



Section 1. Pedagogy

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MANAGING CHANGES IN TEACHING ACTIVITIES IN UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE NORTH CENTRAL REGION OF VIETNAM

*Le Cong Duc*¹, *Pham Le Cuong*¹

¹ Vinh University

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Abstract

This study investigates the management of teaching activity changes in 39 upper secondary schools across Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, and Ha Tinh provinces, with 592 participants (117 administrators and 475 teachers). It identifies existing limitations in planning, implementation, monitoring, and improvement of changes, and proposes five practical measures to strengthen change management. By situating the findings within global discussions on educational leadership and change management, this paper highlights the contextual relevance of Vietnam's educational reforms and the contribution of this study to international scholarship.

Keywords: *Change management; teaching activities; secondary education; Vietnam; educational leadership*

I. Introduction

Upper secondary education holds a strategic role in national development, serving as the foundation for cultivating human capital and advancing socioeconomic goals. Vietnam's Education Development Strategy to 2030 (vision 2045) emphasizes building a modern, globally integrated education system aligned with lifelong learning, digital transformation, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Central to this vision is the effective management of change in teaching activities, which are critical to improving student learning outcomes and institutional resilience.

Although international scholarship underscores the importance of change management in education (Kotter, 1996; Lewin, 1947; Prosci, 2025), limited empirical research addresses how change is managed within Vietnam's upper secondary schools. Existing studies often focus on higher education or curriculum reform without fully exploring the managerial processes guiding teaching transformations at the school level. This study addresses this gap by analyzing current practices in the North Central region of Vietnam and proposing practical solutions informed by both local data and international frameworks.

II. Literature Review

Change management in education integrates classical theories and contemporary models. Lewin's three-step model (Unfreeze–Change–Refreeze) and Kotter's eight-step process highlight the structured phases of change, while the ADKAR model emphasizes individual transitions. The PDCA cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act) has been particularly effective in educational contexts due to its emphasis on iterative improvement (Huan & Nasri, 2022). International research consistently affirms the pivotal role of school leaders. Studies in Botswana (Molefhi & Pheko, 2023), the UK (Woolner et al., 2014), and the US (Acton, 2021) demonstrate that principals act as change agents bridging vision, policy, and practice. However, challenges such as organizational culture, insufficient training, and limited resources often hinder effective leadership.

Vietnamese scholarship has increasingly focused on educational management in the context of reform (Nguyen Van Nguyen, 2023; Le Quoc Tien et al., 2020). Yet, studies specific to managing changes in teaching activities at the upper secondary level remain fragmented. This research contributes by empirically examining the management of change in one of Vietnam's most dynamic yet under-researched regions. Educational change management draws upon both classical theories and contemporary empirical findings. Foundational frameworks such as Lewin's (1947) three-step model and Kotter's (1996) eight-step process emphasize the sequential nature of organizational transformation. More recent models like ADKAR (Prosci, 2025) stress the individual dimension of change, while the PDCA cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act) has been widely applied in educational contexts due to its iterative improvement focus (Huan & Nasri, 2022; Ding, 2024). A growing body of international scholarship demonstrates the central role of school leaders as change agents. Acton (2021) highlighted the tools principals require to manage transformation effectively, while Corrigan (2022) emphasized the importance of principal leadership during periods of systemic disruption. Park (2022) further showed how principals' emotional labor influences the sustainability of school improvement initiatives. Systematic reviews confirm that transforma-

tional leadership contributes significantly to cultivating collaborative cultures and teacher motivation (Toprak, Karakuş, & Chen, 2023; Wilson Heenan, De Paor, Lafferty, & Mannix McNamara, 2023). In developing country contexts, research illustrates the constraints of limited resources and entrenched school cultures. Molefhi and Pheko (2023) in Botswana observed that principals often lacked adequate preparation to drive instructional reform. Woolner et al. (2014) in the UK found that successful school change depends on how leaders and teachers negotiate both physical and cultural conditions. Comparative analyses suggest that leadership for learning is particularly critical in disadvantaged regions (Leadership and Policy in Schools, 2024).

Vietnamese scholarship has begun to integrate these global perspectives. Nguyen (2023) stressed the need for strategic leadership capacities among Vietnamese principals, while studies on learner-centered reform indicate that national curriculum changes demand sustained teacher professional development (Studies in Higher Education, 2024). This growing literature underscores that effective change management in Vietnam requires both adopting global frameworks and tailoring them to local sociocultural realities. In sum, prior research shows that successful management of changes in teaching activities depends on three converging elements: a sound theoretical foundation (e.g., PDCA, Kotter, Lewin), strong leadership that fosters collaboration and emotional resilience, and contextual adaptation to local challenges. This study builds on those insights by empirically analyzing change management in the North Central region of Vietnam and proposing locally relevant solutions.

III. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods design combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews in order to capture both the breadth and depth of change management practices in upper secondary schools.

3.1. Participants

The research sample consisted of 592 participants drawn from 39 upper secondary schools across three provinces in the North Central region of Vietnam: Thanh Hoa, Nghe

An, and Ha Tinh. The sample included 117 administrators (principals and vice principals) and 475 teachers, providing a balanced perspective between management and classroom practitioners. Gender distribution was 52.7% female and 47.3% male, reflecting the overall gender composition of the teaching workforce in the region. Regarding professional experience, 33.7% of respondents had between 5 and 10 years of service, while 50.2% had more than 10 years, ensuring that the majority of participants were experienced educators with substantial exposure to educational reforms. The schools selected were representative in terms of size, geographic location, and socioeconomic conditions, making the findings generalizable to the broader regional context.

3.2. Instruments

Data collection relied on two structured survey questionnaires – one designed for administrators and another for teachers. The questionnaires were constructed on the basis of established change management theories (Lewin's three-step model, Kotter's eight-step process, the PDCA cycle) and educational management frameworks specific to teaching activities. Each questionnaire included Likert-scale items (ranging from 1 = not implemented to 5 = fully implemented) that assessed perceptions of four key dimensions: planning, implementation, monitoring, and adjustment of teaching activity changes. Items also covered contextual factors such as resource allocation, communication, and consensus-building.

To complement the survey data, five in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals (coded HT1–HT5). The interviews explored themes such as barriers to change, leadership strategies, staff perceptions, and lessons learned from prior reform initiatives. These qualitative insights were intended to enrich the survey findings by providing narrative evidence and explanations behind the numerical results.

3.3. Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected during the 2024–2025 academic year. Questionnaires were distributed in both paper and electronic formats to maximize response rates. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Administrators assisted in organizing survey sessions,

ensuring that teachers had sufficient time to complete the instruments without disrupting teaching schedules. Interviews with principals were carried out face-to-face at the respective schools, each lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. Field notes and audio recordings were used, with full consent, to ensure accuracy in transcription and analysis.

3.4. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded and entered into SPSS version 22.0 for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics, specifically means and standard deviations, were computed to assess the level of implementation and outcomes across the four dimensions of change management. The 5-point Likert scale was divided into interpretation ranges (1–1.8 = not implemented; 1.81–2.6 = rarely implemented; 2.61–3.40 = moderately implemented; 3.41–4.20 = frequently implemented; 4.21–5 = regularly implemented). This allowed a clear categorization of schools' performance. Qualitative data from principal interviews were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis. Recurring themes were identified, coded, and linked to the survey dimensions to provide explanatory depth. For example, survey findings indicating low performance in resource mobilization were contextualized with interview comments highlighting financial constraints and lack of government support. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data ensured greater validity and reliability of the findings.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical research practices, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality of responses, and anonymization of interviewees. Data were stored securely and used solely for research purposes. By integrating ethical safeguards, the study ensured the protection of participants' rights and the credibility of the research process.

IV. Results

The survey data collected from 592 participants across 39 upper secondary schools provide a comprehensive view of how changes in teaching activities are being managed in Vietnam's North Central region. Four major dimensions were assessed: planning, implementation, monitoring, and adjustment.

Overall, the quantitative findings indicate that change management practices are currently positioned at a moderate or average level, suggesting that while schools are aware of the need for reform, systemic challenges prevent them from reaching higher levels of effectiveness.

4.1. Planning for Change

Planning was the strongest dimension identified in the study, with a mean score of $M = 3.22$ ($SD = 0.52$). This suggests that most schools are relatively effective at articulating objectives, analyzing contextual needs, and formulating basic action programs. Among the planning indicators, the highest-rated aspect was analyzing the context of changes ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.38$), followed closely by determining objectives ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.45$). These results demonstrate that school leaders and teachers recognize the importance of situational analysis and goal setting as a foundation for change.

However, weaker scores were observed for communicating change plans to staff ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.71$) and developing detailed action programs ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.63$). Interviews with principals (HT1) revealed that while contextual analysis and goal setting have become standardized practices, the translation of these into specific, actionable steps is often hindered by lack of resources, time, and expertise. Consequently, although planning is the relative strength, the process remains incomplete and insufficiently operationalized.

4.2. Implementing Change

The dimension of implementation scored slightly lower than planning, with $M = 3.19$ ($SD = 0.56$). Within this category, the most positively rated practice was organizing discussions to build consensus ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.45$). Principals emphasized that ensuring consensus among teachers and administrators is crucial for reducing resistance and increasing motivation. This reflects an emerging culture of dialogue and participation in decision-making. Yet, implementation challenges emerged in terms of mobilizing resources ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 0.72$). Principals (HT2) reported that financial constraints and inadequate facilities hinder the practical execution of new teaching strategies. Organizing the implementation of changes according to

established plans ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.58$) and restructuring management apparatus ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.49$) were rated moderately, indicating partial but inconsistent alignment between planning and execution. Overall, while schools have developed mechanisms for consensus, they lack the material capacity to fully operationalize change initiatives.

4.3. Monitoring Change

Monitoring received a mean score of $M = 3.09$ ($SD = 0.63$), indicating a moderate but less developed dimension of change management. The highest-rated indicator within this category was analyzing data related to changes in teaching activities ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.49$). However, procedures for monitoring progress remain underdeveloped, with the lowest rating assigned to developing formal monitoring protocols ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 0.75$). Respondents also rated the ability to identify difficulties and challenges during implementation at a relatively low level ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 0.72$). Interview data (HT3 and HT4) confirm that while schools attempt to track change activities, there is no standardized approach to monitoring, and data analysis tends to be superficial. Many schools do not systematically document challenges, leading to repeated mistakes and missed opportunities for improvement. The lack of robust monitoring undermines the feedback loops necessary for iterative improvement.

4.4. Adjusting and Improving Change

Adjustment and improvement was the weakest dimension, with $M = 3.04$ ($SD = 0.65$). The highest-rated aspect was raising awareness among administrators and teachers about the importance of improvement ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.46$). While this demonstrates recognition of the principle of continuous improvement, the actual implementation of adjustment processes was rated much lower. For instance, evaluating the effectiveness of adjustments received the lowest mean score of $M = 2.93$ ($SD = 0.75$).

Principals interviewed (HT4 and HT5) acknowledged that adjustment is often treated as an afterthought rather than an integrated part of the management cycle. The absence of formalized mechanisms to evaluate and refine change practices explains why improvements remain weak. The results suggest that

while awareness exists, the translation of that awareness into structured action is limited.

4.5. Comparative Evaluation

When the four dimensions are compared, a clear pattern emerges: planning is strongest, implementation follows closely, monitoring is weaker, and adjustment is the weakest. This descending order reflects a systemic imbalance where schools can set goals and initiate changes but struggle to sustain and refine them. The lack of structured monitoring and evaluation contributes directly to weaknesses in adjustment, creating a cycle where reforms are initiated but not consolidated. The standard deviations across dimensions (0.52–0.65) indicate a relatively consistent moderate evaluation, with no aspect rated exceptionally high or low. This consistency suggests that schools are uniformly operating at an average level, rather than having isolated strengths or weaknesses. Nonetheless, the consistent underperformance in adjustment points to a systemic gap in institutional learning and continuous improvement.

4.6. Integration of Qualitative Insights

Qualitative interviews supplement the survey data by highlighting specific obstacles. Administrators pointed to the absence of adequate funding, limited training in change management, and cultural resistance among teachers. Many teachers prefer traditional practices due to habit or skepticism about new methods. Principals also reported that even when change initiatives are launched, the lack of detailed guidelines and standardized assessment frameworks makes it difficult to sustain momentum. Interview data also revealed that leadership training for principals is insufficiently aligned with the demands of modern change management. Without systematic training in strategic planning, communication, and data-driven monitoring, principals often rely on ad-hoc strategies. This contributes to inconsistency across schools and reinforces the moderate performance levels identified in the survey.

4.7. Synthesis

Taken together, the findings illustrate that upper secondary schools in the North Central region of Vietnam are at a transitional stage in managing teaching changes. They are capable of planning and initiating reforms, and

they demonstrate an increasing emphasis on consensus-building. However, without robust systems for monitoring and adjustment, reforms risk stagnation. The weak ratings in adjustment and monitoring confirm that institutional learning cycles remain underdeveloped. The evidence points to the need for systemic interventions: investment in leadership development, the creation of standardized monitoring and evaluation protocols, and targeted resource allocation for change initiatives. By addressing these gaps, schools can move from average implementation toward higher effectiveness and sustainability.

4.9. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that management of changes in teaching activities in the surveyed upper secondary schools is at a moderate level across planning, implementation, monitoring, and adjustment. These results align with broader international literature emphasizing the persistent challenges of sustaining educational reform under constrained conditions. The relative strength of planning ($M=3.22$) reflects schools' ability to articulate objectives and analyze contextual needs. This finding echoes Corrigan's (2022) argument that effective planning is a hallmark of resilient leadership during systemic change. However, weaknesses in adjustment and improvement ($M=3.04$) indicate gaps in feedback loops, mirroring Ding's (2024) observation that iterative improvement processes like PDCA require stronger institutionalization to yield long-term impact.

Teacher consensus and participation emerged as relatively strong areas, consistent with Woolner et al. (2014), who found that collaborative cultures underpin successful reforms in the UK. Yet, resource mobilization and monitoring procedures were rated lowest, resembling challenges in Botswana where Molefhi and Pheko (2023) reported insufficient preparation and limited resources undermining principals' roles as change agents. International reviews confirm that transformational leadership can mitigate these barriers by fostering collective commitment and organizational learning. Toprak, Karakuş, and Chen (2023) and Wilson Heenan et al. (2023) demonstrated that such leadership styles enhance teacher motivation and build supportive school cultures.

Our survey findings suggest that Vietnamese principals have begun to embrace collaborative planning, but still require greater capacity in transformational leadership, emotional resilience, and innovation – dimensions highlighted by Park (2022).

Contextually, the North Central region faces socioeconomic constraints similar to other disadvantaged settings. Comparative studies show that leadership for learning is vital in such contexts (Leadership and Policy in Schools, 2024). Nguyen (2023) also stressed that Vietnamese principals must strengthen strategic competencies to lead reforms effectively. This study reinforces those conclusions by providing empirical evidence that without systematic training and stronger support structures, principals' leadership potential remains underutilized.

Overall, the findings indicate that while global frameworks like PDCA, Kotter's steps, and transformational leadership are relevant, their effective application in Vietnam requires contextual adaptation. Schools must institutionalize feedback mechanisms, invest in leadership training, and integrate international best practices with locally grounded strategies.

This study underscores the importance of contextualizing global models within local realities. For example, while PDCA provides a robust structure, its effectiveness depends on localized planning and cultural adaptation.

V. Conclusion and Implications

Managing changes in teaching activities is not only an administrative requirement but also a strategic necessity for advancing educational reform. This study provides new empirical evidence from 39 upper secondary schools in Vietnam's North Central region, demonstrating that while planning and consensus-building are relatively strong,

weaknesses remain in adjustment, improvement, and resource mobilization. These results substantiate global findings that effective change management hinges on leadership capacity, iterative improvement processes, and supportive school cultures. The study's novelty lies in bridging local empirical data with international scholarship. By comparing Vietnamese practices with cases from Botswana, the UK, and other disadvantaged contexts, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how global frameworks – such as PDCA and transformational leadership – must be localized to achieve sustainable results. It also highlights that principals' emotional labor, strategic planning, and capacity for innovation are decisive factors in moving beyond moderate implementation levels.

Internationally, this study enriches comparative education literature by offering insights from a developing country undergoing rapid digital and policy transformation. Practically, it provides policymakers and practitioners in Vietnam with a roadmap of five measures that emphasize context-specific planning, collaborative implementation, structured evaluation, continuous improvement, and leadership development. These recommendations align with recent global trends in educational leadership, underscoring the importance of adaptability and resilience.

In conclusion, managing change in teaching activities requires both global vision and local adaptation. The findings reaffirm that Vietnamese secondary schools can achieve higher levels of reform impact by institutionalizing feedback mechanisms, strengthening leadership training, and leveraging international best practices while staying attuned to local realities. This dual contribution – empirical and theoretical – marks the significance of the present study within the broader discourse on educational change management.

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© Le Cong Duc, Pham Le Cuong

Contact: duclc@vinhuni.edu.vn; lecuong@vinhuni.edu.vn