

Can Shadowing Enhance EFL Learners' Oral Performance? A case study

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Abstract:

This study aims at probing the relationship between shadowing and speaking. In this respect, it has been hypothesised that EFL learners can boost their speaking ability if they emulate a particular recorded material. To attain this aim, a mixed-methods approach, particularly its one-group pretest-posttest design, was adopted as a quantitative approach and a quasi-experiment research strategy. The latter was conducted on 16 participants selected purposely from third year students of English in the University of Biskra, as a case study in our research. Additionally, a questionnaire was administered to a sample after the assignment on this experiment. Video recordings had potential value in the data collection and analysis as being a direct record of the issues of all the stages of the experiment. Therefore, the results of t-test paired two-sample for means and those of the questionnaire revealed that shadowing helps EFL learners to improve their speaking skill.

المخلص:

يهدف هذا البحث الى استقصاء العلاقة بين اسلوب المحاكاة و المهارة الكلامية. لقد افترض في هذا البحث ان طلبة اللغة الانجليزية باستطاعتهم دعم مهاراتهم الكلامية اذا قاموا بتقليد معدات مسجلة تخص اللغة الانجليزية. لتحقيق هذا الهدف، تجربة كوازي و تحديدا تصميم مجموعة واحدة تختبر سلفا و عقبا استعمل كمنهج كمي. هذا الاخير وجه ل 16 مشتركا اختبروا عنوة من طلبة السنة الثالثة في اللغة الانجليزية من جامعة بسكرة كدراسة حالة لبحثنا هذا. اضافة الى ذلك، وزع استبيان لهذه العينة بعد التجربة. قبل كل شيء، تسجيلات الفيديو كان لها قيمة معتبرة في جمع البيانات و تحليلها حيث ان مسجل مباشر للمسائل البيداغوجية خلال مراحل التجربة كلها. تبعا لذلك، نتائج اختبار في العينة مزدوجة المتوسط و تلك التي تخص الاستبيان كشفت ان المحاكاة تساعد طلبة اللغة الانجليزية على تطوير مهارة الكلام.

Introduction

Shadowing refers to the process of emulating a certain speech. The shadower listens to the auditory input over headphones and repeats what the speaker says. In this practice, the listener shadows out loud a source language as soon as it is heard using minimal pauses as possible.

Researchers consider that the integration of this teaching/learning strategy can promote the oral performance of foreign language learners. They presume that it can be a good technique to train EFL learners' ears on language sounds and structures, provides exposure to new vocabulary, and strengthen the speaking skill by supporting oral fluency. In this way, the more those learners shadow, the better their speaking will be.

Hence, stimulating interest in the speaking skill development is one of the most fundamental reasons that provoked this research. The instant need to improve the communicative abilities of most EFL learning through shadowing is the central matter of the present study since the demanding epoch that is based on technology does not rely anymore on traditional methods to teach/learn speaking, but on some modern strategies that can be useful, easily applicable, and enjoyable. That is, what is not unfortunately used in the Algerian context. For that, it has been hypothesised in this investigation that the emulation of a particular recorded input can promote EFL learners' speaking skill.

This paper argues for integrating shadowing in language teaching. It also seeks to provide evidence to support the role of this method in developing learners' oral performance. Specifically, the present paper attempts to answer the following questions: (1) Does the adoption of shadowing contribute to the development of EFL learners' speaking skill? (2) Does shadowing support instruction in speaking and hence encourage learners to speak fluently and effectively in the classroom? (3) How to use shadowing in EFL classes and how are students required to shadow a particular recorded material? And (4) Does shadowing afford EFL learners more chances to practise speaking? In other words, what are the justifications and benefits for incorporating this teaching/learning strategy in foreign language teaching?

In terms of its structure, this paper proceeds as follows: Section One attempts to delineate what it means to shadow. It displays how this research concept has come to emerge in the educational scene. It

identifies the different types of shadowing, and the various stages a shadower needs to follow to practise this method. At the end of this first section, it tries to provide a brief description of the advantages of shadowing. Section Two yields a rationale for the study. The essence of the fieldwork is to confirm or disconfirm the formulated hypotheses about the effectiveness of this technique for the learners. Section Three will be devoted to the discussion of the obtained results. Finally, the paper will conclude with a summary of the main findings and a few relevant recommendations.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Shadowing

Shadowing was first introduced in the domain of psychology. Specifically, it was used in the experiments of cognitive and experimental psychology in the late 1950s. In language learning, this method was first incorporated by an American linguist Alexander Arguelles in the latter part of the last century. His main purpose was to enable language learners become competent in many languages.

Regarding shadowing, the latter is defined as the imitation of a particular input as it is heard in a short period of time as possible. Lamber and Moser-Mercer (1994) recognize that, “shadowing is a paced, auditory tracking task which involves the immediate vocalization of auditory stimuli, that is, word-for-word repetition, of a message presented to a subject through a set of headphones” (p.321). Eizmendi et al. (2007) state that “it is a technique which the hearer imitates the exemplar’s words just after they are spoken” (p.281). Other definitions assume that shadowing affords learners’ several speaking practices since it involves the production of varied sounds and the use of stress patterns and intonation.

With shadowing, learners can be able to respond and use language without thinking too hard. In other words, they will be more fluent in speaking. Namely, Schweda Nicholson claims that shadowing is adopted to develop listening, speaking, and second language learning (cited in Smell-Hornby et al. 1994). In the same vein, Hatasa et al. (2011) consider that, “shadowing is a technique that is found to improve both speaking and listening skills among foreign language learners because it helps them to process information faster” (p.214). Similarly, Julian (2012) demonstrates how one can improve English speaking and fluency through shadowing. He asserts that “one of the best features of this technique is that it enables the learner to practise

pronunciation and train him/herself to be fluent in speaking even at home” (ibid). Rost and Wilson (2013) emphasise that, “shadowing is a useful technique for students who are reticent to speak in more open discussions activities” (p.125).

It is argued that shadowing has many types. Some types have been adopted in psychology; whereas, others have been introduced in language learning contexts. Kuota proposed six types of shadowing. These are stated as follows: full shadowing, slash shadowing, silent shadowing, part shadowing + comment, and part shadowing + question. For Murphey, there are only three types these concern the following: complete shadowing, selective shadowing, and interactive shadowing (cited in Manseur, 2015). For Kadota and Tamari, some procedures, such as mumbling, synchronised reading, prosody shadowing, and content shadowing, are also considered as other types of the shadowing technique (ibid).

In order to practise this method, the shadower should follow systematic stages. The beginning would be that the shadower has to find a recorded material that belongs to the target language. Next, s/he should listen to the input as many times as possible using a pair of headphones or earphones (if they are available, of course). This is a type of shadowing that involves focus on the sounds and imitates them without using the written record of the material (transcript). On this point, what is notable is that the stages may differ from a practitioner to another. This is so because the core idea of the imitation remains the central practice of this method, not what and how many stages they are there.

It is worth noting that researchers have claimed myriads and advantages of this technique. For example, Safont and Compoy (2002) consider that this technique can help learners to develop a variety of aspects and skills. On the same assumption, Smell-Hornby et al. (1994) state that the method enables learners to focus on what they are listening to and comprehend the input. In line with these benefits, Hamada (2014) remarks that shadowing is useful for improving listening comprehension skills. At another level, regarding classroom activities, Wiltshier (2007) asserts that compared to dictation as a classroom task, shadowing manifests as a high level of efficiency on the listening skill of the learners.

In brief, and referring back to the above literature review on shadowing, it can be said that this teaching/learning strategy appears to be a paramount exercise and an efficient paradigm in the language

learning. Its usefulness is that it can boost learners to develop the oral abilities and performance.

1.2 Speaking

Speaking is the action of expressing ones ideas and thoughts. It involves producing utterances and processing information. In other words, it is the exchange of ideas, or it is “taking thoughts and putting them into words and saying them, with much of this process being done unconsciously” (Safont, 2002, p.51).

In particular, speaking requires a lot of energy. It involves the use of several aspects, such as loud voice and clear ideas. It does not require the speaker to be only knowledgeable about grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and other aspects, but also to recognise the subject matter of speaking and the appropriate time to speak. Chastain argues that, “speaking is using background and linguistic knowledge to create an oral message that will be meaningful for the intended audience (ibid).

Successful communication is based on the speaker’s ability to convey messages and transfer information effectively, and on the listener’s ability to understand what is said. On the subject of speaking, speakers use some prosodic elements such as, pauses, pitch and volume change, and intonation to construct talk. They speak consciously or unconsciously reflecting their personality and creating a self-image through their talk (Luoma, 2004, p.10).

Effective speaking means satisfying the listener or receiver by captivating his/her attention, enchanting him/her, and establishing a good rapport with him/her. It is called the gift of the job” (Gangal, 2012, p.4). In this sense, effective speakers have a unique style of speaking and are knowledgeable about language, especially phonetics, which means they produce sounds correctly and present their ideas clearly.

Effective speaking is also pivotal for both teachers and students to promote interaction and establish a successful communication in the classroom. Hence, speaking effectively in the classroom enables the teacher to explain the lesson easily, as well as assists learners through manifesting their understanding of the lesson. In short, effective speaking demands being prepared and adjusting one’s speech to different situations.

In view of this, the speaking skill is vital to progress in foreign language learning. Communicating effectively in various learning situations demands developing the speaking skill of language learners

(Gok and Burns, 2012). It is regarded as the most fundamental language skill that establishes communication in the classroom. Hence, it is of tremendous importance to look for efficient teaching/learning strategies that can help in developing learners' oral abilities and performance. It is one of their best statements that the adoption of shadowing can stand as a good method to realise such and intended purpose.

2. The Study

2.1 Statement of the Problem

During their educational careers, the researchers have noticed that EFL learners are almost reluctant to speak in class. This deficiency seems to be resulted from the fact that EFL learners lack exposure to sounds and structures of the target language. This problem is also due to the dearth of language practice and rehearsal.

2.2 Research Questions and Aims

The present study addresses the following questions:

RQ1. Does the adoption of shadowing contribute to the development of speaking?

RQ2. Does shadowing support instruction in speaking and encourage learners become fluent?

RQ3. Does shadowing afford learners chances to practise speaking?

Based on these research questions, the present research aims at discovering what relationships exist between shadowing and the communicative abilities of foreign language learners.

2.3 Research Hypotheses

This study is founded on three pivotal hypotheses:

Hypothesis One: EFL learners can boost their speaking skill if they emulate a particular recorded material.

Hypothesis Two: If EFL learners shadow a particular recorded input, they will be more confident and engaged in the speaking tasks.

Hypothesis Three: Many aspects to EFL learning will be substantially improved through intensive listening to EFL recorded materials followed by simultaneous speaking.

2.4 Methodology

2.4.1 Research Approach

A mixed-methods approach was employed in this study. It involved both qualitative and quantitative-driven data. In specific terms, the

quantitative study sought to investigate the relationship between the research variables in this research in the form of analysing the data packed in terms of numerals.

As a qualitative study, the present research appertained to probe the participants' perceptions of, attitudes towards, and opinions regarding the subject under investigation.

2.4.2 Research Strategies

A research strategy is a plan of action to achieve a specific goal (Denscombe, 2010). In this investigation, two research strategies were used: A case study and quasi-experiment.

First, a case study is a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle (Nisbet & Watt, 1984). It is the study of an instance in action (Adelman et al., 1980). In our study, the choice of this research is justified by the idea that it allows the provision of an in-depth, complex, and thick description of all the participants.

Second, a quasi-experiment is able to have control over variables that a true experiment cannot provide (Campbell, Stanley, 1963). One of the advantages of this research strategy is the one group pre-test – post-test. Besides, it provides precise data about the subject under investigation.

2.4.3 Population

The population of this research included the sum of 10 groups (≥ 30 or > 40) students in each group. It is composed of 372 third year students of English at the Department of Foreign Languages in the University of Biskra (Algeria). From this sum of students, 16 of them were selected as a sample. They were benevolent and accepted to participate in the study. Consent letters were signed to justify their acceptance.

The problem for sampling was that of non-probability. Basically, a purposive sampling was adopted. This type of sampling is considered as representative since in its essence it requires of participants that is less than 30. The matter of generalizability was not posed since the study is a case study.

2.4.4 Data Collection Methods

In line with the research approach and strategies, two data collection methods were utilized in this study. Specifically, they were a questionnaire and a test.

To make these data collection methods final for use the researchers opted for the systematic stages of piloting and validation.

2.4.5 Data Collection Procedures

In the fieldwork of this study, the following procedures were carried out:

1. An Experiment

The experiment was conducted in three stages. In sum, they consisted of six sessions. For each stage, two sessions were allotted. They were as follows:

a. The First Stage

Both a mock test and pre-test were organised. Their aims were to judge the degree of proficiency of the test takers. Practically, these test takers were exposed to an audio-material and required to respond to three tasks.

b. The Second Stage

The core of this stage was about a treatment. It consisted of two sessions. They were executed in the laboratory. The participants were exposed to videos and required to carry out three tasks.

c. The Third Stage

A post-test was organised. Its aim was to measure whether any progress was realised, or not. The stage involved two sessions. Each session was afforded 75 minutes. They were also executed in the laboratory.

2. A Questionnaire

A semi-structured questionnaire was designed and developed to probe shadowing being as a technique that may help improving the speaking skill. The fundamental aim of this data collection method was to ascertain whether the respondents got profit from the incorporation of this teaching/learning strategy. In terms of its structure, the questionnaire consisted of five items and 29 items.

3. Results and Discussion

First of all, it appears that all the scores of the Mock test were bellow the total score (i.e., 100 points), which implies that our participants belong to the intermediate level. According to the scale of language level that is adopted from the 'Common European Framework of Reference Languages', all the students are ranked under the language level B1. However, the pre-test revealed that all students (100%) have performed that task that was assigned to them after the treatment stage, (70%) replaying their material 3-5 times in order to fully shadow it without and inclusion of pauses (75%). Thus, it can be disclosed that shadowing is enjoyable and useful.

The t-test of paired two-sample was proved to be a two-tail one for task one. Briefly, the post test's mean was greater (about 10.70) than that of the pre-test. Similarly, the probability value ($p=0.01$) was less than alpha (0.05). In other words, this simply indicates that there was a significant difference that led to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis. As a result, Hypothesis Three was confirmed.

In the speaking task, the results revealed that there was a significant difference at $p=0.01$; the alternative hypothesis was accepted since the probability value is inferior to alpha-value (0.05). As a matter of fact, the mean of the post-test (about 13.33) was higher than the pre-test one (about 11.62). This shows that the treatment stage had a positive effect on the participants' speaking skill development. This evolution can be greatly observed in vocabulary expression and pronunciation enhancement. Therefore, Hypothesis One was fully validated while Hypothesis Two was partially confirmed through paired two-sample t-test.

Equally so, the analysis of the questionnaire's result produced a quite similar picture. It can be seen that the pilot stage of Section Five had revealed that the layout of this data collection method was appreciated by the respondents. As a result, all the questions were understood by the majority of the students. Besides, the respondents' perceptions of speaking demonstrated they considered their skill as the most desirable one to develop (46%), and the most difficult one too (58%). Most respondents considered their level in speaking to be good (50%). The rate had also demonstrated that both psychological and language problems are encountered although the highest rate identified that they are constant speakers (58%). With regard to this matter, speaking is seen to be fostered by the teacher according to 50% of the respondents. Almost, a similar rate denoted that there is a carelessness of the teachers (42%) in terms of speaking encouragement. It can be inferred that the teacher has a prominent role towards encouraging the students to speak in the classroom.

Furthermore, it is noticeable that although the majority of these respondents (67%) practise speaking in various contexts, regardless of their classroom, they still have problems in speaking. It can be argued that most participants (83%) are sometimes exposed to English recorded materials; however, most of them have never attempted to imitate them (92%). Thus, it can be said that those learners lack rehearsal and practice produced by native speakers. In particular, most students supported the adoption of shadowing as a classroom method

(50% as a strong agreement and 50% as an agreement). The latter implies that shadowing was enjoyable and useful, particularly if it is applicable using a loud voice, and including some pauses from time to time.

The aspects that can be difficult to shadow refer to the pace of the speaker (43%), and intonation and tone of voice (25%). However, the latter can be minimized by continuous practice of shadowing. Thus, it can be inferred that shadowing trains learners to produce language sounds clearly (100%), listen effectively (59%) comprehend the content of the material (67%) and expand vocabulary efficiently (100%). This means that hypothesis 3 had been validated through this questionnaire. The majority of respondents (83%) stressed on that shadowing had helped them to boost their confidence in speaking.

In sum, it sorts out from this analysis of the results that the participants were satisfied and pleased to recognise that shadowing is an efficient strategy to improve speaking. They also asserted that they will persist practising it since it enables them to better various aspects in their oral performance.

Conclusion and Pedagogical Recommendations

The importance and usefulness of shadowing has been confined in this study. Through the two data collection methods used in this research, it is apparent that shadowing is one of the most paradigms that can assist the language learning process, primarily by developing the speaking skill.

In this respect, shadowing as an efficient practice is appropriate for all the languages levels, which means that it can be applicable by beginner, intermediate, and advanced learners. The latter can be used in multi-level classes in which the teacher can group his/her students on their levels. Each level will be exposed to a material that corresponds to the group's level.

Teachers should be encouraged to adopt shadowing as a technique that helps students understand the content of the lessons. In other words, they can useless on or lecture shadowing to promote the language learning process. Thus, teachers can assign tasks to be done at home in which students have to shadow a particular material in order to perform some questions that will be asked in the classroom or perform certain tasks.

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