



Investigating the Perceptions and Implementation Challenges of Scaffolding Among Libyan English Teachers

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Abstract

This paper is descriptive paper reveals the English teachers perceptions of scaffolding strategies in classroom and how effective they are according to the participants experience in teaching. The research utilizes a quantitative approach through a survey in the form of a questionnaire which is distributed to the participants after attending an online workshop about scaffolding. The responses collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using quantitative method. According to the teachers' continuous needs for effective teaching strategies this study presented the application of scaffolding as an effective instructional strategy in English language teaching. It highlighted a variety of forms of scaffolding including one-on-one tutoring, peer support, and computer-assisted techniques. Also, it distinguished their roles in facilitating learner independence and mastery of new concepts. Through rich feedback of previous studies and findings illustrated and examined different scaffolding techniques—such as questioning, modeling, and visual aids—significantly enhance student comprehension and engagement. The findings showed that effective scaffolding accelerates cognitive development and fosters learners' confidence and autonomous learning skills, aligning with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory.

Key words: *scaffolding, Vygotsky, Zone of Proximal Development, Instructional Strategy*

Introduction

This paper is an opportunity to take a closer look on one of the teaching strategies which is scaffolding as well as the different forms of this method (e.g., one-to-one scaffolding-peer scaffolding-Computer-Based Scaffolding) and how these scaffolds can help teachers to accommodate students' different levels of knowledge. There are several scaffolding techniques which can be used by teachers to present and explain a model of information as well as guiding the learners to practice this information and be able to use certain knowledge. This paper provides a comprehensive overview, incorporating previous research on scaffolding and exploring strategies that educators can employ to enhance the learning process. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (6th ed., 2014) defines scaffolding as , a set of poles and boards that are built into a structure for workers to stand on when they are working on the outside of a building. In this paper a questionnaire is contributed to the participants (English teachers in Libya) after attending an online workshop which presents and explains scaffolding in detailed view, and then the data collected is statistically analyzed.

It is grounded in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (1978) as “The zone of proximal development is the distance between what children can do by themselves and the next learning that they can be helped to achieve with competent assistance” (Raymond,

Investigating the Perceptions and Implementation Challenges of Scaffolding Among Libyan English Teachers

2000, p.176). Walqui (2006) identifies modeling as a key scaffolding technique, emphasizing its role in demonstrating tasks to learners. Additionally, studies highlight the importance of questioning, feedback, and the use of visual aids in supporting language development. The effectiveness of scaffolding lies in its ability to adapt to individual learners' needs, promoting engagement and fostering a deeper understanding of the language. Rooted in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, particularly the concept of the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD), scaffolding provides learners with the support they need to accomplish tasks they cannot complete independently but can achieve with guidance (Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, Bruner's theory of scaffolding emphasizes the importance of gradually transferring responsibility from the teacher to the student, enabling autonomous learning over time.

Recent studies (e.g., Walqui, 2006; Hammond & Gibbons, 2005; Reiser, 2004) emphasize how scaffolding not only supports language acquisition but also nurtures critical thinking and problem-solving skills by encouraging learners to engage in higher-order thinking. As instructors continue to explore its pedagogical impact, scaffolding remains an essential practice in contemporary English language teaching, helping students overcome challenges and achieve academic success through personalized, interactive support. This study employs a quantitative method using a survey conducted via a questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to participants following their attendance at an online workshop on scaffolding strategies and instructional methods. The aim of the survey was to collect data on participants' comprehension, attitudes, and intended application of the ideas presented during the session.

Aim of the Study

This paper aims to reveal the teachers' perception of how effective scaffolding strategies work in a classroom setting and the strategies a teacher can employ to build up learners' knowledge.

Research Questions

The methodology was structured to address three core inquiries:

1. What is the baseline knowledge among teachers regarding scaffolding as a teaching methodology?
2. How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of scaffolding within the teaching and learning process?
3. What specific strategies do teachers intend to employ to construct and build upon learners' existing knowledge?

Literature Review

Scaffolding is one of the most effective methods which lead students toward greater independence and understanding during the learning process (Belland, Walker, Kim, & Lefler, 2017). Scaffolding is a teaching strategy which is not restricted in language teaching but also used in different majors in life in formal and informal learning settings.

Investigating the Perceptions and Implementation Challenges of Scaffolding Among Libyan English Teachers

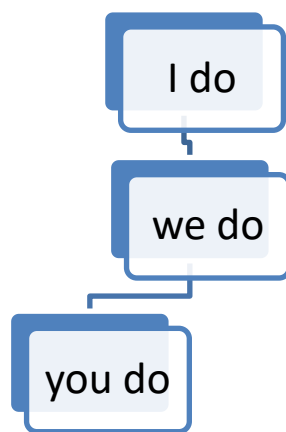
This teaching method involves helping and guiding students until they can successfully utilize new language skills on their own. To begin, teachers introduce the central ideas for any new skill or information. In the first step, called modeling, the teacher demonstrates a clear example. Since students are just starting to learn, the teacher helps them pick out the most main points. As students learn more, the teacher regularly offers less direct help.

The next step often includes working in groups, where students work together and can get extra support from classmates who are better at English. This is called peer scaffolding, and we will explain it more later in this paper.

In the third stage, students work on their own, completely without the teacher's help. This entire process follows the "I do, we do, you do" model.

First, the "I do" stage: the teacher performs the task or presents the model, and the students simply observe. Once the teacher feels everything is clear and the students understand the concept, they move to the "we do" stage. This involves less guided practice, where students work in pairs or groups, often with little to no direct help from the teacher. This stage is particularly helpful because students who might struggle to learn directly from the teacher can often pick up skills more easily by practicing with their friends or peers, a concept known as peer scaffolding. This approach effectively addresses the challenges faced by less proficient students.

In the next stage, when the teacher decides that the picture is clear after practicing in pairs or groups, they move to individual practice which is the last phase of scaffolding in which the teacher watches and the students work through handouts or worksheets individually and this is called the final product because the students begin to work by their own without the help of the teacher or their classmates.



To summarize, scaffolding is a teaching method designed to help and guide learners. It originates from Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, specifically his concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), introduced in 1978. This concept focuses on three key parts of how people learn:

Investigating the Perceptions and Implementation Challenges of Scaffolding Among Libyan English Teachers

- Tasks the learner cannot do alone: These are things the student simply isn't ready to do without help.
- Tasks the learner can do with help: This is the sweet spot where scaffolding is most effective. With the right support, the student can achieve these tasks.
- Tasks the learner can do on their own: These are the skills the student has mastered and no longer needs any assistance with.

Scaffolding Techniques

Alibali (2006) suggests that as students' progress through a task; teachers can use different scaffolds to accommodate students' different levels of knowledge.

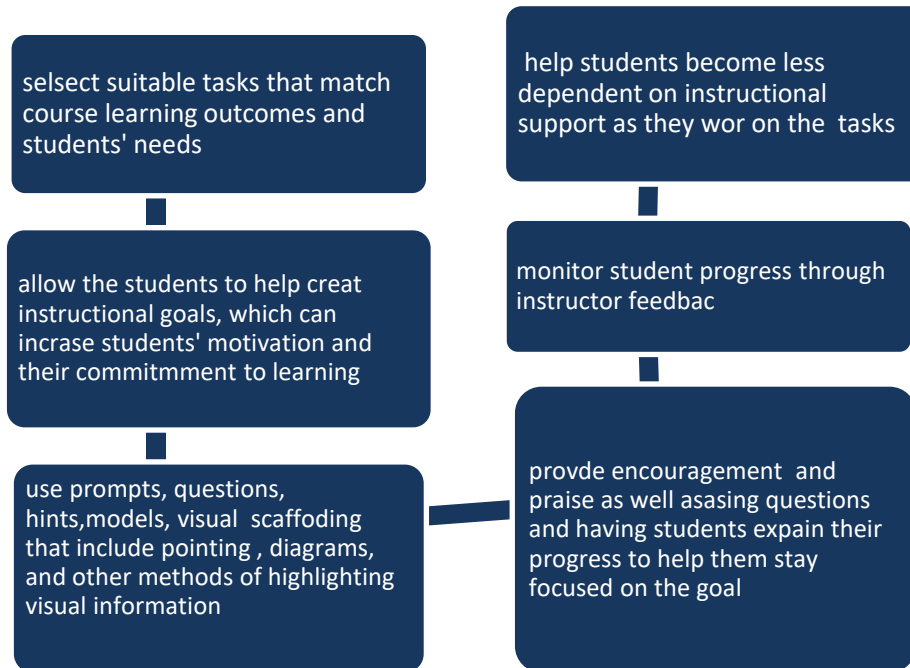
The following are the scaffolding techniques which are suggested by Alibali(2006)

- 1- Questioning: You can provide incomplete sentences which students complete which helps to encourage deep thinking by using higher order 'What if' questions.
- 2- Explanation: You can provide more detailed information to move students along on a task or in their thinking of a concept such as written instructions for a task, or verbal explanation of how a process works.
- 3- Modeling: You can verbally or non-verbally demonstrate for the students how to complete a task.
- 4- Hint: You can provide suggestions and clues to move students along.
- 5- Feedback: You can provide confirmation, corrections, positive comment or constructive criticism.
- 6- Examples: You can provide samples, specimens, illustrations and problems.
- 7- Concept Map: You can provide partially completed maps for students to complete; students can create their own maps based on their current knowledge of the task or concept.
- 8- Visual Clues: Pointing, diagrams, charts and graphs highlight visual information.

Guidelines to implement scaffolding

The following points can be used as guidelines when implementing instructional scaffolding (adapted from Hogan and Pressley, 1997).

Investigating the Perceptions and Implementation Challenges of Scaffolding Among Libyan English Teachers



Scaffolding Forms

One-to-One Scaffolding

One-on-one scaffolding involves a teacher working individually with a student to assess their current abilities, provide tailored support for skill development in a specific task, and adjust the assistance as necessary until the student can independently master the task (Belland, 2014). When considering one-on-one scaffolding, it's useful to differentiate between the teacher's goals—what they aim to achieve through scaffolding—and the methods employed—specific strategies utilized (Belland, 2012)

Peer Scaffolding

Peer scaffolding involves peers offering support to one another, taking advantage of the collective strength found in classroom environments (Davin& Donato,2013). This approach can also include older students assisting younger ones. For instance, students who are proficient in English can use questioning and prompting techniques to help English as a New Language learners enhance their speaking skills (Angelova, Gunawardena, & Volk, 2006).

Computer-Based Scaffolding

Computer-based scaffolding refers to digital support designed to assist students in tackling tasks that exceed their independent capabilities (Belland, 2014). It specifically aids students in developing solutions to intricate, poorly defined problems, relying solely on a computer tool. For example, this tool can offer scaffolding assistance to help preschoolers with their craft projects (Fair, Vandermaas-Peeler, Beaudry, & Dew, 2005).

Investigating the Perceptions and Implementation Challenges of Scaffolding Among Libyan English Teachers

A study by Hammond and Gibbons (2005) titled "Putting scaffolding to work: The contribution of scaffolding in articulating ESL education" provides a comprehensive exploration of scaffolding in English as a Second Language (ESL) education. Their research emphasizes the importance of both macro-level and micro-level scaffolding strategies in supporting ESL learners.

Macro-level scaffolding refers to the planned, structured support provided by educators, such as task sequencing and curriculum design, to facilitate learning. It involves the responsive, in-the-moment support teacher's offer during interactions with students, including questioning techniques and feedback.

Hammond and Gibbons argue that effective scaffolding requires a balance between these levels, ensuring that planned support is adaptable to the dynamic needs of learners. They highlight the role of teachers in recognizing and responding to students' current developmental levels, thereby fostering an environment conducive to language acquisition and academic success.

Methodology and Data Analysis

This part outlines the research framework used to investigate the application of scaffolding within the Libyan educational context. It details the study's design, participant demographics, and the systematic procedures used to collect and interpret practitioner data.

Research Design and Instrument

This study employs a quantitative research design centered on a structured post-workshop survey. The methodology was selected to capture measurable insights into teacher perceptions and their strategic intentions regarding scaffolding.

The primary instrument was a post-workshop questionnaire, meticulously designed based on existing literature regarding pedagogical strategies and teacher development. To ensure the data remained reliable and high in "freshness," the survey was administered immediately following an online professional development workshop focused on scaffolding techniques. Before distribution, the instrument was reviewed by educational experts to validate its relevance to the research objectives.

Participant Profile

The study comprised a cohort of 26 English language teachers currently practicing within private national and international school environments. These participants were purposively selected based on their active attendance at a specialized scaffolding workshop, a criteria designed to ensure that all responses were grounded in a consistent theoretical baseline. The demographic composition of this group reflected a broad professional spectrum, representing a wide range of career stages that encompassed both newly appointed educators and seasoned veterans with over a decade of classroom experience. Regarding academic qualifications, the majority of the educators held a minimum of a bachelor's degree specifically in the fields of English or Education.

Investigating the Perceptions and Implementation Challenges of Scaffolding Among Libyan English Teachers

Furthermore, the instructional focus of these participants is concentrated on the primary oversight and instruction of students within the 6–14 age range.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics to identify trends and general attitudes across the participant group. Quantitative metrics were derived by converting responses from closed-ended questions into frequencies, percentages, and means. Furthermore, the thematic evaluation of the data focused on measuring the effectiveness of the workshop, assessing the participants' preparedness to implement the discussed methodologies, and identifying the specific challenges they anticipate facing within a classroom setting.

Questionnaire Framework

The questionnaire was organized into three strategic sections designed to transition logically from general demographics to specific pedagogical intent. The first part, Section A, focused on collecting general information, such as grade levels, class sizes, years of teaching experience, and the participants' prior knowledge of scaffolding. This was followed by Section B, which addressed the practical implementation of these techniques by examining the intended frequency of use, the selection of specific strategies like modeling or visual aids, and the identification of perceived challenges, including time constraints and differentiation. Finally, Section C evaluated the anticipated effectiveness of these methods, gathering data on expected student responses, potential areas of improvement across academic, social, and cognitive domains, and the participants' requirements for future training and support.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of Professional Demographics and Classroom Complexity

The study's empirical foundation rests upon the responses of 26 English language practitioners. A critical finding in the demographic data is the prevalence of "Mixed Level" instruction, reported by 65.4% of the participants. In the context of Applied Linguistics, this high percentage indicates a significant "pedagogical load," as teachers must simultaneously address the needs of learners at varying stages of interlanguage development.

How many students are in your average class?
26 responses

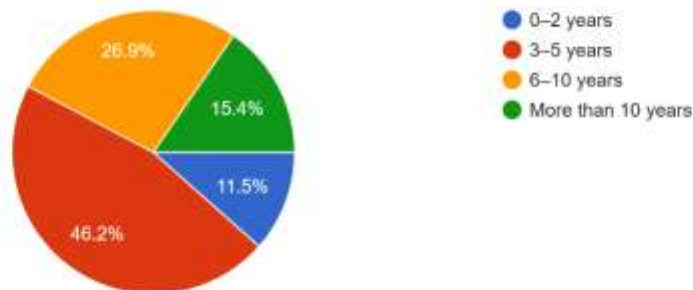


Investigating the Perceptions and Implementation Challenges of Scaffolding Among Libyan English Teachers

As illustrated in the data regarding class size, 57.7% of teachers manage cohorts of 15–25 students, while 15.4% oversee larger groups exceeding 25. When synthesized with the experience levels—where nearly half (46.2%) of the respondents possess 3–5 years of experience—it becomes evident that the Libyan ELT sector is currently driven by a "mid-career" workforce. These educators are developmentally poised to move from "survival-based" teaching toward the adoption of sophisticated instructional frameworks like scaffolding.

How long have you been teaching?

26 responses



2. Perceptual Shifts and Conceptual Orientation

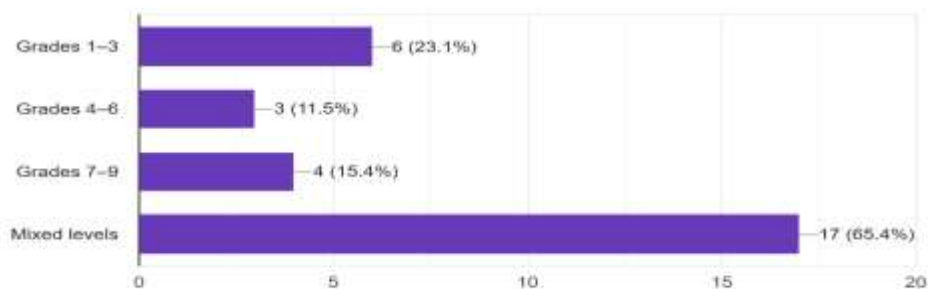
One of the primary objectives was to gauge the impact of the workshop intervention on teacher knowledge. The pre-intervention data suggests that while the term "scaffolding" is not entirely foreign to the Libyan context, its theoretical depth was unevenly understood.

- **Baseline Awareness:**

57.7% of participants entered the study with prior knowledge, yet 23.1% represented a "tabula rasa," having had no exposure to the strategy before the workshop.

Grade level(s) you teach:

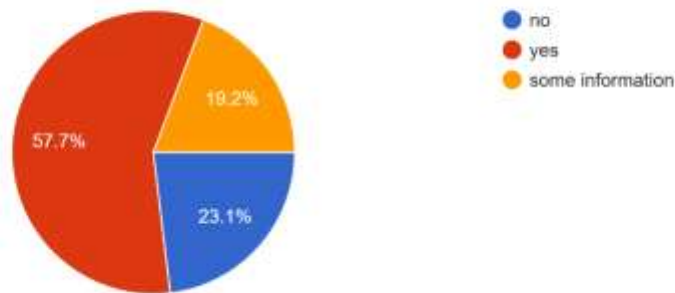
26 responses



Investigating the Perceptions and Implementation Challenges of Scaffolding Among Libyan English Teachers

Have you ever heard of scaffolding as a teaching strategy before this workshop?

26 responses

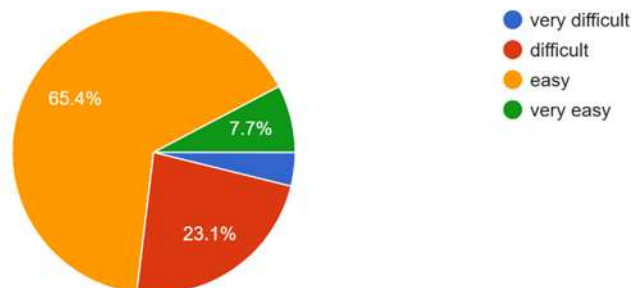


- **The Ease-of-Implementation Paradox:**

A striking 65.4% of participants categorized the implementation of scaffolding as "Easy," with an additional 7.7% viewing it as "Very Easy".

How easy or difficult do you to implement scaffolding in your lessons? (1 = Very Difficult, 5 = Very Easy)

26 responses



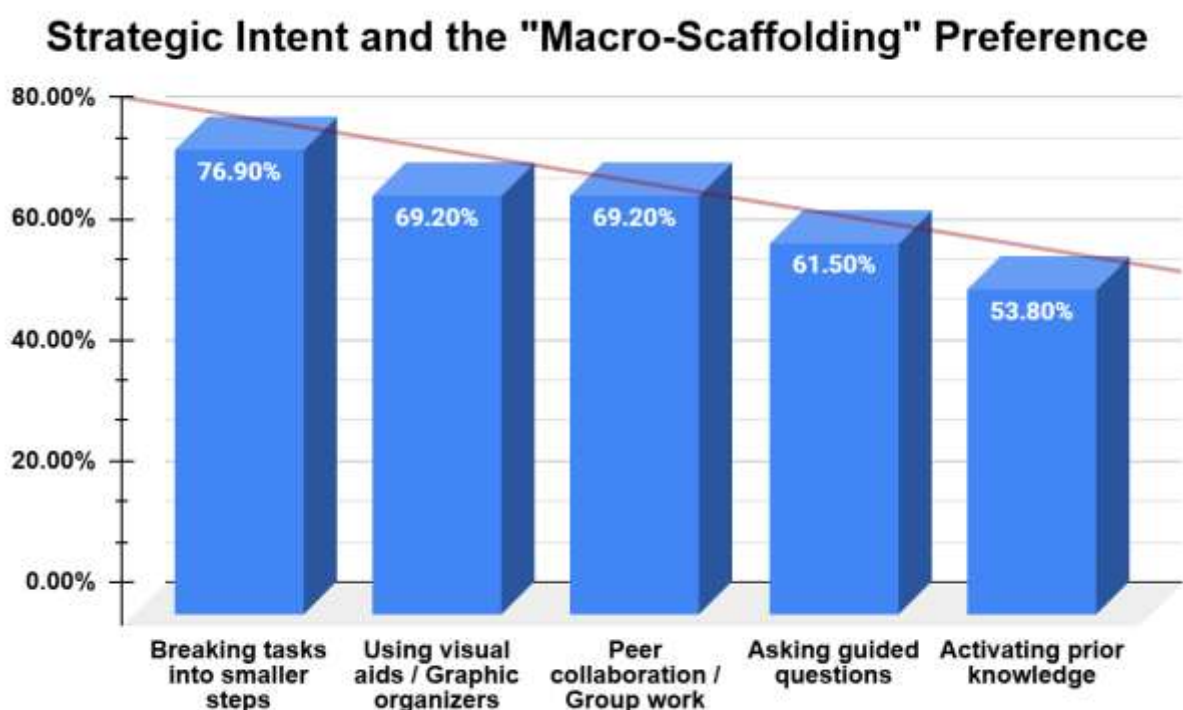
In professional academic discourse, this high perceived ease suggests that the workshop successfully translated complex Vygotskian theory (ZPD) into accessible, "classroom-ready" steps. However, this perceived ease often contrasts with actual classroom constraints, a theme that will be explored in subsequent sections.

4.3. Strategic Intent and the "Macro-Scaffolding" Preference

Participants were asked to identify which specific techniques they intended to integrate into their practice. The responses reveal a clear hierarchical preference for Macro-level Scaffolding—structured supports that are planned before the lesson begins.

Investigating the Perceptions and Implementation Challenges of Scaffolding Among Libyan English Teachers

Strategy	Frequency (%)	Academic Classification
Breaking tasks into smaller steps	76.9%	Procedural Scaffolding
Using visual aids / Graphic organizers	69.2%	Sensory/Cognitive Scaffolding
Peer collaboration / Group work	69.2%	Social Scaffolding
Asking guided questions	61.5%	Interactional Scaffolding
Activating prior knowledge	53.8%	Schema-Building Scaffolding



The data indicates that teachers are most comfortable with Procedural Scaffolding (76.9%), which focuses on the structural organization of the learning task. Conversely, lower-scoring items like "Providing sentence starters" (34.6%) suggest that teachers may be less familiar with Linguistic Scaffolding, which provides direct verbal support for language production. This gap represents a vital area for future professional development in the Libyan EFL context.

4. Evaluative Analysis of Student Engagement and Outcomes

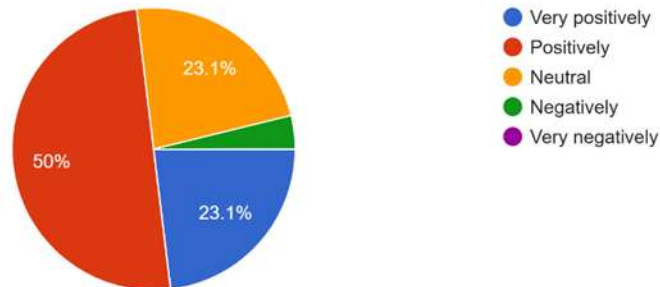
A central tenet of the study was to evaluate how teachers anticipate student reception to these scaffolding interventions. The data reveals an overwhelmingly optimistic professional outlook regarding the efficacy of these methods.

Investigating the Perceptions and Implementation Challenges of Scaffolding Among Libyan English Teachers

- **Anticipated Student Response:**

A total of 73.1% of participants predicted a "positive" or "very positive" student response. Academically, this suggests that teachers perceive scaffolding not merely as an instructional obligation, but as a catalyst for improving the affective domain of learning, such as motivation and reduced anxiety.

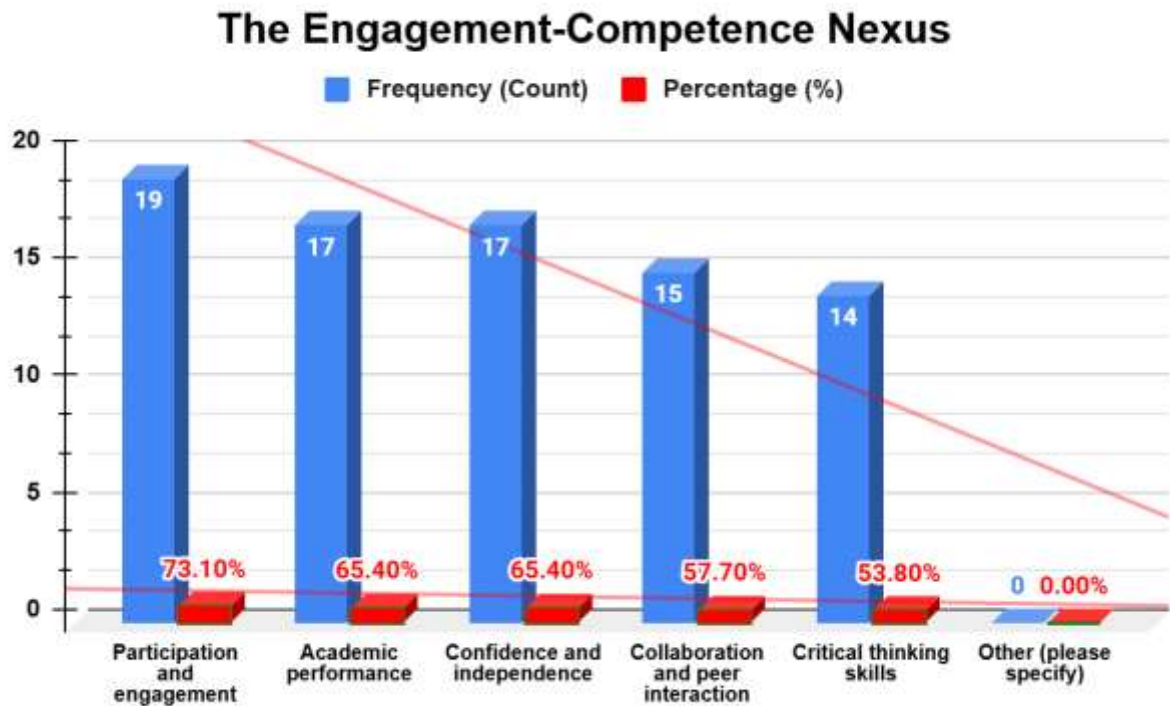
How do you think the students will respond to the use of scaffolding techniques?
26 responses



- **The Engagement-Competence Nexus:**

When asked about the specific nature of student improvement, 61.5% of respondents believe scaffolding will lead to "significant" gains. The primary areas identified for enhancement include:

- **Participation and Engagement (73.1%):** Highlighting the role of scaffolding in fostering a more interactive classroom environment.
- **Academic Performance (65.4%):** Suggesting that teachers link structured support directly to improved assessment outcomes.
- **Confidence and Independence (65.4%):** This is a critical finding, as it aligns with Bruner's concept of "fading"—the gradual removal of support to foster autonomous learners.
- **Collaboration and Peer Interaction (57.7%):** More than half of the participants recognize that scaffolding facilitates social learning, allowing students to learn from one another through structured group work.
- **Critical Thinking Skills (53.8%):** While still a majority, this area was cited less frequently than others. This may suggest that while scaffolding is seen as excellent for engagement and performance, teachers may feel it requires more specialized "Interactional Scaffolding" to deeply impact high-level critical thinking.

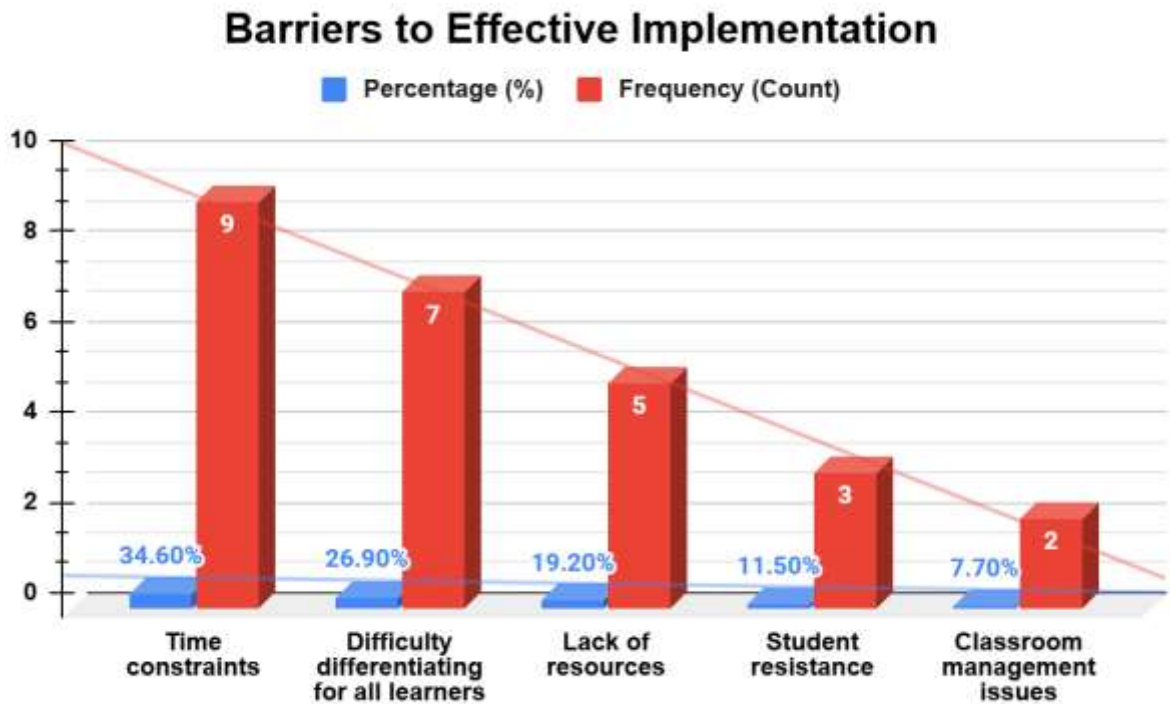


Critical Barriers: The Implementation Gap

Despite the positive disposition of the teachers, the analysis identifies several systemic hurdles that could impede the successful integration of scaffolding in Libyan schools. This "Implementation Gap" is a frequent subject of study in international ELT research.

- **Time Constraints (34.6%):** This is the most significant barrier, indicating that while teachers value scaffolding, the intensive planning and "real-time" adjustment required often conflict with rigid curriculum schedules.
- **Difficulty Differentiating for All Learners (26.9%):** This reflects the complexity of the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD). Teachers find it challenging to tailor supports that are neither too simple nor too advanced for a diverse classroom of 26 different learning speeds.
- **Lack of Resources (19.2%):** Suggests that a lack of prepared "Macro-scaffolds"—such as graphic organizers, translated materials, or leveled texts—hinders the ability to provide consistent support.
- **Student Resistance and Management (19.2% combined):** Interestingly, these social factors were ranked lowest. This implies that the primary struggle is not with student behavior, but with the logistical and pedagogical demands placed on the teacher.

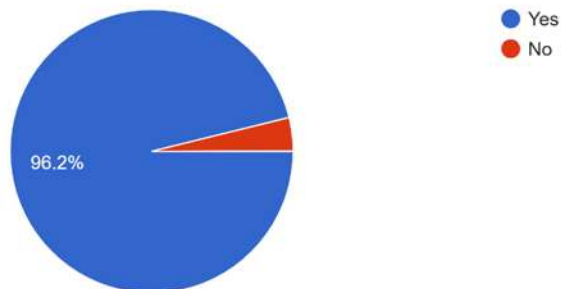
Investigating the Perceptions and Implementation Challenges of Scaffolding Among Libyan English Teachers



Teacher Agency and Professional Development Needs

Perhaps the most resilient finding in the study is the high level of Teacher Agency. Despite the challenges, 96.2% of participants stated they would adapt or modify scaffolding techniques to better suit their classroom needs.

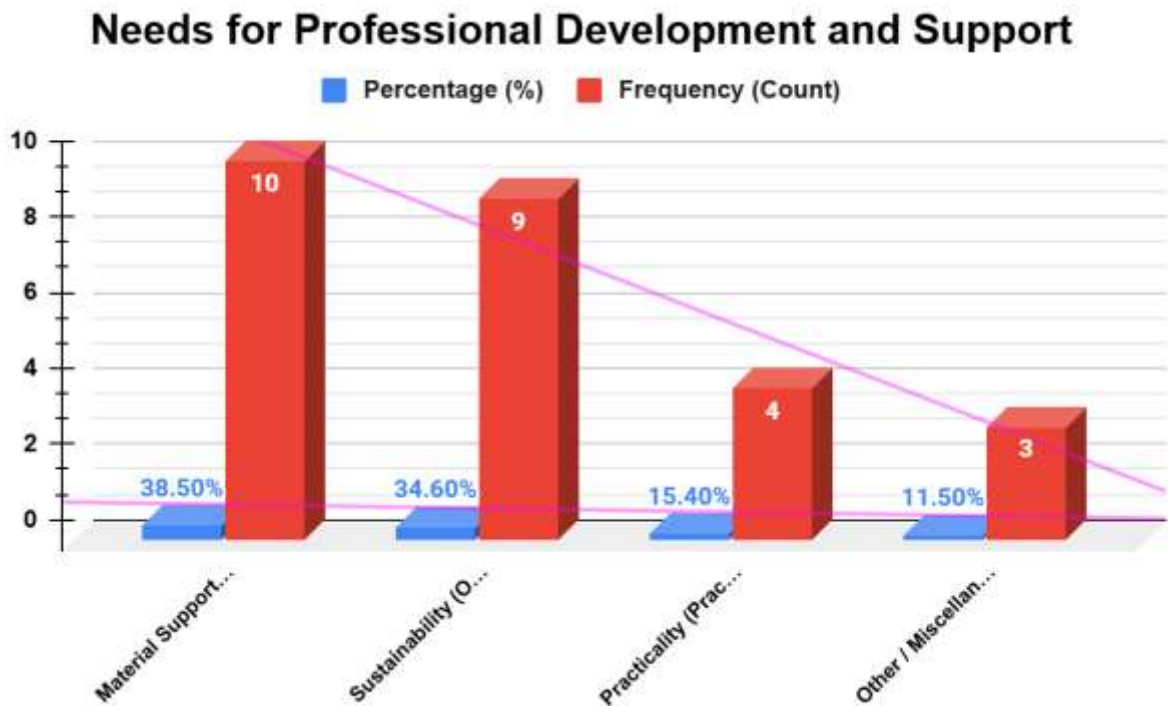
would you adapt or modify any scaffolding techniques to better suit your classroom needs?
26 responses



The data suggests that Libyan English teachers are "Reflective Practitioners" who seek to localize global strategies rather than just passively receiving theory. To support this transition, three clear pillars of professional development have emerged:

Investigating the Perceptions and Implementation Challenges of Scaffolding Among Libyan English Teachers

- **Material Support (38.5%):** The high demand for "ready-made resources" indicates a need to reduce the cognitive and preparatory load on teachers, allowing them to focus on delivery rather than content creation.
- **Sustainability (34.6%):** Respondents emphasize that one-off interventions are insufficient; they require "ongoing workshops or refresher sessions" to ensure that scaffolding techniques become a permanent part of their pedagogical toolkit.
- **Practicality (15.4%):** A significant group identified the need for "practical examples or demonstrations" to bridge the gap between abstract academic concepts and the realities of classroom execution.



Synthesis of Results

The empirical data collected from the 26 participating educators reveals a high level of pedagogical readiness within the Libyan ELT sector. The findings demonstrate that while the "mixed-level" classroom is the standard environment for 65.4% of participants, the adoption of scaffolding is viewed as a necessary mechanism for addressing this complexity. A key insight from the analysis is the participants' strong preference for macro-level structural scaffolding—specifically "breaking tasks into smaller steps" (76.9%)—over interactional linguistic supports. This suggests that while teachers are proficient in lesson

Investigating the Perceptions and Implementation Challenges of Scaffolding Among Libyan English Teachers

design, there is a distinct need for further training in real-time, interactional scaffolding techniques to support English Language Learners (ELLs).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The results align with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, specifically the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The overwhelmingly positive outlook on student response (73.1% positive or very positive) indicates that educators view scaffolding as more than a teaching strategy; it is perceived as a psychological tool that builds student confidence and independence (65.4%). However, the identification of significant barriers—most notably time constraints (34.6%) and the difficulty of differentiation (26.9%)—highlights a critical gap between theoretical endorsement and classroom feasibility.

Conclusion

This research concludes that scaffolding is a highly effective instructional framework for enhancing student engagement and academic performance in the Libyan context. The high degree of teacher agency (96.2%) reflects a workforce that is eager to adapt and localize global pedagogical standards. However, for scaffolding to move from a theoretical preference to a sustainable classroom reality, institutional support must address the systemic pressures of time and resource scarcity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered for academic and administrative consideration:

- **Strategic Resource Allocation:** It is recommended that educational institutions provide teachers with access to pre-designed scaffolding resources to reduce the preparation burden identified by 38.5% of respondents.
- **Targeted Professional Development:** Future training initiatives should prioritize "interactional scaffolding," focusing on sentence prompts and guided questioning to supplement the existing proficiency in structural methods.
- **Curricular Refinement:** Academic authorities should consider modular curriculum designs that provide the temporal flexibility required for teachers to implement the "I do, we do, you do" model effectively.
- **Further Research:** A longitudinal study incorporating classroom observations is recommended to measure the long-term impact of these strategies on student autonomous learning skills.

Investigating the Perceptions and Implementation Challenges of Scaffolding Among Libyan English Teachers

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Investigating the Perceptions and Implementation Challenges of Scaffolding Among Libyan English Teachers

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