

THE IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT-LED EDUCATION RESEARCH ON POLICY AND PRACTICE

A Case Study from South Africa



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ORIENTATION

Case study:

Early Grade Reading Study series conducted by the Research Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate at the Department of Basic Education



DBE

RCME DIR

EGRS 2015-
2025

Policy

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Three questions:

What creates a successful government-embedded EdLab, and how can it be strengthened or replicated?

What are the unique and replicable lessons learned from 10 years of EGRS?

What has been the influence of these studies?



KEY CONCEPTS



POLICY

PRACTICE

**POLICY-
MAKERS**

**GOVERNMENT-
EMBEDDED RESEARCH
UNIT**

**EDUCATION EVIDENCE
LABS**

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS



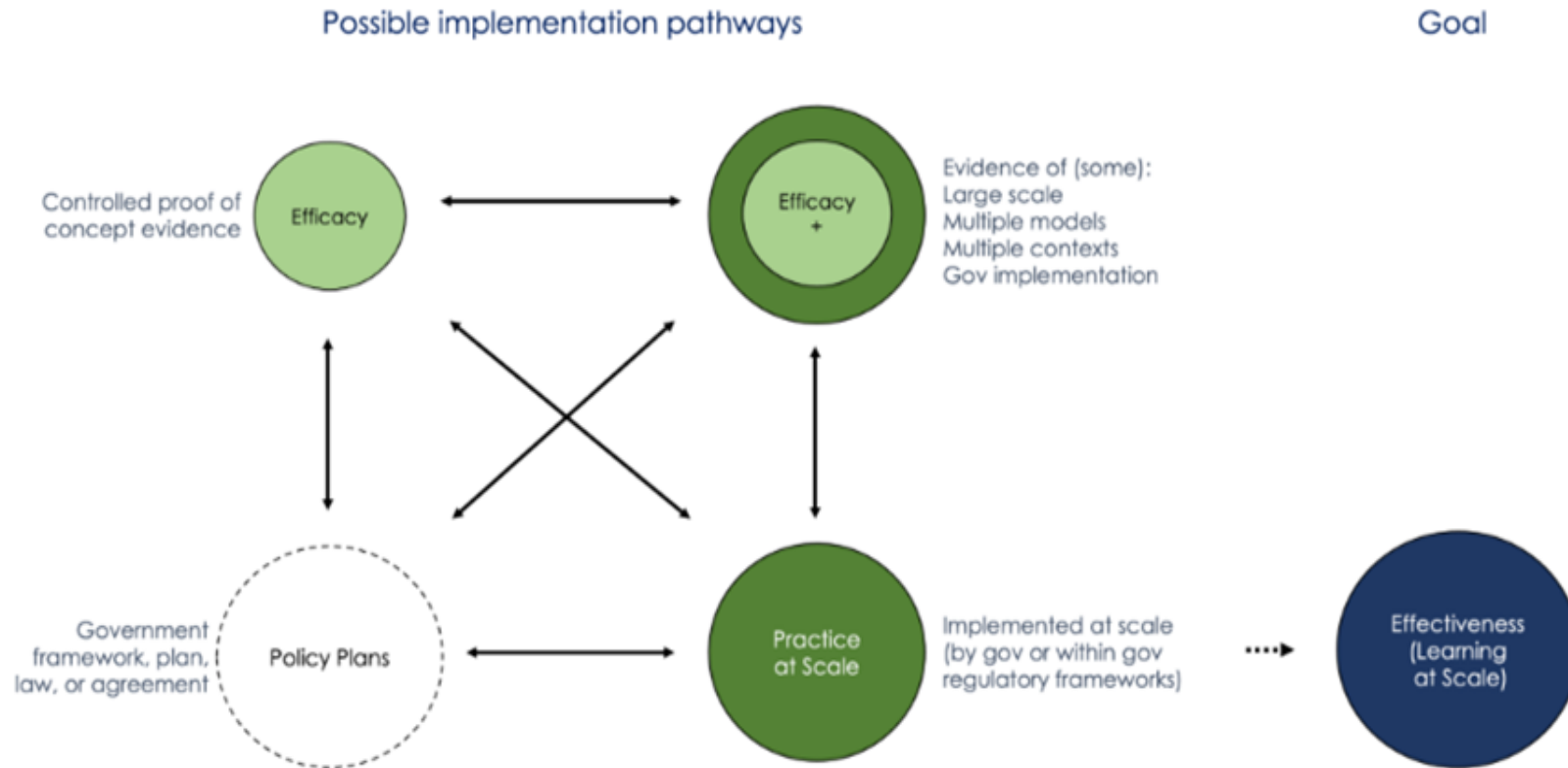
EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY

- SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS FROM RCT
- CONTACT GAP, MISTRUST, LACK OF RESEARCH SKILLS

CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY

- WORLD VIEWS, COLLECTIVE UNDERSTANDING, VALUES, SOCIAL CONSTRUCT OF REALITY, POLITICS, IDENTITY

WHAT WORKS HUB CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF POLICY INFLUENCE

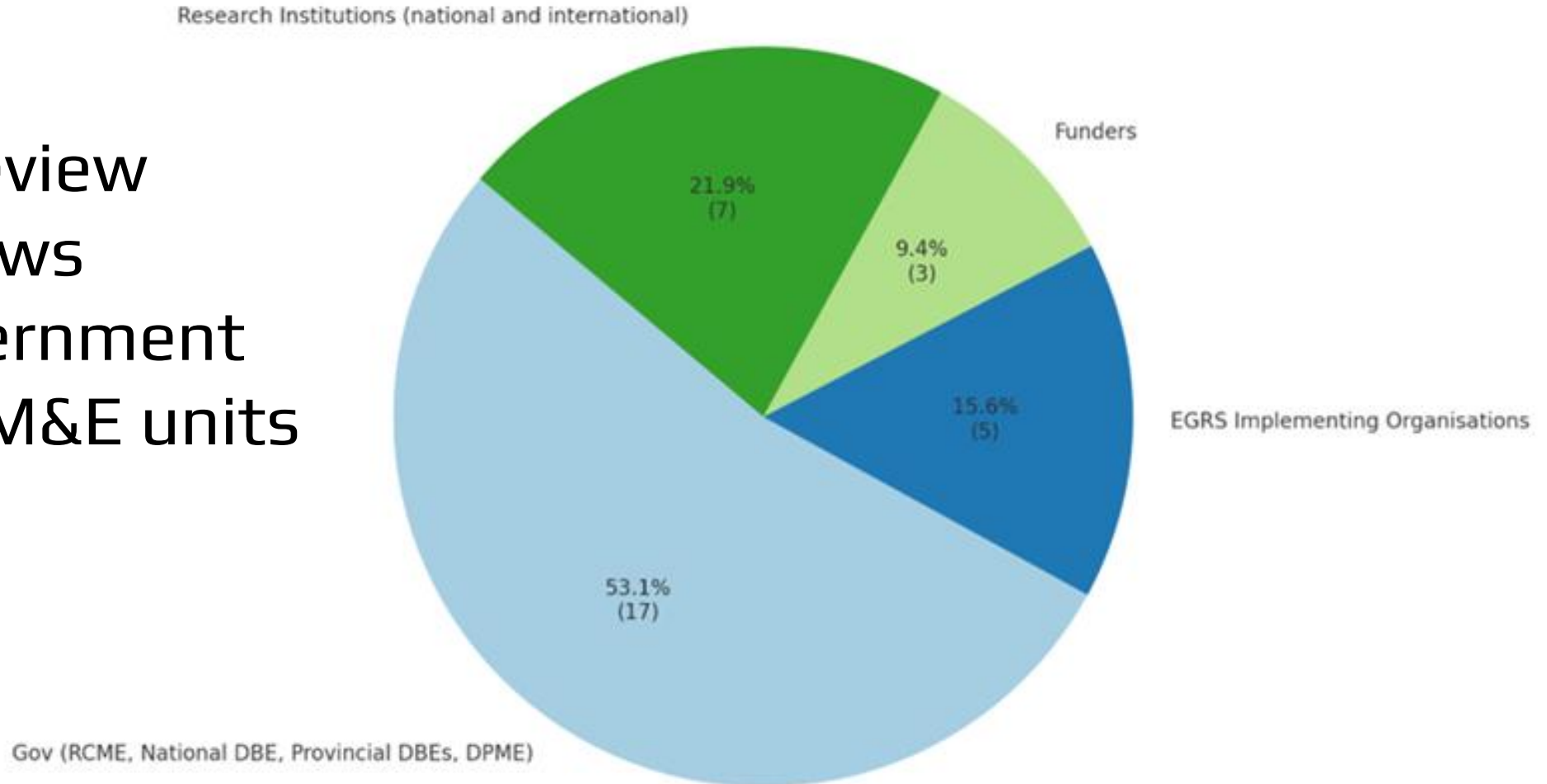


Framework is non-linear: evidence, policy, and practice interact iteratively.
Influence flows both ways (practice informs policy, policy triggers new research).
Provides a lens to analyse EGRS influence on evidence–policy–practice linkages

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative: Case study

- Desktop review
- 32 interviews
- >50% Government
- Provincial M&E units



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Assumptions

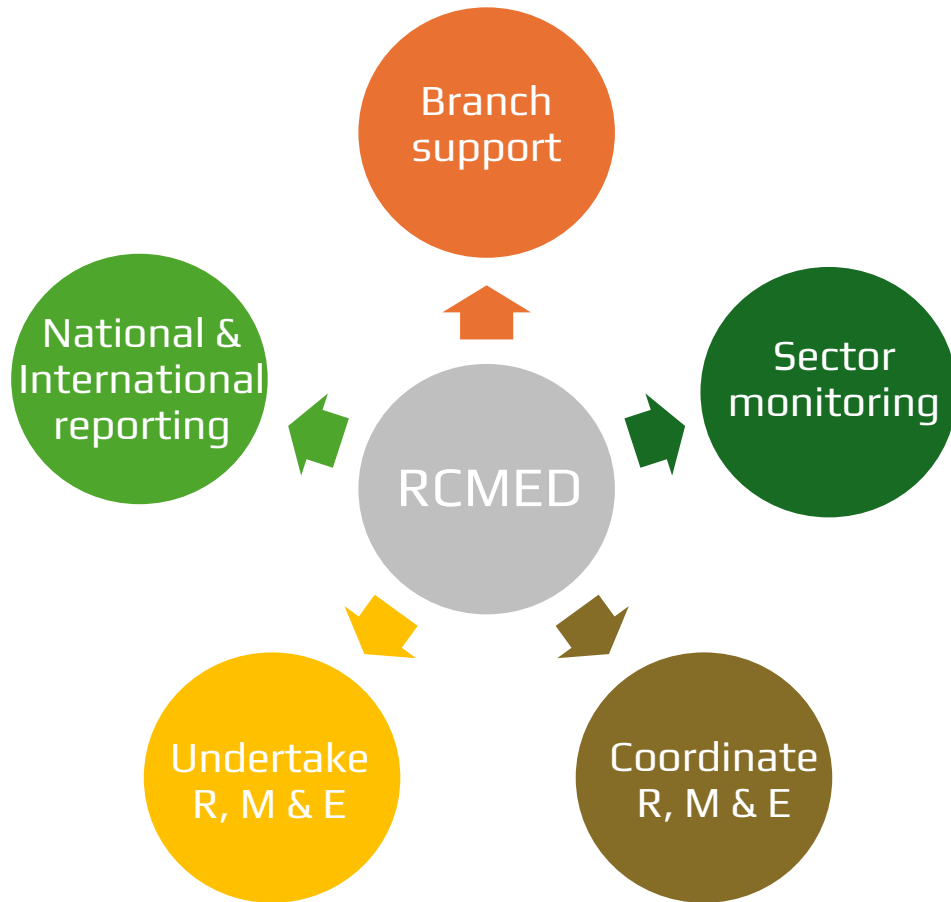
Your thoughts on how an embedded EdLab functions:

- Mandate
- Staff
- Research funding
- Topics of research
- Dissemination



Findings: RCME Directorate

Mandate



Skills



Technical skills



Sector-wide knowledge



Cross-sectoral knowledge



Soft skills

Findings: RCME Directorate

Relationships and collaboration

Internal:
Branches

Provinces

External:
Researchers

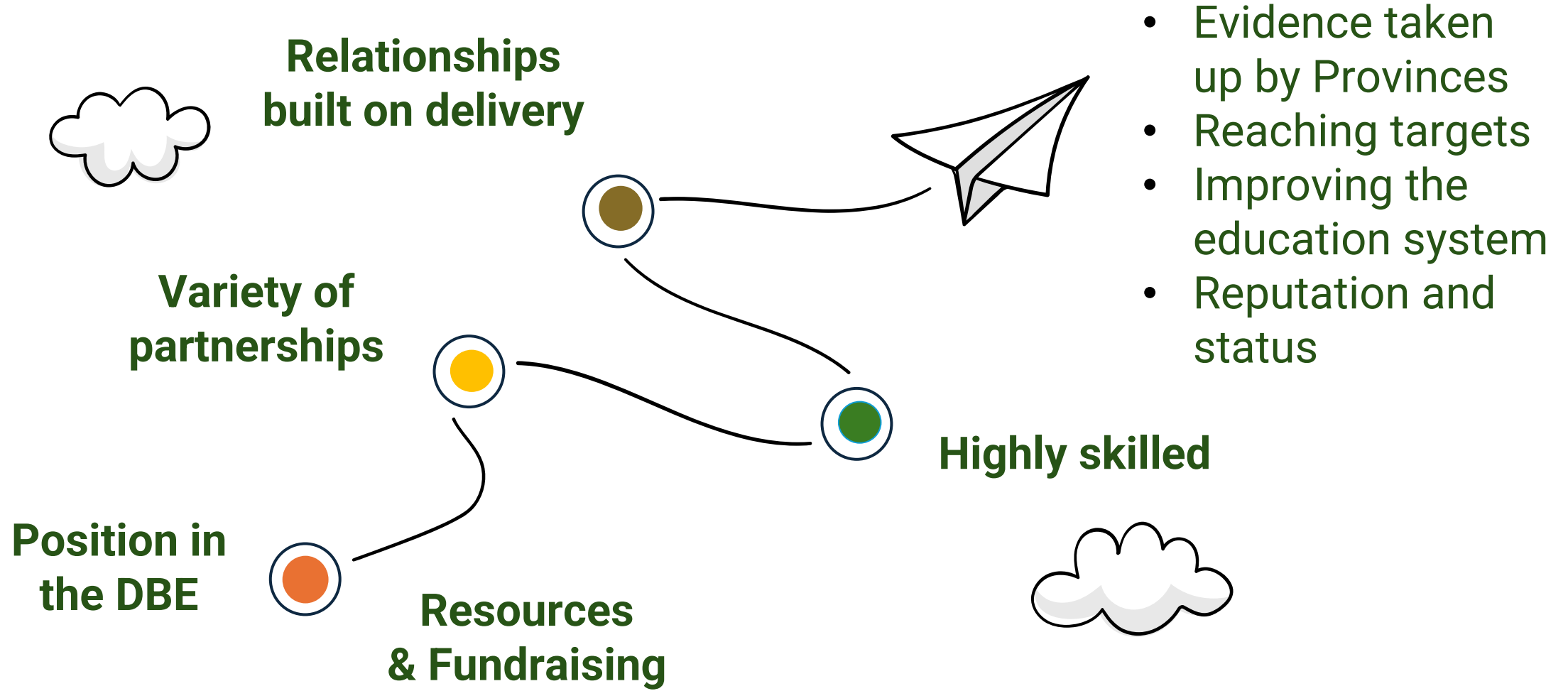


Politics and relationships can be decisive, and cannot be fully managed.

- ☐ Be useful to your clients, equally: Branches and Provinces
- ☐ Boost your reputation through external partnerships
- ☐ Communicate well and often about your mandate and your findings

Findings: RCME Directorate

Success and replicability



FINDINGS: EGRS

Implementation Lessons

- Teacher Capacity Building → Structured lesson plans & continuous training to bridge knowledge gaps.
- Coaching Works → In-person coaching builds trust & accountability but it is expensive. Hybrid mechanism is ideal to reduce cost
- Stakeholder Engagement → Early integration of subject advisors strengthens buy-in & sustainability.
- Technology Integration → Tablets useful but require infrastructure, training & gradual rollout.

Evaluation Lessons

- Balanced Methods → RCTs are credible, but need qualitative insights for context.
- Accessible Evidence → Findings should be simplified & shared with decision-makers.
- Embedded Learning → Evidence must feed into policy structures for quicker uptake.



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Conditions for policy influence

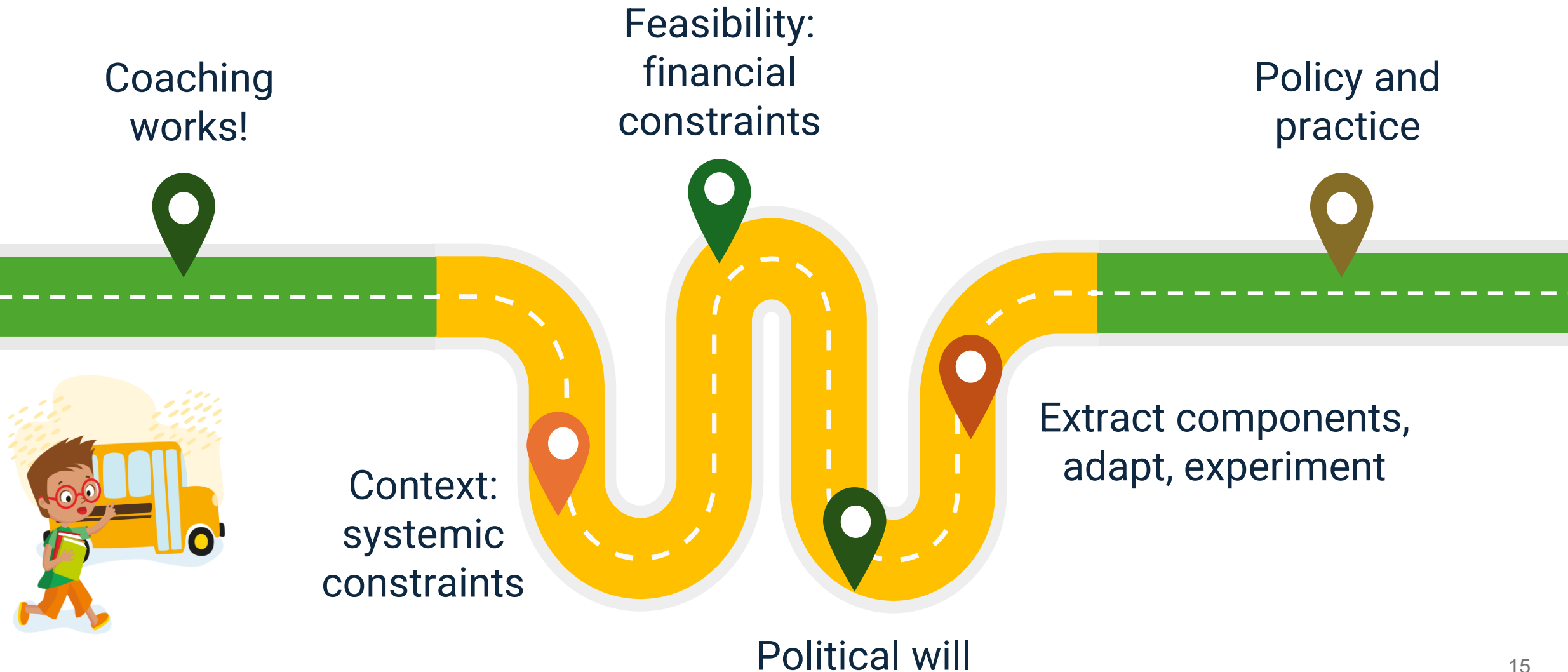
What factors influence MOST how evidence is translated into policy?

- Political will
- Budgets
- Human resources
- Structures and systems
- Research methodology
- Communication of findings
- Trust



Findings: Policy Influence

Coaching: Effective but challenging

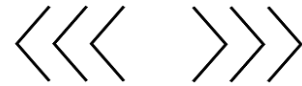


Findings: Policy influence

Invisible and intangible perceptions: shaping thinking over time



RCT



Qualitative

Local



International

Internal



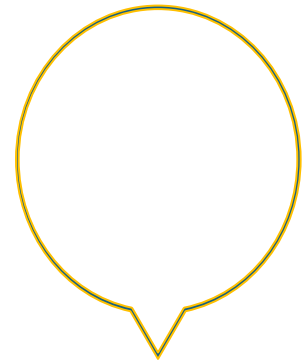
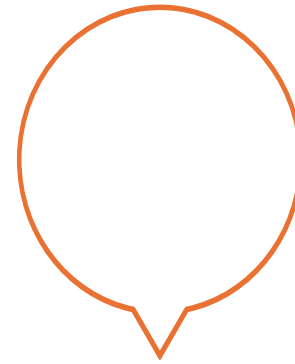
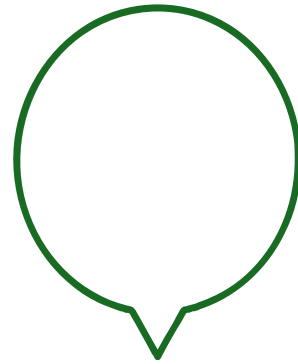
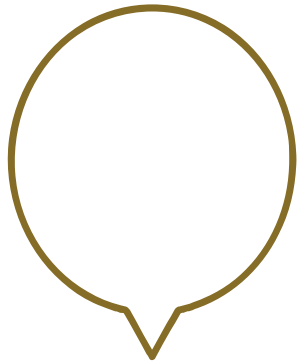
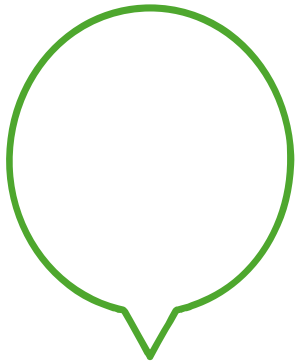
External

Findings: Policy influence



Collaboration vs Independence
Internal vs External

Spectrum



Relationships

Collaboration

Independence

Communication

Trust

Balance methodological rigour and strong stakeholder
engagement to ensure impact and influence

Conclusion

Government-embedded EdLabs

- ❑ Clear mandate, political support, effective partnerships, dedicated funding, precise mechanisms for incorporating research into policy
- ❑ Evidence alone does not shape policy, also political priorities, budgetary constraints, competing agendas
- ❑ EGRS has exerted significant indirect influence: funders' priorities, importance of foundational literacy, structured pedagogy, effective literacy interventions, practice at scale
- ❑ Independence and collaboration must be balanced to maximise trust in research outcomes



Thank you



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