



THE EFFECTS OF THE SHADOWING METHOD ON IMPROVING B1-LEVEL STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS.

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the common communication challenges faced by B1-level language learners, particularly in fluency and pronunciation. The study explores the effectiveness of the Shadowing Method, a technique where learners listen to and immediately repeat spoken language to improve speech production. A two-week training was conducted with 15 B1-level students, assessing their fluency and pronunciation before and after the intervention. The findings indicate that participants showed noticeable improvement in fluency, with increased confidence and reduced hesitation in speech. These results suggest that the Shadowing Method can be an effective technique for intermediate language learners, particularly those seeking to enhance their oral communication skills. Further research is recommended to explore its long-term effects and compare it with other speaking practice methods.

Speaking is one of the most essential skills in learning a foreign language. While reading, writing, and listening are crucial, effective communication is often the primary goal of language acquisition. However, many learners struggle with pronunciation, fluency, and confidence when speaking in a new language. These challenges arise due to various linguistic, psychological, and environmental factors.

To address these difficulties, several language learning methods have been employed. Role-playing allows learners to practice real-life scenarios, enhancing their confidence. Conversation practice encourages interactive learning and peer feedback. While these methods are valuable, they may

not fully address the need for continuous exposure to native pronunciation and rhythm.

A particularly effective technique for improving speaking skills is the Shadowing Method. Developed and popularized by linguist Alexander Arguelles, shadowing involves listening to native speech and repeating it aloud immediately, closely mimicking pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm. Arguelles, who has extensively researched phonetic imitation and fluency-building techniques, identified shadowing as one of the most effective strategies for improving oral proficiency.

Numerous scholars have recognized the benefits of this method. Kató Lomb (2008) highlights the importance of active listening and repetition, which aligns with shadowing principles. Similarly, Hamada (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of multiple studies, demonstrating that shadowing significantly enhances pronunciation and fluency. This paper examines the effectiveness of the Shadowing Method in language learning, focusing on its impact on pronunciation, fluency, and learner confidence. It also compares shadowing with traditional speaking techniques and explores its practical applications in language education.

In our research, we examined 15 students who practiced the Shadowing Method for two weeks. Our goal was to determine whether learners can develop proficiency in a new language within a short period and to assess the method's impact on individuals with low self-esteem in communication. Unlike traditional methods, shadowing emphasizes continuous auditory and verbal repetition, allowing learners to improve fluency more efficiently.

As discussed earlier, the Shadowing Method was initially introduced in interpreter training to develop listening comprehension, rapid cognitive processing, and precise pronunciation. It was widely used in simultaneous interpreter training, where professionals must listen and translate speech in real-time while maintaining accuracy.

One of the earliest advocates of this method was Alexander Arguelles, a renowned polyglot and linguist, who adapted it for language learners. He argued that shadowing enables learners to acquire natural intonation, rhythm, and pronunciation by continuously listening to and repeating spoken language without delay. His research suggests that regular shadowing practice can lead to significant improvements in spoken fluency and confidence, making it an effective technique for language acquisition.

How to Practice Shadowing

Choose an Audio Source – Use clear, natural recordings by native speakers (e.g., audio books, podcasts, news, or dialogues).

Listen and Repeat Immediately – Speak at the same time as the speaker, without pausing. Try to match their tone, speed, and intonation.

Use Transcripts (Optional) – If you struggle, read along with a transcript until you get comfortable.

Practice Regularly – Do short sessions daily (5–15 minutes) to build fluency.

In our research, we used short, engaging dialogues from cartoons as shadowing materials. To assess participants' speaking skills, we asked them to record their voices separately, without the original versions of the cartoon dialogues. After this assessment, we evaluated their tone, intonation, and fluency with the help of CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) speaking descriptor.

Here's how pronunciation and fluency are described across CEFR levels:

Pronunciation

A1: Pronunciation is often unclear, with strong influence from the native language. Frequent mispronunciations make understanding difficult.

A2: Pronunciation is somewhat clearer but still requires effort from the listener. Some sounds may be difficult to produce accurately.

B1: Pronunciation is generally understandable, though noticeable errors exist. Stress and intonation may be unnatural.

B2: Pronunciation is mostly clear and natural. Some minor mispronunciations or intonation issues remain but do not hinder understanding.

C1: Pronunciation is very natural, with appropriate stress and intonation. Small accent traces may be present but do not cause confusion.

C2: Pronunciation is almost native-like, with excellent clarity, rhythm, and intonation.

Fluency

A1: Speech is slow, hesitant, and heavily reliant on memorized phrases. Struggles to form full sentences.

A2: Can manage short, simple conversations but with frequent pauses to think and correct mistakes.

B1: Can speak with some fluency on familiar topics, though still hesitates when forming more complex sentences.

B2: Can speak smoothly and spontaneously, though may hesitate when searching for precise words. Can handle longer conversations.

C1: Speaks fluidly and naturally, with only occasional hesitation when discussing complex ideas.

C2: Can speak effortlessly and at native-level speed, adapting to different contexts with ease.

Initially, many students felt hesitant and self-conscious about speaking. Some struggled to articulate words fluently and lacked confidence. However, by the second week, they demonstrated significant improvements in both fluency and confidence. This aligns with research by Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (2010), who state that: "Shadowing and repetition drills are effective in helping learners acquire the prosodic features of a language, such as stress, rhythm, and intonation."

To further enhance their pronunciation and intonation, we instructed students to count the words spoken and pay close attention to stress patterns. Additionally, we introduced the humming technique, where students hummed the intonation patterns before articulating words in the target language. This technique helped them internalize the natural rhythm and melody of speech, leading to noticeable improvements in their pronunciation and expressive delivery.

In the final week, we conducted a comprehensive analysis and found that nearly 80% of the students showed significant improvements in pronunciation and fluency. Initially, many students were reluctant to participate, as they found the technique tedious and meticulous. However, after just a day or two, they began to notice positive changes in their speaking abilities. By the end of the study, almost all participants reported feeling completely confident in their speech.

We made every effort to conduct this research successfully and without disruptions. However, at the beginning, recruiting a sufficient number of

volunteers proved to be a challenge, as many students were hesitant to try this relatively new method. Fortunately, their hesitation was short-lived, and as the study progressed, they became fully engaged in the process.

Overall, we believe that we have successfully achieved our objectives. However, there is still room for improvement. In this study, we primarily focused on enhancing students' confidence and pronunciation, but the Shadowing Method has the potential to achieve even more. Future research could explore its effectiveness in accent reduction and the development of more natural speech patterns.

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