

# Using Shadowing Technique to Measure B1 Level Learners' Attitudes towards their Speaking Skills

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## Abstract

*Speaking has been stated as being one of the most challenging skills by EFL learners in Turkey. A combination of psychological factors such as anxiety or fear of being criticized and linguistic incompetence has led to this problem. Although initially emerged as a tool to assist learners in listening skills, shadowing technique has also proven to be useful in improving learners' speaking skills as well. The aim of the present study was to see if shadowing technique was efficient enough to help B1 level EFL learners develop positive attitudes towards their speaking skills. Furthermore, the study set out to see if learners get rid of their speaking anxiety and could take active part in communicative activities in the future classes. For this ultimate purpose, a Likert scale consisting of seven questions and interview questions were used. After taking the required permission from the ethics committee, the study was conducted for four weeks, in which participants listened to and repeated the tracks from the podcasts chosen in accordance with their language levels. 31 participants took part in the study. The participants were asked to carefully watch the recordings by paying attention to the pronunciation, stress and intonation. The results from the study were analysed through content analysis and a descriptive research design was used. According to the results, it was observed that the majority of the participants developed positive attitudes towards speaking skills and felt more willing to express themselves in communicative activities. Further studies with more participants are recommended to see if shadowing technique is also applicable in different contexts and groups.*

**Keywords: Speaking, Shadowing Technique, Podcasts**

## Introduction

Although Shadowing Technique first emerged as a tool to improve learners' listening skills, it was later found out that it could be used to improve speaking skills of upper intermediate and advanced learners of English (Hamada, 2019). However, there is limited number of studies on that. Two studies done by Foot and McDonough (2017) and Hamada (2016b) required learners to watch authentic materials to improve their pronunciation skills. However, in both studies students were expected to have a higher degree of language proficiency. Thus, it can be said that low and intermediate level students can have difficulty in the implementation of shadowing technique as they are not familiar with challenging linguistic aspects of the language. From a different perspective, clarity can be said to be a crucial part of pronunciation aspect (Grant et al., 2014). As a result, more research should be done to show that if shadowing technique helps learners not only to improve their grammar skills but also to prepare them to be better speakers whose pronunciation, stress, and intonation skills show their level of English is at a competent level.

During the foreign language teaching process, which lasts from the first level of primary education to the university years, students are expected to master four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing). However, due to various factors, it has been determined that there is no desired improvement in students except for grammar and vocabulary. Speaking skill, which has an important place in language skills, cannot reach the desired academic level due to the fact that it is not emphasized enough, and students neglect it due to the fear of making mistakes or being offended. This situation causes students to remain recessive in speaking activities during the preparatory education process and to avoid situations that require speaking in business life after graduation. The 'Shadowing Technique' improves students' listening, pronunciation, intonation and emphasis skills, and by helping them acquire new word and sentence structures it contributes to speaking skills positively. The positive effects of this technique are also supported by scientific studies, which also show that students develop positive attitudes towards language learning. As made clear in Native Listening (Cutler, 2021), 1st and 2nd language learners have different methods for hearing and understanding English. As a result, non-native learners are expected to try harder to compensate for the inherent disadvantage (Hamada, 2016a). Using shadowing assists language learners to enhance their listening and speaking skills. When listening, people rely on two types of cognitive processes named top-down processing and bottom-up processing (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). As put forward by Hamada, shadowing enhances bottom-up processing in listening since it enables learners to understand and identify words (2016 b). Listeners who have lower proficiencies in foreign language rely on their top-down processing, as emphasised by Rost (2015). They tend to focus more on the general meaning of the input depending on the background information, causing bottom-up processing not to improve. As research suggest, shadowing technique improves incompetent learners' bottom-up processing (Hamada, 2016a; Kato, 2009; Tamai, 1997). Learners with low listening competence depend on their top-down processing to make up for their bottom-up processing as stated by Rost (2015). Thus, bottom-

up processing needs to be boosted while ignoring the interference of top-down processing. As a result, learners will have greater levels of understanding. Furthermore, they will develop positive attitudes towards language learning in general, which is a desired outcome of the teaching process. Therefore, this study aims at focusing on shadowing technique and its impact on learners' attitudes towards their speaking skills.

### **Challenges of Speaking**

Being one of the productive skills, speaking has been challenging for Turkish students who are learning English. Psychological factors such as speaking anxiety or fear of being criticized have played an outstanding role in deterring learners to speak in the classroom. However, lack of vocabulary, poor grammar, and inadequate listening input can be listed as the other reasons why learners hesitate to express themselves in spoken discourses. When in class, learners abstain from taking part in speaking activities requiring them to express themselves by answering the questions within the units. This hesitant behaviour continues in speaking exams which are divided into two parts. The first part is the read-aloud section where students read a text aloud. Evaluators score students' fluidity, pronunciation, and audibility. In the second part of the exam, students are asked to talk about several questions for a minute. Then, their performance is scored related to fluency, task completion, structure, vocabulary choice, and pronunciation. Both in class hours and in the exams, learners have experienced problems with speaking. Believing that having sufficient listening input via shadowing technique will foster learners' speaking skills, we set out to find out how it works with B1 level EFL learners at a state university preparatory school.

### **Research Questions**

1. Finding out learners' attitudes towards speaking skill
2. Improving learners' attitudes towards their speaking skills thanks to using shadowing technique

## Participants

The population was chosen from the B1 level students who have been studying at a preparatory school, at a state university for two months. 30 participants volunteered to take part in the study. The participants were all between 18 and 21 years old. Participants were asked to take part in this study voluntarily and they were reminded that they could drop out of the study at any time they wish. Additionally, the required permission was taken from the ethics committee at the university and a consent form was signed by each participant.

## Research Design

The aim of this study is to test the efficiency of shadowing technique in assisting B1 level EFL learners to develop positive attitudes towards their speaking skills and in enabling them to become more active during speaking tasks. In this study, a qualitative research design was applied, in which the answers to the questions in both Likert scale and semi structured interview were analysed through content analysis and narrated descriptively. As a result of this, the researchers were able to present the participants' answers in detail. In the beginning, the participants were asked to answer seven Likert scale questions. Depending on the answers, the researchers were able to see the participants' attitudes towards speaking skills. Then, participants listened to five podcasts the total duration of which was 55 minutes

## Results

### Research Question 1 Finding Out Learners' Attitudes towards Speaking Skill

**Table 1 Percentage of the Answers given to the Questions**

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never
Q1	26.6	26.6	36.6	10	0
Q2	6.6	16.6	50	23.3	3.3
Q3	10	23.3	46.6	13.3	6.6
Q4	10	30	30	13.3	16.6
Q5	6.6	16.6	53.3	13.3	10
Q6	13.3	23.3	33.3	23.3	6.6
Q7	100	0	0	0	0

30 participants answered the questions in the Likert scale. The first question was "How often do you feel stressful during speaking activities in the classroom?". The answers to the first question reveal that students feel stressed during speaking activities.

for a week and at the end of this, they were asked seven interview questions regarding the process of watching the video recording to see how well shadowing technique worked.

## Instrumentation

A Likert scale consisting of seven questions was used to see learners' attitudes towards speaking skills. Also, seven semi-structured interview questions were prepared by the researchers. This tool will be shared in the appendix chapter within this study. Due to the time limitation of the course, participants shared their answers through voice records with the researchers. Each interview took 3-6 minutes. The interview questions were also translated into Turkish so as not to lead to any misunderstandings or confusions. The findings were explained in a narrative way using content analysis method.

## Data Analysis

The data acquired from the Likert Scale were analysed quantitatively. The percentage of the answers given to the questions were found and the answers were analysed in a descriptive way. The data acquired from the interview questions were initially categorised and then codes were determined in accordance with the most frequently used words in the answers. The percentages of the answers given to the questions were determined and the answers were analysed descriptively.

Ninety percent of the students stated to suffer from not being able to express themselves in English. Only 10% of them indicated that they hardly ever experienced such a problem. The second question aimed at seeing if students felt intimidated when

it came to putting the stress in the correct place in a word. Half of the participants stated that they sometimes felt scared as they were not sure where to put the stress. The other half were divided into two groups where participants stated they either had no difficulty or suffered from while deciding to put the stress correctly. The aim of the third question was to learn whether it was a problem for the participants to pronounce a word correctly. 80% of the participants stated that they felt insufficient particularly when they were asked to pronounce words which they were not familiar with. Only 20% of the participants expressed having no or little difficulty with pronunciation. The fourth question was “How often do you feel discouraged about learning English when you have problems with speaking?”. 70% of the participants stated to get discouraged upon having problems with spoken activities, while almost 17% of the participants did not find that factor as a negative one for their English learning process. The other 13% percent got rarely affected by speaking-

related problems. The fifth question aimed at finding out if participants considered speaking fluently rather difficult. For almost 77% of the participants, speaking without frequent pauses was challenging. 3 participants stated they did not have any problems related to speaking fluently. The sixth question was somehow related to the first question but with a slight difference. Unlike the first question which aimed at finding out how much stressed participants felt in speaking tasks, the sixth question wanted to see if participants find it quite difficult to express themselves in speaking tasks. 21 participants expressed having some level of difficulty in oral communication, while the rest stated they either had no problem or hardly ever experienced such problems related to speaking. The last question was if participants considered speaking an important skill in language learning. All participants agreed with that. There was a total consensus between the participants who stated that speaking is a vital skill for language learning.

**Research Question 2: Improving Learners’ Attitudes Towards their Speaking Skills by using Shadowing Technique**

**Table 1 Distribution of the Answers in the Interview Related to the First Question under the Category “The Contribution of Shadowing Technique to Students’ Attitudes Towards Speaking Skills”**

Participants			
CODES		N	%
Pronunciation and Intonation	11		40.74
Already familiar		1	3.7
Fluency	7		25.92
Decreasing anxiety	4		14.81
Already competent		1	3.7
No contribution		2	7.4
New Phrases		1	3.7

27 participants took part in the interview. The results for the 1st interview question show that the Shadowing Technique (ST) helped participants improve their pronunciation. Participants also stated that they gained more fluency. 4 participants emphasized their level of anxiety stemming from speaking decreased thanks to the ST. There was one participant who was already familiar with this

technique and two other participants stated that the ST did not make any contributions to their attitudes towards speaking. One participant indicated having learned new phrases with this technique. Taking the results of the answers to the 1st interview question, it can be noted that almost 80% of the participants found the ST beneficial both psychologically and linguistically.

**Table 2 Distribution of the Answers in the Interview Related to the Second Question under the Category “Challenges of the Shadowing Technique”**

Participants			
CODES		N	%
Pronunciation and Accent	8		29.62
Difficulty of speaking and listening at the same time		3	11.1
Speed of Speech		10	37.03
No difficulty at all	5		18.51
Low self-esteem in speaking		1	3.70

As for the 2nd interview question, it can be said that the biggest challenge participants faced was the speed of speech. 37% of the participants found it difficult to keep track of what native speakers said as they spoke in their natural pace in the videos. Almost 30% of the participants found it difficult to understand native speakers’ accents and pronunciation. 5 participants stated that they did

not have any difficulties while applying the ST. 3 participants expressed that it was hard for them to speak while they were listening to the tracks. One participant stated to suffer from low self-esteem due to not being able to efficiently carry out the ST. Looking at the results, it can be concluded that the major challenges of the ST are the fast speech and identifying certain words.

**Table 3 Distribution of the answers in the interview related to the third question under the category “Willingness to Carry on Applying the Shadowing Technique”**

Participants			
CODES		N	%
Accessibility	8		29.62
Feel like a native speaker	2		7.4
Confidence	3		11.1
Listening and Speaking Skills		11	40.74
Try it to learn Turkish		1	3.7
Fluency		2	7.4

The third interview question set out to learn if participants were eager to carry on applying the ST in their future learning process. 11 participants indicated that they were willing to apply the ST to their learning as they thought it contributed positively to their listening and speaking skills. Almost 30% of the participants expressed their satisfaction with the accessibility of the ST as they could easily access

listening and video sources to practise this technique. In addition to that, 11% of the participants developed self-confidence thanks to the ST. One participant, who was not Turkish, stated to be willing to use this technique to be better at speaking Turkish. The results of the third question imply that the participants made use of the ST from several points which encourage them to continue using this technique.

**Table 4 Distribution of the answers in the interview related to the fourth question under the category “Benefits of Applying the Shadowing Technique”**

Participants			
CODES		N	%
Pronunciation, Intonation, and Fluency	19		70.37
Self-confidence		8	29.62

According to the answers to the fourth interview question, it can be concluded that the most important

contribution of the ST to language learning in general is related to pronunciation, intonation, and

fluency as %70 of the participants stated to have developed in terms of these skills. Almost %30 of the participants indicated that applying the ST has a positive influence on their gaining self-confidence.

As a result, it can be expressed that the ST has both linguistic and psychological advantages for the participants.

**Table 5 Distribution of the Answers in the Interview Related to the Fifth Question under the Category “Students’ Perception of the Importance of Speaking Skills”**

Participants			
CODES		N	%
A part of their profession	5		18.51
Self confidence	5		18.51
Crucial part of language and communication	17		62.96

The aim of the fifth question was to find out students’ perception of the importance of the speaking skill. The majority of the participants perceived speaking as being an important skill in language learning due its being a crucial part of language and communication. Five participants regarded speaking as an important skill because they are aware of the

fact that this skill will be a significant part of their profession in the future. The other five participants expressed that their self-confidence level increases in parallel with their fluency and accuracy in speaking. Thus, the results signify that the participants are well aware of the impact that being able to speak better can have both as students and future teachers.

**Table 6 Distribution of the Answers in the Interview Related to the Sixth Question under the Category “The Contribution of the Shadowing Technique to Decrease Speaking-Related Problems”**

Participants			
CODES		N	%
Pronunciation	3		11.11
Encouragement	9		33.33
Adjusting Tone		1	3.7
Decreasing fear of making mistakes	4		14.81
Already encouraged		2	7.4
Depending on the motivation for the culture and language		1	3.7
Still afraid	7		25.92

The sixth interview question aimed at finding out if applying the ST helped the participants solve their speaking-related problems. %33 of the participants indicated to become more encouraged, while %26 of the participants stated to be still afraid of speaking. Four participants answered the question saying that they had less fear of making mistakes. 3 participants expressed that their pronunciation became much better. 2 participants said they were already encouraged to speak. One participant was

pleased to be better at adjusting the tone of their voice while speaking. Another participant stated that the problems related to speaking anxiety can vanish or appear depending on the motivation for the culture and language being learned and discussed. Taking the results of the sixth interview question into consideration, it could be right to assume that 7 out of 27 participants did not totally rid themselves of speaking-related problems although the majority were pleased with the results.

**Table 7 Distribution of the Answers in the Interview Related to the First Question under the Category “The Reasons why Speaking is a Challenging Skill”**

Participants			
CODES	7	N	%
Fear of being criticized	11		25.92
Lacking enough exposure to speaking	5		40.74
Requiring knowledge of structure, vocabulary, and pronunciation	2		18.51
Unfamiliarity with the topic	1		7.4
Words not pronounced the same way as they are written	1		3.7
Lacking enough guidance			3.7

The last interview question set out to learn the reasons why speaking is considered to be a challenging skill. For the %40 of the participants, it was because they were not exposed to speaking enough in their language education period. Fear of being criticised was another reason stated by 7 participants. Almost %19 of the participants found speaking difficult as it also requires them to know grammar, vocabulary, and such other skills as pronunciation, stress, and intonation. For 2 participants, speaking seems a challenge only when they are not familiar with the topic. One participant stated that the reason why speaking is challenging is that the words are not pronounced the same way as they are written, which creates a problem for Turkish students in whose language words are generally spoken the same way as they are written. Another participant indicated not having enough guidance in speaking activities. There are again both linguistic and psychological factors contributing to the development of speaking anxiety, making it a challenging skill for the students.

**Conclusion**

The answers given to the questions in the Likert-scale show that all of the participants regarded speaking skill as one of the indispensable parts of language learning. However, they have difficulty in getting rid of the anxiety that arises as a result of the fear of not being able to put the stress, apply intonation, and pronounce some words correctly. This situation disables students from expressing their ideas in classroom activities. In addition to that, their psychology might get damaged due to the fear combined with stress that reaches a climax when the need to speak and exchange ideas arise. Briefly, students are aware of their weaknesses and strengths

in terms of their speaking capabilities. Depending on the answers to the interview questions it can be discussed that the ST is not only an effective technique to boost students’ pronunciation skills, but it also assists and motivates them to carry on speaking activities owing to the decreasing speaking anxiety accomplished thanks to applying this technique. One of the challenges of this technique is the speed of speech that students stated to suffer from; however, by listening to the video or the voice record in slow motion, they can follow what is said. The reason why such a difficulty occurs is that students generally listen to the materials which are adjusted suited to their levels, so they are not familiar with the everyday speech which is not aimed at teaching them certain topics in English unlike the ones in the authentic materials. In a nutshell, we can conclude that applying shadowing technique helps learners both develop a positive attitude towards their speaking skills and decrease speaking anxiety. However, further research with different research design and participants is suggested to see the effectiveness of this technique.

**Recommendations**

Within the context of the current study, 30 participants who are to study either in ELT or ELL departments at a state university took part in the research. Another study with more participants can provide the researchers with different results. The participants in this study were B1 level learners, so further studies could be carried out with different levels of proficiency such as A1 or A2 groups in order to see the effectiveness of the ST in various groups. The researchers carried out a mixed method design in this study. The current research took two

weeks in which participants listened to and watched videos the total duration of which were 60 minutes. Future studies covering longer video recordings can be carried out to see if there will be different results in the students' attitudes towards their speaking skills. Consequently, the current research is significant due to introducing students with a novel technique that can assist them to improve their speaking skills which will be an indispensable part of their future careers as they will be English teachers or instructors after graduation.

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