

## THE EFFECT OF SHADOWING ON EFL LEARNERS' ORAL PERFORMANCE IN TERMS OF FLUENCY

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**ABSTRACT:** *Shadowing is a technique which has been used widely for many years and has led to much better listening comprehension skills. This paper reports on research aimed at discovering if there is a link between shadowing and the fluency of EFL learners' oral performance. Forty learners of Intermediate level took part in the study for a month as part of either an experimental or control group. A strong relationship between shadowing and the fluency of learners' L2 production was found. The results are of great significance for ELT.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Efl Learners', Oral Performance, Terms of Fluency*

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### INTRODUCTION

As ELT practitioners, researchers, teachers and teacher trainers we are continuously seeking for new techniques to improve our learner's proficiency. Shadowing is one of the ways which has been used to enhance listening comprehension and oral performance recently. It was not until the current decade that shadowing captured language instructors' attention and was incorporated into teaching foreign languages. Tateuchi reports that early research into shadowing was done in the field of psychology in the 60s (cited in Mochizuki, 2006). The main purpose was to train interpreters and it continues to be used for that goal. Tanaka (2002) lists shadowing as one of thirteen techniques used for interpreter training, affirming that shadowing is effective in developing a "good ear" for language, particularly in regards to accent and intonation, as well as improving overall listening ability. Hamada (2012) also states that shadowing was originally used for training interpreters. Shadowing has also long been used explicitly as an exercise to enhance simultaneous interpreters' timing, listening, and short-term memory skills before they even start translating (Kurz, 1992).

Lambert (1992) defined shadowing as a paced, parrot-style auditory tracking task, conducted with headphones. Rather than a passive activity, however, shadowing is an active and highly cognitive activity in which learners track the heard speech and vocalize it as clearly as possible at the same time that they hear it (Tamai, 1997). According to Shiki et al., (2010), shadowing is an on-line immediate process of repeating speech, while repeating is an off-line task because it provides learners with silent pauses in which to reproduce the sounds they have heard. Most of the surveys available on the effects the shadowing have been carried out to improve listening skills. In the majority of cases (Tamai, 1997, 2005; Suzuki, 2007; Onaha, 2004; Mochizuki, 2006; Toda and Liu, 2007; Watanabe, 2004) it has had a positive impact on listening skills. I intended to see if it had a positive influence on oral production as well.

Shadowing can be actualized in various forms, including complete, selective and interactive shadowing (Murphey, 2001). In the complete form the students repeat all the sentences uttered by their teacher. In selective shadowing, they choose to repeat the important, message-carrying parts. And finally regarding the interactive type, the learner adds comments or other words while still repeating some parts of what was stated by the teacher. This can also be called conversational shadowing. Other researchers have made suggestions about how to define and proceed the shadowing process (Kadota and Tamai, 2005; Takizawa, 2002; Kurata, 2007). Wiltshier (2006) categorizes various types of shadowing as: Full shadowing, Slash shadowing, Silent shadowing, Part shadowing [also known as echoing (Murphey, 2000; Peters, 1997)], Part shadowing + comment, Part shadowing + question, and "About you" shadowing. Hamada (2012) emphasizes the flexibility in which the shadowing technique can be employed. In the research conducted for this paper, the shadowing technique used was a combination of all seven types discussed by Wiltshier (2006).

It is claimed that input will be forgotten if it is not attended to (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968). Using shadowing ensures students pay attention to oral input and it does not go in one ear and out the other. If attended to, input passes from the sensory memory into the central executive area working memory (Baddeley, 1983). After the data is attended to, it needs to be rehearsed. All these processes help the input to be remembered and associated with what has already been stored in the long-term memory. Taking into account all the information discussed above, the research attempted to measure the effect of shadowing on the oral performance of EFL learners in terms of fluency.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research Question***

What is the effect of shadowing, inside and outside the classroom, on the L2 learners' oral performance in terms of fluency?

### ***Research Hypothesis***

Practicing shadowing will have a substantial effect on improving L2 learners' oral performance in terms of fluency.

### ***Participants***

To carry out this research, forty (40) learners were randomly chosen. They were all learning English in the same institute in Tabriz, Iran. The age range was 20 to 28 with the mean of 24. Almost all of the learners were university students. As for gender, we had 24 females and 16 males in this study. They were randomly divided into two groups, each consisting of twenty students. Regarding their proficiency level, they were almost all placed in the Intermediate level by interviews. Although they had all passed through the Pre-Intermediate level, interviews were done to make sure that the groups were homogeneous rather than heterogeneous.

### ***Instruments***

First of all, each participant in the study took part in an interview in order to assure the homogeneity of the groups in terms of language proficiency. The second instrument was a question answered by all the students at the end of the study. That question was: "What do you usually do

in your free time?” This question was selected since it was clear for all the participants and it did not include any unknown vocabulary and was not culturally ambiguous or strange. Additionally, SPSS software was used to analyze the results of the two groups.

## **Variables**

### *Independent variable*

In this paper, our independent variable was shadowing used as an exercise to foster the learners' oral performance

### *Dependent variable*

The dependent variable was the fluency of the learners. As the literature states, fluency is a fuzzy concept with a variety of definitions (Richards, 1990). In order to improve fluency, students need large amounts of comprehensible input and they must produce the language themselves orally. Shadowing meets both criteria.

In this paper, fluency was measured by calculating the number of words per minute (Skehan and Foster, 1999).

## **Procedure**

To carry out this research, the forty students were divided into two groups with twenty students in each one. One group was the experimental group and the other one was the control group. For the experimental group we had an introductory session before our four-week experiment. In this session, I explained all the seven techniques they could use for shadowing. I asked them to shadow whatever they could get their hands on including listening, reading, speaking, dictionary examples, their partner's speech or anything else at hand. I also mentioned that this was a “fantabulous” technique, confirmed by research, that would help if they really were interested in improving their speaking skill. No such session was held for the control group. Both of the classes were taught for one month, two sessions a week making eight classes in sum. Both of the groups were taught from the same book: Total English. The only difference in the classes was that the experimental group shadowed the listening exercises, some parts of the reading exercises and I checked every session that the learners in the experimental group were also practicing shadowing outside the class. They even sometimes emailed me what they had shadowed. At the end of the one month, all forty students were given a question to talk about. Their voices were recorded, transcribed, and stored for further data analysis.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

For data analysis, the recordings were transcribed and analyzed in terms of fluency. Then, the raw data was fed into SPSS software for further analysis. To compare the two sets of scores, descriptive statistics and Independent Samples t-test were conducted. As can be seen in table 3.1, the participants from the experimental group had a higher mean in comparison to the ones in the control group (15.38 > 7.75). The mean of the experimental group was almost double the mean of the control group. The difference is also displayed graphically in figure 3.1. This proves that shadowing was an effective technique in fostering the fluency of the participants in the experimental group. This difference is also statistically significant. In other words, the hypothesis that shadowing improves learners' performance in terms of fluency is confirmed.

## CONCLUSION

This piece of research is a small contribution demonstrating the effectiveness of shadowing in improving the oral performance of English learners, an area of research which has not received sufficient attention. It is indeed clearly established that being exposed to the language increases the chances of learning it faster. However, we need to create this being-in-touch-with-the-language by a large amount of shadowing practice for those learning in EFL contexts.

## IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research was carried out to highlight the effectiveness of the shadowing technique. I have previously emphasized this technique's significance as a fruitful way to enhance L2 performance in classroom (Zakeri, 2014). This paper was another call for all the teachers and educators worldwide to share their experiences regarding shadowing and specifically its effect on oral performance. They might also consider *complexity* and *accuracy* as other oral production parameters. This paper has implications in the realm of teaching EFL, ESL and ELT. Also it sheds light on techniques which are useful both inside and outside the classroom environment. As for limitations, the sample was small and this makes it difficult to generalize. Learner differences were not taken into consideration either. In addition, the time period of the experiment was short, particularly since it is generally held to be true that, together with appropriate practice, a huge amount of time is needed (American Educational Research Association [AERA], 2006, p.3) in order to achieve fluency in any foreign language. However, this research has a lot to offer and paves the way for a further survey.

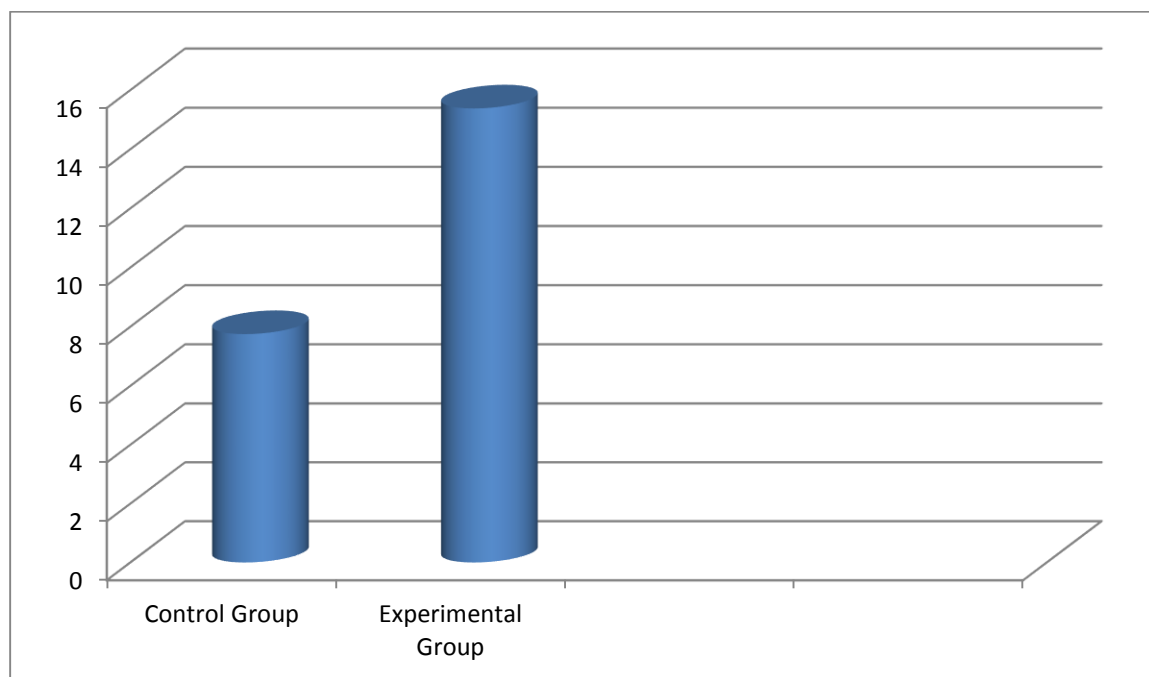
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Table3.1 . Descriptive statistics regarding fluency for the control and experimental group

Measure	Group	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Fluency	Control group	20	7.75	2.40	.53
Fluency	Experimental group	20	15.38	6.56	1.46



*Figure 3.1. Mean differences in terms of fluency for the control and experimental group*