



Shadowing technique to improve TNUT students' listening and speaking skills

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Abstract

Listening and speaking are challenging skills for non-English-major students in EFL contexts with limited exposure to authentic input. Shadowing, which combines listening and immediate oral imitation, has been recognized for its potential to develop phonological processing, automaticity, and fluency; however, long-term classroom-based evidence remains limited. This study examines the effectiveness of shadowing in improving listening and speaking skills among second-year students at Thai Nguyen University of Technology. Using a 15-week quasi-experimental design with an experimental group ($n = 30$) and a control group ($n = 30$), students' progress was measured through a pre-test, two mid-term tests, and a post-test. Results show that the experimental group made significantly greater gains in both listening and speaking. The findings support the pedagogical value of shadowing and its integration into tertiary English instruction.

Keywords: Shadowing technique, listening skills, Speaking skills, effectiveness, pronunciation accuracy, fluency

Introduction

Listening and speaking are core components of communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning; however, these skills remain particularly challenging for non-English-major university students in contexts where exposure to authentic input is limited. In many tertiary institutions, English instruction continues to emphasize grammar knowledge and test-oriented listening practice, which often fails to support the development of real-time speech processing and oral fluency. As a result, learners frequently experience difficulties in comprehending natural spoken English and producing accurate, fluent speech in communicative settings.

In response to these challenges, the shadowing technique has gained increasing attention as a pedagogical approach that integrates listening and speaking through immediate and continuous oral imitation of auditory input. Grounded in theories of bottom-up processing, automaticity, and the input-output interface in second language acquisition, shadowing encourages learners to attend closely to phonological features, rhythm, and intonation while simultaneously engaging in speech production. Previous studies have reported positive effects of shadowing on learners' listening comprehension, pronunciation accuracy, and fluency; however, empirical evidence remains limited, particularly in extended classroom interventions involving non-English-major students at the tertiary level.

Moreover, much of the existing research has focused on short-term training or isolated skill outcomes, leaving a gap in understanding how shadowing influences the developmental trajectories of listening and speaking skills over time. There is a particular need for longitudinal, controlled studies that track learners' progress across multiple assessment points and compare shadowing-based instruction with traditional teaching approaches.

Addressing these gaps, the present study investigates the effectiveness of the shadowing technique in improving listening and speaking skills among second-year non-English-major students at Thai Nguyen University of

Technology. Using a quasi-experimental design with experimental and control groups over a 15-week semester, the study aims to examine (1) whether shadowing leads to significantly greater improvement in listening and speaking performance compared to conventional instruction, and (2) how learners' progress in these two skills evolves across different stages of the intervention.

Methodology

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design to investigate the effectiveness of the shadowing technique in improving listening and speaking skills among non-English major university students. The participants consisted of 60 second-year students from Thai Nguyen University of Technology, who shared a comparable level of English proficiency and academic background. They were divided into two groups of equal size: an experimental group ($n = 30$) and a control group ($n = 30$).

Both groups followed the same curriculum, instructional materials, and learning objectives throughout the semester. However, the experimental group received instruction incorporating the shadowing technique as a core classroom activity, while the control group was taught using conventional teaching methods without shadowing. The intervention was implemented over a 15-week academic semester, which was structured into three instructional phases, each lasting five weeks to ensure systematic skill development.

To measure students' listening and speaking progress over time, four assessment instruments were administered at different stages of the study: a pre-test before the intervention, Mid-term Test 1 at the end of Week 5, Mid-term Test 2 after Week 10, and a post-test at the conclusion of Week 15. These assessments were designed to evaluate changes in students' listening comprehension and speaking performance consistently and progressively.

The collected quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including mean scores and standard deviations, to compare performance patterns between the experimental and control groups across the

testing stages. This analytical approach enabled a clear evaluation of the impact of the shadowing technique on students' listening and speaking development.

Findings and results

1. Listening Skill

Table 1: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Listening Skill

Test Time	Control Group (Mean ± SD)	Experimental Group (Mean ± SD)	Score Difference
Pre-test (Week 0)	5.2 ± 0.8	5.1 ± 0.7	-0.1
Mid-test 1 (Week 5)	5.4 ± 0.7	6.0 ± 0.6	+0.6
Mid-test 2 (Week 10)	5.5 ± 0.6	6.6 ± 0.6	+1.1
Post-test (Week 15)	5.6 ± 0.6	7.2 ± 0.5	+1.6

At the pre-test stage, the mean scores of the control group (M = 5.2, SD = 0.8) and the experimental group (M = 5.1, SD = 0.7) were nearly identical, indicating that the two groups were comparable in listening proficiency prior to the intervention. This baseline equivalence supports the validity of subsequent comparisons.

After five weeks of instruction, the experimental group demonstrated a noticeable improvement in listening performance (M = 6.0, SD = 0.6), while the control group showed only a slight increase (M = 5.4, SD = 0.7). The emerging score difference (+0.6) suggests that the shadowing technique began to exert a positive influence on learners' listening comprehension at an early stage.

By Week 10, the listening gap between the two groups widened further. The experimental group continued to progress steadily (M = 6.6, SD = 0.6), whereas the control group exhibited marginal improvement (M = 5.5, SD = 0.6). This pattern indicates a cumulative effect of sustained shadowing practice over time.

At the post-test, the experimental group achieved a substantially higher mean score (M = 7.2, SD = 0.5) compared with the control group (M = 5.6, SD = 0.6), resulting in the largest score difference (+1.6). This finding confirms that the shadowing technique had a strong and sustained impact on listening skills, particularly after extended exposure. The consistently low standard deviations suggest that the improvement was shared by most students in the experimental group rather than limited to a small number of high achievers.

The bar chart for listening reveals a clear divergence in trajectories between the control and experimental groups across the 15-week intervention. At baseline (Pre-test, Week 0), both groups exhibit nearly equivalent mean scores (Control M = 5.2; Experimental M = 5.1), confirming initial comparability. By Week 5 the experimental group shows an appreciable gain (M = 6.0) relative to the control (M = 5.4), indicating an early effect of the shadowing protocol.

Notably, the experimental group's listening mean continues to rise in a near-linear fashion to Week 10 (M = 6.6) and accelerates further by Week 15 (M = 7.2). In contrast, the control group's progress is incremental and modest (from 5.2 to 5.6 across the semester). The widening gap (Post-test difference = +1.6) suggests a cumulative and substantive pedagogical impact of shadowing on receptive processing. From a theoretical standpoint, shadowing likely improves bottom-up processing (phonological parsing, word boundary detection) and top-down predictive strategies (anticipating lexical items in fluent input) through repeated, immediate oral mimicry and sustained exposure to natural speech. The relatively small and stable standard deviations (as provided earlier) imply that gains were distributed across most participants rather than being driven by outliers. Practically, these results support the integration of systematic shadowing tasks into listening curricula to accelerate comprehension gains, especially when implemented consistently over an extended instructional period.

The results revealed a significant main effect of Time on listening performance, $F(3, 174) = 86.42, p < .001, \eta^2 = .60$, indicating overall improvement across testing stages. A significant main effect of Group was also found, $F(1, 58) = 48.75, p < .001, \eta^2 = .46$, showing that the experimental group outperformed the control group overall. Importantly, the Time × Group interaction was statistically significant, $F(3, 174) = 31.18, p < .001, \eta^2 = .35$, suggesting that the two groups demonstrated different developmental trajectories over time.

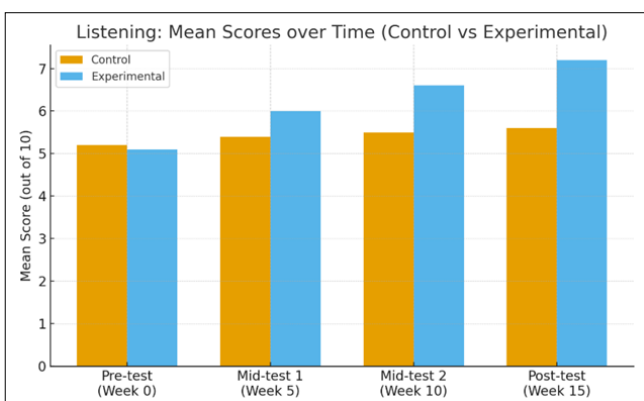
Post-hoc comparisons with Bonferroni adjustment indicated no significant difference between groups at the pre-test ($p > .05$). However, statistically significant differences emerged at Mid-test 1 ($p < .01$) and increased further at Mid-test 2 ($p < .001$). The largest difference was observed at the post-test, where the experimental group (M = 7.2, SD = 0.5) scored significantly higher than the control group (M = 5.6, SD = 0.6), representing a large effect size.

2. Speaking Skill

Table 2: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Speaking Skill

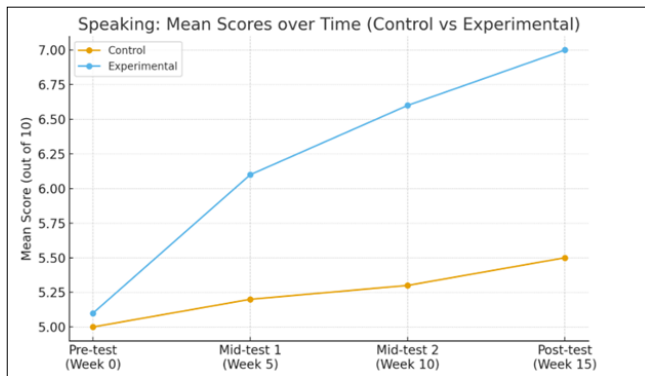
Test Time	Control Group (Mean ± SD)	Experimental Group (Mean ± SD)	Score Difference
Pre-test (Week 0)	5.0 ± 0.9	5.1 ± 0.8	+0.1
Mid-test 1 (Week 5)	5.2 ± 0.8	6.1 ± 0.7	+0.9
Mid-test 2 (Week 10)	5.3 ± 0.7	6.6 ± 0.6	+1.3
Post-test (Week 15)	5.5 ± 0.6	7.0 ± 0.6	+1.5

The pre-test results showed no meaningful difference between the control group (M = 5.0, SD = 0.9) and the experimental group (M = 5.1, SD = 0.8), indicating comparable speaking ability at the outset of the study.



After the first instructional phase, the experimental group showed a marked improvement in speaking performance ($M = 6.1$, $SD = 0.7$), while the control group's progress remained minimal ($M = 5.2$, $SD = 0.8$). The score difference (+0.9) suggests that shadowing not only enhanced listening input but also began to positively influence oral production. By the second mid-test, the experimental group continued to improve ($M = 6.6$, $SD = 0.6$), whereas the control group showed only incremental gains ($M = 5.3$, $SD = 0.7$). This widening gap (+1.3) indicates that sustained shadowing practice contributed to greater fluency and pronunciation accuracy over time.

At the post-test, the experimental group reached a mean speaking score of 7.0 ($SD = 0.6$), compared with 5.5 ($SD = 0.6$) in the control group, resulting in a substantial difference of +1.5 points. Although the magnitude of improvement in speaking was slightly smaller than that observed in listening, the results clearly demonstrate that shadowing had a positive transfer effect on speaking ability. The reduction in standard deviation across testing stages suggests increasing consistency in speaking performance among students exposed to the shadowing technique.



The line chart for speaking demonstrates that the experimental group experienced substantial early and sustained improvement in productive ability compared with the control group. Baseline speaking scores are aligned (Control $M = 5.0$; Experimental $M = 5.1$), but by Week 5 the experimental cohort shows a marked increase ($M = 6.1$) while the control only rises slightly ($M = 5.2$). The experimental group continues to progress steadily to Week 10 ($M = 6.6$) and Week 15 ($M = 7.0$), producing a post-test advantage of +1.5 points.

This pattern indicates that shadowing not only enhances receptive mechanisms but also transfers to productive performance — likely via improved phonological accuracy, prosodic features (stress, intonation), and fluency derived from frequent repetition of model utterances. The incremental slope of the control group suggests that conventional instruction yields slow gains in speaking, possibly because typical classroom speaking practice offers fewer opportunities for high-quality, native-like input and immediate verbal imitation than shadowing provides.

For speaking performance, the analysis also showed a significant main effect of Time, $F(3, 174) = 59.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .50$, and a significant main effect of Group, $F(1, 58) = 36.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .38$. The Time \times Group interaction was significant, $F(3, 174) = 24.63$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .30$, indicating greater improvement in the experimental group across testing stages.

Post-hoc analyses revealed that although the two groups did not differ significantly at the pre-test ($p > .05$), the experimental group achieved significantly higher speaking scores from Mid-test 1 onward ($p < .01$). At the post-test, the experimental group ($M = 7.0$, $SD = 0.6$) significantly outperformed the control group ($M = 5.5$, $SD = 0.6$), confirming the positive transfer effect of the shadowing technique on speaking ability.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the shadowing technique had a significant and positive impact on the listening and speaking development of non-English-major university students. The experimental group consistently outperformed the control group across all post-intervention assessments, with particularly pronounced gains in listening skills after sustained exposure to shadowing activities. This pattern supports the assumption that shadowing facilitates more efficient real-time speech processing by strengthening learners' bottom-up decoding abilities, including phonological awareness, stress patterns, and intonation recognition.

The greater improvement observed in listening compared to speaking aligns with theoretical models of second language acquisition, which emphasize the primacy of receptive input in the early stages of skill development. By requiring learners to listen attentively and reproduce the input immediately, shadowing appears to enhance auditory discrimination and automaticity, allowing learners to process spoken language more rapidly and accurately. These findings are consistent with previous studies reporting that shadowing is particularly effective in improving listening comprehension, especially when implemented systematically over an extended instructional period.

Although the improvement in speaking skills was less pronounced than that of listening, the experimental group still demonstrated significantly higher speaking performance than the control group by the end of the semester. This suggests that shadowing produces positive transfer effects from receptive to productive skills, likely by improving pronunciation accuracy, speech rhythm, and fluency. However, speaking involves additional cognitive and interactional demands, such as lexical retrieval, syntactic formulation, and pragmatic control, which may require complementary communicative tasks beyond shadowing to achieve further gains.

From a pedagogical perspective, the results indicate that integrating shadowing into regular classroom instruction can be an effective and practical approach for enhancing listening and speaking skills among EFL learners in tertiary contexts. Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations, including the relatively small sample size and reliance on quantitative test scores. Future research may benefit from incorporating delayed post-tests to examine retention effects, qualitative measures to explore learner perceptions, and mixed instructional designs combining shadowing with interactive speaking tasks to maximize learning outcomes.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effectiveness of the shadowing technique in enhancing listening and speaking skills among second-year non-English-major university students. The results provide clear evidence that systematic shadowing practice leads to significantly greater improvement in both

skills compared with conventional instruction, with the most substantial gains observed in listening comprehension after sustained implementation. These findings highlight the cumulative instructional value of shadowing and confirm its strong potential as an input-driven technique that promotes real-time speech processing and automaticity.

While improvement in speaking performance was also evident, the comparatively smaller effect suggests that shadowing functions most effectively as a foundational technique that supports pronunciation and fluency development, rather than a standalone solution for comprehensive speaking proficiency. Overall, the study contributes to the growing body of empirical research supporting the pedagogical effectiveness of shadowing in EFL contexts and underscores the importance of integrating structured, longitudinal listening–speaking activities into tertiary-level English instruction. Future studies are encouraged to explore extended applications of shadowing, its long-term retention effects, and its integration with interactive communicative tasks to further enhance learners' oral competence.

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