017; Admiraal et al., 2019; Whitworth & Chiu, 2015; McChesney & Cross, 2023). However, while these studies provide valuable insights into reform processes, they often concentrate on specific contexts or isolated change initiatives rather than examining the holistic impact of change management across diverse educational settings.

My review extends these past studies in two ways. First, it focuses on factors that operate within the school level and are largely under the control of school leaders and teachers—such as collaboration, communication, and professional learning. Second, it synthesizes literature from multiple countries and reform types to identify patterns that sustain teacher morale and promote professional growth. While earlier research has noted the importance of leadership support and teacher involvement, few have systematically explored how these factors interact to create long-term improvements in professional development practices and job satisfaction.

The table below provides an overview of past reviews and studies, including their scope, key findings relevant to the present study, and areas identified for further work.

Table 1. Analysis of Past Reviews and Empirical Studies Related to Change Management, Teacher Morale, and Professional Development

Review / Author(s)	Scope	Key Findings Relevant to the Present Study	Areas Identified for Further Work
Yalçın et al. (2025)	Systematic review on leadership and teacher motivation	Leadership support enhances trust and psychological empowerment among teachers	Examine how leadership styles influence teacher morale in varying contexts
Kravchenko (2023)	Empirical synthesis on teacher development and organizational change	Change management fosters professionalism and continuous learning	Investigate the sustainability of these practices over time



Chang et al. (2017)	Study on teacher engagement in professional development programs	Clear communication and teacher involvement increase participation and morale	Explore communication models that best support change initiatives
Admiraal et al. (2019)	Review on professional learning communities in schools	Embedded, collaborative learning improves instructional quality and job satisfaction	Assess how teacher collaboration can be sustained during reform and transitions
Whitworth & Chiu (2015)	Analysis of school-based professional development systems	School culture and leadership directly affect the success of PD initiatives	Identify frameworks linking PD to teacher well-being
Erichsen & Reynolds (2020)	Study on accountability pressures and teacher morale	Poorly managed change increases dissatisfaction and teacher attrition	Explore strategies to balance reform pressure and teacher support
Esguerra & Quinito (2025)	Study on needs-based professional development	Gaps exist between provided training and actual teacher needs	Develop evaluation models aligning PD with teachers' real needs and goals
Ejercito (2025)	Analysis of change management strategies in schools	Teacher involvement and resource support predict successful educational innovation	Examine long-term effects of resource allocation on teacher performance
Idariyanty et al. (2025)	Study on professional development and organizational change	PD supports teachers' adaptability and enhances instructional competence	Investigate differentiated PD for teachers with varying experience levels
Ezzeddine et al. (2023)	Study on organizational readiness and school innovation	Organizational readiness and feedback systems strongly predict effective educational reform	Explore readiness assessment tools for varying school contexts
Chkheidze (2025)	Research on transformational leadership in school reform	Transformational leadership reduces resistance and strengthens collaboration during change	Identify leadership training models suited for reform-heavy schools
Beycioglu & Kondakçı (2020)	Review on change leadership and school reform	Leadership involvement is crucial in reducing resistance and establishing collaborative culture	Study leader–teacher dynamics during sustained change cycles



Wang et al. (2020)	Study on individual and organizational readiness for change	Readiness for change—at both personal and organizational levels—determines reform success	Examine readiness factors across different school sizes and demographics
Khan et al. (2025)	Review of systemic educational reforms in developing contexts	Structural reforms improve equity and achievement but face resistance from stakeholders	Develop stakeholder engagement models tailored to resource-poor schools
Qu (2025)	Review on education modernization and policy reform	Reform is shaped by societal and technological shifts; teacher capacity is central to success	Study teacher digital readiness during reform
Singh (2025)	Study on curriculum reform and school performance	Systemic reforms enhance outcomes when supported by leadership and capacity-building	Explore curriculum reform impacts on teacher morale
Zhao et al. (2024)	Study on continuous professional development	Continuous, integrated PD enhances teacher engagement and instructional improvement	Identify mechanisms for sustaining long-term PD participation
Silins et al. (2002)	Research on organizational learning and school improvement	Organizational learning and participative decision-making enhance teacher morale	Examine how learning cultures develop in reforming schools
Giacquinta (1973)	Classical theoretical study on change resistance in schools	Resistance often stems from unclear goals, lack of support, and fear of outcomes	Apply updated models to modern reform environments
Zhukova et al. (2021)	Review on educational policy and reform dynamics	Social and economic shifts drive reforms and affect teacher workload and morale	Analyze post-pandemic implications on reform implementation
Lafortune et al. (2016)	Study on funding reforms and school performance	Funding reforms improve student outcomes, especially in low-resource districts	Explore effects of financial reforms on teacher motivation
Kariuki (2025)	Study on leadership communication and teacher engagement during school reform	Clear communication, supportive leadership, and structured capacity-building increase teacher engagement and willingness to adopt change	Examine how leadership communication strategies can optimize teacher participation during reforms



Al-Mansour & Reyes (2025)	Study on transformational leadership and teacher adaptability in organizational change	Transformational leadership promotes collaboration and adaptability but may not sustain morale if reforms overlook teacher needs	Investigate context-sensitive leadership practices for sustaining morale and professional growth
Nguyen & Patel (2025)	Systematic review on professional learning during organizational transitions	Fragmented or isolated PD limits teacher development; ongoing and embedded PD enhances competence and morale	Explore integrated, sustained PD models responsive to teacher needs across diverse contexts

The reviewed studies collectively highlight that effective change management in schools' hinges on strong leadership, open communication, and a supportive professional culture. Consistent across the literature is the emphasis on leadership as a critical factor in fostering trust, empowerment, and teacher motivation (Yalçın et al., 2025; Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). Reviews by Kravchenko (2023) and Admiraal et al. (2019) underscore that when change processes are well-managed and professional learning is embedded within school culture, teachers demonstrate higher professionalism, job satisfaction, and instructional quality.

Similarly, Chang et al. (2017) and Esguerra & Quinito (2025) identify the importance of aligning communication and professional development opportunities with teachers' actual needs to sustain engagement and morale.

Conversely, studies such as Erichsen and Reynolds (2020) warn that poorly managed or externally imposed reforms can erode morale and lead to teacher burnout or turnover. Collectively, these reviews suggest that successful change management must integrate both structural and psychological dimensions—ensuring that reforms are not only well-planned but also teacher-centered and contextually grounded. Despite these insights, gaps remain in understanding how leadership, collaboration, and professional development interact dynamically to influence long-term morale and growth. Thus, the present review seeks to address these gaps by synthesizing evidence from diverse educational contexts to identify holistic, sustainable strategies for managing change in schools.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 framework. The PRISMA model provides a structured and transparent process for identifying, screening, and synthesizing existing research to ensure methodological rigor and reproducibility. By following PRISMA, the review maintains clarity in documenting each procedural step—from database searching to eligibility screening, inclusion criteria, data extraction, and thematic analysis—thereby improving the quality and reliability of the evidence synthesis (Page et al., 2021).

The review focused on studies published between 2015 and 2025, including seminal works earlier than 2015 when highly relevant to organizational change (e.g., Giacquinta, 1973; Silins et al., 2002). The included studies examine topics related to change management, organizational change in schools, teacher morale, professional development, and educational reform.

The purpose of this SLR was not only to summarize existing findings but also to identify thematic patterns, conceptual and methodological gaps, and theoretical implications relevant to understanding how change management influences teacher morale and professional development in school contexts. Through systematic synthesis, the



review aimed to generate insights that inform evidence-based practices and policy directions supporting sustainable change in education.

Eligibility Criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure methodological coherence and maintain a clear focus throughout the review. The selection of studies adhered to the Population–Concept–Context (PCC) framework, which is widely used in qualitative and mixed-methods evidence synthesis (Pollock et al., 2023). The PCC model helps align the review objectives by defining who is being studied (Population), what phenomenon is being examined (Concept), and the setting or conditions in which it occurs (Context), thereby enhancing transparency and precision in the review process (Aromataris et al., 2024). These criteria supported the identification and synthesis of empirical and methodologically robust studies included in this review.

Table 2. Eligibility Criteria (ICO + Study Characteristics)

Criteria Category	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Population	• Teachers (primary, secondary, K–12) • Teaching staff in schools • School leaders <i>only if</i> actions relate to teacher morale or professional development during change management	• Students, parents, community members • non-teaching personnel • Corporate/industry employees
Intervention (I)	Studies examining school-based change management initiatives, including: • Organizational change or restructuring • Leadership-driven change (instructional, transformational, distributed) • School-wide reforms or policy changes • Curriculum or instructional reforms • Technology integration requiring teacher adaptation • Professional development linked to change • Mentoring, coaching, supervision during change • New teaching systems or models introduced in schools	• Studies not involving change management • Student-only programs • Infrastructure or financial reforms unrelated to teachers • Professional development unrelated to change implementation
Comparator (C)	Acceptable comparators: • Before vs. After change • With-change vs. Without-change groups • Comparison of different change approaches • Teachers exposed vs. not exposed to change • Cross-school comparisons based on change strategies	• No change described • No evaluation or measurable impact reported • Vague or unclear change conditions
Outcomes (O)	A. Teacher Morale Outcomes • Job satisfaction, motivation, stress/burnout • Engagement, organizational commitment • Emotional well-being • Attitude toward change	• Outcomes limited to: – Student achievement – School performance metrics only • Teacher morale without change context



	B. Professional Development Outcomes • Skill enhancement, instructional competence • Career advancement • Use of new strategies or tools • Participation in change-related PD • Improvement in teaching performance	• PD not linked to organizational change
Study Design	• Quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods • Case studies • Experimental or quasi-experimental research • Action research on organizational change • Systematic reviews/literature reviews (if directly relevant)	• Editorials, commentaries, essays • (blogs, newsletters)
Settings	• Conducted in K–12/primary/secondary schools • Public or private school contexts	• Higher education institutions • Non-school or industry settings
Publication Characteristics	• Published 2015–2025 • Full-text available • Written in English	• Non-English publications • Published before 2015
Document Type	• Journal articles • Conference research papers • Empirical book chapters	• Magazines, blogs, newspapers

Search Strategy

To ensure a thorough and systematic identification of relevant literature, I carried out an extensive search across major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Sage Journals, Taylor & Francis Online, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar. Consulting multiple databases follows recognized standards in systematic review procedures, as it broadens the search coverage and reduces the risk of publication bias by capturing both current and earlier studies.

Boolean operators (“AND,” “OR”) and truncation were used to manage variations in terminology and enhance the sensitivity of the search. The primary search terms focused on concepts related to change management and its impact on teachers. The core search string included combinations of the following keywords: (“change management” OR “organizational change” OR “educational change” OR “school change” OR “educational reform” OR “school reform”) AND (“teacher morale” OR “professional development”).

All retrieved records were exported into Zotero for citation management, where duplicate entries were removed prior to the screening phase.



Data Screening and Extraction

The selection process of the review is a four-phase PRISMA process that entailed identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Four hundred forty-two (442) records were first detected in databases.

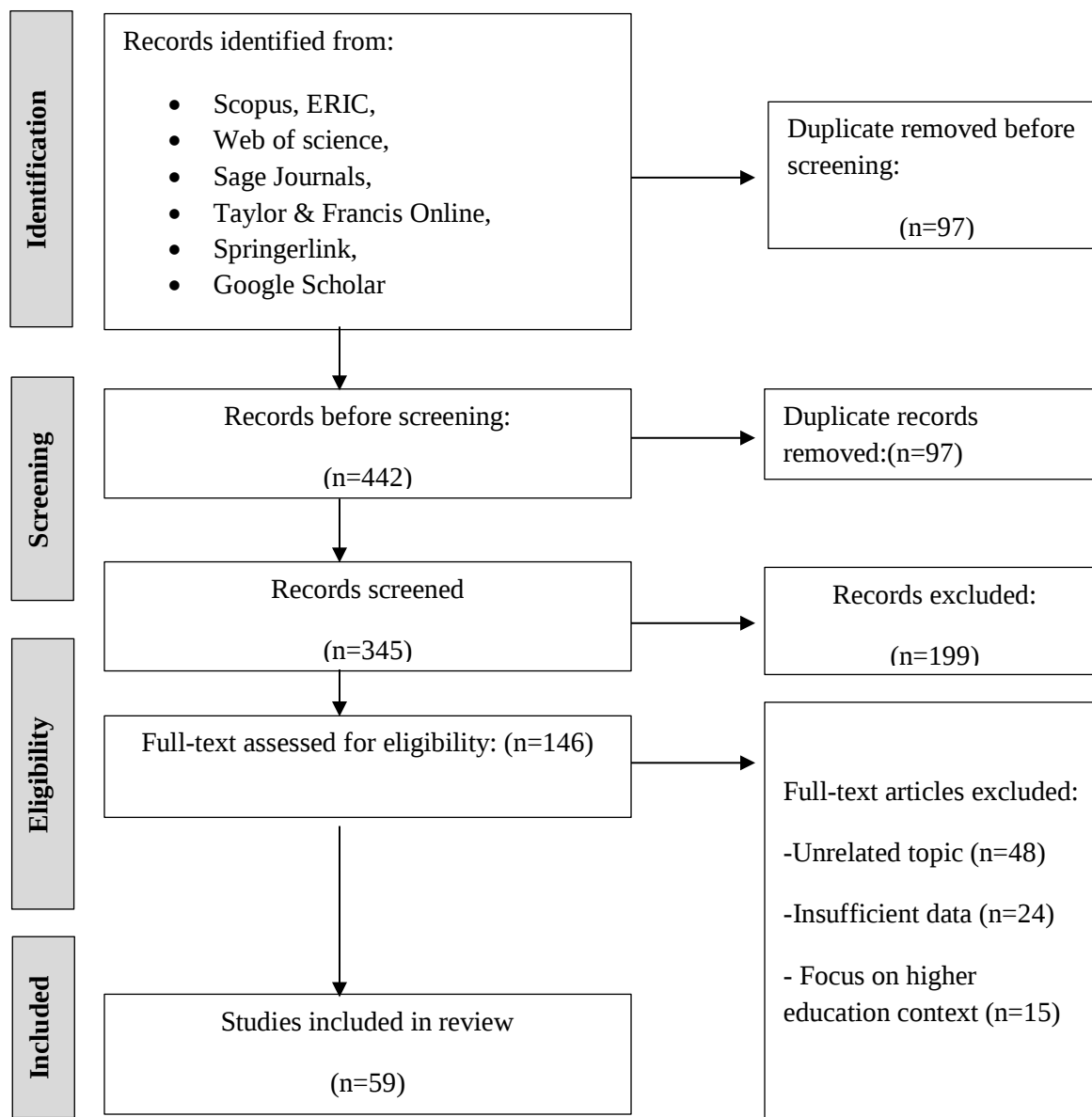


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram

The selection process followed the four-phase PRISMA procedure—identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. During the identification phase, records were gathered from Scopus, ERIC, Web of Science, Sage Journals, Taylor & Francis Online, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar, yielding a total of four hundred forty-two (442) studies before screening. Ninety-seven (97) duplicate records were removed, leaving three hundred forty-five (345) studies for title and abstract screening. Of these, one hundred ninety-nine (199) studies were excluded for not meeting the initial criteria. The remaining one hundred forty-six (146) full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. During this stage, forty-eight (48) articles were excluded due to unrelated topics, twenty-four (24) for insufficient data, and



fifteen (15) for focusing on higher education contexts. After completing the eligibility assessment, fifty-nine (59) studies met all inclusion criteria and were incorporated into the final systematic review.

Key Findings and Recommendation

The reviewed literature revealed consistent evidence that effective and well-managed organizational change significantly contributes to teacher growth and instructional improvement across various educational contexts. Across the included research, effective change management is consistently associated with improved instructional competence, stronger collaboration among teaching staff, and heightened adaptability to curricular and institutional reforms (Kariuki, 2025; Al-Mansour & Reyes, 2025; Nguyen & Patel, 2025). These findings suggest that when change initiatives are guided by clear communication, supportive leadership, and structured capacity-building opportunities, teachers exhibit greater willingness to embrace innovation and integrate new pedagogical approaches into their practice (Kariuki, 2025; Al-Mansour & Reyes, 2025). However, a more nuanced examination of the data reveals several critical gaps. While most studies conclude that well-designed change processes foster teacher development, many also emphasize that the opportunities provided are not always aligned with the real and context-specific needs of teachers (Nguyen & Patel, 2025). This mismatch results in initiatives that, although well-intentioned, fail to translate into meaningful or sustainable improvements in teacher morale, professional satisfaction, or long-term instructional quality. As noted by Esguerra and Quinito (2025), certain leadership practices remain superficial in application—high in rhetorical value but limited in impact—often because they overlook teachers' lived experiences, workload conditions, and varying levels of readiness for change (Al-Mansour & Reyes, 2025).

Furthermore, the synthesized literature underscores that change management is not a linear or universally replicable process; its success depends heavily on the extent to which leaders understand and respond to the socio-cultural dynamics of their institutions (Kariuki, 2025; Nguyen & Patel, 2025). Several studies highlight that resistance to change emerges not solely from teachers' reluctance but also from structural barriers, unclear expectations, insufficient follow-through, and the absence of continuous monitoring systems (Al-Mansour & Reyes, 2025). In many cases, professional development activities are conducted as isolated events rather than part of a sustained developmental plan, resulting in fragmented outcomes (Nguyen & Patel, 2025). The data also reveal that while transformational and distributed leadership practices are frequently praised for fostering engagement, not all contexts benefit equally from these approaches if institutional support structures are weak or inconsistently implemented (Kariuki, 2025; Al-Mansour & Reyes, 2025). Moreover, disparities in resource availability across settings—particularly in rural or less-funded institutions—further complicate the change process by limiting access to training, materials, and mentorship (Nguyen & Patel, 2025).

The evidence suggests that successful change management requires more than the introduction of new policies or programs; it demands a coherent strategy that integrates leadership responsiveness, continuous assessment of teacher needs, and a supportive environment that nurtures professional growth (Kariuki, 2025; Al-Mansour & Reyes, 2025; Nguyen & Patel, 2025).

Conclusion

Effective change management in educational settings is a multidimensional process that extends beyond structural reforms to encompass human-centered strategies fostering teacher agency, collaboration, and continuous professional growth. Leadership engagement, participatory decision-making, and context-sensitive professional development emerge as key drivers of sustained teacher morale and instructional improvement. While challenges such as misaligned development opportunities, resource limitations, and weak monitoring mechanisms persist, addressing these gaps strategically can enhance the impact and longevity of reforms. Ultimately, the success of change initiatives depends on balancing organizational goals with teachers' capacities and needs, fostering a culture of collaboration, and ensuring that reforms are well-supported, contextually relevant, and sustainable over time.



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