



## MANAGING CHANGE TO UPGRADE ENGLISH TEACHING IN VIETNAM

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### **Abstract:**

Managing change in English Language Teaching (ELT) has been implemented to meet the changing requirements and expectations of language learners in a globalized society. This paper investigates the application of change management models in the field of ELT, with particular emphasis on Vietnam. The research employed a document analysis approach by reviewing and analyzing relevant academic papers on change management and managing change in ELT. The study identified five change management models, including Lewin's Change Management Model, ADKAR Model, Kotter's 8 Step Change Model, McKinsey 7S Model, and Kübler-Ross Five Stage Model. Many of these models have been employed in the ELT sector. The best practice of applying change management models in EFL is recommended to Vietnam in order to improve English teaching in its institutions and centers. The paper is expected to provide an in-depth analysis of various change management models and their potential application in the Vietnamese context.

**Keywords:** change management, English Language Teaching (ELT), Vietnamese education, teaching methodologies, technology integration, curriculum shifts

### **1. Introduction**

In today's global world, English proficiency has become a crucial skill, opening doors to educational and career opportunities and facilitating international communication. Recognizing this, Vietnam has made substantial efforts to improve the quality of ELT across the country. Over the past few decades, the Vietnamese ELT sector has experienced significant transformation, from the introduction of new teaching methodologies and the integration of technology to shifts in the curriculum (Le & Le, 2022; Phuong & Tran, 2022; T. T. N. Vu, 2017). While these changes aim to enhance the

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effectiveness of English language education and better prepare Vietnamese citizens for the demands of a global economy, managing these changes presents a considerable challenge (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021; Tuyen & Hien, 2022; H. H. Vu & Nguyen, 2020).

Successful implementation of change management in ELT requires not only the adoption of new practices but also shifts in mindset, and the navigation of various logistical, technical, and human obstacles (Tribble, 2012). Understanding and managing this change process effectively is thus of paramount importance. This paper explores the concept of change management, reviews various change management models, and discusses their application to the ELT sector. The current state of ELT in Vietnam is examined, and recommendations for managing change in this context are proposed. By providing insights into the change management process in the context of ELT in Vietnam, this paper aims to contribute to the ongoing efforts to enhance English language education in the country as well as to broaden the literature on change management in education.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Concepts of Change Management**

Change management is a systematic approach to transitioning or transforming an organization's goals, processes, or technologies (Burnes, 2004). Its primary objective is to implement strategies for effecting change, controlling change, and helping individuals adapt to change (Hiatt, 2006).

In the realm of ELT, change management may involve the incorporation of new teaching methodologies, the integration of technology in teaching, or curriculum modifications (Richards, 2018). Each of these facets requires strategic planning and careful execution to ensure the successful implementation of change and to minimize disruption to the learning process.

An important consideration in change management within the ELT context is the impact of the human element. According to Fullan (2007), individuals involved in the field of ELT, including professionals, students, and administrative staff, frequently encounter the need to make substantial modifications in order to accommodate novel procedures, technologies, or educational programs. The process may entail acquiring new knowledge or enhancing existing abilities, adapting to novel timetables or patterns, and managing the ambiguity and strain that frequently accompany substantial modifications. Kotter (1996) asserts that the provision of adequate support and resources through effective change management strategies is crucial to facilitating a smooth transition and enabling individuals to successfully adapt to new circumstances.

Additionally, the implementation of change management in the field of ELT necessitates a significant level of awareness and consideration of the socio-cultural environment in which educational practices take place. Holliday (1994) asserts that in international or multicultural settings, there can be significant variations in effective teaching, learning preferences, and language use. Therefore, change strategies should be flexible and adaptable, allowing for variations in local contexts and individual needs.

Change management plays a crucial role in ELT. It offers a structured approach to implementing changes in teaching methods, technologies, and curricula. By doing so, it allows the field of ELT to evolve and adapt to the rapidly changing demands of the 21st century, while also ensuring that the human elements of teaching and learning are well supported and catered to.

## **2.2 Change Management Models**

There exist several models for managing change, including Lewin's Change Management Model, ADKAR, Kotter's 8 Step Change Model, McKinsey 7S Model, and the Kübler-Ross Five Stage Model. Each of these models has its strengths and unique perspectives on managing change, offering a roadmap for organizations, such as schools or educational institutions, to handle transitions. Change management models provide a structured approach to managing change, assisting organizations in transitioning smoothly through different phases of change. Here we discuss some popular models and their relevance to education and ELT.

### **2.2.1 Lewin's Change Management Model**

Proposed by Kurt Lewin, this model posits that change involves a three-step process: Unfreeze, Change, and Refreeze (Lewin, 1947). In the context of ELT, “unfreezing” could involve challenging the current teaching methodologies or curricula, “change” could involve introducing and implementing new methods or content, and “refreezing” would involve establishing these changes as the new norm.

### **2.2.2 ADKAR Model**

Developed by Prosci, the ADKAR Model represents five sequential stages that individuals typically go through during change: Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement (Hiatt, 2006). In ELT, this model can be helpful in managing the people side of change, such as teachers transitioning to a new teaching methodology.

### **2.2.3 Kotter's 8 Step Change Model**

This model, developed by John P. Kotter, provides a step-by-step approach to change, starting with creating a sense of urgency for change and ending with making the change stick (Kotter, 1996). Kotter's 8-step model comprises stages that are straightforward to adhere to and can serve as a preventive measure against the multiple errors that have been empirically linked to the failure of change initiatives.

### **2.2.4 McKinsey 7S Model**

The model proposed by Waterman Jr., Peters, and Phillips (1980) highlights the interdependence of various components within an organization, such as its strategy, structure, systems, skills, staff, style, and shared values. This highlights the significance of taking into account all these factors while executing modifications in an ELT environment.

### **2.2.5 Kübler-Ross Five Stage Model**

The model commonly referred to as the Change Curve delineates the emotional trajectory that individuals tend to experience in the context of change, encompassing stages such as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kübler-Ross, 1969). The model, initially designed to delineate the phases of mourning, has been repurposed for the realm of change management and can serve as a valuable tool for comprehending and regulating the affective reactions of educators or learners amid substantial transformations in the field of English Language Teaching.

These models for managing change have their origins in other fields of human endeavor such as industry, healthcare, and bereavement counselling. In the field of education, each may have some useful features to offer towards creating a fully integrated system adapted to the unique challenges of English teaching in Vietnam.

## **3. Materials and Methods**

This study employed a document analysis approach. According to Indeed Editorial Team (2023), document analysis is significant because it enables researchers to make sense of their materials and choose the best bits for their investigations. Documents contain qualitative data, which is non-numerical information organized into categories by researchers. Data organization enables researchers to integrate document analysis with other sorts of study.

Moreover, purposive sampling was selected in the current research as it is a non-probability sampling technique used in research investigations to pick a specific set of people or units for study. Participants are picked "on purpose," rather than at random. Purposive sampling is used when the researcher selects a sample with a specific aim or target in mind. As a result, the sample is chosen depending on the features or attributes that the researcher wishes to investigate (Health, 2023). Consequently, the researchers collected documents related to change management, quality assurance and managing change in teaching English.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Change Management in English Language Teaching**

In the swiftly developing domain of ELT, modification is not only unavoidable but also imperative for advancement and enhancement. The perpetual presence of change is evident in various aspects of education, such as the implementation of novel pedagogical approaches, incorporation of emerging technologies, and modifications in the curriculum. However, these changes also present challenges, particularly when it comes to implementation and acceptance by teachers, students, and other stakeholders. This is where the application of change management models becomes crucial.

### **4.1.1 Managing Methodological Changes**

ELT teaching methods have evolved greatly over the years, moving away from traditional teacher-centered approaches and toward more learner-centered and communicative approaches (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The implementation of these new methods necessitates rigorous change management. Using Lewin's change management model, for example, the "unfreezing" step could involve raising awareness of the limitations of present approaches and emphasizing the benefits of the new approach. The "change" stage could include teacher training and assistance. This can then be reinforced by defining practice standards, implementing assessment and feedback systems, and creating a supportive environment for teachers to constantly grow and improve their teaching approaches.

### **4.1.2 Integrating Technology**

The integration of technology into ELT, from digital textbooks to language learning apps, has become increasingly prevalent (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). Here, the ADKAR Model can be particularly useful. Awareness could be raised about the benefits of technology, desire could be fostered through demonstrations of its effectiveness, knowledge and ability could be developed through training, and reinforcement could involve ongoing support and feedback.

### **4.1.3 Curriculum Shifts**

Changes in curriculum, such as adopting a more learner-centric approach or including more culturally relevant materials, also require effective change management (Cunningsworth, 1995). Kotter's 8 Step Change Model could be employed, starting with creating a sense of urgency about the need for change, forming a powerful coalition to lead the change, and communicating the vision for change. The subsequent steps would involve removing obstacles, creating short-term wins, building on the change, and anchoring the changes into the culture.

The application of change management models in ELT can help ensure that changes are effectively implemented and that all stakeholders are adequately supported through the transition process. This results in more successful change initiatives and a more dynamic, responsive ELT environment.

## **4.2 English Language Teaching in Vietnam**

In response to the demands of globalization and Vietnam's increasing integration into the world economy, ELT in the country has undergone substantial changes over the past few decades. The Vietnamese government has recognized English proficiency as a key skill for its citizens and has initiated a number of reforms to improve the quality of English language education.

The swift and substantial magnitude of transformations in the field of English language instruction has posed diverse obstacles. A significant obstacle that has arisen is the shift from conventional teacher-focused pedagogies to more participatory and learner-centered methodologies. Despite the existence of governmental policies aimed at

facilitating the adoption of these novel methodologies, their execution has not always been without complications. Numerous educators have encountered challenges in adjusting to the modifications, primarily attributed to inadequate preparation and support. Effectively addressing these challenges necessitates providing educators with the requisite training and resources, thereby enabling them to implement novel methodologies and facilitate a seamless transition.

The integration of technology in the field of ELT has encountered challenges despite its potential to improve the learning experience. Limited technological resources in some schools, inadequate teacher training in using these technologies, and a lack of consistent technical support have been significant barriers to effective integration (Vo & Nguyen, 2016).

Finally, shifts in curriculum, such as the adoption of a competency-based approach and the inclusion of more communicative tasks, have also faced challenges. Teachers have had to adapt to new ways of planning lessons and assessing students, often with insufficient guidance and support (Pham, 2016).

These challenges underscore the need for more effective change management in Vietnam's ELT sector. By systematically planning and implementing changes, providing adequate support for teachers and other stakeholders, and continuously monitoring and adjusting the change process, the country can better navigate its ELT transformation journey.

## **5. Recommendations**

Based on the challenges and potential opportunities in the context of ELT in Vietnam, the following recommendations are proposed to manage change more effectively.

### **5.1 Utilizing Established Change Management Models**

In the process of reforming and improving English teaching methods in Vietnam, the application of proven change management models such as the ADKAR Model or Kotter's 8 Step Change Model can provide a structured approach to managing change. The ADKAR model proves its strength by initiating the creation of Desire - the driving force for change. Rather than maintaining a 'frozen' state as suggested by Lewin's Change Management Model, we should aim for a continuous, permanent process of change, a relentless improvement driven by the teachers themselves, akin to the Japanese Kai Zen system. Each teacher is expected to not only perform their duties but also consistently enhance their work. Improvements and innovations are incentivized financially and through enhanced status. Once things start moving forward, we should not intend to halt but maintain the momentum of progress.

The challenge here is to get people to accept change, to stir forward movement, and the way to do that is by motivating them to propel the process themselves. When their emotions are aroused, when they recognize progress, when they take on the role of pioneers, they will push change forward. In the specific context of Vietnam, choosing the appropriate model would depend on the nature of the change (Biech, 2007).

While Kotter's model does emphasize urgency as a catalyst for change, it is crucial to adapt and modify the model to align with the desired ambience and values of the

English school. The urgency in Kotter's model can be interpreted as a call to action and an awareness of the need for change, rather than creating a stressful or negative environment. In the context of managing change in an English school, the emphasis should be on fostering a supportive and collaborative culture rather than solely relying on urgency. This is where the ADKAR Model appears to be the natural choice. The ADKAR Model focuses on creating desire and promoting awareness, knowledge, and ability among individuals, ultimately leading to reinforcement and sustainable change. The approach prioritizes the comprehension of the incentives and ambitions of the individuals engaged in the process of change while cultivating a constructive and enabling atmosphere. When evaluating change management models, it is imperative to adopt a critical and reflective stance. The efficacy of a model is contingent upon its alignment with the particular context and goals of the English educational institution. Through the integration of the respective merits of both models, including the prioritization of motivation and the recognition of the significance of consciousness and assistance, a tailored strategy can be formulated that corresponds with the intended atmosphere and principles of the educational institution.

The ultimate objective is to establish a setting that fosters development, education, and welfare for both educators and learners. The English school community can attain this objective by meticulously choosing and modifying components from diverse change management models to align with their distinct requirements and objectives.

## **5.2 Involving Stakeholders in the Change Process**

The involvement of all stakeholders in the change process increases the likelihood of its success. This encompasses a broad range of stakeholders, comprising not only educators but also pupils, guardians, and educational authorities. The active involvement of all stakeholders is crucial for the successful implementation of changes in ELT in Vietnam. This notion is consistent with the 'Awareness' phase of the ADKAR framework, wherein recognizing the necessity for transformation is of utmost importance. It is crucial to underscore that educators, who serve as the primary implementers of these novel approaches, ought to be situated at the core of the transformational procedure. While students and parents are unlikely to oppose improvements in teaching, the focus should be on engaging teachers in a meaningful and consultative way. This could involve holding forums or meetings for teachers to discuss their concerns and aspirations. Encouraging them to contribute to the development of the change process can not only motivate them but also foster a sense of ownership and commitment to the project.

This approach aligns with the 'Desire' stage of the ADKAR model and is likely to generate a strong impetus for change. Continuing into the 'Knowledge' and 'Ability' stages of the ADKAR model, it is necessary to invest in training and development. This should incorporate aspects of change that teachers have identified as necessary during the consultation process, thus maintaining their interest and enthusiasm. The 'Reinforcement' stage of the model emphasizes the need for change to become a sustained way of life. The teachers who have been involved in the change process will be instrumental in this stage, taking pride in perpetuating the new methods they helped to

develop. By following this approach, the change in ELT in Vietnam is more likely to be successful, enduring, and owned by those who implement it (Hiatt, 2006).

### **5.3 Investing in Training and Development**

In the rapidly changing ELT sector, the integration of innovative teaching methodologies and technology necessitates significant investment in teacher training and development. This ensures teachers acquire necessary skills and receive consistent support for these changes, highlighting the importance of training as a core part of the change process (Ertmer, 2005). To adopt a strategic approach, it is imperative to comprehend the requirements and competencies of educators in order to design tailored training initiatives. The skills in question should encompass both pragmatic abilities and the cultivation of a mindset that is receptive to change. Continuous professional development of teachers is crucial due to the intricate nature of the modifications, necessitating consistent mentorship, coaching, and opportunities for peer learning.

Furthermore, it is imperative to offer educators avenues for professional development, such as specialized instruction, seminars, and symposiums. This demonstrates a dedication by the institution towards the advancement of teacher development, leading to an improvement in both motivation and engagement. In addition, the implementation of a feedback mechanism is imperative to collect the experiences, challenges, and suggestions of educators, thereby informing the effectiveness of training programs and identifying areas for enhancement. In essence, the successful implementation of change in ELT hinges upon a steadfast and uninterrupted dedication to the training and professional growth of educators. The suggested course of action entails the implementation of a thorough, continuous, and adaptable training strategy that encompasses tailored curricula, regular assistance, prospects for career advancement, and a proficient mechanism for evaluating performance. This methodology enables educators to engage proactively in the developing ELT milieu.

### **5.4 Developing a Clear Communication Strategy**

The occurrence of uncertainty or resistance is a common outcome during the process of change. However, this phenomenon can be alleviated by implementing a well-structured and uniform communication strategy. The crucial role of teachers in facilitating the change process, which necessitates a thorough understanding of the ongoing progress, emphasizes the significance of implementing a strategy. The communication strategy, rather than being predominantly top-down, should be multi-directional. This means fostering an environment where ideas can be freely exchanged and everyone involved in the process – teachers, students, parents, and education officials – have an opportunity to voice their thoughts and actively contribute to the process. Teachers, having been involved in the formulation of the change process, would already have a clear understanding of the reasons for change, the expected benefits, and the steps being undertaken. Their role is not static but continues to be dynamic with their ongoing contribution of new ideas and improvements. Crucially, this communication strategy should be an iterative process where the reasons for change, initially discussed during

the 'Awareness' stage of the ADKAR model, are revisited periodically. This not only serves as a reminder of the objectives but also allows for any modifications or refinements to be communicated in a timely manner. Regular updates and feedback opportunities should be integral components of this strategy, thereby ensuring that everyone involved stays informed and engaged throughout the process (Kotter & Cohen, 2002).

### **5.5 Continuous Monitoring and Adjustment**

In education management, especially within ELT, the task of change doesn't halt at the mere implementation of novel methodologies or technologies. The post-implementation phase is equally crucial, necessitating continuous monitoring and timely adjustments to gauge the efficacy of the changes and make required modifications (Biech, 2007). Monitoring provides measurable data to ascertain the impact of the implemented changes, enabling informed decision-making and optimization of the change. This process should involve both quantitative measures, like student performance metrics or teacher participation rates, and qualitative data such as stakeholder feedback. Monitoring should be an iterative, ongoing process allowing for refinement and adjustment of changes over time, ensuring their continued relevance. Flexibility to adjust changes in response to feedback or evolving circumstances is also vital. For effective change management in ELT, a systematic, iterative monitoring approach and the flexibility to adjust changes as required are essential. This ensures changes achieve their intended outcomes and contribute to long-term improvements.

### **5.6 Constructive and Phased Implementation of Changes**

An abrupt introduction of numerous changes can lead to overwhelming situations for teachers and students, potentially eliciting resistance. However, a well-prepared process that embraces the perspectives and insights of the teachers can greatly enhance the manageability of the process and boost the chances of successful implementation. Teachers, being at the forefront of these changes, are in a unique position to understand what can be readily implemented, what may need to be deferred, which areas require additional training, and where more resources are needed. Their insights can contribute to the prioritization of changes, taking into account their significance, feasibility, and the available resources. Instead of a top-down approach, this process should be viewed as a collaborative effort, with the involvement of teachers in the decision-making process. Implementing changes in phases, guided by this prioritization, will allow for a more controlled transition and reduce the likelihood of resistance. In this manner, the process becomes a joint venture, shaped and driven by those most affected by the changes, thereby increasing the likelihood of success and acceptance (Kotter, 1996).

### **5.7 Providing Adequate Resources**

In the realm of ELT, successful implementation of novel methodologies or technology integration necessitates a profound commitment to resource allocation (Fullan, 2007). Adequate resources go beyond the mere provision of financial backing. They encompass time, a critical, often overlooked, resource that allows teachers to fully engage with and

adapt to the new practices. Financial resources are indisputably vital. They enable the procurement of necessary tools and technology, as well as the delivery of comprehensive training programs. However, change cannot be rushed. It is a process that requires patience and perseverance. Teachers need time to learn, experiment with, and eventually master the new methodologies. They need time to adjust their teaching practices and to integrate the changes into their routine. Without this investment of time, even the most well-intentioned changes risk falling short of their potential. Moreover, resources should also be allocated to provide ongoing support during the transition. This can take the form of mentoring, coaching, or even technical assistance to help teachers overcome any challenges they may encounter.

### **5.8 Fostering a Culture of Change**

Ultimately, nurturing a culture that is receptive to change, cherishes continuous learning, and spurs innovation is integral to the successful introduction of new teaching methodologies, technologies, and curricula. However, to truly instill this culture, it is essential to maintain a focus on collective efforts throughout all stages of the change process. Rather than considering this as an isolated, final step, fostering a culture of change should be a continuous, pervasive theme. The development and reinforcement of this culture ought to be achieved through collaborative team efforts, wherein all stakeholders actively contribute towards its expansion. The process of change entails more than mere acceptance; it necessitates the cultivation of a collective sense of responsibility and dedication towards the entire endeavor. In this particular context, the act of acknowledging and incentivizing innovative practices serves as a means of affirming the collective endeavors of the team as opposed to solely advancing individual accomplishments. The collective learning experiences should be considered opportunities for experimentation, where the team collaborates to innovate and gains knowledge from each attempt. Likewise, the provision of a conducive atmosphere wherein errors are regarded as prospects for acquiring knowledge fosters a collectively secure milieu that motivates all participants to offer input, explore, and develop. Fullan (2007) argues that a collaborative culture of change is crucial for the successful implementation of new teaching methodologies, technologies, and curricula. This approach transforms the process into a team-driven journey of continuous learning and innovation, thereby increasing the probability of sustainable and meaningful change.

Vietnam can enhance its management of the ELT industry by considering these suggestions. The improvement of English education in the nation can potentially augment its caliber and equip its populace with the necessary skills to meet the requirements of the worldwide market.

## **6. Conclusion**

The field of ELT in Vietnam is presently experiencing a significant shift in order to address the requirements of an increasingly interconnected global community. The ELT sector is faced with challenges and opportunities due to the adoption of novel teaching

methodologies, the incorporation of technology, and changes in curriculum. The successful navigation of changes is contingent upon the implementation of effective change management strategies.

The implementation of established change management models, such as the ADKAR Model or Kotter's 8 Step Change Model, offers a systematic methodology for managing change. The ADKAR Model, which prioritizes the impetus and aspiration to effect change, is well-suited to the constantly evolving landscape of ELT in Vietnam. The involvement of stakeholders, particularly educators, in the process of change is crucial for achieving success. The involvement and ownership of teachers are crucial for promoting commitment and ensuring the durability of change initiatives, with teachers positioned as central figures in the change process.

The provision of extensive training and development opportunities for teachers is imperative in facilitating the successful adoption of novel pedagogical approaches and technological advancements. To ensure the preparedness of teachers to adapt to changes, it is imperative to provide them with tailored training programs, consistent support, and avenues for professional development. It is recommended to establish a comprehensive communication strategy that is inclusive of all stakeholders and prioritizes consistent updates and feedback to ensure that all parties are informed and actively involved throughout the process.

It is imperative to engage in ongoing monitoring and adjustment in order to assess the efficacy of alterations and implement the requisite modifications. The process ought to encompass both quantitative and qualitative metrics, along with the ability to adjust to changing circumstances. To ensure successful implementation and long-term sustainability, it is crucial to prioritize and phase changes, allocate sufficient resources, and cultivate a culture that embraces change.

The overarching objective is to cultivate a milieu that prioritizes transformation, wherein originality, ongoing education, and cooperation are welcomed. A group of passionate and motivated educators who take on responsibility for the transformative course of action ought to lead the cultivation of this culture. Vietnam can ensure the responsiveness and preparedness of its ELT sector to meet future demands by prioritizing individuals and fostering a shared commitment towards change.

In summary, Vietnam can effectively navigate the current changes in its ELT industry by implementing a methodical, comprehensive, and human-centered strategy for managing change. The improvement of English education would not only elevate its standard, but also equip individuals to effectively navigate the demands of an increasingly interconnected world. Through the transformation of individuals, a new era of English language education will emerge in Vietnam, driven by a culture of continuous improvement and innovation.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

### About the Author

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