Introduction

The realm of education experiences a constant flux of change and development as technological innovations and new teaching methods are continuously emerging. In addition, the current generation of students exhibits different learning styles, educational expectations, learning mindsets and interests. Therefore, lecturers need to effectively respond to this evolving reality to remain relevant and address the ever-changing pedagogical circumstances.

Since lecturers serve as change agents who administer the innovative practices in their classes, a reform in education is dependent on lecturers’ readiness for change and their involvement in the change process (Harris, 2004). In academic institutions lecturers’ openness to the organizational reform and adaptation to change determines its success (Nicolas-Augustin et al., 2022). Thus, lecturers’ favorable attitude towards change is crucial for effective implementation of change (Anghelachea & Bentea, 2012; Bent et al., 2017; Hamilton, 2018). Lecturers who regard the change positively will display personal responsibility and commitment as agents of change as well as demonstrate high level of engagement and participation in the reform process (Matthysen & Harris, 2018; Radita et al., 2021).

Employees’ identification with the transitional process and their proactive approach to executing the change are said to be influenced by three constructs: transformational leadership, communicative and participatory organizational climate and perceived organizational support. Transformational leaders are characterized by enhanced emotional intelligence and inspire and motivate followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes. They foster staff involvement in change and innovation by cultivating a safe environment where risks are welcome, and new ideas can be explored freely (Kirkman et al., 2004; Moolenar et al., 2010). Likewise, communication-oriented and developmental workplace cultures, which encourage discussion, employee involvement in decision making, collaboration of the team members and employee growth and evolvement, positively implicate lecturers’ perception of and readiness for change (Griffioen & De Jong, 2015; Neil et al., 2019; Vakola, 2014). Finally, when employees perceive the organization as appreciative of their contribution and caring for their needs and well-being, they are more engaged with the institution and exhibit heightened commitment to their role and responsibilities. As a result, they are more willing to embrace and implement the required change (Gigliotti et al., 2019; Kebede & Wang, 2022; Lestari, 2022; Taufikin et al., 2021).

# Israeli tertiary EFL education has undergone a few changes in the past five years. One of these was the transition initiated by the Israeli CHE from teaching exclusively reading comprehension of academic articles to incorporating the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) aligned with the CEFR. Another set of changes was induced by the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced the English studies online and the Zoom platform replaced the in-person teaching. Additionally, for the past year and a half Israel has been experiencing the adversity of war, which disrupted the routine course of learning and teaching and necessitated adaptations in the teaching methods. Apart from teaching in turbulent times, lecturers in the English department were also required to grapple with the initiation of AI applications, which posed unique challenges for language learning and assessment.

# The purpose of this paper is to explore English lecturers’ perception of versatile organizational changes and examine the combined effect of the leadership style, the organizational climate and the perceived organizational support on the lecturers’ readiness for change.

Literature review

Transformational leadership and readiness for change

Holt et al. (2007) assert that the employee readiness for organizational change originates from a set of employee beliefs: a belief that they are capable of executing the change; a belief that the organization leader is committed to change; a belief that it is appropriate for the organization and a belief that he/she may benefit from the change. According to literature, change beliefs affect attitudes towards change (Humayun, 2008; Carporarello & Viachka, 2010; El-Farra & Badawi, 2012). Belief refers to a person’s conception regarding a certain behavior or an object, while attitude is defined as an evaluation of a behavior or an object and an inclination to respond to those in a positive or negative manner (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Teacher attitudes towards change are considered a critical factor in their intention to accept or resist change (Anghelachea & Bentea, 2012; Bent et al., 2017; Hamilton, 2018).

Teachers are the mediators between the institution and the students and thus, their favorable attitude to change and their readiness to implement the change is vital for its successful and smooth execution (Meria et al., 2023). Teacher beliefs re change and subsequently their attitudes to change are said to be influenced by the institution leaders (Chan, 2002; Child Bowen et al., 2000; Giannakaki & Belikaidi, 2012; Kursunoglu & Tanriogen, 2009; Oreg & Berson, 2011; Pashiaridis & Johansson, 2016; Sarafidou & Nikolaidis, 2009; Tai et al., 2017). At times of change the leader is the axis of the process and teachers seek certainty in their superior as a change agent. They rely on their leader’s competencies to initiate and implement the change by determining the necessary strategies, careful planning and managing practices to substantiate the change objectives (Bueno & Tubbs, 2005; Duffy, 2009; Steiner & Hassel, 2011).

In the context of organizational change, transformational leadership is emphasized in literature as the optimal managerial style that has the potential in reforming organizational systems (Geijsel et al., 2009; Moolenaar et al., 2010). Transformational leadership, as defined by Bernard M. Bass (1985), is a leadership style in which leaders inspire and motivate followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes by influencing their values, beliefs, and attitudes. This approach goes beyond managing tasks and focuses on fostering innovation, creativity, and commitment through a shared vision. Mulford (2006) outlined six components of transformational leadership: developing shared vision, setting high expectations, building a caring and trustful culture, fostering a cooperative school climate and enhancing a productive working environment.

Research on transformational leadership in educational context was initiated by Leithwood and his colleagues in the 1980s and the 1990s (Leithwood, 1994) and was followed by numerous studies since (Geijsel et al., 2009; Griffioen et al., 2017; Marks & Printy, 2003; Shalley & Gilson, 2004; Thoonen et al., 2011 FIND MORE RECENT SOURCES- TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION).

Educational change necessitates personal change, which often involves managing emotional conflicts among stakeholders. As a result, educational leaders are expected to possess emotional intelligence to effectively manage themselves, support their staff, and foster an institutional climate conducive to change (Brinia et al., 2014; James et al., 2018; Moser, 2017). Research highlights a positive correlation between leader’s emotional intelligence and subordinates’ attitudes toward change (Tai & Omar, 2018, 2020). Transformational leaders with high emotional intelligence encourage staff to engage in the change and innovation process by creating a safe environment where risks can be taken and new ideas explored without fear of failure, criticism, or ridicule (Kirkman et al., 2004; Moolenar et al., 2010 in THE IMPACT OF TEAM EMPOWERMENT ON VIRTUAL TEAM PERFORMANCE: THE MODERATING ROLE OF FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION).

# In addition to the mediating effect of the transformational leaders’ emotional intelligence in the reform process, their central position in the organizational network guarantees three properties that promote successful implementation of change, namely, degree, closeness and betweenness (Kilduff & Krackhardt, 2008; Wasserman & Faust, 1998). Degree centrality refers to the number of people who see the leader as available resource and seek out his advice, social support and expertise. Closeness centrality address the reachability by the educational leader, i.e. how fast he can reach the staff members by both direct and indirect relationships. Betweenness centrality relates to the leader’s role as a bonding agent between disconnected teachers. The combined effect of these three qualities of a transformational leader in the educational setting guarantees more readiness to change among the subordinates as such superior is close to the lecturers and is regarded as a source of knowledge and advice, as well as a connecting link between the colleagues (Nienke et al., 2010; Vijaya, 2015, Social networks and employee voice: The influence of team members’ and team leaders’ social network positions on employee voice)

# Organizational culture and climate and readiness for change

# In addition to the agency of transformational leadership in driving organizational change, organizational culture is a significant catalyst in the employee change attitude. Open and transparent communication climate contributes to the employee readiness for change (Farahana et al., 2017; Men & Bowen, 2017). A supportive organizational environment is created through effective communication, in the course of which employees receive all the necessary information about the change and feel ready to embrace it (Chiang, 2010; Vakola, 2014). Positive communication environment enhances individual’s readiness and positive response to change (Neil et al., 2019; Vakola, 2014).

# In addition, evidence suggests that developmental culture shapes employee responses to change. Developmental culture refers to a type of workplace environment that emphasizes growth, innovation, and adaptability. It is characterized by a focus on continuous improvement, learning, and the empowerment of individuals and teams to achieve their full potential. This type of culture encourages creativity, experimentation, and flexibility, allowing employees to adapt to changes initiated by the institution (Ahmad et al., 2020; Moynihan and Pandey, 2007). In developmental organizational cultures team members are encouraged to be part of the change and facilitate it.

# Communication-oriented and developmental cultures promote discussion, involvement in decision making and collaboration of the employees and are directly related to the lecturers’ favorable perception of change (Griffioen & De Jong, 2015). Organizations that allow a large space for discussion and debate guarantee higher likelihood of employee acceptance of the new organizational aims (Ritchie, 2012; Thoonen et al., 2011). Likewise, lecturer participation in decision making procedures increases their ownership of the institutional goals and promotes their readiness for the change ahead (Geijsel et al., 2009; Griffioen & De Jong, 2015; Qureshi et al., 2018). In addition, when employees are involved in the change process, they tend to view change positively and exhibit high level of responsibility for its successful outcomes (Neill et al., 2019; Smith, 2005; Workeneh & Abebe, 2019). By the same token, collaborative organizational culture high in solidarity and sociability ensures that teammates are dedicated to mutual goals and realize organizational changes by working together (Amanor, 2021; Neil et al., 2019; Smith, 2005; Weiner, 2009).

# An organizational culture promoting discussion, employee collaboration and involvement in decision making increases the teaching staff’s identification with the educational organization and commitment (Geijsel et al., 2009; Moolenaar, 2010, Qureshi et al., 2018; Suwaryo et al., 2015). Lecturers’ commitment may be defined as belief in and acceptance of the institutional goals and values, readiness to dedicate one’s energies for the sake of the organization and willingness to remain a member of the organization (Khasawneh et al., 2012). Lecturers’ experiencing heightened work engagement tend to feel more committed to the organization. They are more energetic and feel more attached to their jobs and exhibit a higher level of responsibility and adaptability (Matthysen & Harris, 2018; Radita et al., 2021).

# Commitment to the workplace is a major prerequisite for educational change (Handal & Herrington, 2003; Meria et al., 2022). Literature reveals that organizational commitment determines employee attitudes regarding institutional change and impacts team members’ perception concerning change implementation success. Thus, employees who are highly committed and believe that the organizational change would benefit them would be willing to embrace the change and exert extra effort in its administration (Nafei, 2014; Parish et al., 2008; Peccei et al., 2011; Vakola & Nikolaou; 2005).

# Open and participatory communication culture, in which individuals feel committed to the organization is also strongly associated with organizational trust. Employee trust in the organization and the leader plays a significant role in alleviating concerns and in addressing complex issues and undertaking risks without fear of failure (Erlyani et al., 2024; Thakur & Srivastava, 2018). Research has shown a positive correlation between organizational trust and employees’ readiness for change (Erturk, 2008; Marouf & Agarwal, 2016; Yue et al., 2019; Zayim & Kondakci, 2015). Trust is vital in the process of organizational change as it guarantees constructive response on the employees’ part. In this regard, employees characterized by high trust in their organization will be prepared to change assumptions and attitudes to meet the new organizational goals (McShane & Glinow, 2008; Oreg et al., 2011).

# Perceived organizational support and readiness for change

# **Perceived Organizational Support (POS)** refers to employees' beliefs about how much their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. It is rooted in the idea that organizations, through policies, practices, and interactions, can communicate their commitment to employees (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 2020; Robbins & Judge, 2015). According to Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), perceived organizational support increases employees’ responsibility to support the organization in achieving its goals and enhances employee commitment toward the organization. It fosters the employee vitality and dedication as well as a caring attitude for the organization (Lan et al., 2020).

# According to literature, perceived organizational support has a positive influence on the employee readiness for change. Higher levels of POS are associated with increased levels of preparedness of the employees to adapt to organizational changes (Ganni et al., 2018; Gigliotti et al., 2019; Jabbarian & Chegini, 2017; Kebede & Wang, 2022; Lestari, 2022; Ming-Chu & Meng-Hsiu, 2015; Prakoso et al., 2022; Ramdhani & Desiana, 2021; Taufikin et al., 2021).

# Perceived organizational support is said to foster work engagement, which encompasses employees’ ownership of their role, commitment to their responsibilities and involvement of their thoughts and emotions in carrying out their tasks (Adil et al., 2020; Imran et al., 2020, Jia et al, 2019; Oubibi et al., 2022; Rizki et al, 2022). Employees with high work engagement are more energetic in their performance, demonstrate higher levels of responsibility and exhibit increased levels of job attachment. Consequently, they adapt to organizational change more readily (Radityia et al., 2021; Rizky et al., 2017). Therefore, there is a threefold connection between employee perceived organizational support, work engagement and readiness to change (Lista Meria et al., 2023; Rizky et al. 2022; Saks, 2019). When employees feel that workplace values them as a meaningful asset, they become more actively involved in the organizational activities and procedures and thus they are more innovative and perceive organizational changes positively.

# In conclusion, favorable perception of and readiness for change by the lecturers are impacted by transformational leadership, communicative and developmental organizational culture, and perceived organizational support. While research on lecturers’ readiness for change has addressed these factors in isolation, the purpose of this study is to examine their combined effect on the lecturers’ experience of institutional changes and their willingness to embrace and administer them. To this end, the current research will attempt to answer the following research questions:

# 1. How do the English lecturers perceive organizational changes?

# 2. How do the lecturers experience the leadership style and how does it affect their readiness for change?

# 3. How do the lecturers regard the organizational climate and how does it affect their readiness for change?

# 4. How do the lecturers view the organizational support and how does it affect their readiness for change?

# 5. How do transformational leadership, organizational climate, and perceived organizational support collectively influence English lecturers' readiness for institutional change?

***Field and participants***

I conducted the research in the winter term of the 2024/2025 academic year in Ashkelon Academic College located in Israel's southern periphery. Prior to the beginning of their course of studies, students take an English placement test and enroll in EPIC courses in accordance with the score of this test. Only a small minority of learners are exempt from studying English. Most students in the college are required to take at least one English course. The learner population in the EPIC courses comprises of …. students annually and there is a yearly total of …. English courses. The English department consists of 27 EPIC lecturers. In this research the English department will be viewed as a micro-organization.

In the past five years the English department has undergone several significant changes. First, the Israeli CHE launched a reform in teaching the English language, which required the transition from teaching reading comprehension to CEFR-aligned instruction, i.e., teaching a composite of four English proficiency skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking). The new program necessitated adaptations in the instructional methods and materials and the evaluation system. Second, the outbreak of Covid 19 introduced online teaching and further changes in teaching and assessment. In addition, for the past year and a half the Israeli academia has been affected by the reginal war, and the English program has been revisited again to accommodate to the new turbulent circumstances. The shifting reality was addressed in the new program that considered both the pedagogical aspects and the social-emotional needs of the learners. Finally, the surge of AI-related applications required updating of the teaching and evaluation approaches. Each of these changes was executed by the department lecturers in a satisfactory manner.

The English department is characterized by its transformational leadership, long established culture of communication and development, and organizational support. The department head involves the team members in decision making, values the contribution of each lecturer and is highly accessible. In addition, the EPIC department is known for its atmosphere of collaboration, openness and acceptance of novel pedagogical ideas for optimal teaching and learning. Staff members collaborate in devising study and test materials, share pedagogical insights and continually reflect on existing practices and refine them. In this regard, the team is subdivided into level-oriented groups, each headed by a level coordinator. There are periodical level meetings as well as daily exchange of ideas and opinions in the WhatsApp group. Moreover, every term begins and ends with a department meeting. These meetings focus on discussion of the most beneficial teaching and assessment practices for the students and possibles upgrades and refinements of the program. Team members also communicate by means of the department WhatsApp group and via e-mails. Furthermore, the department enjoys a shared platform where lecturers upload the new materials they have developed. Finally, the lecturers receive appreciative feedback for every contribution they make both from the teammates and the leader and their concerns and challenges are addressed by the department head. In addition, new lecturers receive mentorship by their veteran colleagues.

Twenty EPIC lecturers were approached and agreed to participate in the research. All the participants have been teaching at the college between 7 and 25 years and thus have experienced the transition from EAP to EPIC as well as teaching in turbulent times and the emergence of the AI platforms.

***Interviews***

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as data collecting methodology for this research since this is the ultimate instrument for examining experiences and perceptions (Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Seidman, 2013). First, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to obtain unlimited and optimal information from the respondents. Second, this method allows a considerable degree of flexibility for the researcher may refer to the interviewees’ responses and ask for further clarification and elaboration as well as rephrase the original questions according to the course of the interview.

Most interviews lasted between an hour and an hour and a half, with the longest continuing for an hour and forty minutes. In addition to audio-recording the interviews, the researcher took notes while the participants responded to the questions to be able to refer to their answers as the interview unfolded. Data transcriptions were conducted immediately after each interview to help the researcher in the process of data recording. Prior to the beginning of the interviews the researcher performed a trial interview with a non-participating lecturer to examine the quality of the questions and further revise them based on the insights gained from this experience. In addition, as each interview was conducted on a separate day, the researcher reflected on each interview and interview techniques were refined for the following session. For example, a question that was poorly understood by two respondents was rephrased to make it more comprehensible.

This research endeavours to understand lecturer attitude to changes and their readiness for change. It also seeks to understand the factors contributing to their perception of changes and readiness to implement them. Thus, the interview questions addressed the isolated and composite effect of the leadership style, the department culture and the perceived organizational support on the readiness for change by the staff members.

***Data Analysis***

Content analysis was employed to create thematic coding of the information. The procedures of the content analysis the researcher performed are in line with the suggestions of Charmaz (2017), Gay et al. (2012), Corbin & Strauss (2014) and Mason (2017). First the researcher thoroughly reviewed the transcripts to become profoundly familiar with the data. At the next stage the researcher examined each transcribed interview and labeled the main themes and ideas. She further compared the data of the respondents, identified the differences and similarities and labeled them with codes. Subsequently, similar codes were grouped into categories. The researcher used the codes and categories to outline the findings. At the final interpreting stage, the researcher compared the findings of the current research with previous relevant literature and interpreted the unique results of this study.

***Ethics***

I approached the participants and provided a brief description of the research introducing the research questions. The subjects were notified that their responses may be published, with the assurance that their identities will remain confidential. They granted their permission to record the interviews and signed a consent form. The participants were informed that the interviews might take up to an hour and a half and would be conducted via Zoom. Additionally, they were told that they could quit at any stage of the interview. Consent from the college ethics committee was received prior to the interviews.

Interview questions

1. Please share your experience of the changes in the English department (the transition to the CEFR, the Covid-19 adaptations, the revisions in the pedagogical program in the wake of the war, the introduction of AI platforms).

- Which change was the most difficult and why?

2. Please describe your perception/attitude of these changes? What were your thoughts and feelings with regards to the necessary revisions?

3. How would you describe the leadership style of the department head?

4. How do you perceive the leader’s functioning in the change process in terms of her competence to implement it, her emotional intelligence to effectively manage herself, support her staff, and foster an institutional climate conducive to change.

5. In your opinion, what is the relationship between this leadership style and your attitude and readiness for change?

6. How would you describe the department culture and climate? Please refer to the properties of discussion, involvement in decision making and collaboration.

7. What response does this culture elicit in you?

8. In your opinion, what is the relationship between this department culture and your attitude and readiness for change?

9. Please share your thoughts regarding the perception of your contribution by the department head and the staff members.

10. Please share your thoughts regarding the department caring for your wellbeing.

11. What response do these department attitudes elicit in you?

12. In your opinion, what is the relationship between the perceived department support and your attitude and readiness for change?

13. Do you believe that any one of the three factors could determine your readiness for change or is it rather a composite effect of the three factors that influences your readiness for change?