

# USING SHADOWING TECHNIQUE EFFECTIVELY TO IMPROVE SPEAKING SKILLS FOR FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH MAJORS AT HANOI OPEN UNIVERSITY

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of the study is to investigate the first-year English majors' perceptions of using the shadowing technique and their practices in learning English speaking skills at the Faculty of English, Hanoi Open University. A questionnaire survey was employed to gather data for the study. The structured questionnaire was administered to 253 participants from class K29. The survey results revealed that almost all students were aware of the role of the shadowing technique. The findings also showed the problems faced by first-year students in learning speaking skills. These difficulties were mainly represented by fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, insufficient vocabulary, lack of speaking practice, and others. In addition, the results indicated that using the shadowing technique would bring several benefits to improving speaking skills. As can be seen from the quantitative research, the students' attitudes toward the shadowing technique were positive. As a result, some strategies were provided to help the students improve their speaking skills effectively.*

**Keywords:** *Shadowing technique, English speaking skills, perceptions, speaking practice.*

## **I. Introduction**

### **1.1. Rationale of the study**

Over the past few years, applying technology to the teaching process has played a role in open education and helping educational activities become more effective. Technology helps people access multi-dimensional information, shorten distance, narrow down space, and optimally save time. Since then, people have developed faster in knowledge, awareness, and thinking. Computer-aided programs help people exchange and search for knowledge effectively. Modern learning

and teaching require approaching many different sources of information from many different perspectives. Accompanying open education are open learning resources, helping learners and teachers connect with knowledge effectively no matter where they are and at any time. Open learning resources are an inevitable development trend in current education. According to Wicklein (1998) [14], practical technology has the potential to significantly improve the learning experience. Teachers can employ visual technologies to enhance instructional experiences. The Internet and other online learning resources

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are easily accessible. Educators can quickly access knowledge from diverse perspectives due to its open nature.

Many universities have been increasingly moving away from traditional learning methods towards learner-centered ones. According to Chandha and Chowdury (2023) [2], collaborative learning is changing from a traditional lecture-based classroom to a more learner-centered one. As students gain various abilities necessary for learning, this transformation may impact their learning results. Successful speakers support the student's growth in communication and critical thinking. However, there are many difficulties in learning speaking skills as a second language. According to Shteivi (2022) [11], the problems or weaknesses faced by students in speaking skills are fear and worry about making mistakes when speaking and the material used does not conform to their requirements. Additionally, the teacher does not support training outside the classroom but rather in the classroom, making it uninteresting for students.

There still exist many problems in learning the speaking skills of English majors in Vietnam generally and at Hanoi Open University particularly, mainly because they need to familiarize themselves with how to use authentic materials in their learning process. Shadowing techniques have become an effective method to develop students' English competency. Therefore, the researchers decided to conduct a paper titled "Using Shadowing Technique Effectively to Improve Speaking Skills for First-year English Majors at Hanoi Open University". This article assesses the first-year English majors' attitudes toward speaking skills and the application of shadowing techniques. Furthermore, it analyzes the benefits of using the shadowing technique as a beneficial teaching method to promote students'

speaking skills in classrooms and their autonomous learning.

## ***1.2. Research Questions***

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the survey was employed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions towards speaking skills and the application of shadowing techniques of the first-year English majors at Hanoi Open University?
2. What problems do first-year English majors at Hanoi Open University face in learning speaking skills?
3. What are the strategies for using shadowing techniques to improve speaking skills for first-year English majors at Hanoi Open University?

## **II. Literature Review**

### ***2.1. Overview of previous studies***

So far, many previous studies from many researchers have focused on shadowing techniques for speaking skills. According to Acton [1] and Osburne [9], shadowing during pronunciation practice can improve students' speaking skills. Recent studies on the shadowing technique use experimental designs that only test working hypotheses and do not provide additional interventions to improve students' English pronunciation (Christa et al., 2020; Leonisa, 2020) [3] [5]. Ai-Ling Lu (2021) [6] also studied the impact of shadowing on Mandarin tone in spontaneous speaking. The study compares the effectiveness of shadowing, real materials, and textbook audio in improving learners' tone accuracy. To improve student-centered education, learners' views towards the shadowing activity and resources are assessed. Practically, not many pieces of research on applying shadowing methods related to first-year English majors so this article has fulfilled this area.

## **2.2. Theoretical background**

### *Definition of speaking skills*

Speaking plays a very important role in human communication and interaction. Speaking skills are defined as the skills that allow us to communicate effectively. They give us the ability to convey information verbally and in a way that the listener can understand. There are many definitions given by many researchers. According to Widdowson (1985) [13], speaking is an oral communication that gives information and involves two elements, they are: the speaker who gives the message and the listener who receives the message in the world, communication involves the productive skill of listening.

Based on the definitions above, it can be concluded that speaking skills are involved in many language-learning activities, both inside and outside the language classroom.

### *Definition of shadowing technique*

According to Manseur (2015) [7], "Shadowing can be defined as the imitation of a particular input as it is heard in as a short period as possible". He said it is a repeating activity of the exact words of an audio track or recorder input of the target language. Lambert (1992) [4] argued that shadowing is a task we vocalize immediately the auditory such as word-by-word repetition, in the same language. Therefore, the shadowing technique involves you shadowing someone else's speech, which means you repeat what they say. You can also refer to it as the imitation exercise, in which you simply echo what someone else says.

### *The roles of shadowing technique in the teaching and learning process*

The shadowing method, also known as the parody speech technique, was created under the name Shadowing Speech. This

strategy is widely recognized as one of the most effective methods for supporting learner in developing all areas of their speaking abilities, including pronunciation, prosody, and rhythm. Renukadevi (2014) [10] argues that listening not only facilitates communication but also enhances language comprehension. Listening in practicing shadowing is essential for mastering the language's pronunciation, rhythm, intonation, and accent. Listening also plays an important role in communication. Effective communication relies heavily on active listening. Listening provides auditory input for learners to engage in speech communication. Effective communication requires accurate comprehension of the input. Improved listening skills can boost learners' enthusiasm to learn spoken language.

### *Difficulties in learning English speaking skills*

According to Ur (1996) [12], Speaking is one of the most difficult skills language learners have to face. Many factors that cause difficulties in speaking skills. The first is inhibitory, as a result, students are concerned about making mistakes, afraid of criticism, or simply shy. The second option is to say nothing. Students have little motivation to express themselves. The third category is low or uneven involvement. Because of the size of the class and the tendency of some students to dominate, only one participant can speak at a time, while others speak very little or none at all. The final challenge is to use one's mother tongue. Learners who share the same mother tongue are more likely to use it since it is easier and they feel less exposed when speaking it.

### *The strategies of using shadowing techniques to improve speaking skills*

Manseurs(2015)[7] recommended the following procedures to practice shadowing: "First and foremost, the shadower should find recorder material that belongs to the target language." Second, listen to the input

repeatedly with headphones or earphones. The earlier stages involve blind shadowing, which is done without a written transcript. He acknowledged that shadowing can be challenging and suggested using subtitles or transcripts for practice. Northbrook (2013) [8] also provided many steps for practicing shadowing properly. The first step, according to him, is for pupils to gather shadowing materials from TV episodes, radio programs, audiobooks, and other sources. The materials should be appropriate for each learner's level, as the practice focuses on improving pronunciation and speaking skills rather than comprehension.

### **III. Methods of the study**

#### ***3.1. Pedagogical Setting and Participants***

The speaking skills module is a compulsory subject, including two credits and being taught from the 1st term to the 7th term of the English bachelor's degree program. The module content includes six units; each lesson provides basic grammatical structures, necessary vocabulary, and pronunciation practice to help students initially get acquainted with and improve speaking skills. In addition, each lesson also has a real-life communication situation (at a hotel, restaurant, airport, etc.), providing learners with useful conversation patterns.

The research participants were 253 first-year students in classes K29 at the Faculty of English, Hanoi Open University. The first-year students were chosen because they had never been trained in shadowing techniques and had difficulties learning speaking skills. Furthermore, they have been studying speaking skills in the first term, so they could more easily access the method. When the researchers gathered the data for this study, these students had finished the first term of the school year 2022-2023 and started the second term. With 12 weeks for speaking skills (30 periods in class and 60 periods of self-study), applying

the shadowing technique was a beneficial method to overcome difficulties in practicing speaking skills and motivate the students in their autonomous learning process.

#### ***3.2. Design of the study***

To achieve the aim of the study, a quantitative approach was employed. A survey was conducted with the participation of 253 first-year students in classes K29 at the Faculty of English, Hanoi Open University. The questionnaire consisted of 11 multiple-choice questions. All of them are closed-ended ones that focus on their perceptions of students towards the importance of speaking skills and using shadowing, the frequency of using shadowing techniques to improve speaking skills, the difficulties that first-year English majors at Hanoi Open University face, and the strategies of using shadowing techniques as a cutting-edge teaching method to promote students' speaking skills in the classroom and their self-study abilities.

#### ***3.3. Data collection and analysis***

##### ***3.3.1. Data collection***

The quantitative data from the questionnaires will be analyzed for meaningful facts, and figures for the students' perceptions and practices to determine the efficiency of using the shadowing method and students' success in acquiring speaking skills. The questionnaires were then analyzed by calculating each aspect's statistical data and percentage for findings and discussion.

Two language specialists were consulted regarding validity and reliability to check the unity between the questionnaire items. The initial questionnaire was tested and improved to make it more comprehensive, reliable, and valid for data collection.

##### ***3.3.2. Data analysis***

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## IV. Results/ Findings and Discussion

### 4.1. Results/ Findings

4.1.1. *The perceptions of the importance of speaking skills and the frequency of using shadowing techniques to improve speaking skills.*

1. What do you think about the importance of speaking skills?

252 câu trả lời

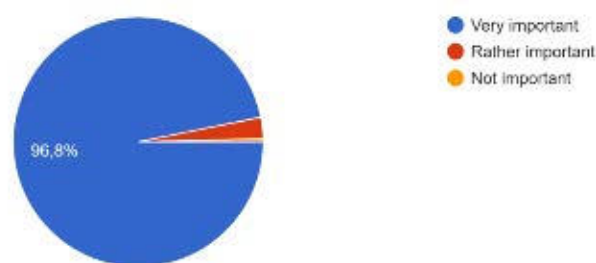


Figure 4.1.1a The perceptions of the importance of speaking skills

This pie chart illustrates that most respondents (96.8%) perceive speaking skills as important. Only a small fraction (3.2%) considers them to be “rather

important,” implying that there’s a strong consensus among the surveyed population regarding the significance of speaking skills.

3. How often do you use shadowing technique to improve your speaking skills?

253 câu trả lời

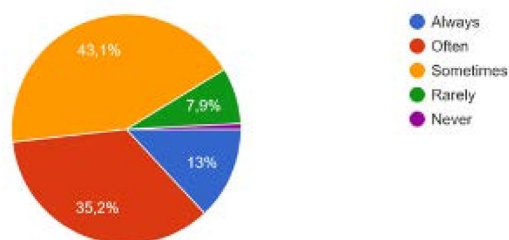


Figure 4.1.1.b The frequency of using shadowing techniques to improve speaking skills

Figure 4.1.1.b demonstrates that a significant portion of respondents use the shadowing techniques regularly, with 35.2% doing so “often” and an additional 13% doing so “always.” However, there is still a considerable portion (43.1%) who only use the shadowing techniques “sometimes.” The fact that only 7.9% of respondents use the shadowing techniques

“rarely” indicates that it’s not a widely disregarded method but rather something utilized to varying degrees among the surveyed population. Overall, this analysis suggests that shadowing techniques are commonly used among individuals seeking to improve their speaking skills, with a substantial portion using them frequently or always.

#### 4.1.2. The problems faced by the first - year students in English speaking skills

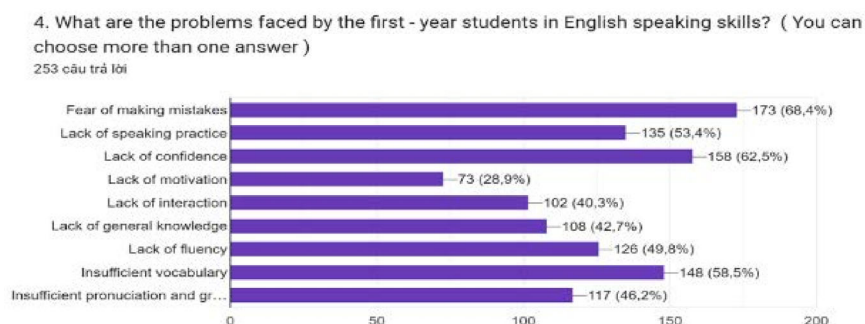


Figure 4.1.2 The problems faced by first-year students in English speaking skills

The bar chart displays the problems faced by first-year students in English speaking skills. Fear of making mistakes (68.4%) suggests that a significant portion of students may feel inhibited or anxious about speaking in English due to the fear of making errors. Many students may lack the self-assurance (62.5%) needed to communicate effectively in English, which could hinder their speaking skills development. Many students (58.5%) struggle with vocabulary, indicating they may have difficulty finding the right words to express themselves effectively.

Nearly half of the respondents (49.8%) face challenges in speaking English fluently, which could impact the flow and coherence of their speech. Many students (46.2%) struggle with pronunciation and grammar accuracy, which are essential components of effective communication. Other issues mentioned, such as lack of speaking practice, lack of interaction, and lack of general knowledge, also contribute to the overall difficulties faced by first-year students in improving their English-speaking skills.

#### 4.1.3. Strategies to use shadowing technique effectively to improve learner autonomy in speaking skills

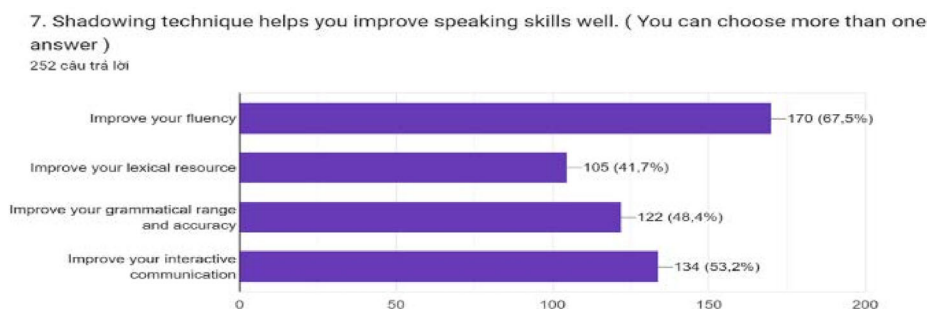


Figure 4.1.3a Strategies to use shadowing technique effectively to improve speaking skills

In addition, more than half of the respondents believe that shadowing helps enhance their ability to engage in interactive communication, indicating its effectiveness in promoting active participation in spoken interactions. Nearly half of the respondents recognize the shadowing technique's contribution to enhancing both

the range and accuracy of their grammar usage, which are crucial components of effective communication. Remarkably, a significant portion (41.7%) acknowledge that shadowing helps improve their lexical resource, suggesting its role in expanding vocabulary and word usage.

8. What do you normally do while you are using shadowing technique? ( You can choose more than one answer )  
252 câu trả lời

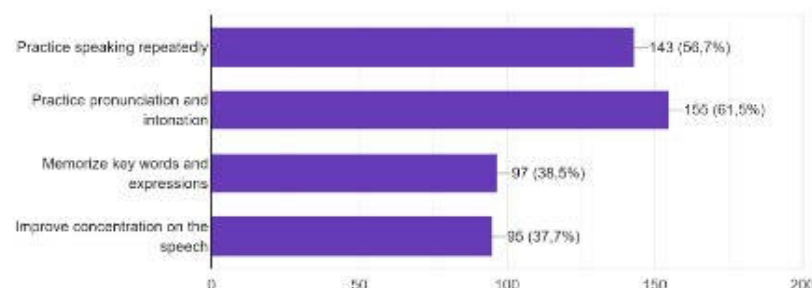


Figure 4.1.3b Shadowing technique activities.

This analysis suggests that respondents typically engage in several activities simultaneously while using the shadowing technique. The most common activities reported include practicing pronunciation and intonation, with 61.5% of respondents indicating they do so. Additionally, a significant portion (56.7%) practice speaking repeatedly, suggesting a focus on repetition to improve speaking fluency and accuracy. Furthermore, slightly fewer respondents mentioned the activity of memorizing keywords and expressions (38.5%), which still represents a significant portion, indicating that some individuals use shadowing to reinforce vocabulary acquisition and retention. Nearly the same proportion of respondents (37.7%) reported improving concentration on the speech, suggesting that maintaining focus and attention during shadowing exercises is an important aspect of the technique for many users.

Overall, these findings suggest that individuals utilize the shadowing technique in various ways to enhance their speaking skills, including practicing pronunciation and intonation, repeating speech, memorizing vocabulary, and improving concentration. Integrating these activities into shadowing exercises can help learners effectively develop their speaking proficiency.

#### 4.2. Discussion

Based on the theoretical background mentioned above and the findings on the

results and discussion, the study concludes with several recommendations for using shadowing techniques to improve English speaking skills for first-year English majors at Hanoi Open University.

##### 4.2.1. Using shadowing technique to improve pronunciation.

To improve pronunciation, the students should:

- aim to mimic the native speaker's pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm as nearly as possible.
- focus on specific sounds, stress patterns, and related speech.
- begin with shorter phrases and move to longer sections as skill increases.
- use audio or video recordings of native speakers with clear pronunciation and natural speech patterns.
- record and compare pronunciation to the original speaker to identify areas for improvement.
- regularly and persistently practice correct speech patterns.

Overall, learners can improve their language competency by focusing on accurate pronunciation via regular practice.

##### 4.2.2 Strategies for using shadowing techniques improve speaking skills for first-year English majors at Hanoi Open University

Step 1: Select video/audio.

First, the teachers can choose a video or audio with a native speaker's voice on their favorite topic to inspire learning. The students should listen to it all at once to grasp the main content of the audio or video. Only choose videos or audio within 5 minutes to avoid frustration. The teacher should choose videos with subtitles or audio with a transcript because first-year English majors have not experienced shadowing technique training in a blended class.

#### Step 2: Practice listening skills.

Listen to the video or audio 4 to 5 times until the students are sure that they have understood as much of the content as possible. While listening, they focus on listening carefully to native speakers' pronunciation of accents, vowels, consonants, and ending sounds. Listen and read subtitles or transcripts and look up unknown words.

#### Step 3: Practice shadowing

For autonomous learning processes, the teachers should guide the students to turn on the video or audio practice each sentence slowly, and then listen carefully and imitate each sentence. The best repetition rate is the same rate as the speaker. The students can slow down the video or audio speed to practice, and when they get used to it, they will adjust the speed to normal.

#### *Step 4: Record and correct shadowing*

The students can practice and record what they say and compare their recording with the original to identify areas where they might need improvement; note down any incorrect words and correct them for completeness.

### V. Conclusions

To sum up, this study explores the first-year English major students' perceptions of shadowing technique and their practices in learning English speaking skills. In addition, it attempts to find effective suggestions to improve

pronunciation and English-speaking skills. The most significant findings are related to technology application perception and improving the student's awareness of speaking practice. The questionnaire survey data are expected to be very valuable for teachers and students. Remarkably, the recommendations will motivate the first-year English majors at Hanoi Open University to improve their speaking skills. However, the study has potential limitations because of the sample size. Therefore, future research should be carried out with more participants from the Faculty of English-Hanoi Open University, from first-year to second-year students. Moreover, experiential research should be done to see how much shadowing techniques in the teaching and learning process improve learners' speaking competency.

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## SỬ DỤNG KỸ THUẬT SHADOWING HIỆU QUẢ ĐỂ NÂNG CAO KỸ NĂNG NÓI CHO SINH VIÊN NĂM THỨ NHẤT CHUYÊN NGÀNH TIẾNG ANH TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC MỞ HÀ NỘI

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**Tóm tắt:** Mục đích của nghiên cứu là tìm hiểu nhận thức của sinh viên năm nhất chuyên ngành Tiếng Anh về việc sử dụng kỹ thuật shadowing và việc học kỹ năng nói tại Khoa Tiếng Anh, Trường Đại học Mở Hà Nội. Câu hỏi khảo sát đã được sử dụng để thu thập dữ liệu cho nghiên cứu. Câu hỏi khảo sát dành cho 253 sinh viên các lớp K29. Kết quả khảo sát cho thấy hầu hết học sinh đều nhận thức được vai trò của kỹ thuật shadowing. Kết quả nghiên cứu cũng chỉ ra những vấn đề mà sinh viên năm thứ nhất gặp phải trong việc học kỹ năng nói. Những khó khăn này chủ yếu thể hiện ở việc sợ mắc lỗi, thiếu tự tin, thiếu vốn từ vựng, thời lượng luyện nói chưa đủ và một số vấn đề khác. Ngoài ra, kết quả còn chỉ ra rằng việc sử dụng kỹ thuật shadowing sẽ mang lại nhiều lợi ích trong việc cải thiện kỹ năng nói. Như có thể thấy từ nghiên cứu, thái độ của sinh viên đối với kỹ thuật shadowing là tích cực. Do đó, một số chiến lược đã được đưa ra nhằm giúp sinh viên cải thiện kỹ năng nói một cách hiệu quả.

**Từ khóa:** Kỹ thuật shadowing, kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh, nhận thức, thực hành nói.

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