

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SHADOWING TECHNIQUE TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS AT SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES – THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

In the age of globalized communication, innovative approaches to improving English speaking abilities are essential, especially in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts like Vietnam where students still have little contact to native speakers. This study investigates the effectiveness of the shadowing technique, which involves imitating native speech in real time, in enhancing EFL learners' speaking abilities. The research, which was carried out at School of Foreign Languages, Thai Nguyen University, sought to determine how shadowing affected students' verbal English competence in terms of pronunciation, fluency, prosody, and confidence as well as their views toward its application. During the 15-week intervention, 50 second-year intermediate English majors engaging in self-study shadowing with diverse authentic materials. A mixed-methods approach, utilizing pre- and post-tests, questionnaires, and interviews, measured the outcomes. The findings showed that participants' confidence, fluency, and pronunciation had significantly improved. Students also showed positive attitudes, enthusiastic engagement, and motivation from a variety of resources, despite difficulties with technical access and rapid speech rates. The study finds that shadowing is an effective, approachable method for developing communicative competence in EFL environments with limited resources when accompanied by authentic materials. The potential of shadowing to revolutionize English speaking skill is confirmed by the recommendation that it be incorporated into curricula and explored through digital tools for scalability.

Keyword: shadowing, speaking skills, authentic materials, EFL learners, School of Foreign Languages, Thai

1. INTRODUCTION

Of the four skills in English, reading and listening are receptive skills while speaking and writing are productive skills. It might be difficult for EFL learners to acquire productive skills, particularly if they have experienced the language infrequently. It is still quite difficult for students to speak English well, especially in places like Vietnam where they lack communication with native speakers. Speaking fluently requires not just precise pronunciation and prosody (including emphasis, rhythm, and intonation), but also the confidence to carry on a conversation in an unplanned and natural way. Traditional teaching approaches that prioritize vocabulary and grammar learning over engaging oral practice compound these difficulties for students at School of Foreign Languages, Thai Nguyen University (Richards, 2015). As global communication increasingly demands communicative

competence, innovative approaches are needed to bridge this gap. One such approach is the shadowing technique. Yavari and Shafiee (2019) define shadowing as a language learning technique in which students listen to a spoken text and then mimic it as precisely as they can. By using neuroplasticity to activate brain pathways, shadowing helps people absorb English phonemes and lessen their non-native accents (Doidge, 2007). Additionally, shadowing facilitates easy speech production by speeding up proceduralization through repeated, real-time practice (Segalowitz, 2010). For natural speech, prosody—which includes intonation, emphasis, and rhythm—is crucial. By teaching students to mimic native prosodic rhythms, shadowing helps speakers of syllable-timed languages, such as Vietnamese, overcome their difficulties (Kjellin, 2002). The advantages of shadowing are confirmed by empirical research. Using real audio,

Hamada (2016) found that Japanese EFL learners improved their pronunciation and fluency. According to Foote and McDonough (2017), shadowing increased confidence and fluency with varied materials. In summary, shadowing's effectiveness is rooted in established theories of language acquisition, cognitive science, and prosodic learning.

Several studies have explored the application of shadowing in Vietnamese EFL contexts to enhance oral participation. For instance, Ngoc and Phuong (2023) for shadowing highlighted that shadowing is an effective technique to improve non-English-major students' speaking skills at Thai Nguyen University of Education. In addition, Chi et al. (2024) concluded that shadowing beneficially assisted freshmen's speaking skills at Hanoi Open University. As for young learners, Phung and Ngan (2024) exploited text shadowing to develop EFL primary students' speaking skills. However, few studies using the shadowing technique were conducted at the School of Foreign Languages, Thai Nguyen University, where English major students lack real-world communication due to limited native speaker exposure. Another critical gap in the literature is the exploration of diverse authentic materials in shadowing interventions. While course books (Ngoc and Phuong (2023); Phung and Ngan (2024)) and TED Talks have been used effectively (Yen and Phuong, 2023), other resources, such as children's shows (e.g., Peppa Pig) for slow, clear speech, TED-Ed videos for structured narration, sitcoms (e.g., Friends) for informal dialogue, and news broadcasts (e.g., BBC News) for formal diction, remain underexplored. These materials offer varied linguistic input, catering to different proficiency levels and personal interests, yet their integration into a cohesive shadowing program has not been systematically studied.

In order to fill these gaps, this paper examines how well a speaking-focused shadowing program at School of Foreign Languages, Thai Nguyen University improves students' speaking abilities. Children's programs, TED-Ed videos, sitcoms, and news broadcasts are the selected authentic materials used in this 15-week shadowing program. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study assesses the program's effect on students' speaking confidence and communicative competence by combining quantitative speaking assessments (which measure fluency,

pronunciation, and prosody) with qualitative case study insights from student and teacher feedback. Furthermore, it identifies practical challenges and opportunities for integrating shadowing into the EFL curriculum with the purpose of fostering students' autonomy and life-long learning. This article aims to enable teachers and students to fully utilize the transforming power of shadowing by providing evidence-based recommendations, resulting in more engaging and successful speaking instruction in Vietnamese higher education and beyond. Basically, the study seeks answers to two following research questions:

1. What are the effects of using shadowing technique in enhancing students' speaking skills?
2. What are students' attitudes towards the use of shadowing technique to improve their speaking skills?

2. METHODOLOGY

The intervention targeted 50 second-year English majors (CEFR B1-B2, aged 19-21) at the School of Foreign Languages, Thai Nguyen University, Vietnam with limited access to native speakers.

The intervention was integrated into the English speaking course schedule with students' weekly assignments in their self-study time at home under their teacher's supervisor in a 15-week semester. The students received a one-hour training session on shadowing techniques, material selection, and feedback strategies. They are required to select 1-3 minute clips from a curated list of authentic sources with clear audio, engaging content, native speakers, and availability of transcripts or subtitles, progressing in complexity from children's shows Peppa Pig (Weeks 1-2), TED-Ed videos (Weeks 3-8), Friends scenes (Weeks 9-12) to BBC News segments (Weeks 13-15) and complete a journal form each week. Tests, interviews, and questionnaires were used to gather data for this study. Because the outcomes of the three strategies can complement one another, combining the three approaches guarantees careful insight into the research. A speaking pre-test and a post-test were administered as a significant tool to for assessing students' speaking proficiency. Also, participants were given a questionnaire to collect their opinions on the effectiveness of the pilot strategy. In addition to the survey questionnaire, interviews were employed as a data collection method to supply supplementary information.

Through the use of in-depth interviews, the researcher was able to delve deeper into participants' thoughts regarding the state of speaking skill research, the efficacy, challenges, and recommendations for employing the shadowing technique to improve students' speaking abilities. This was vital because the participants had fewer opportunities to express their opinions when responding to closed-ended survey questions or the limited space provided by open-ended questions.

It was suggested that students follow a few steps during shadowing. First, students listened to the video twice and took notes on the prosodic elements (e.g., stress, connecting sounds), key vocabulary, and context. Unfamiliar words were researched briefly using dictionaries to ensure comprehension. After seeing the video, students imitated the speaker's pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm by pronouncing every word as closely to the clip as they can. Headphones enhanced audio clarity and learners stood or gestured to emulate speaker energy. Learners recorded their shadowing using apps like Audacity. Recordings were compared to the original, with learners noting discrepancies in pronunciation, prosody, or fluency using a checklist (e.g., "Did I match the speaker's stress patterns?"). Furthermore, they logged activities in a 15 week progress tracker noting materials, duration, challenges, and improvements. Weekly reflections summarized progress and set goals (e.g., "Improve linking sounds in Friends dialogues").

Particularly, three variables were examined in pre- and post-intervention assessments: and pronunciation, fluency, and confidence. Pronunciation was graded by qualified ESL teachers on a scale of 0–10 for suprasegmental accuracy (intonation, stress, and rhythm) using prosodic analysis and segmental accuracy (e.g., /θ/, /ð/, vowel distinctions) using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Praat software was used to assess speech rate (words per minute, as determined by timed recordings), pause frequency, and signals of hesitation (such as "um," "uh"). Interviews and a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire (e.g., "I feel confident speaking English in public") were used to gather self-reported confidence.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Research Question 1

The shadowing intervention significantly enhanced students' speaking skills in terms of pronunciation, fluency, and prosody, as evidenced by pre- and post-intervention assessments. Table 1 illustrates the experimental group's performance improvements.

Score Range	Pre-test (%)	Post-test (%)
0–2.9	30%	5%
3–4.9	45%	15%
5–7.9	20%	60%
8–10	5%	20%

Table 1. Pre-test and Post-test Speaking Scores of the Experimental Group

The pre-test revealed limited speaking proficiency, with 75% of students scoring below 5 points, including 30% below 3 points. Just 5% achieved scores between 8 and 10. Post-test results, conducted after the 15-week intervention, showed marked improvement: 60% of students scored between 5 and 7.9, and 20% achieved excellent scores (8–10), a fourfold increase from the pre-test. Low performers have significantly decreased, as seen by the 5% decrease in the percentage of test takers who had a score below 3.

There were noticeable gains in both segmental and suprasegmental accuracy of pronunciation. Vowel differences (e.g., /i/ vs. /i:/) were inconsistent, and frequent mistakes in phonemes such as /θ/ and /ð/ were seen in pre-test evaluations. After being assessed by qualified ESL teachers, post-test results revealed an increase in the mean pronunciation score from 5.8 to 8.2 (0–10 scale). As students more accurately imitated native prosodic patterns, suprasegmental accuracy—especially in stress and intonation—improved, supporting Kjellin's (2002) research on prosodic acquisition through imitation.

The participants' fluency also improved. Pre-test speech rates were 90 words per minute (wpm) on average, with a mean of 12 pauses and hesitation clues meanwhile post-test results revealed an average speech rate of 120 wpm and a reduced pause frequency (mean: 5 per minute), analyzed

via Praat software. These gains reflect the proceduralization stage of Skill Acquisition Theory (DeKeyser, 2015), where repetitive shadowing practice fostered automaticity.

The findings were supported by qualitative information gathered from interviews. Participants reported being able to articulate difficult words more clearly and keeping up conversational flow more easily. "Shadowing Friends scenes helped me sound more natural, like I'm not thinking about every word," one student wrote. These results are consistent with those of Hamada (2016), who found that shadowing improves fluency and phonological awareness.

The results affirm shadowing's efficacy in enhancing speaking skills, aligning with prior research (Hamada, 2016; Foote & McDonough, 2017). The intervention's success stems from its grounding in linguistic theories, such as the Motor Theory of Speech Perception (Liberman & Mattingly, 1985), which links imitation to articulatory accuracy, and Skill Acquisition Theory (DeKeyser, 2015), which supports proceduralization through repetition. The diverse authentic materials—spanning children's shows, TED-Ed videos, sitcoms, and news broadcasts—catered to varied linguistic demands, fostering both formal and informal speech patterns.

3.2. Research Question 2

Students' attitudes toward shadowing were overwhelmingly positive, as captured through questionnaires and interviews. Table 2 summarizes key themes from the 5-point Likert scale responses.

Aspect	Agreement (%)
Improved pronunciation	85%
Enhanced fluency	80%
Increased confidence	78%
Engaging and motivating	75%
Practical for self-study	70%

Table 2. Students' Attitudes toward Shadowing for Speaking Improvement

A significant majority (85%) agreed that shadowing improved their pronunciation, particularly in mimicking native accents and

stress patterns. The different resources were well received by the students, who named TED-Ed films and Friends scenes as their favorites due to their interesting content and variety of language input. "Friends made me sound less robotic, and TED-Ed videos taught me how to stress important words," said one interviewee.

Fluency enhancement was acknowledged by 80% of students, who noted reduced hesitation and smoother transitions in speech. Confidence, a crucial factor in EFL contexts, improved for 78% of participants. Because shadowing practice is low-pressure and repetitious, students reported feeling more at ease in both informal discussions and academic presentations. A student stated, "I used to be shy, but shadowing BBC News made me feel like a professional speaker."

Engagement and motivation were high, with 75% of students finding the materials enjoyable and relevant. The progression from Peppa Pig to BBC News catered to varying proficiency levels, sustaining interests. Compared to shadowing with more formal resources like coursebooks, using these varied authentic materials might assist students reduce potential tension and boredom. However, 70% respondents viewed shadowing as practical for self-study, with some citing challenges like fast speech rates or limited access to headphones in shared living spaces.

Certain challenges emerged in interviews. Approximately 15% of students found conversational content (like Friends) difficult to follow, which is consistent with Renandya and Farrell's (2010) findings about the influence of speech rate on understanding. 10 % of students had technical problems, such as unstable internet when streaming TED-Ed videos. These results highlight the necessity of carefully chosen readings and low-tech substitutes, such as audio replay in the classroom and written transcripts.

The favorable attitudes of students demonstrate the motivating power of shadowing, even in environments with limited resources like Thai Nguyen University. But issues like technical access and speech rate point to areas that need improvement. Providing offline resources and pre-selecting items with varying playback rates (for example, using VLC Media Player) may help to alleviate these problems.

In summary, the study contributes to the literature by demonstrating shadowing's long-

term impact on speaking proficiency in a Vietnamese EFL context. Additionally, it fills a study gap by highlighting the importance of diverse authentic materials. In order to improve self-assessment, future research might use real-time feedback systems like Elsa Speak or investigate adaptive shadowing techniques for different skill levels.

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, this research examined the effectiveness of a 15-week shadowing program that used a variety of authentic resources to improve the speaking abilities of second-year majors at the School of Foreign Languages, Thai Nguyen University. The findings demonstrate that shadowing significantly improved students' pronunciation, fluency, and prosodic competence, with pre- and post-test results showing a marked increase in scores and a reduction in low performers. Students' positive attitudes, as seen by surveys and interviews, indicate that using a variety of resources, such as Peppa Pig, TED-Ed videos, Friends scenes, and BBC News pieces, has improved their confidence, motivation, and engagement. These materials served a variety of interests, which made the intervention useful and accessible in a setting with limited resources. In spite of challenges such as fast speech rates and technical limitations, the intervention's integration into the curriculum, supported by teacher training and progress tracking, ensured its feasibility. The study suggests that shadowing, when paired with carefully selected authentic learning tools, is a powerful tool for fostering communicative competence in Vietnamese EFL contexts. Educators are advised to use shadowing as a useful, interesting way to improve speaking lessons, and future studies should look into how it can be scaled and integrated with digital technologies to further maximize results.

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