**Teachers as Agents of Change**

By definition, as an agent of change in the literature on ELT is the person who is actually responsible for the overall planning and day-to-day execution of the innovation implementation process. The term ‘*entrepreneurs*’ is sometimes used to refer to change agents (Lambright and Flynn, 1980). The issue of the role of the teacher is seen as highly significant in terms of the successful implementation of change. Research on innovation in education has shown that teachers’ perceptions of innovation determine to a larger extent the success of that innovation. In this context, Markee (1997) highlights that ***“teachers play the key role in the success or failure of a planned innovation, because they are the executive decision makers in the actual setting in which the intended innovation is to be integrated- the classroom”*** (Markee, 1997, p. 20). If teachers want to act as effective and efficient “agents of change” based on their own self-evaluation and self-improvement, they will be soundly equipped to exercise control over their teaching and to critically question educational reforms. Professionalism in the field of ELT implies increased responsibility for both proposing and implementing innovations on the part of the teacher. To accomplish lasting reforms, awareness of the meaning of innovation and how to proceed is vital (Delano et al., 1994). In short, an understanding of the elements of the reform is seen as a precondition for making change (Stecher et al., 2004).

In this very specific context, Richards (1999) argues that, ***“the process of change occurs when teachers articulate to themselves and others what they want to change and why, when they identify the factors that inhibit change, and when they develop strategies to implement change over time”*** (Richards, 1999, p. 143). In the same line of thought, Carless (2001) note that teachers should possess a thorough understanding of the principles and practices of the proposed change if a curriculum innovation is to be implemented successfully. He emphasized that ***“teachers not only need to understand the theoretical underpinnings of the innovation, but more importantly, how the innovation is best applied in the classroom”*** (Carless, 2001, p. 263).

It is further agreed that (Heyworth 2003) that no innovatory projects will bring about the expected learning outcomes without the convinced and sustained commitment of those who are fully in charge of its implementation and the management of the organizational variables can influence the acceptance of refusal in a decisive way. Fullan in his book *Successful school improvement* (1992, p. 45) argues that, ***“The stark reality is that innovations fail more times that they succeed mainly because the process of implementing innovations continues to be downplayed or overlooked.”*** Successful innovation is attributable to an ensemble of factors; Heyworth (2003) gives an account of these factors: motivation, involvement, commitment, communication, realistic evaluation and institutionalization.

**Motivation**

It is quite normal to assert that no innovative initiative can be successful without the motivation of the people involved. There are numbers of well-known theories of motivation which generally try to give an illustrative framework for action for example, Gardner and Lambert’s (1972) dichotomy of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation and Cooper and Fishman’s (1977) construct of ‘developmental’ or personal motivation to refer to personal motivation or personal satisfaction. Yet, the concept of motivation has been viewed differently by different schools of thought: behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism.

From the behaviouristic perspective, motivation is ***“quite simply the anticipation of reward”*** (Brown, 2000, p. 160). The cognitivists view motivation are being more related to ***“the choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid, and the degree of effort they exert in that respect”*** (Keller, 1983, p. 389). However, the constructivists’ definition of motivation places ***“further emphasis on social contexts as well as the individual’s decisions”*** (ibid). Despite the differences, in all the aforementioned definitions of the concept of motivation as viewed by the three schools of thought, the idea of ‘need’ is emphasized, in other words, ***“the fulfillment of needs is rewarding, requires choices, and in many cases must be interpreted in a social context”*** (ibid, 390).

Arguably, the people mandated to manage innovatory projects must account for consultation, participation and ownership of the project for those closely involved in the projects (Heyworth, 2003). In over-centralised or top-down projects, where the decision to implement innovation is external to those who are to put them into practice, must pay attention to providing them opportunities to get involved. These grassroots, have the right to voice their views, opinions and involvement as to what to implement and how what this ought to be implemented.

**Involvement**

By definition the term ‘involvement’ refers to act of involving or state of being involved. In the literature on approaches to the management of innovation in ELT, it denotes the responsibility placed on teachers in charge of implementing an innovation initiative. It aims at a dual-focused responsibility in the sense that it is a right and a duty. A right that teachers can claim by virtue of the fact that they are an integral part of the continuum in the implementation process. Conversely, a duty is a moral or legal obligation that teachers ought to fulfill mindfully duty-bound or out of a sense of duty.

In change management in the context of educational programmes and projects, teachers are key elements in the process of change. Successful and effective innovation is largely dependent on an appreciation of their view of what will or will not work in the classroom. As Bolitho (2012, p. 44) reminds us forcefully, ***“teachers are often the target of a change initiative, but they are also frontline change agents. They need to be involved in the project from the earliest possible stage and inspired to take ownership of the change.”***  However, teachers are rarely involved in educational innovations when these are in the planning stages (Bolitho, ibid).

According to Heyworth (2003), it is clear that innovations will be adapted more smoothly and effectively if those in charge of implementing it are involved, preferably from the very onset of the process. The involvement approach views innovation initiatives as primarily changes at the level of practice, and therefore holds that teachers as practitioners should have a voice, expressing both a right and a duty, in how in-class practices, lesson presentation, classroom management, time allocation to activities and assignments, operate. Ultimately, the key locus of innovation management resides at the practice level rather than in decision-making arenas, i.e. a bottom-up approach initiated by teachers instead of a centralized top-down management initiated by ‘non-practitioners’. Unfortunately, the common practice for innovations is that decisions to innovate are decided on by the Ministry of Education as a result of political decisions, this is another way of recalling that “*it’s the political that determines the educational”.* The 1995 World Bank review of education notes that “This central management, extending even to instructional inputs and the classroom environment, allows no room for the flexibility that leads to effective learning” (World Bank, 1995, p. 4).

**Commitment**

The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (1994) defines ‘commitment’ as promise or pledge to do something. According to Heyworth (2003), for innovations to go beyond the stage of being desirable, those whose involvement has been established must commit themselves to the project. It needs to be noted here that:

***Believing that a goal is desirable and reachable does not automatically force an individual to act. The individual must choose to put his or her judgement in action; accordingly, ‘goal commitment’ is an important goal property. Commitment making is a highly responsible personal decision and it entails a significant qualitative change in one’s attitudes.***

(Heyworth, 2003, p. 38)

Here are some clear imperatives adapted from Heyworth (2003) relating to building commitment to change:

* Allow room for participation in the planning of the change
* Leave choices within the overall decision to change
* Provide a clear picture of the change , a “vision” with details about the new state
* Share information about change plans to the fullest extent possible
* Give advance warning about new requirements
* Repeatedly demonstrate your own commitment to the change
* Make standards and requirements clear, i.e. tell exactly what is required in implanting the change
* Help people feel compensated for the extra time and energy change requires[[1]](#footnote-1).

Thus, committing oneself to a goal is a decisive step in the innovatory process, but ***“it is not sufficient in itself to promote effective action if the goal is not translated into concrete steps the individual needs to take.”***(Heyworth, ibid.). This quotation clearly illustrates that commitment to concrete action plans over a sustained period of time is requirement to implementing effective change process. In overall terms, “***innovators must take steps to ensure that they have the necessary commitment of the people who are responsible for implementing the innovation at classroom level”*** (Hayes, 2012, p. 54).

**Communication**

To reach the expected goals in an innovation initiative some communication skills become therefore a must. These skills denote the art of successfully sharing meaningful information with people by means of an inter change of experience. It is commonly agreed that the initial stages in the implementation of a change are the most crucial where theoretical knowledge has to be translated into practical activity. A lack of clarity, misunderstanding or, ambiguous understanding, of aspects related to innovatory procedures may be the main source of failure and disorientation in many innovatory projects. In this respect, Bolitho (2012) focuses on the procedures involved in getting change messages across to those who need to put them into practice. Any change initiative needs to be founded on clear understanding of the expected goals, a clear understanding of the reasons underlying the change and a clear understanding of the procedures to be followed for undertaking the change. The notion of clarity is at the core of the foundation of successful change. In sum, as Bardi argues,

***Project managers have a crucial role in facilitating communication among team members and in ensuring that there is a complete transparency for all team members, about the implantation process. Communication and transparency generate better understanding and facilitate the process of task implementation.***

(Bardi, 2012, p. 187)

Literature on innovation in ELT abounds with examples of CLT case studies where teachers believe their teaching draw on communicative principles but in fact have changed their teaching practices cosmetically. Instances describing such common practices are cases of ‘false clarity’ as opposed to ‘painful unclarity’ to describe situations where an innovation is rejected on the premise that teachers have no clear vision of either the principles or the expected outcomes. KaravasDoukas (1998) reports that in the evaluation a Greek project implementing a new communicative curriculum, it was found that although teachers thought they applying a new curriculum, in fact they tended to find ways of reproducing a more grammar-based teaching with imported exercises. Similar situations may be reported in Algerian ELT classrooms where teachers were supposed to teach ‘communicatively’ but when asked to situate themselves within the syllabus, they tended to use pure grammatical labels, such as, “Last week we studied *The Conditional Type One and Type Two*, and this week we’re going to carry on with *The Conditional Type Three.”*

It is highly recommended that those in charge of planning innovation need to articulate their goals around clear communication schemes; these include organizing meetings on a regular basis to discuss implementation procedures and identify problematic issues, open channels between those managing and those implementing innovations and ultimately accepting proposals as a result of feedback between innovators and grass-root involvements. As Hayes (2012, p. 55) has rightly pointed, ***“if educational administrators and others who are responsible for educational reform are truly concerned with the effectiveness of what they propose and wish to heighten the chances of its being implemented in the classroom, it is essential that they listen to classroom teachers at every stage of the reform process”.*** It also demonstrates the impossibility of implementing a top-down reform without grassroots understanding and support (Fullan, 1991).

**Realistic Evaluation**

It is in the context of realistic evaluation that any innovatory project is subject to careful scrutiny. Close examination of the innovation should commence at the very initial stage. The purposes of evaluation are of two folds: (1) a product-based evaluative approach in which the focus is exclusively on the product that reflects success or failure, i.e. is the implementation innovation a success, and therefore it deserves support, encouragement and continuation? Or is the implementation a failure, and therefore it is not worth continuing and should be abandoned? (2) a process-oriented evaluative approach in which the result emerges out of a series of evaluative sub-processes that fine tuned the implementation process accordingly throughout the life of the innovation. However, As Heyworth 2003, p. 41) posits, ***“a realistic framework evaluation, formulated at the outset of the project contributes to clarity of purpose and realism in both aims and assessment”.***

**Institutionalization**

The ultimate phase in the implementation of an innovation initiative is its institutionalization or, in practical down-to-earth terms, its adoption. In the context of English language education, the institutionalization process takes place at the following levels:

* changes in programmes, i.e. curricula, syllabi or teaching material, e.g. introduction of home-made ELT textbooks
* changes in teacher and learner behaviour, i.e. introduction of new teaching methodology, e.g. shift from teacher-centredness to learner-centredness
* logistic changes, i.e. reorganization of where learning takes place, use of new resources and media, e.g. use of ICT’s (Global Virtual Classroom, or GVC for short, at the University of Tlemcen to stimulate students to practice English in meaningful context)
* changes in beliefs and principles, i.e. radical, large-scale or profound changes in the educational paradigms, e.g. textbook reform projects in the former Soviet Republics and Eastern European countries.

**Profile of Teachers as Agents of Change**

The concept of a teacher as an agent of change is nothing new. Educators have been talking on innovation and change for as long as one can remember, though it is only in recent years that the spirit of change agentry has been promoted within the educational sphere.The teacher as an agent of change plays a pivotal role in the teaching-learning process. As the adage goes, ‘*no education system can rise too far beyond the level of the teachers in it*’; and ***“what goes on in the classroom, and the impact of the teacher and teaching, has been identified in numerous studies as the crucial variable for improving learning outcomes. The way teachers teach is of critical concern in any reform designed to improve quality”*** (UNESCO, 2004, p. 152). In order for teachers to bring about significant differences in the teaching-learning process and move away from routine to recreational language learning, it is believed that these educators must be able to make responsible decisions based on a sound professional knowledge background and reflect a strong commitment to their profession. Additionally, teachers who aspire to be agents of change cannot content with merely replicating traditional teaching practices. Research has shown that a teacher who wishes to incorporate the change agentry club should able to demonstrate the following traits:

* to implement a learner-centred pedagogy in which the adequacy between learner practice time and teacher talking time is respected
* to use a variety of teaching methods in the sense of being able to combine innovative, up-to-date approaches with the best of traditional approaches[[2]](#footnote-2)
* not to rely solely on the prescribed textbook in the sense of being able to break up with the routine by introducing teaching materials of his/her own
* to have high expectations of his/her learners in the sense that he/she asks for feedback from learners on how whether he/she is meeting their needs[[3]](#footnote-3)
* to integrate moral purpose dutifully and change agentry creatively in the sense of being able to engage in a new conception of teacher professionalism[[4]](#footnote-4)
* to make learners want to learn in the sense of being able to adapt his/her teaching to suit the different abilities (mixed abilities) and learning styles
* to get the message across in the most obvious and clearest way to learners so that success can be expected and provides strong academic attachment to the language
* to use a variety of assessment methods in the form of continual control tests in addition to standardized tests
* to incorporate new ICT’s and to promote “earning to learn” and lifelong learning, to help learners to become self-learners to develop learner autonomy
* to assign field work and project writing (exposés) to encourage out-of-class activity.

Can all teachers act as effective agents of change? The answer to this challenging question is: May be not. Yet, all teachers have the potential to become an agent of change in the true sense of the word provided that as the proverb has it ‘*Where there’s a will there’s a way*’. It is worth noting that students spend between 850 and 1,000 hours of instruction per year. Thus, it stands to reason that teachers are probably the people who can most powerfully and positively impact their learner’s lives. This puts a high premium on teacher’s roles and ethical responsibility within the community.

It is in this context that the role of teachers as agents of change is significant; they must accept to become themselves learners of teaching and teachers of learning, and therefore incarnate the models who demonstrate moral purpose and professional behaviours. Regrettably, one dare say that the way would-be teachers are prepared, the way teachers are trained, the way schools are managed, the way educational hierarchy operates and the way policy and decision makers treat educators, all this results in a system that leaves a lot to be desired and that it is likely to retain the status quo. Such situation arranges some teachers and who strive and manage fiercely to preserve as long as they can and by all means. In plain terms, many teachers are comfortable with their old ways of teaching and do not want to abandon them completely.

**Teachers as Resistant to Change**

It is strongly believed that one of most crucial issues in the management of innovation in ELT is resistance to change that teachers express overtly or covertly when they are asked to adopt new ways of teaching. It is evident that no change is successful if the people being asked to change do not value its need. Change, broadly speaking, aims at improving learners’ educational experience and teachers’ professional output. In this respect, as Williamson and Blackburn (2012, p. 36) note, ***“the school culture must include a collective commitment to improvement and a parallel commitment to supporting people who take risks and make changes”*** to satisfy the requirements of those at the chalk face. Resistance[[5]](#footnote-5) is a likely normal and natural behavioural response, especially in the early stages of an innovation initiative and most frequently among the more experienced and long-servicing members of a teaching community (Bolitho 2012).

Teachers usually respond to change in different ways depending on their existing beliefs and practices, contextual support and professional expertise and understanding of the key concepts underlying an innovation initiative[[6]](#footnote-6). However, three different ways or reactions have been identified: obedience and acceptance, rejection and resistance and reflection and acceptance. Some are, right from the very beginning, eager and willing to implement the change, some bluntly resist the change and nothing can convince them to embrace the innovation, and some can be moved to accept the change if given sufficient time to accommodate themselves and clear information to see its need.

Admittedly, teachers resist change for two main reasons: they do not see the usefulness of the innovation and therefore undermine the change, or they are not sure that there change will bring about the expected results and lead to an improvement of the teaching-learning situation. One of the most fiercely form of resistance is manifested insidiously when the change involves shifting form long-standing and deep-rooted traditional teaching practices to supposedly new, creative and more productive ones, for example, to give up with traditional grammar-based and teacher-centred approaches to embrace Learner-Centred Education through Communicative Language Teaching. In many cases of resistance, it has been noted that some teachers manifest their disagreement and express their dissatisfaction as a strategy to gain time to reflect thoughtfully about the proposed change. All too often, as Bolitho (2012, p. 41) has rightly pointed out, those teachers take up ***“the position of the devil’s advocate in order to probe and understand more fully what the change is about and how it is likely to affect their lives”***.

More tellingly, perhaps Hayes (2012) outlines three main reasons underpinning the different forms of change. Firstly, the nature of the change expected is too great and the speed at which it is required to happen is too rapid. For example, the implementation of CLT is seen particularly effort-demanding ***“because of the profound shifts required in teacher-learner power relations, and due to the nature of teacher professional learning”*** (Schweisfurth, 2011, p. 421), which is shaped by prior learning experience as well as sociocultural context. Secondly, in many countries, the resources to support the innovation in terms of the school structure, class size, teaching-learning materials and teacher capacity, are severely constrained. Thirdly, innovations based on imported pedagogy are often difficult to accommodate in an alien context[[7]](#footnote-7). From a pragmatic standpoint, when teachers start to feel that the ideas put forward by reformers are incompatible with reality many switch back to traditional approaches. In gross, teacher’s main reason for not wholeheartedly embracing the curricular reform is that the new pedagogical practices do not seem to fit within the local established school traditions. Ultimately, it is stated that ***“when an innovation fails, there is a tendency to blame the way it was implemented rather than criticize the idea itself”*** (Fullanquoted in Wall, 1996, p. 339).

**Quality Assurance**

It is firmly acknowledged that the provision of teaching services to any group of learners should be subject to a form of evaluation system for ensuring that the quality of the learning experiences in English Language Education is consistently high and meets the requirements set by the General Inspectorate of English. Boards of Education at the national level organise ‘inspection visits’ to have a weather eye on the teaching quality, hence quality assurance. The concept of quality assurance draws, to a larger extent, on the principles involved in the former concept of quality control: adherence to some externally conceived and validated process, determined through a rigorous inspection process. It ***“refers to the systematic activities implemented in quality system so that quality requirements for a service are fully fulfilled”*** (Wikipedia, 2011). The relationship between quality provision and quality outcomes is so tight that poor quality provision leads to poor quality learning outcomes.

Kiely in his article entitled *Designing evaluation into change management process* (2012) deals with quality assurance in ELT. He focuses on what are generally acknowledged as the drivers of quality: education and training of teachers, development of effective assessment formats, learning materials and uses of technology, and classroom activities which promote and sustain English Language Education. Quality assurance provides clear benefits to the three main partners of the teaching-learning process: the learner, the teacher and the institution.

It is strongly believed that quality assurance has the following benefits to the learner:

* It is conducive to a better learning experience.
* It helps learners to have realistic and clear expectations.
* It helps learners to understand their rights and responsibility.
* It can make learners think about how they learn.
* It can help learners to feel more valued.
* It should help them to achieve better results.

For teachers benefits are as follows:

* It is conducive to a better teaching experience.
* It helps teachers dutifully and mindfully understand what is expected from them.
* It establishes a shared responsibility teacher, learners and the institution.
* It helps teachers think about how they ought to teach.
* It helps learners feel more valued.
* It should help teachers to become more interested in their professional development.

Finally benefits for the institution are as follows:

* It helps the institution develop a common understanding of the notion of high-quality teaching leading systematically to high learning outcomes.
* It helps meet the needs of teachers, individual learners and institution.
* The institution develops its reputation as a pole of excellence.
* It helps determine what needs to be improved.
* It puts a high premium on the institution.
* It encourages internal and external competitiveness between teachers and learners.

Admittedly, quality enhancement and assurance function are the *raison d’être* of learning experiences in language education, and needless to say establishing a structured system in charge of quality assurance in the field of language learning, not least English Language Education is a direct route to improve learning outcomes and to foster a culture of quality in ELT. On the other hand, quality assurance practices are important means for the sustainability of the project and in-school and external accountability**.**

1. In this very specific context when a number of countries were looking West and rewiring their education systems and with close reference to the Romanian experience in textbook project reform undertaken in the post-Soviet era, Popovici (2012, p. 165) notes that, ***“Time and detailed attention given to the selection of team members pay off in that they ensure commitment, ownership, and efficiency.”*** [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The notion eclectic teaching is at the core of this trait. Here eclectic, as one might interpret it, is to combine innovative, up-to-date approaches with the best of traditional approaches by integrating skills work around communicative tasks and task-based learning to make learning stimulating, motivating and effective in order to improve the learners’ overall communicative ability. It is the teacher’s responsibility to find as much as one can about the approach or method that he is required to use and to determine ways to make it relevant to one’s classroom context. Put in down-to-earth terms, and to borrow Tuck’s quotation, ***“Take the best from a hotch-potch of methodologies and dump the rest.”***(Tuck, 2003, p. 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Research has shown that in a safe, secure and supportive classroom environment, there is a far greater possibility that learners can exploit optimally their latent potential. They are likely to develop high self-esteem, to have a positive image, a sense of purpose and skills of competence (see Appendix II). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Moral purpose is a technique to keep teachers close to the needs of young learners; while change agentry causes them to develop better strategies for bringing about improvements at the level of learning outcomes. Eventually, rapport is established between the teacher and learner, making the teaching-learning environment a friendly one. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A. Kohn, in a personal communication, April 17, 2002, notes that teachers do not resist changes; they resist being changed. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Andrews (1994) summarizes three possible responses of educators in response to curriculum innovation: *fight it*, *ignore it* and *use it*. While Davison (2004) identifies six different responses to curriculum change: *resistance* including explicit rejection of the innovation; *pseudo-compliance*, with little or no alteration to underlying practices and beliefs*; compliance*, where the innovation is assimilated without significantly altering existing practice; *accommodation*, where there are some adjustments made to incorporate aspects

   of the innovation into existing practices and *convergenceand creative co-construction*, where the most significant elements of the innovation are integrated into existing practices to create something fundamentally new. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The notion of ‘tissue rejection’ (Holliday, 1992) is at the core of this form of resistance. This notion is based on the organ transplant metaphor which sees systems as organic and coherent and with a capacity to reject any alien element which does not fit within the ecology of the situation. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)