Effects of the shadowing technique on pronunciation skills of first-year students at Thai Nguyen University of information and communication technology

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Abstract: *The study investigated the impact of the shadowing technique on the pronunciation skills of EFL students at Thai Nguyen University of Information and Communication Technology. Over six weeks, 27 freshmen participated in an action research project, using multiple audio files for shadowing practice and submitting regular voice recordings. Pre-tests and post-tests were conducted to measure the effectiveness of the technique, and post-intervention questionnaires gathered students' attitudes. The results showed that consistent shadowing practice significantly improved students' pronunciation.*

Keywords: *Shadowing technique, pronunciation skills, English Language Learning.*

1. Introduction

Pronunciation involves several key elements, including the correct articulation of vowels and consonants, the blending of sounds, and connected speech, which refers to the natural flow of language. Other crucial aspects include word stress, rhythm, sentence stress, and intonation, all of which contribute to clear and effective communication. Mispronunciations in any of these areas can result in misunderstandings, making proper pronunciation critical for learners to communicate confidently and accurately in English.

At Thai Nguyen University of Information and Communication Technology, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students are required to pass oral exams to demonstrate their language proficiency. However, many students continue to struggle with pronunciation, even if they understand the vocabulary. This raises an important question: how can students effectively improve their pronunciation skills? This article seeks to explore the potential of the shadowing technique as a tool for helping students at Thai Nguyen University of Information and Communication Technology enhance their pronunciation abilities and overall communication skills.

2. Results

2.1. Aspects of pronunciation and the effectiveness of the shadowing technique in improving pronunciation skills

2.1.1. Pronunciation

Paulston and Burder (1976) define pronunciation as the ability to produce a sound system that does not interfere with communication. In other words, learners must be able to pronounce words in a way that allows them to be understood by others without causing confusion. Harmer (2001) further emphasizes that the primary goal of language learning is effective communication, and pronunciation plays a crucial role in achieving this. When learners mispronounce words, it can lead to misunderstandings or breakdowns in conversation, hindering the flow of communication. Therefore, clear and accurate pronunciation is essential for learners to express themselves confidently and fluently in English, enabling them to engage in meaningful interactions and be understood by native and non-native speakers alike. By mastering pronunciation, learners can avoid potential communication barriers, thus enhancing their overall language proficiency and competence.

2.1.2. Shadowing technique and the effectiveness of the shadowing technique in improving pronunciation skills

Initially developed for interpreter training, the shadowing technique has become increasingly important for EFL students to enhance their speaking and listening abilities (Hamada, 2015). This method engages students in an active cognitive process where they listen to speech and immediately repeat it (Tamai, 1997). Shadowing can take various forms, including mumbling, synchronized reading, and content shadowing (Tamai, 2005).

Research has consistently demonstrated the benefits of shadowing. Lin (2009) reported significant improvements in pronunciation and self-confidence among Taiwanese junior high school students. Similarly, Salim, Terasne, and Narasima (2020) observed similar advancements in pronunciation and motivation among Indonesian high school students using the technique. Bovee and Stewart (2009) found that approximately 70% of participants improved their pronunciation and intonation through shadowing homework, although some students found the exercises demanding. Foote and McDonough (2017) showed that using iPods for shadowing improved pronunciation and fluency, and they recommended practices such as recording sessions, using appropriate audio models, and utilizing short audio clips for training.

Overall, these studies underscore the effectiveness of shadowing in enhancing pronunciation, building self-confidence, and increasing motivation among EFL students, while also acknowledging potential challenges and offering practical advice for successful implementation.

2.2. Current status of pronunciation teaching at University of Information Technology and Communication

The study employed an action research design, with the researcher acting as both teacher and investigator, to address pronunciation challenges faced by EFL students. The main goal was to improve students' pronunciation of English sounds using the shadowing technique. The study involved 27 first-year EFL students, aged 18-19, from Thai Nguyen University of Information and Communication Technology. These non-English majors had mostly elementary-level English proficiency. Data was collected through pre-tests, post-tests, and structured questionnaires. The pre- and post-tests assessed pronunciation comprehensibility, clarity, and accuracy in stress and intonation, using a scale adapted from VSTEP criteria. The comparison of test scores determined the effectiveness of the shadowing technique. Additionally, questionnaires gathered students' feedback, self-assessments, and challenges faced during the intervention, providing insights into both objective improvements and subjective experiences.

The results are as follows: Scores from assessments conducted before and after the intervention period,

focusing on students' pronunciation, are detailed in table below.

Table 2.1: Pretest and posttest results for students' pronunciation

	Number	Min	Max	Average
Pretest score	27	3	5.5	3.9
Posttest score	27	3.5	7	4.8

The statistics in Table 2.1 indicate a difference between pretest and posttest scores, with an average increase of 0.9, rising from 3.9 to 4.8. The highest pretest score was 5.5, whereas the highest posttest score was 7. The lowest pretest score was 3, which increased slightly to 3.5 in the posttest. This suggests that the shadowing technique positively impacted all students' pronunciation abilities. To understand how shadowing practice influenced various aspects of pronunciation, the average test scores shown in Table 2.2 will provide further illustration.

Table 2.2: Pretest and posttest results concerning students' pronunciation aspects

Aspects	Number	Average pretest score	Average posttest score	Deviation
Overall comprehensibility	27	3.7	4.7	1.0
Frequency and accuracy in word stress and sentence stress	3.6	3.5	4.8	1.3
Frequency and accuracy in intonation	4.1	3.9	4.5	0.6

Regarding the improvement details based on the test scores, it is evident that although students' pronunciation was mostly intelligible, their word stress, sentence stress, and intonation were unclear before the shadowing practice. However, following six weeks of shadowing practice, students demonstrated heightened awareness in employing word stress, sentence stress, and intonation in their oral communication. Consequently, they demonstrated better proficiency in these areas during the posttest, resulting in higher scores. Among the three aspects, word stress and sentence stress saw the most significant improvement, with students' scores increasing by 1.3 points. Overall comprehensibility of students' pronunciation also improved, with an average increase of 1.0 point. Although intonation remains a weakness, the average score for this aspect

rose from 3.9 in the pretest to 4.5 in the posttest.

Table 2.3: Students' perception of the effectiveness of shadowing practice on their pronunciation

Opinion	Number	Percentage
Agree	27	100
Disagree	0	0

Table 2.3 presents data on students' perceptions of the effectiveness of shadowing practice on their pronunciation. All students surveyed (100%) concurred that shadowing practice had a positive effect on their pronunciation. Table 2.4 provides a detailed summary of the survey results regarding students' attitudes toward the effectiveness of shadowing practice on various aspects of pronunciation.

Table 2.4: Students' Attitudes Toward the Effectiveness of Shadowing Practice on Different Aspects of Pronunciation

Opinion	Agree	Percentage
Improvement in individual sounds	27	100
Improvement in word stress	27	100
Improvement of sentence stress	18	67
Improvement in intonation	24	78

The figures in Table 2.4 show students' evaluations of the shadowing technique for learning pronunciation. All students (100%) found that shadowing practice improved their pronunciation of individual sounds and word stress. Additionally, 78% believed they improved their intonation, and 67% felt more aware of sentence stress in their speaking. Both the test and survey results agreed that shadowing practice positively impacted students' pronunciation. These findings align with previous studies (Lin, 2009; Salim, A., Terasne, & Narasima, L., 2020; Foote J.A. & McDonough K., 2017), confirming that the shadowing technique improves students' pronunciation.

This study explored the effectiveness of the shadowing technique in improving students' pronunciation, specifically in terms of comprehensibility, clarity, accuracy of word and sentence stress, and intonation. It also assessed students' evaluations of the impact of shadowing practice on their pronunciation. The findings indicated that participants viewed shadowing activities positively and found them to be an effective method for enhancing pronunciation. Shadowing

practice allowed students to hear and immediately reproduce sounds, enabling them to focus solely on pronunciation without other distractions. This method is effective because it requires learners to produce sounds with minimal delay, helping them practice all pronunciation features simultaneously and reducing the risk of incorrect pronunciation.

To successfully implement shadowing, "careful consideration should be made" (Foote, J.A & McDonough, K., 2017) regarding practice materials and instructions to ensure clarity of requirements and expectations. The current study's author followed Foote's (2017) tips, such as allowing students to record themselves while practicing, selecting appropriate models, providing manageable lengths of shadowing stimuli (sound files), supplying scripts, and encouraging students to closely mimic the speaking. These practices significantly contributed to the study's success and are recommended for the effective application of the shadowing technique in teaching pronunciation.

3. Conclusion

Shadowing is praised for improving English language learners' pronunciation through immediate practice. Despite a small sample size, findings confirm its effectiveness. However, challenges include a heavy preparation workload for teachers and significant time commitment for students. Despite these drawbacks, shadowing is recommended for broader use in EFL settings to enhance pronunciation.

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