

# **Fishbowl Technique in Teaching Grammar**

**Heba Ahmed Kreim  
Sa'ad Salal Srahan**

## **Abstract**

This study aims at investigating the effect of Fishbowl Technique in teaching grammar.

Grammar structures are not easy to master because of the diversity between the grammar systems of Arabic and English.

Therefore, teachers should reflect deeply this aspect and should try hard to experiment new techniques that may prove effective to redress this problem which is highly documented in the literature of ELT. Jawad (2006:2) stresses this idea by stating that Iraqi EFL users can not differentiate between grammatical patterns. Hence, the Fishbowl Technique hoping to fill a gap in the domain of teaching English grammar.

This indicates that fishbowl technique is more effective in teaching grammar.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem and its Significance**

There is a lot of evidence showing that grammar should be taught. The immediate purpose of teaching grammar is to increase knowledge of the language system in order that the crucial goal to master productive and receptive skills can be fulfilled. As a result teachers should save no effort to experiment with how to present grammatical structure and show the learner how to study grammar in a variety of ways. Harmer (2001:161) suggests that, "students are encouraged to work out for themselves how language forms are constructed and used".

The problem of the present study stems from the fact that the researcher intends to carry out an experiment using Fishbowl Technique hoping to take part in presenting a solution problems.

Grammatical structures of English are not easy to master due to intra and enter linguistic and educational factors. Intra linguistic factors are represented in the fact that tenses are not easy to handle by learners adding to that the rigidity of the word or in English .Inter linguistic factors are represented by the fact that Arabic and English grammatical systems fall into sharp contrast with each other.

As for the educational factor, they are: First, teachers always feel more comfortable and confident when using the traditional methods to teach grammar since these methods of teaching are quite familiar to them. Secondly, the school facilities cannot meet the requirements of communicative language teaching application. Particularly, large-size classes are not an ideal environment for a communicative lesson, and schools lack equipment (e.g. audio-visual teaching aids).

Grammar structures are not easy to master because of the diversity between the grammar systems of both Arabic and English. Therefore, teachers should reflect deeply on this aspect and should try hard to experiment with new techniques that may prove effective to redress this problem which is highly documented in the literature of ELT. The significance of the problem lies in the fact that grammar is considered to be an essential part of a language needed.

### **1.2 Aim of the Study**

This study aims at investigating the effect of Fishbowl Technique in teaching grammar.

### **1.3 Definition of Basic Terms**

#### **1.3.1 Technique**

Technique is a method of doing some task or performing something. It can also refer to someone's skillfulness with the fundamentals of a particular task (Richards and Schmidt, 2002, 544).

Richards and Rodgers (2001:19) claim that a technique is what actually takes place in a classroom. It is a particular trick,

stratagem, or contrivance used to accomplish an immediate object. This is the operational definition.

### **1.3.2 Fishbowl Technique**

The operational definition which is adopted here is that Fishbowl technique is a teaching technique used in the classroom to give everyone the chance to participate and observe. It has many variants but the underlying idea is to facilitate learning via discussion ( Priles ,1993: 49).

Alvermann and Haves (1989:24) mentions that it is a technique used effectively in the classroom to give everyone in the room an opportunity to participate and observe. This technique has many variants but the underlying idea is to facilitate learning via discussion.

### **1.3.3 Grammar**

Richards and Schmidt (2002:230) define grammar as a description of the structure of a language and the way in which linguistic units such as words and phrases are combined to produce sentences in the language. When we communicate with sentences and utterances, we use them to represent some experiences or describe real or unreal world.

As for Fromkin et al, (2005:14), the term grammar is used with a systematic ambiguity .On one hand, the term refers to explicit theory which is constructed by the linguist and proposed as a description of the speaker's competence, and on the other, it refers to the competence itself as an innate capacity of a native speaker. This represents our linguistic competence of our mother tongue.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Fishbowl Technique**

Psychologically, the term "Fishbowl" refers to the observation of one group by another group. Silberman (1996:110) defines Fishbowl as a discussion format in which some students make a discussion circle while other students make a listener circle in a round of discussion group.

Discussing the process of conducting a "Fishbowl" session, White (1974: 474), states that:

*A group of participants was divided into subgroups, one subgroup observing another subgroup on a task or a group development issue, then reporting back to the observed group what was seen. Then the "observed", now observing and reporting- the "observing" now interacting around a task or issue, then getting process reports from those watching.*

Fishbowl is used in classrooms where group dynamics are important. It allows deeper discussion of any given topic. It helps building a sense of community and focuses the attention on the ways in which a group might work together more productively. In a language classroom, it can demonstrate how groups can collaborate to construct meaning from a text. They model peer literature circle discussions as students analyze a text and connect their responses with others (Barkley et al, 2005:92).

### **2.2 The Objectives of FBT**

Johnson & Carson (1990: 30) mention a number of objectives for the Fishbowl Technique that can be summarized as follows:

1. The primary focus in this technique is on the fact that students can learn English from an instructional program through using communicative tasks and procedures.
2. This technique aims primarily at enabling learners to learn the language through carrying out activities not through 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 as well as language and academic concepts of students at different levels of language proficiency.
5. It provides the students with opportunities to use the target language contextually, and to explore it through activities.
6. It encourages the participants to get in touch with their thoughts/feelings concerning their cross-cultural and bilingual relationships.

## **2.3 FBT in Steps**

Fishbowl as a teaching technique belongs to learner-centered or collaborative ways of presentation. It can be used not only in classroom but also in seminars, management, business, etc. where group work is demanded. Krueger (1994: 87 f) suggests the following six steps:

### **Step 1**

Organize the Group (5 minutes): As people come into the room they are organized into four groups in equal numbers. If they don't know the precise numbers of people, handing out an ordered set of colored question sheets as people come in the room (1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.) helps keep the groups even and also helps mix the participants with people that they may not know. People sit in groups of chairs or at tables according to their color/question assignment.

### **Step 2**

Introduce the Topic and Process (5-10 minutes): The facilitator sets the stage for the discussion by introducing the topic and the four questions to be explored. The facilitator briefly explains the questioning process and how the rounds of questioning/listening will proceed.

### **Step 3**

Questioning and Listening Process (40 minutes): There are three rounds of questioning and listening. Two groups are matched together and participants. (If there is an extra person they can join others to form a triad). Each person in turn asks his question, listens with attention but mostly without comment, and takes notes. Each person is given 5 minutes to answer – this can sometimes seem longer than is comfortable but the intention is to continue to sit with the question and see what thoughts emerge rather than engage in a back and forth questions. After 10 minutes the facilitator indicates it is time to switch around and a different set of groups are paired.

### **Step 4**

Regrouping (20 minutes): Participants return to their four groups. In clusters of 8-10 people they share what they have heard in answer to their questions and look for themes and contrasts. This is mainly a dialogue but groups are encouraged to create a flip chart or poster summarizing what they have heard.

### **Step 5**

Fishbowl Conversation (up to 40 minutes): The whole group comes back together for a single conversation. Five chairs are arranged in the center. Four participants are invited to come to the center and discuss the key messages that they have heard during the previous conversations and/or something in particular that they are taking away from the discussion. A typical contribution might start with "What struck me from our conversation was..." and end with "What I am taking away from this is..." Anyone can come up to participate in the Fishbowl and all are encouraged to do so. One of the five chairs always remains empty, a place to welcome the next participant. As a fifth person joins the group one of the other four voluntarily leaves, opening up a spare chair once again.

### **Step 6**

Conclusion (5 minutes): As the Fishbowl naturally winds the facilitator brings the conversation to a conclusion. Participants are asked to leave their notes behind in order that we can summarize the discussions as part of the conference proceedings. The intention is that the group leaves the room in a mood of satisfaction and reflection. Definitely, such steps are only appropriate for the educational system that follows "sessions" rather than lessons.

## **2.4 FBT in Rounds**

According to Gillett and Witmer (2001:307) FBT can be conducted through three rounds during which a discussion of three sessions with three rounds each is carried out; the rounds are:

- \* **Round 1:** Inner Circle (party A, quite homogenous) are the fishes and discuss the issue to be presented.
- \* **Round 2:** (party B, the spectators) become fishes and vice versa; the former spectators discuss within the inner circle, starting to answer the question: What did they hear about the positions of the former fishes (part A), then taking their own stances.
- \* **Round 3:** An additional empty chair will be put to the inner circle (still part B sitting there); as soon as one person from the outer circle takes the empty chair the discussion stops until someone has left his/her inner chair.

### **2.5 Stages of FBT**

The management of FBT can be divided into three stages: Pre-Stage ,Whilst-Teaching stage, and Post-Teaching stage (Gall& Gillett,1980 :101) .It is possible to add a fourth stage, i.e. the feedback stage.

#### **1. Pre-Stage**

- a. The teacher makes preparation, such as prepares the class to give greeting and takes attendance.
- b. The teacher presents the material and gives motivation to the students so that they become enthusiastic and serious to receive the material.
- c. He asks a small group of students (generally three to five) to form a circle in class.
- d. He asks the remaining students to form a larger circle around the first circle.

#### **2. Whilst-Teaching Activities**

- a. The teacher gives guidelines only to inner circle students to speak and discuss the presented topic.
- b. The outer circle students will be the "observers".
- c. The teacher asks the students to practice the material he gave to the speak group.
- d. The Speak group conveys materials to the observers group.
- e. Each group will make notes about the topic.

- f. Although observers will not speak during the Fishbowl discussion, they will have the opportunity to address any issue that arises in the follow up discussion.
- g. The teacher requires each group of observers to express their opinions in order to solve a problem.

### **3. Post-Teaching Activities**

- a. The teacher gives students the prompt question from discussion.
- b. He asks students to report out in a whole-class discussion, so that they address the content issues that arose and comment on group processes.

### **4. Feedback Stage**

At the end of the discussion, it is necessary to provide a positive feedback that is likely to motivate students. In this stage, the teacher shares any points that stood out and the future plan of action.

### **2.6 The Advantages of FBT**

There are many advantages of FBT, as follows:

- 1. FBT stimulates discussion, (Frost, 2005:52).
- 2. It provides class interaction,
- 3. It allows students to learn from peers,
- 4. It involves critical thinking,
- 5. It improves oral and listening skills,
- 6. It provides break from routine, (Ibid: 53).
- 7. It provides a natural opportunity for revision and recycling and give teachers the opportunity to assess students' progress,
- 8. It provides cooperative support. Classroom work is to be carried out on a cooperative basis involving a lot of participants' initiation right from the start.
- 9. It allows the teacher to see what misconceptions students have and address them, (Taylor, 2007:55).
- 10. Students in the outside circle of a Fishbowl can observe how specific individuals question, respond to and make meaning of a text, which can model small-group literature circle discussions.

11. Fishbowl rounds allow students to practice group discussion skills.
12. It is recommended that the moderator takes into account the time needed for participants to move from one place to another either to introduce new elements (Barkley& et al, 2005:20).

### **3. Teaching of Grammar**

Knowing a language means knowing the grammatical system of that language .This was called 'prescriptive grammar' which stood in sharp contrast with. 'Descriptive grammar' that aimed at the description of the system as it has been used by the speakers of that language at a particular time. Psychologically, grammar could be learnt through memorization and translation or pattern practice exercises. This was well represented by 'Grammar Translation Method' and, Audio –Lingual Approach .Or, it could be 'innate capacity ' originated in the mind of native speakers that helps them to generate an' infinite number of novel sentences' by using a finite number of grammatical rules (Yule, 2006:86f).

Richards and Schmidt (2002:230) define grammar as a description of the structure of a language and the way in which linguistic units such as words and phrases are combined to produce sentences in the language. When we communicate with sentences and utterances, we use them to represent some experiences or describe real or unreal world.

As for Fromkin et al. (2005:14), the term grammar is used with a systematic ambiguity .On one hand, the term refers to explicit theory which is constructed by the linguist and proposed as a description of the speaker's competence, and on the other, and it refers to the competence itself as an innate capacity of a native speaker. This represents our linguistic competence of our mother tongue.

In language teaching, grammar gains its prominence, particularly in English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL), inasmuch as without good knowledge of grammar, learners' language development will be

severely constrained. Practically, in the teaching of grammar, learners are taught rules of language commonly known as sentence patterns. Ur (1999: 24) states that grammatical rules enable the learners to know and apply how such sentence patterns should be put together. The teaching of grammar should also ultimately center the attention on the way grammatical items or sentence patterns are correctly used.

In other words, teaching grammar should encompass language structure or sentence patterns meaning and use.

Furthermore, grammar is thought to furnish the basis for a set of language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In listening and speaking, grammar plays a crucial part in grasping and expressing spoken language (e.g. expressions) since learning the grammar of a language is considered necessary to acquire the capability of producing grammatically acceptable utterances in the language (Corder, 1988:123; Widodo, 2004:28). In reading, grammar enables learners to comprehend sentence interrelationships in a paragraph, a passage or a text. In the context of writing, grammar allows the learners to put their ideas into intelligible sentences so that they can successfully communicate in a written form. Lastly, in the case of vocabulary, grammar provides a pathway to learners to observe how some lexical items should be combined into a good sentence so that meaningful and communicative statements or expressions can be formed. In other words, Doff (2000: 10) says that by learning grammar students can express meanings in the form of phrases, clauses and sentences.

Grammar plays a central role in the four language skills and vocabulary to establish communicative tasks.

### **3.1 Deductive Learning**

Corder (1980:12) states that, deductive learning is a traditional learning in which information about target language and rules are given at the beginning of the lesson, i.e., at the presentation phase and continued with examples. The principles of this type of learning are generally used in the classes where the

main target is to teach grammar structures. As for Thornbury's (1999:29), three basic principles in which a deductive lesson starts with presentation of the rules by the teacher. Secondly the teacher gives examples by highlighting the grammar structures. Then students make practice with the rules and produce their own examples at the end of the lesson. He (ibid: 30), for instance, argues that these principles are convenient for the classes in which grammar translation method is applied.

No one doubts that foreign language learners should internalise the linguistic system of the language they want to learn and know how to utilize it in a suitable way. To learn grammar in the classroom, the system has to be presented, structured and modified in a way that facilitates the process of learning (Corder, 1980:12).

### **3.2 Inductive Learning**

An inductive approach comes from inductive reasoning stating that a reasoning progression proceeds from particulars (that is, observations, measurements, or data) to generalities (for example, rules, laws, concepts or theories). In short, when induction is used, a number of specific instances is observed and from them it is possible to infer a general principle or concept (Chalipa, 2013:180). As for Long & Richards (1987:33), they state that in the case of pedagogical grammar, most experts argue that the inductive technique can also be called rule-discovery learning. It suggests that a teacher teaches grammar starting with presenting some examples of sentences. In this sense, learners understand grammatical rules from the examples. The presentation of grammatical rules can be spoken or written.

---

**References**

- Alvermann, D. E, and Haves, D.A. (1989). *Classroom Discussion of Content Area Reading Assignments: An intervention study*. Reading Research Quarterly.
- Barkley, E., Cross, K. P., & Major, C. (2005). *Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Chalipa , Simin. (2013). "The Effect OF Inductive Vs Deductive Instructional Approach In Grammar Learning OF ESL Learners . <http://iresearcher>. P 17, 176-187.
- Corder, S.P (1980). "Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching" in J.Allen and S.Pit Corder (2nd). *Papers in Applied Linguistics* (Vol.2) London: Oxford University Press.
- Doff, A. (2000). *Teach English: A training course for teachers*. (14<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dun,K.M.(1997).*The Fishbowl Motivates Students to participate*. College Teaching.
- Fromkin,V and Rodmay, R,and Hyams, N. (2005). *Introduction to Language*. (7<sup>th</sup>ed).Thomson Place, Boston, Massachusets.
- Frost, R (2005). *A Task Based Approach in Teaching English*. [Http-www. Teaching English org](http-www.TeachingEnglish.org) UK / methodology / task based html 2014.
- Gall, M. D., & Gillett, M. (1980). "The Discussion Method in Classroom Teaching". *Theory into Practice*, 19 (2), 98-103.
- Gillett, C. and Witmer,G. (2001): "A Physical Need: Physicalism and the Via Negativa", *Analysis* 61, pp. 302-308.
- Harmar, J. (2001). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. (3th ed). London: Longman.
- Jawad, Zainab. Abbas. (2005). *"The Development of Learning the English Articles By EFL Learners"* Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation. University of Baghdad.
- Johnson, D.W. & Carson, L (1990). "Social Skills for Successful Group Work". *Educational Leadership*, 47 (4), 29-33.

## **Fishbowl Technique in Teaching Grammar .....**

Heba Ahmed Kreim, Sa'ad Salal Srahan

- Krueger, Richard, A. (1994): *Focus groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage; Morgan, David L.
- Long & Richards .J (1987). *Methodology in TESOL* New Jersey: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Priles, M. A. (1993). "The Fishbowl Discussion: A Strategy for Large Honors Classes". *The English Journal*, 82 (6), 49-50.
- Richards, J and Rodgers, S. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J and Schmidt, R. (2002). *Dictionary of Language and Applied Linguistics*. London: Pearson Education Ltd.
- Silberman, Mel. (1996). *Active Learning: 101 Strategies to Teach Any Subject*. U.K.A Pearson Education Company.
- Singh, R. (2011). "Controversies in Teaching English Grammar'. *Academic Voices: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 156-60.
- Taddeo, Jan E. (2006). ["A Unitarian Universalist Approach to Youth Ministry"](http://uua.org). uua.org. Retrieved 25 February 2010.
- Taylor, D.B. (2007) "*Fostering Engaging and Active Discussions in Middle School Classrooms*". *Middle School Journal*. Online Teaching Activity Index.  
<http://www.ion.uillinois.edu/resources/otai/Fishbowl.asp>.
- Thornbury, S. (1999). "How to Teach Grammar". In J. Harmer (Ed.), *How to Teach English*. London: Pearson Education Ltd.
- White, K. R. (1974). *T-groups Revisited: Self – Concept Change and The "fish-Bowling" Technique. Small, Group Behavior*.
- Widodo, H. (2004). "Kemampuan mahasiswa Bahasa Inggris dalam menganalisis kalimat bahasa Inggris". *Fenomena*, 3(2), 27-38.
- Yule, G. (2006). *The Study of Language* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

## **تقنية Fishbowl (حوض السمك) في تدريس قواعد اللغة الانكليزية**

هبة احمد كريم                      أ.م سعد صلال سرحان

الجامعة المستنصرية/ كلية التربية الأساسية

### **ملخص البحث**

ان تراكييب قواعد اللغة ليست سهلة الإتقان و ذلك بسبب التنوع بين أنظمة القواعد في كلا اللغتين العربية والإنجليزية. لذا، يجب أن يعكس المعلمون بعمق هذه السمة ويحاولوا تجربة التقنيات الجديدة ذات الصعوبة والتي قد تثبت فعالية حل هذه المشكلة التي توثق إلى حد كبير في تعلم تدريس اللغة الاجنبية. شدد جواد (2006:2) في رسالته الموسومة على هذه الفكرة وذكر ان الاستخدام للمتعلمين العراقيين للغة الاجنبية لا يستطيعون التفريق بين الأنماط القواعدية، لذلك، فان الدراسة الحالية هي محاولة لمعالجة هذه المشكلة باستخدام تقنية Fishbowl وتتمنى ملئ الفجوة في تعليم قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية للمتعلمين العراقيين. تهدف هذه الدراسة الى تحري تأثير استخدام تقنية حوض السمك Fishbowl تعلم العراقيين للغة الاجنبية ليصبحوا متعلمين في القواعد اللغوية. وهذا يشير بأن تقنية Fishbowl أكثر فعالية في تعليم قواعد اللغة.