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Fishbowl Technique in Action: Fostering Engagement and Self-Regulated Learning of Intermediate EFL Learners

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Abstract

The Fishbowl technique allows for active engagement and participation among students, creating opportunities for idea-sharing. This study investigated whether the Fishbowl technique enhanced classroom engagement and fostered self-regulated learning among intermediate Iraqi EFL learners. For this purpose, 60 intermediate EFL learners were randomly selected and received 11 sessions of Fishbowl technique training. The data were collected by the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT), the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ), and the Students' Engagement Questionnaire. The participants were homogenized by OQPT, and both questionnaires were administered before and after the implementation of the Fishbowl technique in the classroom. The data were analyzed by one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The findings indicated that the implementation of the Fishbowl technique in the classroom revealed its beneficial effects on both students' engagement in the classroom and the enhanced self-regulated learning potentials of the participants. In general, this study demonstrated the efficacy of the Fishbowl technique in enhancing classroom engagement and promoting self-regulated learning among intermediate Iraqi EFL learners.

Keywords: Classroom engagement; EFL learners; Fishbowl technique; Self-regulated learning

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1. Introduction

From a psychological standpoint, the designation "Fishbowl" pertains to the situation when one group observes the other. Silberman (1996) characterizes the Fishbowl as a discussion formation wherein certain students form a discussion circle, and others constitute a listener circle during a session of the group discussion. Fishbowl methodology is prevalent in educational settings where the dynamics of groups are of paramount importance. It facilitates a more profound examination of any specified topic.

Additionally, it fosters a sense of community and directs focus toward the strategies by which a group may collaborate more effectively. Within a language learning environment, it exemplifies the way groups can jointly make meaning based on a textual source. This methodology emulates peer discussion circles as students scrutinize a text and correlate their answers with those of their peers (Barkley et al., 2005; Abdurrahman et al., 2024). Johnson and Carson (1990) delineated the aims of the application of the Fishbowl technique, which are: (1) The principal emphasis of Fishbowl is predicated on the notion that students can acquire proficiency in English through an instructional framework that employs communicative tasks and methodologies. (2) This technique aims primarily at enabling learners to learn the language through carrying out activities, not by

performing mere tasks specified in the syllabus. (3) It develops students' confidence in speaking, reading, writing, and listening through true participation with the group. (4) It aims at developing thinking and study skills and the linguistic and scholarly constructs pertaining to students exhibiting varying degrees of language proficiency. Finally, (5) it prompts the participants to engage with their cognitive and emotional responses regarding their intercultural and bilingual interactions.

In general, this technique is a medium to large-group conversation that encourages students to participate. This technique creates a physical structure that allows students on the outside to observe what is happening on the inside. It aids in developing a sense of community among students and attends to methods wherein a group may collaborate more effectively.

A larger outer circle of students' seats around a smaller inner circle of students in the fishbowl technique. The inner circle ones engage in in-depth conversation, while the outer circle ones consider what they will say and how they will say it (Fauzi, 2023).

While the existing literature, as you've outlined, provides a solid understanding of the Fishbowl technique's definition, application in educational settings, particularly language learning, and its intended aims in fostering communicative competence, community, and critical thinking, a noticeable gap exists in the empirical investigation of the nuanced impact of the Fishbowl technique on specific language skills and learner perceptions within diverse language learning contexts. Specifically, there is a need for more research that delves into how it affects classroom engagement, self-regulated learning, and strategic use of language.

Furthermore, studies exploring learners' affective responses to the Fishbowl activity, including their levels of anxiety, motivation, and engagement in relation to their assigned roles and language proficiency levels, remain underexplored.

Understanding these differential impacts and affective dimensions across varied language learning environments, including different proficiency levels, cultural backgrounds, and learning objectives, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Fishbowl technique's pedagogical effectiveness and inform its optimal implementation in language classrooms.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Students' engagement in the classroom

Student engagement is conceptualized as "energy in action" (Appleton et al., 2006, p. 428). Many classifications of student engagement have been proposed, including psychological, cognitive, and academic (Parsons & Taylor, 2011). Typically, student engagement is examined as a multi-faceted concept comprising three interconnected classifications: behavioral (i.e., time on task), emotional (i.e., students' sentiments, attachments, and bonds to their educational institution), and cognitive (i.e., self-regulation and learning strategies) (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). Educators aspire to stimulate their students to cultivate motivation, involvement, and enthusiasm. Student engagement is correlated with favorable social and academic dimensions of school living (Conner & Pope, 2013) as well as psychosocial advantages (Reddy et al., 2003). Furthermore, student engagement serves as a predictor of improved student accomplishment and graduation rates from secondary education (Barkatsas et al., 2009), acquiring knowledge and competencies (Ladd & Dinella, 2009), and enhanced emotional well-being (Skinner et al., 2008).

Students exhibiting engagement demonstrate attentiveness and active participation in classroom discourse, perform classroom tasks, and display intrinsic motivation and interest in learning (Fredricks et al., 2004). Additionally, they exchange ideas, pose inquiries, and follow the lead of their peers. In educational environments characterized by student engagement, educators can distinctly ascertain their students' comprehension levels and identify the concepts and topics that necessitate further elucidation and in-depth discussion. Engaged students collaborating in groups persist in dialogue, inquire of one another and their educators, engage in critical listening, and provide arguments supported by examples from their personal experiences and existing knowledge. Classrooms wherein the majority of students are actively engaged exhibit heightened energy levels, and students contribute additional energy to both their classmates and their instructors (Furrer et al., 2014). Effective learning is fundamentally dependent on the number of students' active participation in educational activities within the classroom milieu (Wang & Pomerantz, 2009). Students of middle schools who indicate elevated levels of engagement in their studies exhibit a 75% greater likelihood of achieving superior academic grades and maintaining a more consistent school attendance compared to their less-engaged counterparts (Klem & Connell, 2004). Nonetheless, it is crucial to acknowledge the insights provided by Park et al. (2012), who posited that categorizing a student as either engaged or disengaged is not feasible, as engagement constitutes a dynamic and adaptable construct (varying over time and context) wherein specific contextual factors significantly influence a student's level of engagement (Park et al., 2012). Consequently, it is imperative to investigate variations in student engagement within the classroom environment.

2.2. Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)

Self-regulated learning (SRL) delineates the autonomous processes of learning wherein learners actively convert cognitive competencies into academic outcomes by means of self-established objectives and strategic approaches (Zimmerman et al., 2015). As succinctly articulated by Pintrich, SRL is characterized as "an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and

behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment" (Pintrich, 2000, p. 453). Students who exhibit self-regulation are typically recognized for their adept management of their educational endeavors through the establishment of goals, monitoring of progress, utilization of strategies, and self-reflection on their accomplishments (Boekaerts et al., 2000). Scholars conceptualize SRL as transcending the notion of a mere personal trait or an assemblage of skills associated with expertise in a specific area of knowledge. Rather, SRL is framed as a construct that amalgamates self-consciousness, expertise, and behaviors necessary for the successful attainment of educational objectives (Zimmerman, 2002).

Since SRL pertains to the mechanisms governing students' implementation of tasks during their engagement, it bears a closer relationship to real classroom practices than general personality attributes, thereby potentially mediating the influence of personal traits on educational success (Eilam et al., 2009).

Also, contemporary researchers no longer regard SRL as a unitary concept that learners either employ or neglect. Rather, it is increasingly understood as a multi-faceted and heterogeneous array of strategies that students may apply contingent upon their situational interpretations and motivational levels in relation to a specific task (Kaplan, 2008).

Self-regulated cognitive processes, emotions, behaviors, and behaviors cooperate intricately with the educational and educational context, culminating in enhanced cognitive acquisition, academic success, and achievement (Ben-Eliyahu & Zeidner, 2020). Many studies have illuminated the dynamic nature of students' application of diverse self-regulation strategies as they engage situationally within academic tasks.

The sociocultural role of students within a specific context affords psychological frameworks that inform their unique interpretations and meanings associated with fulfilling that role – thus contributing to their distinctive student identity role (Kaplan & Garner, 2017). The effective implementation of SRL strategies arises from the intricate synthesis of abilities, strategic knowledge, overarching beliefs about oneself and the world, motivation pertaining to the domain, the social context specifications, and the specific task, along with transient experiences encountered during task engagement (Boekaerts & Cascallar, 2006; Winne & Perry, 2000; Zimmerman, 2008). In a broad sense, the construct of SRL represents a comprehensive and multi-dimensional practical process that encompasses cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of the learning experience. The cultivation of SRL capabilities among students is posited as a strategic investment in their educational advancement and cognitive development, which promises to yield significant benefits in the future (Zimmerman et al., 1996). As learners enhance and develop their ability to self-regulate their educational processes, it is anticipated that they will improve their comprehension of the subject matter, their learning efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and perceived self-efficacy in achieving academic objectives. This study aimed to investigate how the Fishbowl technique enhanced classroom engagement and fostered self-regulated learning among intermediate Iraqi EFL learners. While various teaching strategies have been explored for improving language skills, there is still a major gap in uncovering the specific effects of the Fishbowl technique in the context of Iraqi EFL classrooms, particularly regarding its role in enhancing student engagement and promoting self-regulation. This study is to provide empirical evidence on how this interactive method can not only increase students' participation but also encourage them to bear the responsibility of their learning, ultimately contributing to more effective language instruction in the EFL setting. Does the Fishbowl technique enhance classroom engagement of intermediate Iraqi EFL learners?

Does the Fishbowl technique promote intermediate Iraqi EFL learners' self-regulated learning?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The study participants comprised intermediate Iraqi EFL learners enrolled in Al-Mustansiriyha University in Iraq. A total of 60 male (N=25) and female (N=35) intermediate Iraqi EFL learners (aged between 18 and 22 years old) were selected using convenience sampling. They were all native Arabic speakers, and none had experience living in English-speaking countries.

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. *Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT)*

The OQPT serves as a versatile assessment tool for English language proficiency, comprising 60 multiple-choice questions that evaluate vocabulary (30 items) and grammar (30 items). Learners scoring between 0 and 10 are classified as beginners; those with scores ranging from 11 to 17 are categorized as breakthrough; learners with scores from 18 to 29 are identified as elementary; pre-intermediate students achieve scores between 30 and 39; intermediate students score between 40 and 47; advanced students attain scores between 48 and 54; and proficient students score between 55 and 60. The reliability coefficient for the OQPT in the current investigation was determined to be .74.

3.2.2. *Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990)*

The MSLQ, a self-report 44-item questionnaire, is designed to assess self-regulation through the five subscales of self-efficacy (nine items), intrinsic value (nine items), test anxiety (four items), cognitive strategy use (13 items), and self-regulation (nine items). The responses are rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all true of me) to 7 (very true of me). The reliability of this questionnaire was .91 (Garcia & Pintrich, 1996). The reliability coefficient of the MSLQ was .88 in the present study.

3.2.3. *Students' Engagement Questionnaire (Reeve & Tseng, 2011)*

This questionnaire includes 27 statements that measure the five engagement components, namely emotional engagement (four items), social engagement (five items), cognitive engagement (eight items), behavioral engagement (five items), and agentic engagement (five items). The responses are rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). The reliability coefficients of the sub-scales were 0.78, 0.82, 0.88, 0.94, and 0.75, respectively (Reeve & Tseng, 2011). Its reliability coefficient was .92 in this study.

3.3. Procedure

Six steps were taken to implement the Fishbowl teaching method in the class. Both instruments (MSLQ and Students' Engagement Questionnaire) were administered before and after the treatment, comprising 11 sessions. Firstly, group organization (five minutes): As students entered the classroom, they were organized into groups of five, each comprising both talkative and reticent students. They sat in chairs or at tables as groups to do the speaking (a topic for discussion selected from the topics of anger, habits, happiness, the Internet, culture, money, and the future) assignment. Secondly, introducing the process and topic (5-10 minutes): The educator established the context for the ensuing discussion and listening activities by articulating the thematic focus and the inquiries to be investigated and addressed. The educator provided a concise overview of the procedural aspects of the speaking tasks. Thirdly, the 'discussing/listening' phase (30 minutes): This segment consists of three cycles of discussion and listening. Each participant, in a sequential manner, poses a question and engages in attentive listening—predominantly refraining from commentary—and documents notes. Each individual is allotted five minutes to respond—this duration may occasionally extend beyond what is deemed comfortable, yet the objective is to remain contemplative of the question and observe the emergence of thoughts rather than engage in reciprocal questioning. Following ten minutes, the educator signaled the transition to reorganize and form new pairs for discussion. Fourthly, in the regrouping phase (20 minutes), students get back to their groups to exchange insights regarding the responses to their inquiries and to identify thematic elements and divergences. This segment primarily consists of dialogue; however, groups are encouraged to develop a flip chart or poster that encapsulates the insights they have gathered. Fifthly, the Fishbowl conversation (up to 40 minutes): all members get back for a unified dialogue. Five chairs are placed centrally. Four sit on these chairs and deliberate on the principal messages learned during the prior listening and discussions or highlight particular takeaways from the discourse. A conventional involvement might commence with, "What struck me from our conversation or today's listening unit was…" and conclude with, "What I am taking away from these tasks is…" Participation in the Fishbowl is open to all, and everyone is encouraged to contribute. 'One of the five chairs' is perpetually left vacant, serving as an invitation for the next person. As a fifth individual joins the discussion, one of the existing four participants voluntarily vacates their seat; thereby, a chair is again available.
Finally, conclusion (five minutes): When the Fishbowl discussion ends, the teacher ends the task. Participants were asked to put their notes to be summarized as part of the wrap-up phase. The intention was that the group leave the room in a mood of satisfaction and reflection. The data were analyzed by analysis of variance (ANOVA).

4. Findings

The first research question of the present study was to show whether the use of the Fishbowl technique enhances classroom engagement among Iraqi EFL learners. A repeated measure analysis of variance ANOVA was run to compare the pre- and post-test scores of the speaking instruction group in terms of the five sub-scales of classroom engagement (emotional engagement, social engagement, cognitive engagement, behavioral engagement, and agentic engagement).
Table 1 shows that the Fishbowl group obtained higher scores in the post-tests of classroom engagement sub-scales compared to their pre-test scores. The following table shows if the difference between the pre- and post-test scores was statistically significant.

Table 1. 'Descriptive Statistics of Pre- and Post-test Scores' of Classroom Engagement Sub-scales

	Mean	SD	N
Emotional engagement (pre-test)	14.95	1.96	60
Social engagement (pre-test)	18.35	1.62	60
Cognitive engagement (pre-test)	21.33	2.52	60
Behavioral engagement (pre-test)	17.56	1.59	60
Agentic engagement (pre-test)	15.86	1.72	60
Emotional engagement (post-test)	17.75	1.85	60
Social engagement (post-test)	20.58	2.07	60
Cognitive engagement (post-test)	34.93	2.9	60
Behavioral engagement (post-test)	23.6	1.45	60
Agentic engagement (post-test)	21.54	1.26	60

As shown in Table 2, the result of Wilk's Lambda F (9, 51) = 644.76, p= 0.00 reveals a statistically significant difference among the pre- and post-test scores of classroom engagement. The pairwise comparison results (Table 3) show the sub-scales whose pre- and post-test differences were statistically significant. The pairwise comparisons table indicates that the difference between

the mean of pre-and post-test scores of classroom engagement sub-scales was significant (p< 0.05). In other words, this group obtained higher scores in the sub-scales after instruction with the Fishbowl technique (Table 3). The second research question of the present study was to find if the use of the Fishbowl technique promoted intermediate Iraqi EFL learners' self-regulated learning in speaking.

Table 2. Multivariate Tests Comparing Pre- and Post-test Scores of Classroom Engagement Sub-scales

	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Pillai's trace	0.99	644.76	9	51	0.00	0.99
Wilks' lambda	0.00	644.76	9	51	0.00	0.99
Hoteling's trace	113.78	644.76	9	51	0.00	0.99
Roy's largest root	113.78	644.76	9	51	0.00	0.99

A repeated measure analysis of variance ANOVA was run to compare the pre- and post-test scores of the speaking instruction group in terms of the five sub-scales of self-regulated learning (self-efficacy, intrinsic value, test anxiety, cognitive strategy use, and self-regulation).

Table 3. Pairwise Comparisons of Pre- and Post-test Scores of Classroom Engagement Sub-scales)

Component	Mean difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Emotional engagement (post- and pre-test)	2.8*	0.35	0.00
Social engagement (post- and pre-test)	2.23*	0.27	0.00
Cognitive engagement (post- and pre-test)	13.6*	0.46	0.00
Behavioral engagement (post- and pre-test)	6.03*	0.24	0.00
Agentic engagement (post- and pre-test)	5.7*	0.25	0.00

* Mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Pre- and Post-test Scores of Self-Regulated Learning Sub-scales

	Mean	SD	N
Self-efficacy (pre-test)	49.86	2.13	60
Intrinsic value (pre-test)	41.43	2.33	60
Test anxiety (pre-test)	11.78	2.18	60
Cognitive strategy use (pre-test)	25.31	3.06	60
Self-regulation (pre-test)	45.53	3.15	60
Self-efficacy (post-test)	58.66	2.95	60
Intrinsic value (post-test)	48.91	5.34	60
Test anxiety (post-test)	13.53	2.43	60
Cognitive strategy use (post-test)	37.58	8.43	60
Self-regulation (post-test)	57.56	2.63	60

Table 4 shows that the speaking instruction group obtained higher scores in the post-tests of self-regulated learning sub-scales compared to their pre-test scores. The following table shows if the difference between the pre- and post-test scores was statistically significant. As shown in Table 5, the result of Wilk's Lambda F (9, 51) = 3103.7, p= 0.00 reveals a statistically significant difference among the pre- and post-test scores of self-regulated learning. The pairwise comparison results (Table 5) show the sub-scales who's pre- and post-test differences were statistically significant. The pairwise comparisons table denotes that the difference between the mean of pre-and post-test scores of self-regulated learning sub-scales was significant (p< 0.05). In other words, this group obtained higher scores in the sub-scales after speaking instruction with the Fishbowl technique (Table 6).

Table 5. Multivariate Tests Comparing Pre- and Post-test Scores of Self-Regulated Learning Sub-scales

	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Pillai's trace	0.99	3103.7	9	51	0.00	0.99
Wilks' lambda	0.00	3103.7	9	51	0.00	0.99
Hoteling's trace	574.71	3103.7	9	51	0.00	0.99
Roy's largest root	574.71	3103.7	9	51	0.00	0.99

Table 6. Pairwise Comparisons of Pre- and Post-test Scores of Self-Regulated Learning Sub-scales

Component	Mean difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Self-efficacy (post- and pre-test)	8.8*	0.37	0.00
Intrinsic value (post- and pre-test)	7.48*	0.78	0.00
Test anxiety (post- and pre-test)	1.75*	0.33	0.00
Cognitive strategy use (post- and pre-test)	12.26*	1.13	0.00
Self-regulation (post- and pre-test)	12.03*	0.44	0.00

*Mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

5. Discussion

This study was to find the way the Fishbowl technique enhanced classroom engagement and fostered 'self-

regulated learning' of intermediate Iraqi EFL learners. The implementation of the Fishbowl technique in the classroom revealed its beneficial effects on both students' engagement in the classroom and the enhanced self-regulated learning potentials of the participants.

Regarding the first research question, the Fishbowl structure inherently promotes active participation by creating a dynamic where both the inner circle participants and the outer circle observers have defined roles and responsibilities (Silberman, 1996). The inner circle's direct engagement in discussion necessitates active contribution and immediate processing of information, fostering a sense of ownership over the learning process (Barkley et al., 2005).

Simultaneously, the outer circle's task of observation and reflection encourages focused attention and cognitive processing of the ongoing discussion, preparing them for potential future participation and reinforcing the discussed concepts (Fauzi, 2023). This dual-role structure minimizes passive learning and maximizes the involvement of all students.

Cognitive engagement pertains to the mental effort and investment students put into learning activities (Fredricks et al., 2004). The Fishbowl technique fosters cognitive engagement by promoting critical thinking and active participation in discussions. Research shows that collaborative learning strategies, such as the Fishbowl, encourage students to analyze information deeply, reflect on their ideas, and articulate their thoughts effectively (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). For example, Warsah et al. (2021) demonstrated that the use of collaborative learning techniques, including structured discussions, significantly enhanced the critical thinking skills of students and cognitive engagement in language learning. The findings also imply that the Fishbowl technique enhances emotional engagement. It denotes students' attitudes, feelings, and connections with their learning experiences (Pekrun, 2006). The interactive and collaborative nature of the Fishbowl technique creates a supportive classroom environment where students feel valued and understood. Such environments are critical for nurturing positive emotional responses to learning activities. The same was reported by D'Errico et al. (2016), who noted that emotionally engaging pedagogical strategies positively impact students' overall affective engagement in language learning contexts.The positive effects on social engagement can be attributed to the Fishbowl format, which facilitates peer interaction and cooperation (Sutherland et al., 2012). By allowing students to listen and respond to their peers in a structured setting, the Fishbowl technique enhances social skills and promotes a sense of community among learners. Research by Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) supports this idea, indicating that collaborative learning experiences strengthen students' social connections and foster a more inclusive classroom climate. Additionally, the social engagement realized through the Fishbowl has implications for language development, as interacting with peers in meaningful dialogues helps students practice and refine their language skills (Dornyei, 2001). Behavioral engagement is reflected in students' participation in academic tasks and adherence to classroom norms (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). The Fishbowl technique inherently demands active participation, as students must switch roles between speakers and listeners. This requirement likely contributed to the heightened behavioral engagement observed in our study. Dara and Kesavan (2024) reported that participatory learning strategies lead to increased student involvement and adherence to learning activities, supporting the effectiveness of interactive techniques like the Fishbowl to engage learners behaviorally. Finally, 'agentic engagement' pertains to students' proactive involvement in their learning processes, where they take ownership and initiative (Reeve, 2012). The Fishbowl technique inherently encourages this type of engagement by allowing students to shape discussions and influence the direction of their learning. Similar findings were reported by Almusharraf and Bailey (2021), who observed that active learning strategies led to higher levels of agency among students, enabling them to be in charge of their contributions and learning outcomes. This increased sense of agency may motivate students to participate more readily and feel more connected to their education.

The second research question revealed the improvement of the participants' self-regulated learning potentials. Consistent with those of the present research question, Jiang et al. (2024) posited that practicing the Fishbowl method by dividing students into either fish or observer facilitates interactive and self-regulated learning through problem-solving practice (fish) or proactive observation (observer), reflection, and discussion in the class (fish and observer).

The findings might be justified by the fact that the structured observation and subsequent participation in the Fishbowl activity encourage planning and goal-setting. Outer circle students must actively listen and analyze the inner circle's discussion, anticipating their own potential contributions and formulating their thoughts and language use in advance (Fauzi, 2023). This pre-task reflection aligns with the planning phase of self-regulated learning, where learners set goals and strategize their approach to a learning task (Zimmerman, 2002). Besides, the Fishbowl technique promotes self-monitoring. As inner circle participants engage in the discussion, they are constantly monitoring their own language production, comprehension, and interaction with peers. The presence of observers can heighten this awareness, encouraging learners to pay closer attention to their clarity, accuracy, and fluency (Barkley et al., 2005). Similarly, outer circle observers are monitoring the discussion strategies and language use of their peers, which can provide valuable insights for their own learning and future participation, fostering metacognitive awareness – a crucial aspect of self-regulated learning (Flavell, 1979).

The interactive structure of the Fishbowl encourages learners to express their ideas publicly and engage with peers, which can bolster their confidence in their speaking abilities. Research by Zimmerman (2000) supports this notion, indicating that collaborative learning environments can enhance self-efficacy as students receive immediate feedback and peer

encouragement. The Fishbowl's focus on peer interaction likely gave students the affirmation needed to increase their belief in their speaking abilities.

Findings also revealed significant improvements in the intrinsic value students associate with speaking tasks after participating in Fishbowl activities. The collaborative nature of the Fishbowl encourages meaningful discussions and exploration of ideas, making the speaking practice more engaging and relevant. Research by Deci et al. (1991) suggests that active engagement in a learning task fosters intrinsic motivation, increasing interest and value placed on the activity. By allowing students to take ownership of their contributions, the Fishbowl technique likely enhanced their intrinsic motivation to speak, supporting the present study findings. The Fishbowl format, emphasizing supportive peer interactions, may have created a more relaxed atmosphere for learners. This aligns with findings from Cassady and Johnson (2002), who noted that students engaging in collaborative learning environments reported lower levels of anxiety. The non-threatening, discussion-based nature of the Fishbowl format likely alleviated anxiety by normalizing mistakes and fostering a supportive environment where students felt their contributions were valued. The significant enhancement in cognitive strategy uses and self-regulation post-intervention indicates that the Fishbowl technique effectively encourages students to employ various strategies to plan, monitor, and evaluate their speaking performances. Cognitive strategies are essential for effective speaking and are pivotal in self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 2002; Sari & Sujarwati, 2025). The Fishbowl technique likely promoted the use of cognitive strategies by encouraging learners to organize their thoughts, anticipate questions, and engage in active listening. Finally, participation in the Fishbowl can help learners build resilience, as students must respond to varying viewpoints and critique their ideas constructively. This exposure helps them learn to cope with feedback and adjust their strategies accordingly—a hallmark of self-regulation (Chung, 2000). Although this research offers significant contributions to understanding the efficacy of the Fishbowl method for enhancing classroom engagement and promoting self-regulated learning among Iraqi EFL learners, several limitations must be acknowledged. First and foremost, the lack of a control group restricts the ability to draw definitive conclusions about the causal impact of the Fishbowl technique. Other factors like the learning setting, teacher enthusiasm, or participant characteristics might also influence the findings. Additionally, this study is limited by its focus on a specific sample of intermediate Iraqi EFL learners, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. The results may not apply to learners of different proficiency levels or those in other cultural or educational contexts. Future research should aim to replicate this study with diverse populations and control groups to validate the findings and explore the broader applicability of the Fishbowl technique. Last but not least, self-report measures were used to assess student engagement and self-regulation, which can introduce bias and may not fully capture the complexities of these constructs. Incorporating multiple data sources, such as observational methods or qualitative interviews, can offer a more comprehensive grasp of how the Fishbowl technique influences learner behaviors and attitudes.

Regarding the implications of the study, the demonstrated effectiveness of the Fishbowl technique in enhancing classroom engagement suggests that educators should consider incorporating this interactive method into their teaching practices, particularly in speaking instruction.

By fostering a more participatory classroom environment, teachers can help students feel more comfortable and motivated to express themselves, which is crucial for developing speaking proficiency in a foreign language. Besides, the positive influence of the Fishbowl technique on self-regulated learning indicates the need for instructional strategies that enable students to manage the classroom educational experiences. This approach enhances engagement and equips students with essential lifetime learning skills, like goal-assignment, self-observation, and reflection.

As such, educators should focus on creating opportunities for student-led activities that encourage self-assessment and critical thinking, further promoting autonomy in their learning processes. The findings of this study contribute significantly to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence for the effectiveness of the Fishbowl technique in enhancing both classroom engagement and self-regulated learning specifically within the context of intermediate Iraqi EFL learners. This research offers valuable insights into a pedagogical approach that can actively involve learners and cultivate their autonomy in language learning within a specific cultural and educational setting.

Furthermore, by quantifying the impact of the Fishbowl technique through standardized questionnaires, this study provides practical implications for EFL instructors seeking to implement engaging and learner-centered activities that promote both active participation and the development of self-regulatory skills crucial for successful language acquisition.

These findings underscore the potential of the Fishbowl technique as a viable and beneficial strategy in the Iraqi EFL context and may encourage further investigation into its applicability and adaptation in other diverse language learning environments.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the efficacy of the Fishbowl technique in enhancing classroom engagement and promoting self-regulated learning of intermediate Iraqi EFL learners in speaking instruction.

The findings suggest that the interactive nature of the Fishbowl technique encourages active participation, allowing students to express their ideas and perspectives, which fosters a more dynamic learning environment. Moreover, by engaging in this collaborative speaking activity, learners develop essential self-regulation skills, enabling them to take ownership of their learning and

improve their speaking proficiency. The findings of this research extend beyond the confines of the classroom, proposing that educators in Iraq and similar contexts should consider integrating the Fishbowl technique into their teaching practices. Such strategies enhance student engagement and empower learners to become self-regulated participants in their educational journeys. By doing so, we can continue to refine our approaches to EFL instruction, ultimately nurturing a more appealing and efficient learning context that prepares students for successful communication in English.

Authors Contributions

All the authors have participated sufficiently in the intellectual content, conception, and design of this work or the analysis and interpretation of the data (when applicable), as well as the writing of the manuscript.

Availability of data and materials

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

Conflict of interest

The author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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