



Perspectives of English Language Instructors and Students towards the Student-Centred Approach: A Case Study at the English Department, Faculty of Languages, Omar Al-Mukhtar University

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Abstract

This study explores perspectives of English language instructors and students towards the Student-Centered Approach (SCA) at the English Department, Faculty of Languages, Omar Al-Mukhtar University, Libya. The Student-Centered Approach (SCA) represents a paradigm shift in English language teaching (ELT), emphasizing learner autonomy, active engagement, and critical thinking over traditional teacher-centered methods, particularly relevant in EFL contexts like Libya where cultural and resource constraints prevail. A mixed-methods approach was adopted in the current study, combining quantitative and qualitative data collected through a questionnaire with 40 undergraduate students across all four academic years and semi-structured interviews with 8 experienced English language instructors. Findings reveal strong student support (75-90% agreement) for SCA's benefits in motivation and critical thinking, with instructors affirming its value per Weimer's (2013) learner-centered framework despite barriers like large classes and cultural norms. The study recommends professional development and hybrid strategies aligned with constructivist theory to facilitate SCA implementation.

Keywords: Student-centred approach, English language teaching, Omar Al-Mukhtar University, EFL perspectives, learner-centered teaching.

وجهات نظر معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية والطلاب تجاه النهج المتمحور حول الطالب: دراسة حالة في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية اللغات، جامعة عمر المختار

الملخص

يمثل النهج المتمحور حول الطالب نقلة نوعية في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية، إذ يُركز على استقلالية المتعلم، ومشاركته الفعالة، وتفكيره النقدي، بدلاً من الأساليب التقليدية التي تتمحور حول المعلم. ويُعدّ هذا النهج ذا أهمية خاصة في سياقات تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، كما هو الحال في ليبيا، حيث تسود القيود الثقافية والمواردية. تستكشف هذه الدراسة وجهات نظر مدرّسي اللغة الإنجليزية وطلابها تجاه النهج المتمحور حول الطالب في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، بكلية اللغات، جامعة عمر المختار، ليبيا. وقد اعتمدتُ منهج بحثي مُتكامل، يجمع بين البيانات الكمية والنوعية التي جُمعت



من خلال استبيان ومقابلات شبه مُهيكلية مع 40 طالبًا جامعيًا من مختلف السنوات الدراسية، و8 مدرّسين ذوي خبرة في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية. وتُشير النتائج إلى تأييد قوي من الطلاب (بنسبة موافقة تتراوح بين 75% و90%) لفوائد النهج المتمحور حول الطالب في التحفيز والتفكير النقدي، حيث أكد المدرّسون على قيمته وفقًا لإطار عمل وايمر (2013) الذي يُركز على المتعلم، على الرغم من وجود عوائق مثل كبر حجم الفصول الدراسية والأعراف الثقافية. توصي الدراسة بالتطوير المهني والاستراتيجيات الهجينة المتوافقة مع النظرية البنائية لتسهيل تنفيذ النهج المتمحور حول الطالب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نهج يركز على الطالب، تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية، جامعة عمر المختار، منظورات تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، التدريس الذي يركز على المتعلم.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, educational paradigms have shifted significantly from traditional teacher-centered approaches toward learner-centered pedagogies that prioritize students' active involvement in the learning process. The Student-Centered Approach (SCA) positions learners at the core of instruction, emphasizing three fundamental principles: active engagement, individualized instruction, and critical thinking development (Weimer, 2013).

In English language teaching contexts, particularly within EFL settings like Libya, implementing Student-Centered approaches presents unique challenges and opportunities. Traditional teacher-centered practices remain dominant due to cultural expectations, large class sizes, limited resources, and examination-driven curricula. However, growing evidence suggests student-centered pedagogies enhance motivation, language proficiency, and lifelong learning skills essential for communicative competence.

Weimer (2013) documents how educational leaders consistently advocated redistributing decision-making authority from teachers to students, yet many educators revert to direct instruction due to familiarity and external accountability pressures. Aslan and Reigeluth (2015) identify this reversion tendency as particularly pronounced when educational outcomes fall short of expectations.

This study addresses a specific research gap at Omar Al-Mukhtar University by investigating both English language instructors' and students' perceptions toward the student-centered approach. Three primary research questions guide the investigation:

1. What are English language instructors' perceptions toward the Student-Centred approach?
2. What are students' perceptions of the Student-Centred Approach (SCA)?
3. What are the main barriers to use Student-Centered approaches, and how do instructors address them?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Historical Development of Student-Centered Learning



The conceptual foundations of Student-Centered learning trace back to early 20th-century progressive education movements. Hayward (1905) first articulated principles of student-centeredness, while John Dewey's work in 1956 emphasized experiential learning through active participation rather than rote memorization. Carl Rogers (1983), recognized as the founder of client-centered counseling, extended these principles into comprehensive educational theory, advocating for teachers as facilitators rather than authoritative knowledge transmitters.

Burnard (1999) and Rogoff (1999) trace the term "student-centered learning" to Piaget's cognitive development research and Malcolm Knowles' adult learning theories. Crumly et al. (2014) assert that student-centered principles have permeated educational discourse for over two centuries, representing a sustained critique of factory-model pedagogies that prioritize uniformity over individual learner needs.

2.2 Definitions and Conceptualizations

Student-Centered approach, also termed learner-Centered teaching (LCT) or student-centered learning (SCL), fundamentally prioritizes learners' needs above institutional or teacher requirements. Al-Zube (2013) defines it as placing students at the instructional system's core, contrasting sharply with traditional child-centered learning models. The National Institute for Educational Development (NIED, 1999) in Namibia emphasizes that learner-centered approaches require teachers to focus on students' existing knowledge, skills, and understanding rather than imposing predetermined content.

Rodolfo et al. (2012) describe student-centered learning as an instructional system positioning students at the learning process's core, encouraging self-directed goal setting, progress assessment, and collaborative knowledge construction. This self-directed approach fosters independence and accountability essential for lifelong learning.

2.3 Theoretical Foundations

2.3.1 Constructivism Theory

Constructivism, foundational to student-centered approaches, posits that learners actively construct knowledge through experiences rather than passively receiving information. Piaget's cognitive development theory (2013) emphasizes that learning occurs through assimilation and accommodation processes where learners integrate new information into existing cognitive structures.

In Student-Centered classrooms, constructivist principles manifest through problem-based learning, discovery activities, and reflective practices enabling students to build understanding incrementally. This approach particularly suits EFL contexts where authentic language use emerges from meaningful communicative tasks rather than decontextualized drills.

2.3.2 Social Constructivism

Vygotsky's social constructivism (1978) extends individual constructivism by emphasizing social interaction's role in knowledge construction. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)



(1978) concept suggests learners achieve higher performance levels through collaborative interaction with more knowledgeable peers or teachers serving as scaffolds.

Student-Centered group work, peer teaching, and collaborative projects exemplify social constructivist principles, creating environments where students co-construct language knowledge through authentic interaction. This theoretical perspective particularly resonates with communicative language teaching methodologies emphasizing fluency through meaningful exchange.

2.3.3 Weimer's Learner-Centered Teaching Framework

Weimer's (2002,2013) framework provides the conceptual foundation for this study, she provides the most comprehensive framework, conceptualizing learner-centered teaching as involving five paradigm shifts: (1) shifting the teacher's role from content expert to learning facilitator; (2) establishing a balance of power in classroom decision-making; (3) transferring responsibility for learning from teacher to students; (4) redefining content to emphasize process alongside substance; and (5) repositioning evaluation from grading tool to learning enhancement mechanism.

2.3.3.1 Role of the Teacher

Teachers transition from "sage on the stage" to "guide on the side," prioritizing facilitation over content delivery. This role demands higher-order skills including questioning techniques, active listening, and creating learning environments fostering autonomy.

2.3.3.2 Balance of Power

Classroom authority becomes shared through student involvement in content selection, assessment criteria development, and pacing decisions. This power redistribution challenges traditional hierarchical teacher-student dynamics prevalent in many EFL contexts.

2.3.3.3 Responsibility for Learning

Students assume primary responsibility for their learning through goal setting, time management, and self-assessment practices. Teachers provide structure and resources while students drive the learning process.

2.3.3.4 Purpose and Processes of Evaluation

Evaluation shifts from summative grading toward formative feedback facilitating learning improvement. Self and peer assessment become integral, helping students develop metacognitive awareness essential for autonomous language learning.

2.3.3.5 Function of Content

Content becomes a tool for learning, not the goal; prioritize less material but deeper application to overcome time/content overload barriers.



2.4 Student-Centered Approach in EFL

English language teaching increasingly adopts student-centered principles through communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based language teaching (TBLT). These methodologies emphasize authentic language use in meaningful contexts rather than structural drills characteristic of traditional grammar-translation approaches.

Slunt and Giancarlo (2004) document how learner-centered content delivery empowers students to control their education through active engagement rather than passive lecture reception. Kennedy (2009) found debate participation increased positive ratings from 75% to 85%, demonstrating SCA's motivational potential even among initially reluctant students.

2.5 Effectiveness Evidence

Research consistently demonstrates Student-Centered approaches yield superior learning outcomes across disciplines. Slavich and Zimbardo (2012) identify multiple methodologies enhancing student engagement, retention, skill development, and innovative project creation. Hoidn (2017) positions SCL as encompassing initiatives promoting active student participation while educators serve as experience designers and facilitators.

Ryan and Deci (2000) link SCL effectiveness to Self-Determination Theory's basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Meeting these needs creates intrinsically motivating learning environments where students willingly invest effort in challenging tasks.

2.6 Implementation Challenges

2.6.1 Cultural Influences

High power distance cultures characteristic of many Arab contexts resist authority redistribution central to SCA. Schweisfurth (2011) documents how teacher authority expectations impede successful SCA adoption in Middle Eastern educational systems.

2.6.2 Professional Capacity

Many teachers lack training in facilitation skills required for SCA implementation. Traditional pre-service programs emphasize content knowledge over pedagogical strategies fostering learner autonomy.

2.6.3 Teachers' Beliefs

Deeply ingrained beliefs about effective teaching often conflict with SCA principles. Teachers comfortable with direct instruction perceive loss of control when adopting student-centered methods.



2.6.4 Students' Attitudes

Some students initially resist increased responsibility accompanying SCA. Emenyeonu (2012) identifies cultural barriers affecting collaborative learning opportunities essential to social constructivist approaches.

2.7 Previous Studies

In Arab and Libyan Contexts Regional research reveals mixed SCA implementation experiences. Yasmin et al. (2019) found Arab students' engagement significantly influenced by cultural expectations requiring pedagogical adaptation. Al-Zube (2013) demonstrated Jordanian university students exhibited higher motivation and ownership when involved in learning decision-making processes.

Libyan studies remain limited but illuminating. Alharbi (2019) declares that Libyan university students' positive attitudes toward technology-enhanced learning environments aligning with student-centered pedagogies. Bashir and Hossain (2020) identified significant barriers to communicative language teaching implementation including large class sizes and insufficient teacher training—challenges paralleling SCA adoption.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods convergent parallel design combining quantitative student questionnaires with qualitative instructor interviews. This approach provided comprehensive insights into both groups' perspectives while enabling methodological triangulation. A mixed-methods convergent parallel design was adopted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2012).

3.2 Participants

This study involved 40 undergraduate students from all four academic years at the English Department, selected via probability sampling to ensure balanced representation across gender and proficiency levels, alongside 8 experienced English language instructors chosen through purposive sampling based on their demonstrated implementation of student-centered methods and capacity to provide insightful reflections on practical challenges.

3.3 Research Instruments

This study employed two primary instruments: a student questionnaire and semi-structured instructor interviews. The questionnaire, adapted from Abdalla and Alsiddig (2016), comprised 12 Likert-scale items (ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) and one open-ended question to capture students' perceptions of the student-centered approach (SCA). It was validated through piloting a small sample to ensure clarity, reliability, and relevance. Complementing this, semi-structured interviews with instructors utilized a protocol designed to elicit in-depth insights into their



definitions of SCA, classroom implementation practices, perceived learning outcomes, encountered barriers, and proposed mitigation strategies, thereby triangulating quantitative findings with qualitative depth.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The student questionnaire was administered in person during regular class sessions. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and assured of confidentiality before completing the questionnaire. The approximate time required was 20 minutes.

Subsequently, individual interviews with instructors were scheduled at their convenience. Each interview lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes and some of interviews conducted in a private setting to ensure confidentiality and encourage candid responses. Moreover, some interviewees preferred to make the interviews via online platforms (WhatsApp) to accommodate availability and flexibility. All the questions of the interviews were conducted in English language because the instructors had sufficient proficiency in English, which enabled them to understand the questions. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed via Otter application for analysis.

4.Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative software to ensure methodological rigor. Quantitative data from the student questionnaires were processed using SPSS (Version 26.0) to calculate descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. For the qualitative component, the transcripts from the semi-structured interviews and the responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed using NVivo software. This facilitated the thematic analysis process, allowing for the systematic coding and identification of the core themes related to the instructors' and students' perspectives on the Student-Centered Approach

This section presents the findings categorized to address the two primary research questions of the study, integrating both quantitative data from student questionnaires and qualitative insights from instructor interviews.

4.1 Results of the Students' Questionnaire items

This section illustrates the quantitative findings from the 12-item Likert-scale questionnaire administered to 40 undergraduate students. The items, adapted from Abdalla and Alsiddig (2016), evaluate student perceptions of the Student-Centered Approach (SCA) across three primary dimensions: psychological and cognitive impact (Items 1, 2, and 3), shifts in teacher roles and collaborative efforts (Items 4, 6, 7, and 11), and institutional support (Items 9 and 12). Data is analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify levels of agreement and disagreement among participants across all four academic years.

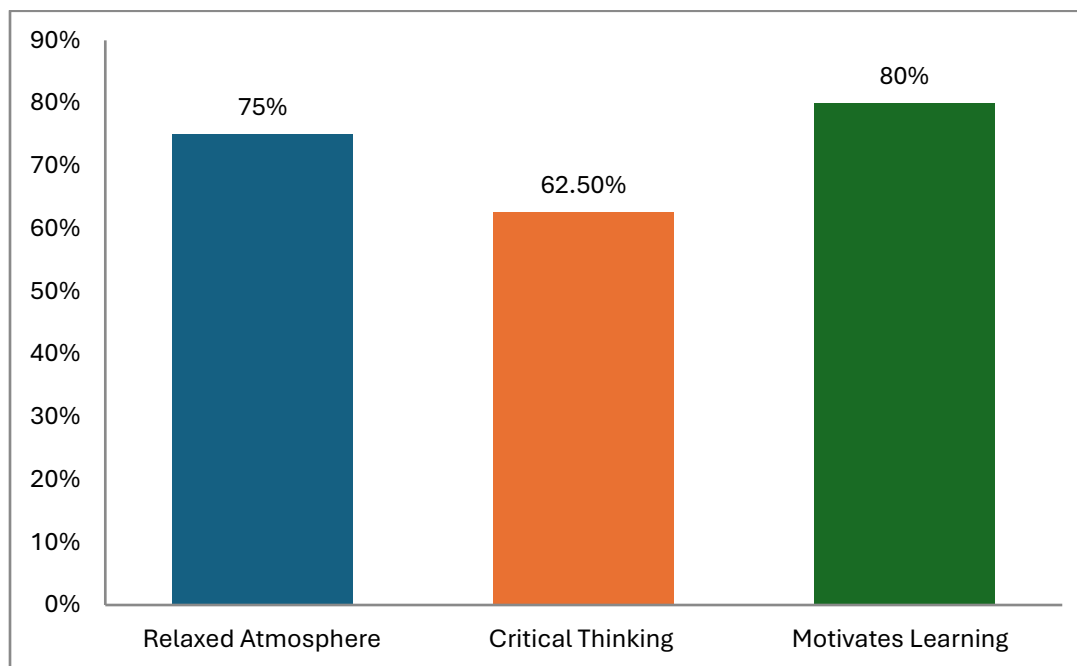


4.1.1 Psychological and Cognitive Impact

Students reported high levels of agreement regarding the psychological and cognitive benefits of SCA. 75% of students acknowledged a "relaxed atmosphere," and 80% reported increased motivation. However, recognition of "critical thinking enhancement" was slightly lower (62.5%), with 25% remaining neutral.(see figure 1)

Figure : Perception of Classroom Atmosphere and Cognitive Benefits

(Agreement percentages for Statements 1, 2, and 3)

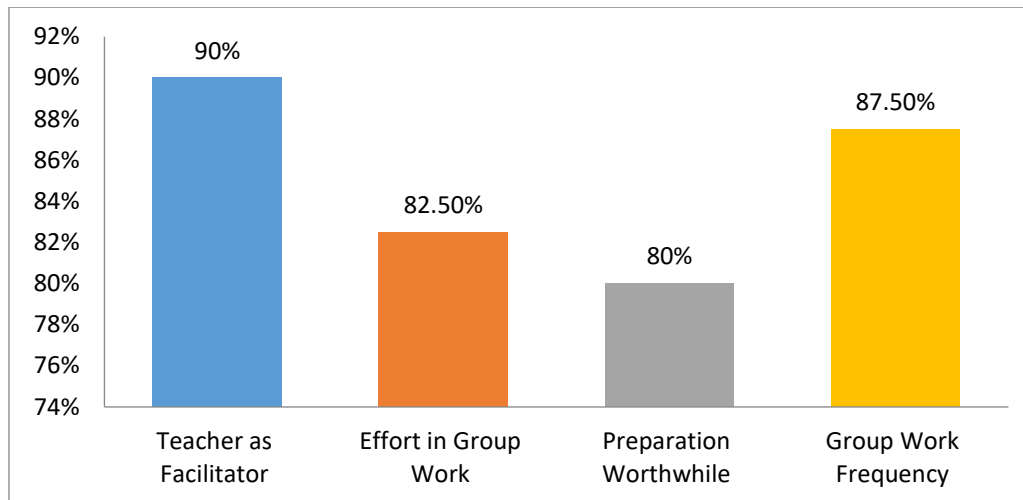


4.1.2 Reimagining Teacher Roles and Collaborative Effort

There was an overwhelming consensus (90%) regarding the shift of the teacher's role to that of a "facilitator." Similarly, students showed high buy-in for the value of group work, even when it required more preparation.(see figure 2)

Figure 2: Teacher Facilitation and Collaborative Engagement

(Agreement percentages for Statements 4, 6, 7, and 11)

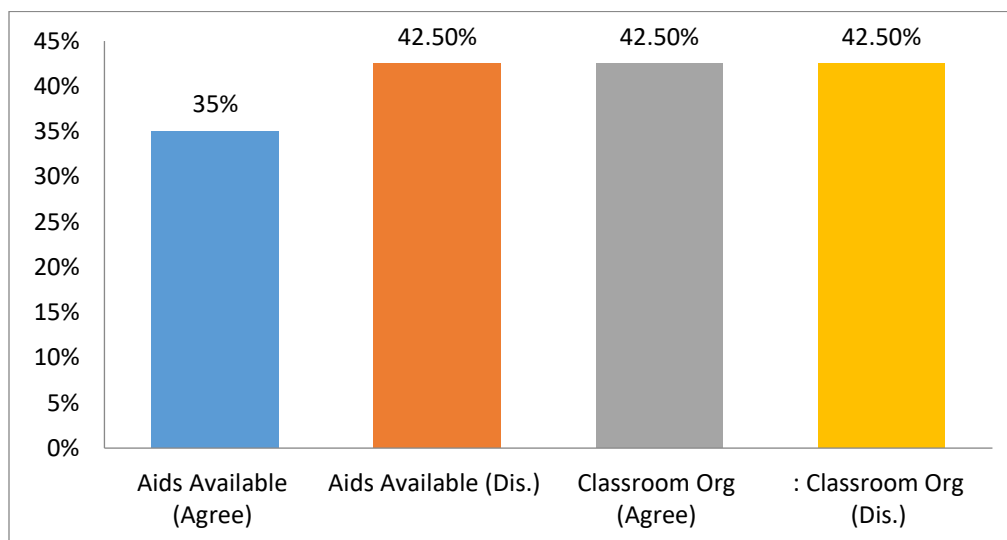


4.1.3 Institutional and Environmental Friction

In contrast to the pedagogical results, data regarding resources and organization revealed significant dissatisfaction. Only 35% of the students felt learning aids were available, and 42.5% of them explicitly disagreed that classroom arrangements were well-organized.(see Figure 3)

Figure 3: Perception of Institutional Support and Resources

(Agreement vs. Disagreement for Statements 9 and 12)



4.2 Analysis of Open-Ended Questions



The analysis of the open-ended question from the students' questionnaires (n=40) revealed four prominent themes regarding the Student-Centered Approach (SCA). Enhanced language skills emerged most frequently (28 mentions), with students highlighting improved speaking confidence and fluency through group interactions: "SCA helps me speak English better and builds my confidence in class discussions." Enjoyment and motivation ranked second (22 mentions), as students appreciated the engaging, interactive nature: "Classes became fun and interesting, not boring lectures." However, structure concerns surfaced among first-year students (12 mentions), who expressed anxiety over perceived classroom chaos: "We need more teacher guidance to avoid confusion." Finally, resource limitations were noted by 15 respondents, underscoring logistical barriers: "We lack projectors and materials for group activities." These qualitative insights complement the quantitative findings, confirming SCA's motivational benefits while validating instructors' concerns about implementation challenges in resource-constrained EFL contexts .

4.3 The analysis of Instructors' Interviews Themes

Thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews produced five core themes, with all instructors acknowledging SCA benefits but only partial adoption due to constraints (Table 1). Positives centered on skill-building (n=5: "fosters critical thinking, collaboration via debates/projects") and engagement (n=4: "boosts motivation, reduces passivity"). Barriers dominated: class size/resources (n=6: "40+ students overwhelm facilitation; no tech/projectors"); curriculum rigidity (n=5: "fixed syllabus prioritizes coverage"); student shyness/culture (n=6: "Arab hierarchies favor lectures; introverts disengage"); teacher beliefs (n=3: "lose control, suits advanced only"). Strategies included hybrid models (e.g., "start teacher-led, shift to groups").

Table 1 : *Instructor Interview Themes: Positives and Barriers*

Theme	Positive Aspects (Quotes/Count)	Barriers/Challenges (Quotes/Count)
Teacher Role	Facilitator (n=6: "Guide, not dictate")	Control loss (n=3)
Student Engagement	Motivation/skills (n=4/5)	Shyness/culture (n=6)
Techniques	Projects/debates (n=4)	Time/prep (n=2)
Implementation	Hybrid success (n=3)	Class size/resources (n=6/4)
Curriculum Fit	Autonomy builds confidence (n=2)	Rigid syllabus (n=5)

5. Discussion of Findings Linked to Research Questions

The findings from this mixed-methods study at Omar Al-Mukhtar University systematically address all three research questions, revealing both SCA's robust theoretical alignment and significant practical implementation challenges. Specifically, the data demonstrates strong coherence between stakeholder perceptions and established educational frameworks, while simultaneously highlighting contextual barriers requiring localized adaptation.

5.1 RQ1: Instructor Perceptions towards SCA



Firstly, instructor perspectives revealed mixed but theoretically-grounded endorsement. Notably, 6/8 instructors (75%) affirmed Weimer's (2013) facilitative role shift (Domain 1), emphasizing transition from "knowledge transmitter" to "guide on the side." Additionally, 5/8 instructors documented tangible skill development through projects and debates, directly aligning with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Consequently, autonomy-supportive teaching demonstrably enhanced student motivation, despite reservations about full SCA adoption due to logistical constraints.

5.2 RQ2: Student Perceptions & Experiences

Furthermore, student data provided overwhelming empirical validation. Robust support emerged with a 77.5% mean agreement rate across 12 Likert items. Specifically, 90% endorsed teacher facilitation, 82.5-87.5% valued collaborative group work (Vygotsky, 1968 Zone of Proximal Development), and 80% reported heightened motivation. However, institutional gaps tempered enthusiasm: only 35% confirmed resource availability while 42.5% disagreed about classroom organization. Moreover, first-year anxiety (n=12 open-ended responses) echoed Lea et al.'s (2003) "novice transition challenges," with seniors demonstrating superior acclimation (85% vs 65%).

5.3 RQ3: Barriers & Instructor Adaptation Strategies

Turning to implementation realities, RQ3 identified universal constraints affecting all 8 instructors: class sizes (n=6/8), curriculum rigidity (n=5/8), and cultural expectations (n=6/8). These findings validate Schweisfurth's (2011) high power-distance barriers, where Arab hierarchies favor teacher-centered authority. Nevertheless, instructors demonstrated remarkable pragmatism through three adaptive strategies:

- Hybrid models (n=3/8): "Structured grammar → group discussions"
- Low-resource techniques (n=4/8): Syllabus-integrated projects
- Systemic solutions (n=6/8): Professional development workshops

Thus, these solutions extend Biggs' (1999) balanced pedagogy, offering culturally-sensitive evolution beyond Western purist models.

6. Theoretical Integration

In summary, a clear progression emerges: RQ1-RQ2 establish theoretical foundations (Weimer Domain 1 → Vygotsky ZPD), while RQ3 provides contextual adaptation (Schweisfurth → Biggs). Ultimately, this demonstrates SCA's motivational universality (80% gains) requires culturally-sensitive hybridization for sustainable Libyan EFL implementation, bridging global theory with local practice

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study elucidates the nuanced implementation of the Student-Centred Approach (SCA) within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction at Omer Al-Mukhtar University in Libya, revealing a compelling interplay between theoretical promise and contextual realities.



Quantitative data from 40 undergraduate students demonstrated robust endorsement of SCA's affective and collaborative dimensions—90% agreement on the teacher as facilitator, 80% on heightened motivation, and 82.5-87.5% support for group work—validating foundational theories such as Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and Vygotsky's (1968) social constructivism.

Yet, institutional bottlenecks, including resource scarcity (35% agreement on aids availability) and organizational discord (42.5% balanced agreement/disagreement), alongside qualitative insights from 8 instructors highlighting class size barriers and hybrid preferences, underscore the limitations of purist SCA in high power-distance, resource-constrained settings (Schweisfurth, 2011; Bashir & Hossain, 2020).

Collectively, these findings affirm SCA's motivational efficacy while advocating pragmatic hybridization with Teacher-Centred Teaching (TCT) elements, as per Weimer's (2013) paradigm and Mazer and Hess (2017), to foster gradual autonomy transitions (Bruner, 1966; Lea et al., 2003).□ Ultimately, the research contributes to Libyan EFL scholarship by empirically grounding SCA's viability, signaling that contextual adaptation, rather than wholesale adoption, holds the key to sustainable pedagogical transformation amid ongoing academic reforms.

Recommendations include:

- Professional development workshops focusing on facilitation skills
- Infrastructure improvements addressing resource limitations
- Curriculum flexibility enabling SCA integration
- Gradual implementation with hybrid teacher/student-centered models.

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Appendix A

List of Semi-structured interview questions

- 1.How do you define the student-centered approach?
- 2.What does a student-centered approach look like in your classroom? Please describe the classroom environment.
- 3.Could you provide examples of student-centred techniques that you have used in your classroom?
- 4.Is there any presence of a teacher-centered approach in your classroom? If so, which aspects of your lessons demonstrate this?
- 5.In your opinion, what are instructors' attitudes toward implementing the student-centered approach?
- 6.What changes have you observed in student outcomes since implementing the student-centered approach?
- 7.How do you address the barriers that hinder the implementation of the student-centered approach in the English language department?



Appendix B

Questionnaire

Perspectives of EL Students Towards the Student-Centered Approach

Section 1: Demographic Information

Please answer the following questions about yourself

What is your academic year

[] First Year [] Second Year [] Third Year [] Fourth Year

Gender:

Male [] female []

Section 2: Perspectives on Student-Centered Approach

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about student-centered learning in your classes ?

No	Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Student-centered approaches provide a relaxed atmosphere for your class.					
2	Student-centered classes improve your critical thinking skills.					
3	Implementing the student-centered approach, motivates students to learn better.					
4	The main role of the teacher in the classroom is to facilitate lessons and motivate students to share their knowledge.					
5	Student-centered classes are interesting.					

Open-ended Question

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