The Development of English Language Skills through Shadowing Exercises

Yokubova Maftuna

Master student of Kimyo International University in Tashkent Branch Samarkand

Abstract. *As the communicative approach to English language teaching gains popularity, many universities and high schools have begun incorporating shadowing into their language programs. Although shadowing is traditionally used in interpreter training, Torikai (1997) highlights its numerous benefits for English language learners. This paper examines the role of shadowing in language acquisition by analyzing an English class in which students practiced shadowing over a period of three months. Following the practice, students completed a questionnaire, and the results showed that over 80% of the students felt their English skills had improved through the exercise and viewed it as an effective tool. Additionally, it helped enhance their motivation and led to more active participation in class. With the growing emphasis on communicative methods in English language teaching, numerous universities and high schools have begun incorporating shadowing into their language curricula. Originally a core technique in interpreter training, shadowing also offers several benefits for English language learners. This article delves into how shadowing can enhance language acquisition, specifically by analyzing an English class in which students engage in this practice.*

Key words: *English language, communicative approach, "shadowing" method, communicative competence, speaking proficiency, speech skills, communicative language teaching, speaking skill, speaking technique, educational technique, interpreting skill, motivation.*

Introduction. More than forty years have passed since the communicative approach to language teaching was first introduced in the realm of second language acquisition (Hymes, 1972, cited in Brown, 2000). Since its inception, various models of communicative competence have been widely debated and explored within the field of English language teaching (Brown, 2000; Savignon, 1997).In today's world, English has become a global language, widely spoken, learned, and understood, even in countries where it is not the native tongue. It holds significant importance across various sectors, including medicine, engineering, education, research, business, technology, banking, computing, tourism, and more (Kadamovna, 2021).

The main objective of English education is to help students strengthen their communication skills by improving their abilities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as expanding their language knowledge, which includes phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar. In the new general education curriculum, the focus is on communicative language teaching, which centers on improving students' ability to communicate effectively. Communication methods share certain similarities with the learner-centered approach in education, as both guide the teaching activities of instructors and the learning activities of students. It is clear that communication cannot occur unless individuals are able to express themselves in the language to their conversation partners. Consequently, over time, the significance of speaking skills in English education has been increasingly emphasized. The value of speaking effectively lies in its powerful potential to drive progress in language learning. Through speaking, students are able to engage with peers both within their own country and internationally,

exchanging ideas and perspectives. Mastering speaking skills is considered the most crucial aspect of learning a second or foreign language, with success often being measured by one's ability to engage in conversation in the target language (Nunan, 1995). Echoing this view, Ur (1996) identifies speaking as one of the most vital skills among the four language competencies, noting that those who learn a language are recognized as its speakers. The primary goal of English language education is to equip students with the ability to speak English effectively and appropriately. However, many language learners struggle to communicate fluently and accurately due to a lack of understanding in this area (Davies & Pearse, 2000). Numerous students report that, despite years of studying English, they are still unable to speak it properly or clearly (Bueno, Madrid, & McLaren, 2006). For over three years, we have been teaching English as a foreign language to Uzbek students. While they, like many others in similar situations, are proficient in reading and writing, they remain hindered by a traditional educational system that has not given sufficient emphasis to listening and speaking skills. To master speaking, students need to dedicate significant time to practice. Teachers can model language structures for their students and encourage them to repeat them.

The shadowing method, also referred to as the parody speech technique, was developed in the late 1950s under the term "Shadowing Speech." This method is widely recognized as one of the most effective techniques for helping students improve various aspects of speaking, such as pronunciation, prosody, and rhythm. In recent years, shadowing has gained significant attention in the field of English education. Tamai (2002a) defines shadowing as "an act or task of listening where the learner follows the spoken words and repeats them as accurately as possible while paying close attention to the incoming information" (181). Initially, shadowing was used as a training exercise for interpreters. In interpretation, the interpreter conveys the message as soon as it is heard in the source language, rephrasing it in the target language. The ability to listen and speak simultaneously is an essential skill for interpreter trainees. Because shadowing involves the dual task of both listening and speaking at the same time, it is considered an effective training technique for interpreters. At the same time, it aids learners in expanding their vocabulary, enhancing communication fluency, familiarizing them with sentence structures, and fostering greater autonomy in their learning. Recently, several educational experts have researched the shadowing technique and its effectiveness in foreign language acquisition, particularly in skills development. However, there is still much uncertainty regarding the most effective way to use shadowing to improve students' speaking skills. This study adds to the current research by filling gaps in the teaching of speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL), while also exploring the effects of shadowing on students' speaking performance. Speaking is one of the four key language skills essential for effective communication, especially when speakers are using a language that is not their native tongue. It is a crucial skill that enables individuals to convey their thoughts, ideas, or messages to others. As a macro skill, speaking is actively used to communicate meanings and information (Asakereh, 2016). Clearly, speaking is a language skill closely tied to communication, meaning it involves the ability to use language appropriately to express one's ideas, opinions, or emotions in order to share or receive information and knowledge. In this study, speaking is defined as the learner's capacity to communicate orally in a clear, fluent, and suitable way, within a relevant context.. As defined by Lambert (1992), shadowing involves closely tracking and repeating heard speech in a parrot-like manner, where a speaker repeats the words they hear, word for word, through headphones. Originally developed by cognitive psychologists and neuropsychologists, shadowing was primarily used to enhance simultaneous interpretation skills. However, Hamada (2011) argues that Lambert's (1992) definition overlooks the cognitive processes involved, which are a crucial aspect of shadowing. He suggests that shadowing should be considered "an active and highly cognitive activity" rather than just auditory repetition. Jaramillo & Isaza (2016) describe shadowing as a technique used to train interpreters in Europe, and it has since become widely adopted in Uzbekistan to improve English language skills. Similarly, Seo & Takeuchi (n.d.) agree that shadowing, initially designed for interpreter training, has been adapted for use in language classrooms by high school students and teachers. They argue that this technique helps learners strengthen their mental faculties and memory. From these definitions, we can conclude that shadowing is an advanced learning method in which learners listen to a text in their target language and simultaneously repeat it aloud, mirroring

the speech of a native speaker. As previously noted, acquiring communicative competence is currently a primary focus for Japanese learners (Mext, 2003). While this is crucial, many learners lack opportunities to engage in English communication or participate in exercises aimed at developing their communicative skills. Shadowing, however, can be a useful tool for enhancing communication abilities, as it involves multi-tasking during the practice. Given the effectiveness of shadowing, various exercises have been created and implemented to focus on this technique. These exercises help students assess their current skills in areas such as input, comprehension, and output, all of which are vital for effective communication.

The goal is to improve these skills in English classes. Consequently, the researcher emphasizes the following three key points to consider during the practice.

1. Participants should concentrate on correct enunciation.

2. Participants should attend to meaning.

3. Participants should reproduce speech by picturing the story.

The shadowing audio materials were taken from the textbook *Issues for Today*, which is part of the Freshman English curriculum. Given that shadowing is a complex and challenging task, most students would find it difficult to accurately follow and repeat the speech without having encountered it beforehand. To maximize its effectiveness and allow students to gain benefits in a short time, all the shadowing materials were drawn from stories that had already been covered in their reading textbook. Furthermore, in order to help students grasp the speech, vocabulary, and sentence structures, only three chapters were selected for the first semester. In each session, students first read through a few paragraphs and then engaged in shadowing practice. Since they were already familiar with the material, they were able to concentrate on listening attentively and performing the shadowing task without losing focus on the overall objective. In this study, authentic materials were not used. Widdowson (1990) defines authentic materials as real-life discourse, such as news reports, speeches, interviews, animations, and lectures, where the language style varies across each type of material. He suggests that such materials have a positive impact on language learning. If students become accustomed to practicing shadowing, authentic materials could then be introduced, provided they are interesting and suitable for their level of English proficiency. This would make the class more enjoyable for students while helping them become familiar with different accents. By doing so, learners would have more opportunities to engage with real-world English and further develop their language skills through shadowing.

Conclusion. Through empirical research, this paper examined the impact of shadowing exercises on enhancing the oral English skills of non-English major college students. The findings indicated that shadowing exercises significantly contributed to improving their oral English proficiency. Notably, the students' fluency in speaking English showed considerable progress, and their pronunciation and intonation were also noticeably enhanced. The difficulty of shadowing content can gradually increase, and the duration of shadowing exercises can be extended over time. Additionally, when students encounter unfamiliar words, teachers should encourage them to stay in sync with the recording. In the shadowing exercise, teachers play a key role by motivating students to actively engage with oral English, fostering enthusiasm, and ultimately enhancing students' speaking abilities through consistent practice.

References:

1. Bueno, A., Madrid, D., & McLaren, N. (2006). TEFL in Secondary Education. Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada.

2. Davies, P., & Pearse, E. (2000). Success in English teaching. Oxford University Press.

3. Ha, B.N. (2020). A study on the use of the shadowing technique to enhance pronunciation skills among junior English majors at Ho Chi Minh University of Food Industry. Presented at the Workshop on Innovation in Language Teaching and Learning. ISBN: 978-1-71674-888-2.

4. Hamada, Y. (2018). Shadowing: What is it? How to use it. Where will it go?. RELC Journal, doi:10.1177/0033688218771380.

5. Jaramillo, A. M., & Isaza, A. (2016). The Implementation of Shadowing Technique to Improve Oral Accuracy in Young Children.

6. Kadamovna, S.N. (2021). The significance of speaking skills for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).International Journal of Innovations in Engineering Research and Technology, 8(1), 28–30.

7. Lambert, S. (1992). Shadowing. Meta, 37(2), 263–273.

8. Le, T.T.H. (2021). Using the Shadowing technique to enhance the pronunciation of English learners who are non-majors. Vietnam Journal of Educational Sciences.

9. Nguyen, M.T. & Nguyen, T.O. (2019). Using the shadowing technique and authentic materials to foster phonological awareness in young English learners. ELT Upgrades 2019: A Focus on Methodology.

10. Torikai, Kumiko (1997). Nihon ni okeru Tsuyaku kyouiku no kanousei- Eigo kyouiku no doukou wo fumaete. [Possibility of interpreter training in Japan: From the perspective of English education]. Collected Papers from 'Interpreting Research'. Editorial committee of the Japan Association for Interpretation Studies.

11. Tamai, Ken (2002a The effects of shadowing on listening comprehension. [Keynote lecture at the 3rd Annual Conference of JAIS]. *Interpretation Studies*, No. 2, pp. 178-192.

12. MEXT (2003). Action Plan to Cultivate "Japanese with English Abilities." Retrieved from http://www. mext.go.jp/b_menu/hakusho/html/hpac200201/hpac200201_2_015.html on September 21st, 2012.

13. Widdowson, H. G. (1990). Aspects of Language Teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press.