

The Effects of Shadowing on English Final Consonants among Secondary School Students at a Vietnamese Language Center

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Abstract
This study tested the effect of using Shadowing in comparison to Listen-and-Repeat drilling, on Vietnamese students' accuracy in articulating final consonants /t, d, k, g, s, z, tʃ, dʒ/. Forty students aged 12-15 years (approximately at the CEFR levels A2-B1) from two intact classes at a private language center in Ho Chi Minh City were participants. One class (n = 20) practiced Shadowing, and the other class (n = 20) practiced Listen-and-Repeat drilling, for eight weeks. Both classes had the same teacher, practice time (20 minutes per lesson) and recordings. Accuracy of the final consonants was measured by students' performances on word list and sentence reading tasks, done before and after the practice. The Shadowing group also completed an attitude questionnaire. Both groups improved, but the Shadowing group showed more improvement (6.75 vs 4.40 points out of 24), and the improvement was statistically significant ($t(38) = 3.84$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.21$). The difference was still statistically significant, after the control of the pre-test scores ($F(1, 37) = 19.90$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .35$). The students in this study showed positive attitudes towards Shadowing, with an overall mean score of 4.17 out of 5, and 90% of the students preferred Shadowing over drilling. The findings of the present study suggest that the way students practice final consonants affects how well they can produce them, and that Shadowing is a viable way to practice final consonants. Because of the small sample size and the use of intact classes, results should be considered as preliminary.

Keywords: Shadowing, English pronunciation, final consonants, Vietnamese learners, lower secondary students, quasi-experimental study

1. Introduction

English is a main language of international communication, teaching and work (Crystal, 2003) [5], and pronunciation is one important part of communicating clearly. Listeners often misunderstand a speaker because of inaudible speech (Gilakjani, 2016) [10]. Traditionally, research in second language acquisition focused on attaining a native like pronunciation; however, recently it has been reoriented to ensure communicative adequacy (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Levis, 2018) [7, 21].

In Vietnam, English is taught as a foreign language at public and private schools; however, insufficient attention is given to the pronunciation of the language (Nguyen & Newton, 2020; Nguyen *et al*., 2021) [23, 24]. After several years of language study, many students still have noticeable pronunciation problems. One main reason is the difference between the two sound systems. A Vietnamese syllable can end with only a few unreleased consonants. Therefore, students often drop or weaken the final consonants of English sounds. As a result, they pronounce words like /bʌ/ for bus, or /laɪ/ for like (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992; Honey, 2001) [2, 16]. Speech mistakes like these create significant barriers to communication. Final sounds of a word like c-a-t or cap or cab. Final sounds also indicate grammatical functions (Celce-Murcia *et al*., 2010; Jenkins, 2000) [4, 18].

Many teachers still use the Listen-and-Repeat drilling method, primarily because it is easy and simple to use. However, it often focuses on individual words and gives the learners a short pause before they speak, thus allowing them ample time to plan what they are going to say (Celce-Murcia *et al*., 2010) [4]. Shadowing, however, is a different technique.

With Shadowing, learners say the same as what they hear almost at the same time as the speaker, with a delay of less than a second (Kadota, 2019; Hamada, 2019) [13, 19]. Previous studies showed that engaging in Shadowing activities helped participants developed their listening, speaking, and pronunciation skills (Hamada, 2016a; Kadota, 2019) [11, 19]. However, most of these participants were university students or adults. These studies often measured speaking or listening skills in a general sense. Few of these studies evaluated Shadowing in comparison to drilling. Evidence on whether Shadowing can also help remove final consonants among younger Vietnamese students is scarce.

The author encountered similar cases in his own teaching context. At the language center where the study was conducted, students used English in many speaking activities; however, teachers often noticed that students omitted or changed final consonants in words. Students were often able to repeat the target words during drills, but many of them omitted the final sounds when they spoke freely. This meant the current practice did not fully resolve the issue.

This study assesses if Shadowing is more effective in addressing the problem of accuracy of eight English final consonants among Vietnamese secondary students as compared to Listen-and-Repeat drilling. The study addresses the following questions:

1. To what extent does Shadowing improve English final consonant accuracy compared with traditional Listen-and-Repeat drilling among Vietnamese secondary school students?
2. What are the students' attitudes toward using Shadowing activities for their pronunciation practice?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Final Consonants and Vietnamese Learners

Final consonants are important for intelligibility. They help listeners distinguish words that differ in only one sound, such as *cat*, *cap* and *cab* (Jenkins, 2000) [18], and they carry grammatical information, including plural endings, third-person singular verbs and regular past tense endings (Celce-Murcia *et al*., 2010) [4]. When these sounds are dropped, listeners need more effort to recover both the word and the grammar of the sentence.

For Vietnamese learners, final consonants are a persistent problem, mainly because of first language transfer (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992; Lightbown & Spada, 2013) [2, 22]. A Vietnamese syllable can end only in an unreleased voiceless stop (/p, t, k/) or a nasal (/m, n, ŋ/). Vietnamese has no final fricatives, affricates, voiced stops or consonant clusters (Honey, 2001) [16]. Learners therefore tend to omit or replace English final sounds, as in *nose* /nəʊz/ pronounced as /nəʊ/ or *bus* /bʌs/ pronounced as /bʌ/. In a study of 16 Vietnamese adult learners, Disney and Le (2024) [8] found that 28.4% of expected word-final /s/ and /z/ were omitted, and they concluded that this omission cannot be explained by first language transfer alone.

2.2. Shadowing and Listen-and-Repeat Drilling

Shadowing initially was mainly used in interpreter training (Hsieh *et al*., 2013) [17]. In the class, students listen to an audio and shadow it (Hamada, 2019, 2021) [13, 14]. Shadowing with a gap can help final consonants in various ways. One is the Noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990) [27] which states that to learn a language form, the learner must be conscious of it. As Students must follow the speaker in real time, they may become conscious of the gap between their lack of producing final sounds and the model. The other theory is the Skill Acquisition hypothesis (DeKeyser, 2007) [6] which states that if a language activity is practiced repeatedly, that activity can be done automatically. In drilling, learners may revert to their first language habits before they start the repetition activity, however in shadowing, there is no such break.

Listen-and-Repeat drilling comes from the Audiolingual method (Celce-Murcia *et al*., 2010) [4] and it is the most common type of pronunciation practice in Vietnamese classrooms. It is simple to manage and immediately gives teacher feedback. There are studies (Trofimovich & Gatbonton, 2006) [29] which prove that repeated work with teacher's guidance can improve L2 pronunciation and there are metanalyses (Lee *et al*., 2015; Saito, 2012; Thomson & Derwing, 2015) [20, 26, 28] showing that there are improvements after explicit and focused instruction. Thus, drilling is not a futile method and thus Shadowing cannot be said to be better. Shadowing is quite demanding because learners may find the audio recordings to be too fast and/or too difficult (Hamada, 2016b; Kadota, 2019) [12, 19].

Table 1: Comparison of Shadowing and Listen-and-Repeat drilling

Feature	Shadowing	Listen-and-Repeat drilling
Timing	Learners speak almost at the same time as the model	Learners speak after the model, during a pause
Unit of practice	Connected speech	Mainly isolated words or single sentences
Teacher's role	Facilitator; self-checking with recordings	Teacher-fronted; immediate oral correction

2.3. Previous Studies

International studies have focused on the effects of Shadowing on listening comprehension, information processing speed and speaking rate (Hamada, 2016a; Kadota, 2019) [11, 19]. Kadota (2019) [19] posited that repeated Shadowing exercises strengthen the phonological loop in the working memory of the learners, enabling them to keep and repeat sounds. Foote and McDonough (2017) [9] conducted an experiment shadowing with mobile technology and assessed both a shadowing task and an extemporaneous speaking task in second language learners for their comprehensibility, accent, and fluency. In Vietnam, Nguyen (2025) [25] reported positive effects of a structured Shadowing program on the speaking performance of non-English-major freshmen at university. While there are very few studies with younger learners, Au (2024) [1] reported improvements in listening and speaking of a Shadowing group in a language center; however, he presented the data in form of percentages only. Hoang and Nguyen (2025) [15] conducted their study with Grade 11 students; the participants in the Shadowing group showed improved speaking scores after 8 weeks, although the researchers noted the students repeat after a short pause, and the way they pronounced sounds was evaluated as a whole.

2.4. Research Gap

Despite these promising findings, three notable gaps remain in literature. First, there is little evidence that Shadowing affects specific segmental features such as final consonants. Second, few studies compared Shadowing with drilling while keeping materials, practice time and teacher the same. Third, most participants were university students or adults, and younger learners at language centers, who are at a lower level and have less exposure to English outside class, have received little attention. The present study addresses these gaps.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design, Setting and Participants

The study used a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test design with two intact classes. It was carried out at a private English language center in an urban district of Ho Chi Minh City, where students attend communicative English classes twice a week for 90 minutes after school. Public school English in Vietnam focuses mainly on grammar, vocabulary and reading, so pronunciation practice is limited, and centers such as this one partly fill that gap.

The participants were 40 Vietnamese students aged 12 to 15, selected by convenience sampling from two intact classes of 20. The center's placement test placed all of them at the elementary to pre-intermediate level (CEFR A2-B1). They all spoke Vietnamese as their first language and had studied English at public schools for three to five years. One class was the experimental group (Shadowing) and the other was the control group (Listen-and-Repeat drilling). Both classes used the same textbook, objectives and instructional hours, and both were taught by the same teacher, who was also the researcher.

3.2. Instruments

Pronunciation test. The same test was used before and after the treatment. Part 1 was a word-list task of 16 words (for example *cat*, *dog*, *bus*, *nose*, *nose*, *watch* and *bridge*), and Part 2 was a sentence-reading task of 8 sentences (for example *The cat is sleeping on the mat*). Each correctly produced final consonant was awarded one point, and an omitted or altered sound was given zero, therefore the maximum score was 24. In the case of final consonants, if a student produced a voiced final consonant as its voiceless pair (e.g. /d/ as in bed, produced as /t/), the production was considered replacement, as final consonant voicing affects intelligibility (Jenkins, 2000) [18]. Students were tested individually in a quiet room, and their recordings were saved anonymously (S01 to S40).

Questionnaire: The experimental group filled out a 10-item questionnaire after the treatment. The questionnaire contained three sections: participating and engagement (Items 1-3), perceiving improvement (Items 4-7), and attitudes towards Shadowing (Items 8-10). It was written in Vietnamese and created on a 5-point Likert scale.

Scoring and reliability: The recordings were evaluated by two TESOL raters, who were not aware of the groups and/or the time of the test. They gave the same total score for 61 of the 80 tests (76.25%), and the intraclass correlation coefficient was .964 for the pre-test and .980 for the post-test. Final voicing was judged primarily by the duration of the preceding vowel, which is longer before voiced consonants, because English voiced final consonants are often partially devoiced. Differences of one to three points were resolved through discussion and by checking waveforms in Praat. ELSA Speak was used only as an additional reference. Two TESOL specialists checked the content of the test, and the test and questionnaire were piloted with 10 students who did not take part in the main study. The questionnaire had an acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .70).

3.3. Treatment

The treatment lasted eight weeks (16 lessons of 90 minutes). Each week focused on one final consonant, in the order /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/, /s/, /z/, /tʃ/ and /dʒ/, using movie clips, songs, short dialogues and riddles of about one minute. The teacher introduced the sound in the same way in both groups, and the last 20 minutes of each lesson were used for practice with the same recordings. The two practice routines differed as follows (Table 2).

Table 2: Practice routines of the two groups

Step	Experimental group (Shadowing)	Control group (Listen-and-Repeat)
1	Listen to the recording and notice the target final consonants	Listen to the recording played by the teacher
2	Mumble along with the audio	Repeat each word or sentence after the teacher pauses the recording
3	Shadow aloud with the transcript (parallel shadowing)	Receive short oral correction from the teacher
4	Shadow aloud without the transcript (blind shadowing)	Choral repetition and individual reading from the transcript
5	Record the shadowing, compare it with the original and underline dropped final consonants	Record the repetition, compare it with the original and underline dropped final consonants
6	Short teacher feedback on common errors	-

The only planned difference between the groups was the way students practiced with the recordings. Textbook, target sounds, audio, syllabus, teacher, weekly hours and the 20 minutes of practice were the same, and both groups checked their own recordings. ELSA Speak and Praat were not used during practice.

3.4. Procedure and Data Analysis

The pre-test was given in Week 1, the treatment ran from Week 2 to Week 9, and the post-test and questionnaire were given in Week 10. Parental consent was obtained because the participants were minors, participation was voluntary, and all data were anonymized.

Data were analyzed in SPSS. An independent-samples t-test on the pre-test scores checked that the groups started at a similar level. Paired-samples t-tests examined progress within each group, and independent-samples t-tests compared post-test and gain scores between groups. Some score distributions were not normal, but t-tests were still used because the two groups had equal sizes (Boneau, 1960) [3]. An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with the pre-test as covariate was also run, after checking that the regression slopes were similar in the two groups ($p = .756$) and that the variances were equal ($p = .606$). Cohen's d and partial η^2 were used as effect sizes, with $\alpha = .05$. Questionnaire data were

analyzed with frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations (*SD*).

4. Results

4.1. Pronunciation Test

The two groups started at a similar level. The pre-test means were 10.70 for the Shadowing group and 10.50 for the control group, and the difference was not significant ($p = .884$). Both groups made significant progress from the pre-test to the post-test (Table 3). The Shadowing group improved by 6.75 points, $t(19) = 16.48$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.87$, and the control group by 4.40 points, $t(19) = 9.66$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.00$. Every student in both classes scored higher on the post-test.

Table 3: Pre-test, post-test and gain scores (maximum = 24)

Group	Pre-test M (*SD*)	Post-test M (*SD*)	Gain M (*SD*)	Score as % of maximum
Shadowing ($n = 20$)	10.70 (3.91)	17.45 (3.32)	6.75 (1.83)	45% to 73%
Drilling ($n = 20$)	10.50 (4.68)	14.90 (4.12)	4.40 (2.04)	44% to 62%

The more important question is whether the Shadowing group improved more. The post-test mean of the Shadowing group was significantly higher, $t(38) = 2.16$, $p = .037$, $d = 0.68$, and the difference in gain scores was larger, 2.35 points, $t(38) = 3.84$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.21$. An ANCOVA with the pre-test as covariate confirmed the result: after starting level was controlled, the Shadowing group still scored significantly higher on the post-test, $F(1, 37) = 19.90$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .35$. The adjusted post-test means were 17.37 for the Shadowing group and 14.98 for the control group. The distribution of gains shows the same pattern. Thirteen of 20 students in the Shadowing group gained 7 points or more, while 14 of 20 students in the drilling group gained 4 points or fewer. The median gain was 7 points for Shadowing and 4 points for drilling.

4.2. Attitude Questionnaire

Students in the Shadowing group reported positive attitudes (overall $M = 4.17$ out of 5). No student chose "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree" for any item, and between 80% and 90% agreed or strongly agreed with each statement. The remaining students chose "Neutral". All three dimensions of the questionnaire had high means (Table 4).

Table 4: Questionnaire results by dimension (n = 20)

Dimension	Items	M	Agree and strongly agree
Participation and engagement	1-3	4.18	80-90%
Perceived improvement	4-7	4.13	80-90%
Attitudes toward Shadowing	8-10	4.22	85-90%

The highest means were for Item 1, on finding Shadowing activities interesting and engaging ($M = 4.30$), and Item 8, on preferring Shadowing over traditional Listen-and-Repeat drilling ($M = 4.30$). Item 4, on awareness of final consonants, had the highest mean among the perceived improvement items ($M = 4.25$). Item 7, on recording and listening to oneself, had the lowest mean ($M = 4.05$), although it was still in the "agree" range.

5. Discussion

5.1. The Effect of Shadowing on Final Consonants

The results show that Shadowing improved final consonant accuracy more than Listen-and-Repeat drilling. The Shadowing group rose from about 45% to 73% of the maximum score, against 44% to 62% for the control group, and the advantage remained after the pre-test scores were controlled. Several features of the two techniques may explain this difference.

One key factor is the timing of speech production. Vietnamese syllables end with a vowel, a nasal or an unreleased stop, so learners often leave out English final sounds. In Listen-and-Repeat, students repeat after a pause, which gives them time to prepare each word but does not require them to produce final sounds at natural speed. In Shadowing, students speak almost at the same time as the audio, so they cannot slow down to add a final sound. This kind of practice may help learners move from controlled to more automatic production, as Skill Acquisition Theory suggests (DeKeyser, 2007) [6]. The Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990) [27] offers a second explanation, since following the audio in real time requires close listening and may make the gap between their speech and the model easier to notice.

The second is the way teacher feedback was given. In the control group, the teacher corrected students aloud after almost every repetition. In the Shadowing group, students could not stop to be corrected, because they had to keep up with the audio, and the teacher gave only short feedback on common errors at the end. Both groups recorded themselves, compared their recording with the original and underlined the final consonants they had dropped, so self-checking does not explain the difference. The advantage of Shadowing may therefore come from continuous practice with the whole recording at natural speed, with the learner's own attention on the sounds, rather than from more correction by the teacher. This remains an interpretation, because the study did not measure how much feedback each student received.

Both groups scored below 50% at the pre-test, although the students had studied English at school for three to five years. This fits the limited attention to pronunciation in public school English. The low starting level may explain why drilling also brought a clear improvement of 4.40 points, but it does not explain why Shadowing led to a larger gain.

The final possibility concerns the application of /s/ and /z/, which used to be practiced as plural and third-person endings. Vietnamese learners omit these sounds and can also make sentences ungrammatical. This can suggest that benefits of Shadowing connected speech can extend beyond phonetic realization. This was not tested in the current study, as results were not analyzed based on sound groups, and this can be a focus of future work.

5.2. Students' Attitudes Toward Shadowing

Generally, students were in favor of Shadowing, and the highest means were for interest (Item 1) and preference toward Shadowing over drilling (Item 8). Item 4 (awareness of final consonants) was the highest item in the perceived improvement group, which matches the Noticing explanation above. Traditional practice, such as repeating sounds one by one or being corrected in front of the class, can be stressful for students of this age. In Shadowing, students practiced aloud together, so they were corrected in public less often and had more control over their practice. The positive attitudes are more likely related to the way of practicing than to the materials, because both groups used the same recordings.

These results must be read carefully. As mentioned in Item 8, Shadowing was compared to a method the students had used before at the same center, so Shadowing may have seemed more interesting because it was new, and an eight-week study cannot show if this interest lasts. As the teacher also did the research, and the students were between 12 and 15, some may have answered more positively than they felt. In addition, the items in the questionnaire were positively phrased, and only the Shadowing group answered them. Between 10% and 20% of students chose 'Neutral' on every item, and so we can say not all students were fully positive.

5.3. Comparison with Previous Studies

The results regarding Shadowing are in line with previous studies. A positive influence of Shadowing on the phonological loop is reported by Kadota (2019) [19]. Furthermore, Nguyen (2025) [25] reported that a structured Shadowing program improved the speaking skills of Vietnamese University students. The present study is closest to Hoang and Nguyen (2025) [15]. They also used two intact classes (total 40 students) over a period of eight weeks, and positive attitudes in the Shadowing group were also found in their study. The two studies are different in three ways. The students in the other study repeated the audio after a short pause, and in the present study, students were required to speak almost simultaneously with the audio. Their study measured pronunciation as a whole, while this study measured only final consonants. Their control group followed the regular curriculum, while the control group here practiced the same sounds with the same recordings for the same time. The result of Au (2024) [1] with young learners at a language center points in the same direction.

5.4. Contributions and Practical Meaning

This study makes three contributions. It focuses on one clear problem of Vietnamese learners instead of pronunciation in general. It involves secondary school students at a language center, a group that has received less attention than university students. It compares two ways of practicing while keeping materials, practice time and teacher the same.

The findings also have a practical meaning. The procedure needs only a recording of about one minute, 20 minutes at the end of a lesson, and a way for students to record their own voices. A class of about 20 students is small enough for the teacher to monitor and give short feedback, so teachers at similar centers can apply it without changing the rest of their lessons. For classroom implementation, teachers can organize students to record their practice in small groups of four in separate corners of the room to minimize background noise during self-checking.

5.5. Limitations

The advantages of Shadowing should not be overstated. The control group also improved by more than four points, which shows that drills are useful when the target sounds are practiced regularly. Part of the improvement in both groups may be related to taking the same test twice. The post-test difference was moderate (d = 0.68), and each class included students with a wide range of abilities.

Whether Shadowing caused the better results is another question. Both groups practiced the same sounds with the same recordings, for the same time and with the same teacher, and ELSA Speak and Praat were used only for scoring. However, the study used intact classes, the sample was small (N = 40) and came from one center, and the teacher knew which class used the new technique. In the Shadowing class, many students spoke at the same time, so the teacher could not hear each student clearly or correct every error at once. Self-recording and short feedback on common errors reduced this problem, but some individual errors may have gone unnoticed. The researcher also saw that some students could not keep up with the audio in the first lessons, but this was only an impression and was not measured. The test measured only read-aloud performance and only eight final consonants, and there was no delayed post-test, so it is not clear whether the gains last. The findings should therefore be seen as supportive evidence for Shadowing in this setting, not as final proof of its effect.

6. Conclusion and Implications

This study compared Shadowing with Listen-and-Repeat drilling in improving eight English final consonants among 40 Vietnamese secondary school students at a language center. Both methods helped, but Shadowing led to larger gains (6.75 vs. 4.40 points out of 24) with a large effect on gain scores (d = 1.21), and students held positive attitudes toward it (overall M = 4.17). The findings indicate that the method learners utilize to practice is important, even if the teaching materials, the teacher and practice time are the same. Shadowing may be integrated with drilling. Shadowing can then be utilized to assist students with sound production in connected speech. Teachers may use different levels of discourse (i.e., sentences to paragraphs) based on the age of their students. The students also can record their speech, listen to the recording and evaluate their speech in a group or individually outside of class. For language centers, pronunciation is a core part of communicative competence and teachers may require a short training on Shadowing to manage classes with mixed levels.

Other research should incorporate larger samples, random assignment, a delayed post-test to evaluate if the gains are long-lasting, a control group questionnaire, classification of results by sounds, measurement of other psychological factors of learners (such as anxiety and willingness to communicate), and other learner groups (e.g. primary school students and adults).

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