

How does the use of scaling from the OSKAR framework impact upon student progress and emotional well-being?

What is 'scaling'?

Scaling is a tool used within solution-focused coaching. A student is asked to rate themselves on a scale from one to ten, where the desired outcome is ten and one the complete opposite, for example:

"On a scale from one to ten, where ten is you have achieved all this (the future perfect) and one is none of this is happening and you have no idea of how to get there, and you have never managed to achieve any goal, where are you now?"

Why are we investigating this research question?

We have empirical evidence that the coaching approach which our personal tutors use with students has had a positive impact on students and institutional performance indicators. We wanted to understand how effective scaling was within this approach and, more widely, understand the perceived benefits of one to one conversations.

Context

- The Sheffield College has a centralised pastoral and personal tutoring model which is delivered through a specialised team of personal tutors called 'Tutorial Mentors'.
- Groups involved in the research were full time 16 – 18 year old students across a range of vocational subject areas and levels.

Data collection and analysis

- 13 tutorial groups
- 7 control groups (scaling not used), 7 experiment groups (scaling used). *1 group of ESOL learners were divided
- One to ones were undertaken by the personal tutors over a 12 week period
- Quantitative data was gathered from 3 questionnaires completed by students at the beginning, middle and end of the 12 week period
- Qualitative data was gathered from focus groups carried out by us, the project researchers, with all research groups
- Data was analysed through statistical analysis of the questionnaires and thematic analysis of the focus group content.

Lead Project researchers

Andrew Stork
Ben Walker

Project researchers

Celia Clarke
Francesca Devlin
Steven Flounders

Nicola Hodson

Emma Lewis
Richard Martinson
Donato Restaino

Main themes emerging from research

Control group (non-scaling)

Positives about one to one conversations:

Elicits positive emotions. Examples include feeling more motivated, appreciated, comfortable and relaxed. This also led to students feeling they could be more open, honest and that they could offload negative emotions. Many students conveyed feelings of trust and friendliness.

Approach. Students commented on the open minded, personal, calm, caring and informal approach. They also commented that the tutor actively listened and made them think differently about an issue they were facing and that it felt like a two way conversation. Further points showed a holistic approach was taken and expectations were clarified. The message of the personal tutor being an 'equal partner not superior' came across on many occasions.

Helpful content. The content of one to ones was described as helpful in the following ways: it helped students to 'look forward', identify areas for development and identify achievable targets. A key message was that students found it useful to have their targets reviewed within a short time frame.

Behaviour change. Students commented that their attendance, behaviour and time-keeping improved as a result of their one to one conversations.

Negatives about one to one conversations:

Some students commented that they felt the conversations should have been longer, that they told the personal tutor 'what they wanted to hear' and that they were not useful if not focused on their future plans.

Experimental group (scaling)

Positives:

Student self-evaluation. Some students commented that scaling in one to one conversations helped to clarify their priorities, made it easier to assess their on-going progress and helps others (personal tutor and teachers) to take action on their behalf.

Students generally found it easier to articulate current progress through a number than through description.

Helps elicit positive emotions. Some students commented that scaling helped to improve their confidence and motivation.

Negatives:

Validity of scaling questioned. Some students questioned whether scaling worked through citing examples such as the scale being meaningless because it is different for every person, it is unreliable because feelings change every day, they could 'lie' or make up a number because they didn't want to admit weakness, the relationship between improvements and scaling is hard to prove and if they are doing well scaling is not meaningful.

Some students commented that their motivation and emotion didn't change due to the scaling.

Some students commented that they had difficulty in choosing a number.

Findings

Questionnaires

- The statistical analysis of questionnaires didn't show a significant difference between scaling and non-scaling groups in terms students' perception of their performance and well-being.

Focus groups

- The thematic analysis showed that generally one to one conversations were received very positively by students. For most students this was a new approach in relation to their experience in previous educational institutions.
- Scaling was found to be very useful for students to self-evaluate their performance; however, SMART targets were seen as important for progress to be made to move up the scale. Reviewing of targets was seen to be most effective if this was done within a short time frame.

Recommendations

Teachers and personal tutors should carry out one to one conversations with learners using a coaching approach because:

- students significantly value the personal and holistic nature of these;
- they can result in positive behaviour change.

Teachers and personal tutors should consider using the technique of scaling to help students evaluate their progress. This is particularly useful when a student is facing a difficulty or issue in their studies or in their personal life.

Teachers and personal tutors should ensure that after a student has scaled their progress, this is used in combination with SMART target setting and reviewing of these within a short time frame.

Strengths of the project

Experienced and reflective practitioners carried out the coaching conversations.

A relatively large sample size was used across a variety of different vocational areas within a large further education college

Limitations of the project

- Personal tutors were given the choice of topic they asked the students to scale so that it was individually tailored to students or groups. This meant, arguably, a consistent application of scaling was not carried out because the choice of topic may affect this. Topics used for scaling, however, were generally consistent within the groups themselves.
- Even though students involved were from within the 16-18 year old bracket and included a variety of levels and subject areas, not all levels and subject areas were covered.

Ethical considerations

Specific ethical considerations for this research include the observational bias on the side of both the teacher and student and the ethical issue of denying one group of students the technique of scaling when it may be appropriate and imposing its use on the other when it may not always be appropriate.