

The Simple View of Outcomes-Literacy



The Science of Reading x Implementation Science =
Sustainable Positive Literacy Outcomes

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Abstract

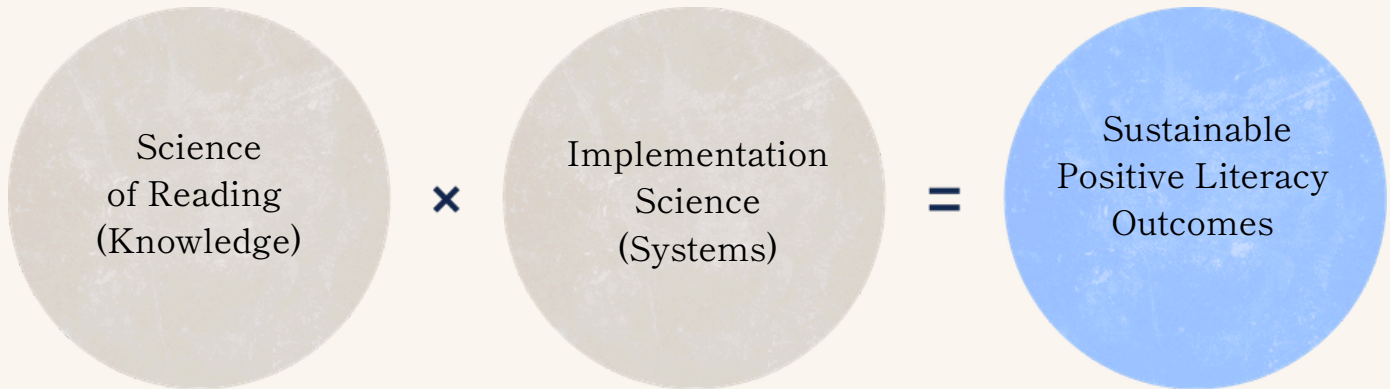
Despite widespread focus on programs, practices, and policies aligned with the Science of Reading, literacy outcomes remain persistently poor across the US. We argue that the gap between evidence and practice is not only a knowledge problem, it is a systems problem. In this paper, we introduce the Simple View of Outcomes - Literacy. This framework posits that sustainable literacy outcomes require the multiplicative integration of the research and evidence gained from two distinct but related areas of inquiry: Science of Reading and Implementation Science. We:

- Review the evidence base for this framework,
- Describe ten components of school-based reading systems that influence outcomes, organized around two domains, Knowledge (Science of Reading grounded in word reading and language comprehension) and Systems (Implementation Science grounded in coherence and sustainability)
- Operationalize both toward school-based literacy achievement for all learners.

Importantly, this framework embraces contextual differences that influence literacy achievement across classrooms and schools and has the potential to be applied to other disciplines, such as math, science, and civics. Implications for researchers, educators, families, communities, and policymakers are discussed.

Keywords: Science of Reading, Implementation Science, Simple View of Reading, Simple View of Outcomes-Literacy, School Leadership, Reading Systems, School Systems

The Simple View of Outcomes - Literacy



"There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in." Archbishop Desmond Tutu's observation captures one of the most persistent challenges in educational reform in the United States: the failure to address upstream, systemic factors that produce poor literacy outcomes generation after generation. Reading is foundational to academic, social, economic, and overall health and well-being (Mihret & Joshi, 2025; Romeo et al., 2022; Shulman et al., 2024; Snow et al., 1998). Yet national data indicate that as many as two-thirds of students do not achieve grade-level reading proficiency by fourth grade; the results are even poorer among students growing up in low-resourced schools and communities, emerging multilingual learners, and students with neurodiversity (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2024).

"There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in."

Archbishop
Desmond Tutu

The central paradox of reading achievement in US schools today is that we largely know what to teach and how to teach it so that **most** children learn to read in school (Solari et al., 2020; Petscher et al., 2020; Cervetti et al., 2020; Cain et al., 2017; Castle et al., 2018). Indeed, since 2019, the overwhelming majority of states in the nation have passed legislation related to the Science of Reading, requiring schools and districts to adopt and implement curricula, teacher training and screening and diagnostic assessment systems aligned with the Science of Reading (Schwartz, 2022; Neuman et al., 2023). Yet, on average, student outcomes often fail to improve as expected (Holston et al., 2024).

Many school and district leaders describe feeling like they have done “everything right” and still cannot explain why their literacy system is not delivering results. Although we agree that a lack of knowledge of the Science of Reading is part of the problem, we argue that reasoning alone is insufficient, and solutions solely focused on it are limited. Instead, we propose that the primary reason is an under-utilization of lessons learned from Implementation Science to create sustainable systems in which the Science of Reading can flourish.

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This paper presents a framework for understanding and addressing that problem: the Simple View of Outcomes - Literacy. This framework integrates the Science of Reading with Implementation Science, the systematic study of how evidence-based practices are adopted, sustained, and scaled in real-world settings (Eccles & Mittman, 2006). Critically, there are many pathways through which the integration of the Science of Reading and Implementation Science can lead to improved literacy outcomes, and those pathways must be understood in the context of the whole school system. The sections that follow review the evidence base for this framework, describe the ten school-based components it encompasses, and connect those components to existing Implementation Science (IS) frameworks that can support systematic school improvement.

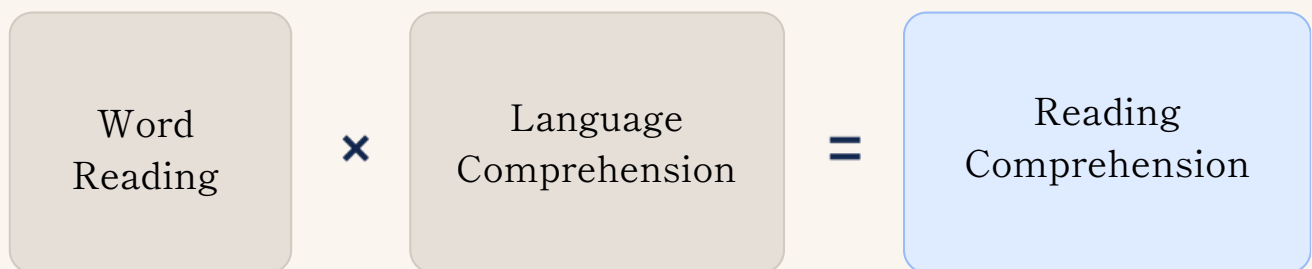
We Know What Works, But the Results Are Poor

Reading proficiency by third grade strongly predicts long-term academic attainment and economic mobility (Hernandez, 2011). Despite decades of investment in reading science, national data show that only 31% of fourth graders and 30% of eighth graders in the United States reached reading proficiency in 2024 (NCES, 2024), a decline from 2022 that continues a pattern that has been largely consistent over the past several decades (NCES, 2024). Children with neurodiversities—such as dyslexia, developmental language disorder (DLD), autism, and ADHD—remain underidentified and underserved, with serious consequences for their academic and health outcomes (Catts & Hogan, 2021; McGregor, 2020; Tomblin et al., 1997). Moreover, students from historically and systematically marginalized groups continue to demonstrate poorer literacy outcomes when compared to their peers, including students growing up in poverty and low-income households, bilingual and multilingual learners, and students from varied racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds (Terry, 2021; Terry et al., 2022). Teachers nationwide are underprepared to deliver evidence-based literacy instruction, and professional development alone does little to close that gap (Wijekumar et al., 2019).

These conditions make clear that the problem is not a shortage of evidence. The Science of Reading - the body of knowledge about how children learn to read and how to teach reading effectively - is well established. Schools that have adopted Science of Reading-aligned programs but are not seeing improved outcomes are, in most cases, experiencing implementation failures: structural, cultural, or leadership-related barriers that prevent evidence from being consistently applied in classrooms.

The Simple View of Reading

To understand why both Science of Reading and Implementation Science are necessary, it helps to start with a framework that most literacy educators and researchers know well: The Simple View of Reading (SVR; Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Gough, 1990). The SVR is a data-driven model that defines reading comprehension as the product of two distinct but complementary processes: word reading (i.e., decoding) and language comprehension. Formally expressed:



The multiplicative structure of the SVR is essential to its logic. A score of zero on either component yields a reading comprehension score of zero, regardless of how strong the other component is. This means that, for example, strong phonics instruction, without attention to developing oral language and language comprehension skills, is insufficient. It also means that strong vocabulary and comprehension instruction, without attention to developing word-level decoding skills, is insufficient. Both are necessary (Hogan, 2022).

The SVR has proven useful in identifying different profiles of reading difficulty. Children who struggle primarily with decoding but have adequate language comprehension exhibit the profile associated with dyslexia. Children with strong decoding but weak language comprehension—often described as “word callers”—show a profile associated with DLD, and their comprehension difficulties are frequently overlooked in schools focused exclusively on phonics instruction (Catts et al., 2006). Students with other neurodiversities, including autism and ADHD, may also show distinct and intersecting reading profiles that require differentiated assessment and instruction (Hancock et al., 2025; Brown et al., 2013). Research has also established that oral language development is an important foundation underlying both word reading and language comprehension across development (Hogan, 2022; Language and Reading Research Consortium Language and Reading Research Consortium [LARRC] & Chiu, 2018; Snowling & Hulme, 2025). This is why literacy systems must address oral language, not just print-level skills.

The SVR also helps explain the so-called “reading wars”—the longstanding pendulum swing between phonics-focused and whole-language approaches (Castles et al., 2018). This oscillation reflects a tendency to prioritize one side of the SVR equation over the other, when research consistently shows that both are necessary. Any comprehensive literacy system must therefore address both word reading and language comprehension in developmentally appropriate, evidence-based ways.

Closing the Know-Do Gap

Implementation Science is the scientific study of methods and strategies that facilitate the uptake of evidence-based practices and research into regular use (Eccles & Mittman, 2006). Its core purpose is to systematically close the gap between what we know and what we do—often referred to as the know-do gap—by identifying and addressing barriers that slow or halt the adoption of proven practices.

Implementation Science originated in the medical and public health fields, where researchers sought to understand why evidence-based treatments were not consistently delivered to patients (Fixsen et al., 2005). In education, parallel work under various names, such as, organizational leadership, program management, collaborative professional learning, needs assessment, and systemic reform, has been underway for decades, though in fragmented form (Lyon & Bruns, 2019). What has been missing is a comprehensive, integrated approach to applying and evaluating how Implementation Science is used specifically in school-based literacy.

If the Science of Reading provides the knowledge, Implementation Science provides the systems that support what to do—and how to sustain it over time

Reading systems in schools are complex and interdependent. When any one component is weak, student achievement is undermined across the whole system (Braithwaite et al., 2018). If the Science of Reading provides the **knowledge**, Implementation Science provides the systems that support what to **do**—and how to sustain it over time. Schools have been primarily focused on what we know from Science of Reading, but have had far less focus on what we know from Implementation Science (Komesidou & Hogan, 2023). Closing the know-do gap in literacy education requires attending to both.

The Ten Components of the Simple View of Outcomes-Literacy

A review of the literature on the Science of Reading (knowledge) and Implementation Science (systems) sets forth ten impactful, malleable, and sustainable components that operationalize the Simple View of Outcomes - Literacy: five Science of Reading components (assessment, instruction, intervention, individual differences, and spoken and written language), and five Implementation Science components (leadership, teacher effectiveness, data use and analysis, shared commitment, and stages of implementation). The ten components represent our current best synthesis of what a strong, sustainable school-based literacy system requires, organized to reflect that knowledge and systems carry potentially equal weight in producing outcomes. As with any evidence base, we expect this list and weighting of each component to evolve as research advances.

Two threads run beneath these ten components and tie them together. Within the reading (knowledge) domain, each component operationalizes the SVR's two pillars—word reading and language comprehension: Assessment, Instruction, and Intervention each address both word reading and language comprehension (e.g., decoding-focused and language-focused screening, instruction, and intervention), Individual Differences accounts for profiles defined by relative strengths and weaknesses in word reading and language comprehension (e.g., dyslexia as a primarily word reading profile, DLD as a primarily language comprehension profile), and Spoken and Written Language explicitly bridges both. Within the implementation (systems) domain, the five components are unified by two underlying qualities: sustainability, the capacity of educators to persist and adapt beyond any single leader, grant cycle, or initiative (reflected especially in Leadership, Stages of Implementation, and Shared Commitment) and coherence, the alignment and consistency of practices, data, and decisions across roles, tiers, and time (reflected especially in Data Use and Analysis, Teacher Effectiveness, and Leadership). Rather than standing apart from the ten components, word reading, language comprehension, sustainability, and coherence describe how those components combine into a single, functioning system.

The Knowledge (Science of Reading) Components of the Simple View of Outcomes - Literacy

Drawing on the SVR, the reading side of the Simple View of Outcomes - Literacy can be conceived of as what schools need to know from the Science of Reading to ensure literacy achievement for all learners. Grounded in word reading and language comprehension, it comprises five evidence-based components: assessment, instruction, intervention, individual differences, and spoken and written language. As with any evidence base, the Science of Reading continues to evolve. To be clear: much more scientific evidence is needed for many aspects of literacy achievement in schools (e.g., effective instructional approaches for adolescent learners; evidence-based writing instruction for early learners; academic instruction for autistic students; and so on). Therefore, these five components represent our current, evidence-based synthesis rather than a fixed and final list.

Assessment

1

Effective literacy systems use both classroom and comprehensive assessment tools. Universal screeners and progress-monitoring measures identify students at risk for experiencing difficulty and track response to instruction, while comprehensive diagnostic assessments characterize the nature and severity of a student's reading and language difficulties and support eligibility determination. Well-designed universal screening and progress-monitoring systems reliably track student growth and inform tiered instructional decisions at scale (Deno et al., 2008), and screening batteries accurately identify children at risk for reading disability early enough to guide preventive intervention (Catts et al., 2015).

Instruction

2

Classroom instruction provided to all students (i.e., Tier I) is evidence-based, systematic, and explicit, grounded in the evidence base for word reading and language comprehension, and coherent and developmentally appropriate across grade levels and content areas. Meta-analytic evidence indicates that systematic, explicit phonics instruction produces moderate to large gains in decoding, word reading, and comprehension relative to unsystematic or no-phonics instruction (Ehri et al., 2001), and consensus reviews confirm that explicit instruction in code-based skills, integrated within a comprehensive approach to language and comprehension, is essential to sound Tier I practice (Fletcher et al., 2021). Likewise, Tier 1 language interventions (e.g., LARRC et al., 2019) promote listening and reading comprehension.

Intervention

3

Tier II and Tier III interventions are targeted, systematic, and explicit, matched to students' identified needs, and delivered with appropriate intensity and fidelity. Tier II interventions in Grades K–3 show moderate to large effects on foundational skills and language/comprehension outcomes (Wanzek et al., 2016; West et al., 2026), and studies comparing implementation quality show that students who receive supplemental intervention delivered with high fidelity make significantly greater reading gains than those receiving the same intervention with lower fidelity (Jiménez et al., 2021).

Individual Differences

4

The literacy system explicitly recognizes and responds to variability among students, including neurodiversity (e.g., dyslexia, DLD, autism, ADHD), dialectal variation, race and ethnicity, and multilingual learners while maintaining high expectations for all students. Longitudinal research confirms that dyslexia and DLD are dissociable but frequently co-occurring conditions with distinct patterns of reading comprehension difficulty, underscoring the need for differentiated identification and instruction (Catts et al., 2005). Despite persistent, measurable achievement gaps, children with DLD and/or dyslexia, particularly those with DLD alone, continue to be under-identified and under-served by school support systems (Duff et al., 2023). Research consistently indicates that multilingual learners make the strongest gains when high-quality, evidence-based reading instruction is paired with explicit support for oral language and academic language development while leveraging students' linguistic assets when appropriate (Kittle et al., 2024; August & Shanahan, 2006). Effective literacy instruction for multilingual learners is not a separate science of reading, but an extension of it (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020). "Structured multiliteracy" involves the intentional application of structured literacy alongside language development capitalizing on students' knowledge and skills in their heritage language by integrating cross-linguistic and cross-cultural features (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2024).

Spoken and Written Language

5

Instruction integrates across modalities, attending to oral language as a foundation for both word reading and language comprehension (Hogan, 2022; LARRC & Chiu, 2018; Terry et al., 2025) and treating writing as inseparable from reading development. Longitudinal evidence shows that listening comprehension and word decoding, together with their interaction, account for nearly all variance in early reading comprehension, confirming oral language as a core determinant of literacy outcomes rather than a peripheral skill (LARRC & Chiu, 2018; Lervåg et al., 2018). Reading and writing development are similarly interdependent, drawing on shared oral language and linguistic knowledge that instruction must address in tandem rather than in isolation (Kim, 2026).

The Systems (Implementation Science) Components of the Simple View of Outcomes-Literacy

The systems side of the Simple View of Outcomes - Literacy, grounded in coherence and sustainability, comprises five components, drawn from Implementation Science research, that moderate the relationship between instructional quality and student outcomes: leadership, teacher effectiveness, data use and analysis, shared commitment, and stages of implementation. Like the reading components, these represent our current best understanding of what a strong implementation infrastructure looks like in schools, and that understanding will continue to evolve.

Leadership

1

School leaders who understand both the Science of Reading and Implementation Science are positioned to make consequential decisions: building communication structures, allocating time for ongoing professional learning, and making scheduling decisions that allow evidence-based practice to take hold. Research consistently identifies leadership as one of the most powerful moderators of school improvement (Leithwood et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2008), and in the General Implementation Framework (GIF) School, leadership engagement is a key determinant of implementation readiness within the inner setting domain (e.g., classroom, school, district) (Komesidou & Hogan, 2023). A leader who understands where a system's greatest implementation barriers lie, whether in teacher efficacy, data use, or shared commitment, can prioritize accordingly, rather than pursuing uniform reform efforts that do not address the system's specific needs (Crawford [Brooke] & Torgesen, 2007). A three-level meta-analysis of over 100 studies confirms that school leadership practices, particularly those related to instructional management and building teacher capacity, are significantly associated with student achievement across grade levels, reinforcing leadership's role as a key lever for system-wide literacy improvement (Tan et al., 2024).

Teacher Effectiveness

2

Systems that invest in professional learning without attending to teacher effectiveness often find that knowledge does not translate to practice (Fixsen et al., 2005). Experimental evidence supports this link: a motivationally focused implementation strategy targeting teachers' self-efficacy and outcome expectations significantly increased both immediate adoption and fidelity of an evidence-based program relative to training alone (Merle et al., 2023), and teacher self-efficacy is significantly associated with higher-fidelity implementation of tiered instructional frameworks (Nichols et al., 2020).

Data Use and Analysis

3

Ideally, schools have protocols for collecting, analyzing, and acting on data at multiple levels — from individual student progress to system-wide implementation outcomes — with data that are immediately accessible and easy to use. Data literacy is a prerequisite for data use, and systems must invest in both. Reviews of data-based decision-making identify data literacy and leadership as the most important enablers of effective data use for school improvement, while cautioning that data alone does not improve outcomes absent structures for interpretation and action (Schildkamp, 2019). Where schools implemented structured, school-wide data-based decision-making over two years, student achievement growth increased by roughly one additional month of schooling on average (van Geel et al., 2016).

Shared Commitment

4

Literacy is a shared responsibility across the school community, families, and disciplines. General educators, special educators, speech-language pathologists (SLPs), and administrators work together across roles (Komesidou & Hogan, 2023), and families are active, respected partners in assessment, goal-setting, and intervention planning, not merely recipients of information. Genuine partnership includes practical access support, such as offering family meetings at multiple times, providing childcare, and ensuring interpreters are available for families who need them. Commitment extends beyond the school walls to district leaders, community organizations, and policymakers, creating the outer-setting conditions that sustain implementation over time. A meta-analysis of 46 studies found a strong, positive relationship between family educational involvement and children's learning outcomes during early childhood and early elementary education, with behavioral involvement and home-school connection identified as particularly influential (Ma et al., 2016). Effective family-school-community partnerships further depend on redefining teachers' professional roles to include structured collaboration with families, rather than treating such collaboration as incidental to instruction (Epstein, 2018).

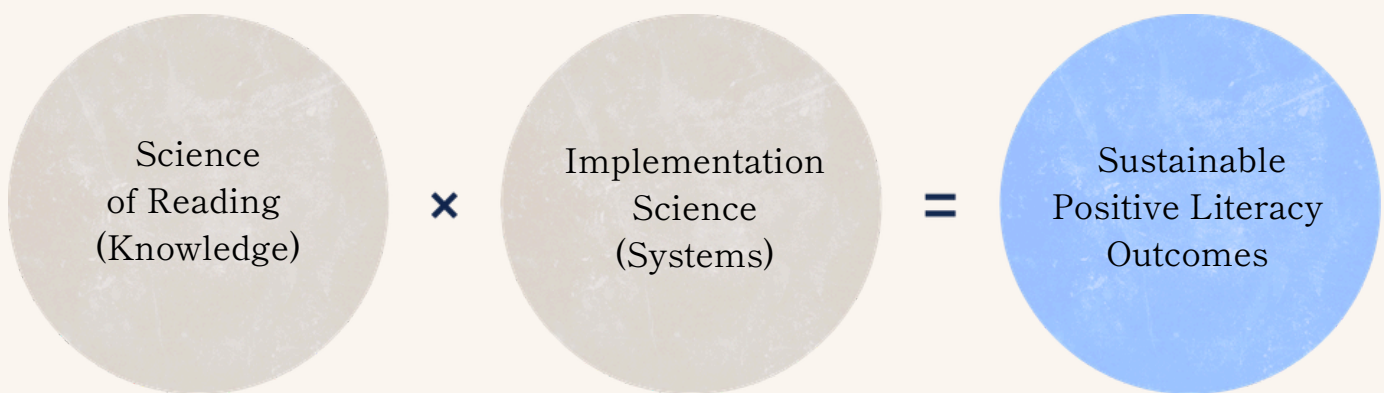
Stages of Implementation

5

Implementation unfolds across pre-implementation, implementation, and sustainment stages that overlap and recur rather than proceeding strictly in sequence (Meyers et al., 2012). What a system needs, and what “strong implementation” looks like, depends on which stage a school or district is currently in, and systems must be designed to persist beyond any single champion, grant period, or administrative tenure. A systematic review of the widely used Exploration, Preparation, Implementation, Sustainment (EPIS) framework confirms that implementation unfolds across these recursive phases in public-sector settings, including education, and that attention to factors at the broader national and state level in addition to local school level at each phase improves the likelihood of successful adoption (Moullin et al., 2019). Tools such as the Stages of Implementation Completion further operationalize this progression by measuring the duration, completeness, and quality of activities across pre-implementation, implementation, and sustainment phases, allowing systems to detect implementation risk early rather than after failure has occurred (Saldana, 2014).

The Simple View of Outcomes-Literacy

The Simple View of Outcomes - Literacy marries the Science of Reading and Implementation Science. It proposes that positive literacy outcomes are the multiplicative product of two equally essential components: (1) the Science of Reading and (2) Implementation Science. Formally: Science of Reading × Implementation Science = Sustainable Positive Literacy Outcomes.



Like the SVR, the Simple View of Outcomes - Literacy is explicitly multiplicative. A school with strong Science of Reading knowledge but weak implementation capacity will not achieve consistent outcomes. Consider, for example, a district that has invested in a high-quality structured literacy curriculum but has not addressed the communication structures, data systems, or leadership engagement needed to support its consistent and effective use. Teachers may deliver the curriculum inconsistently or with low fidelity, not because they lack commitment, but because the system around them has not been built to support implementation. The curriculum exists; the conditions for its effective use do not. Conversely, a school with strong implementation infrastructure but misaligned instructional practices, perhaps one with excellent coaching systems built around an unvalidated reading program, will also fall short. Both components are necessary; neither is sufficient alone.

Teachers may deliver the curriculum inconsistently or with low fidelity - not because they lack commitment, but because the system around them has not been built to support implementation.

The multiplicative logic of the Simple View of Outcomes – Literacy has an important ancestor in Implementation Science. The Active Implementation Frameworks propose that socially significant outcomes are the product of effective interventions, effective implementation, and enabling contexts (Fixsen et al., 2005; Fixsen et al., 2013). The Simple View of Outcomes – Literacy inherits this insight but departs from it in two ways. First, whereas the Active Implementation Frameworks are deliberately content-agnostic because the "effective intervention" term is a placeholder to be filled by any usable innovation, our framework specifies the content side for literacy, synthesizing five components of the Science of Reading that are themselves organized by the Simple View of Reading's two pillars. This integration matters because in literacy, what must be implemented shapes how it must be implemented: differentiated profiles of reading difficulty, layered assessment systems, and the oral language foundation place distinct demands on leadership, data use, and educator capacity. Second, whereas the Active Implementation Frameworks function as a process methodology for implementation teams, the Simple View of Outcomes – Literacy functions as a diagnostic and organizing heuristic for school leaders, expressed through an equation the field already knows. In this sense, the framework does not compete with other models such as the Active Implementation Frameworks, EPIS, or the General Implementation Framework (GIF)-School. Instead, it provides a literacy-specific conceptual home from which schools can select and apply them.



Importantly, the Simple View of Outcomes - Literacy does not prescribe a single pathway to improved literacy outcomes. Schools and districts vary in their starting conditions, available resources, community contexts, and student populations. A school whose primary challenge is low teacher knowledge about language comprehension will need a different pathway than one whose primary challenge is inconsistent Tier II implementation. The framework provides a way for diagnosing where a system's weaknesses lie and for building toward the conditions that allow both the Science of Reading and Implementation Science to work together.



An important insight embedded in the Simple View of Outcomes - Literacy is that whereas the Science of Reading has been operationalized through a range of practical tools, assessments, curricula, intervention programs, and MTSS frameworks, a comparable practical infrastructure for Implementation Science (IS) in schools does not yet exist at scale. This framework aims to address that gap by providing a conceptual home for IS work in literacy and by connecting educators to existing IS components and keys to successful literacy implementation that can be used to operationalize this work in practice.

Of note, the Simple View of Outcomes - Literacy is not limited to literacy. As a general systems model, we contend that it has the potential to be applied to any domain in which evidence-based practice and implementation infrastructure must work together to produce student outcomes, including mathematics, science, and social-emotional learning.

Practical Implications for the Simple View of Outcomes - Literacy

It is important to acknowledge that we are not alone in our insistence that the Science of Reading alone is insufficient to improve reading achievement in schools. From calls to develop a “Science of Teaching Reading” (Kim & Snow, 2025), to develop better systems to translate the Science of Reading (Solari et al., 2020), and even an “Engineering of Reading” (Tipton & Terry, 2026), both researchers and practitioners have expressed concern with solutions that do not adequately account for the complexity of classrooms and schools (Conway, 2022). The Simple View of Outcomes - Literacy is a theoretically grounded but practice-oriented response to this problem. As a result, it has several practical implications for what can happen in schools.

Practical implications:

First: Reframing the Central Question

First, it reframes the central question for school and district leaders in relation to literacy improvement. Instead of asking “Which reading program should we adopt?” the more useful question is “What does our reading system look like as a whole, what are the systemic barriers preventing our educators from consistently delivering evidence-based instruction, and how can we facilitate improvement?” This shift moves accountability from individual teachers or programs to the system, which is a stance that is consistent with Implementation Science’s emphasis on systemic rather than individual explanations for implementation failure (Fixsen et al., 2005).

Second: Operationalizing Implementation Science

The Simple View of Outcomes - Literacy highlights the need for practical tools to operationalize Implementation Science in educational settings. Numerous frameworks provide useful structures for thinking about barriers and facilitators, implementation stages, strategies, and outcomes. Connecting these frameworks gives schools a way to organize implementation work within a broader, theory-driven approach.

Third: Equity is Central to Implementation Work

Equity must be central to implementation work, not peripheral to it. The Simple View of Outcomes - Literacy reinforces this commitment: high expectations for all students, acknowledgment of neurodiversity, and genuine family partnership are not optional features of a reading system; they are essential ones. Implementation work that does not attend to equity will not produce equitable outcomes for all learners (cf. Baumann & Cabassa, 2020; Terry & Baumann, 2022).

Fourth: Implications for Education Technology and Artificial Intelligence

The Simple View of Outcomes - Literacy has implications for educational technology and AI-augmented systems. AI tools are increasingly deployed in schools to support data analysis, instructional planning, and professional learning. Such tools must be designed with the full framework in mind—not merely as vehicles for delivering instructional content, but as structures that help schools understand and improve the implementation quality of their literacy systems. Consistent with guidance from the U.S. Department of Education (2023), the role of AI in education is best understood as augmenting human intelligence (HI), not replacing it. The educator remains in control; AI reduces burden and amplifies capacity.

Fifth: Implications for Research

Finally, the Simple View of Outcomes - Literacy has implications for research. Like SVR, the explicitly multiplicative framework allows for empirical investigation of if, how, and under what conditions the integration of these components leads to improved literacy achievement in schools. It is not difficult to envision a vast research agenda that can tackle complex questions that have befuddled reading and literacy researchers for years, but whose answers would be consequential for policy and practice.

Conclusion

The persistent gap between reading science and reading outcomes is a systems problem. Schools that have adopted Science of Reading-aligned programs and are not seeing improved results are, in most cases, experiencing implementation failures — structural barriers that prevent evidence from being consistently applied in classrooms. Addressing this problem requires attending to both the Science of Reading and Implementation Science.

The persistent gap
between reading science
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systems problem.

The Simple View of Outcomes - Literacy framework provides a coherent and practically grounded model for that work. By framing literacy outcomes as the multiplicative product of ten components—five knowledge and five systems—the framework orients school improvement efforts toward the whole system. By recognizing that there are many pathways to improved literacy outcomes, it allows schools and districts to diagnose their specific barriers and build toward improvement from where they are across multiple domains, not from a single prescribed starting point. By putting Implementation Science tools in the hands of school leaders, school systems can move theoretical frameworks to concrete actions.

Heeding Archbishop Tutu's call to 'go upstream' means more than adopting better curricula. It means examining and transforming the systems within which instruction occurs. It means building sustainable capacity in educators and leaders, rather than dependence on external programs or initiatives. And it means treating every child's right to read with the urgency it deserves—not as a periodic reform effort, but as a civil right and the central, enduring mission of our schools.

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