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EFFECTS OF SHADOWING ON ADULT EFL LEARNERS' ORAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

EFEKTOS DEL SHADOWING EN LA COMPETENCIA COMUNICATIVA ORAL DE LOS ESTUDIANTES ADULTOS DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA: UNA REVISIÓN SISTEMÁTICA

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Effects of Shadowing on Adult EFL Learners' Oral Communicative Competence: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

This literature review synthesizes empirical evidence on the impact of shadowing on the oral proficiency of adults learning English as a foreign language (EFL), with the aim of identifying which aspects fluency, comprehensibility, and prosody are improved, and under which teaching conditions. A systematic review of publications from 2019 to 2025 was conducted in multidisciplinary and specialized databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Dialnet and Redalyc. Studies with adult EFL learners that implemented shadowing and reported on oral performance were included, while theoretical essays and works without performance measures were excluded. The selection process involved a transparent series of steps: identification, screening, eligibility assessment and inclusion. Standardized data extraction covered design, sample, implementation, instruments and results. The findings demonstrate consistent enhancements in fluency (decreased pauses and increased continuity) and comprehensibility/prosody when interventions surpass 6–8 weeks and incorporate shadowing alongside modelling and feedback. In contrast, the effects on segmental accuracy are mixed, particularly in the absence of explicit phonetic feedback. Affective benefits (increased confidence and decreased anxiety) were also observed, being modulated by the speed and authenticity of the input. Moderators include the duration of the intervention, the type of shadowing (prosodic vs. echo), the difficulty of the materials and the degree of teacher scaffolding. Overall, shadowing emerges as an effective strategy for enhancing fluency and prosody in adult EFL learners, with variable effects on segmental accuracy.

Keywords: Shadowing strategy; communicative competence; adult learners; EFL; andragogy.

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Efectos del shadowing en la competencia comunicativa oral de los estudiantes adultos de inglés como lengua extranjera: una revisión sistemática

RESUMEN

Esta revisión de literatura sintetiza la evidencia empírica sobre los efectos del *shadowing* en la competencia oral de adultos que aprenden inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL), con el fin de precisar qué dimensiones fluidez, comprensibilidad y prosodia se benefician y en qué condiciones didácticas. Se llevó a cabo una revisión sistemática de publicaciones de 2019 a 2025 en bases multidisciplinares y especializadas (Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Dialnet y Redalyc). Se incluyeron estudios empíricos con población adulta en EFL que implementaran *shadowing* y reportaran resultados orales; se excluyeron ensayos teóricos y trabajos sin medidas de desempeño. El proceso de selección siguió un flujo transparente de identificación, cribado, elegibilidad e inclusión, con extracción estandarizada de diseño, muestra, implementación, instrumentos y resultados. Los hallazgos muestran mejoras consistentes en fluidez (reducción de pausas y mayor continuidad) y en comprensibilidad/prosodia cuando las intervenciones superan las 6–8 semanas y combinan *shadowing* con modelado y retroalimentación. En contraste, los efectos sobre la precisión segmental son mixtos, especialmente en ausencia de retroalimentación fonética explícita. Se observan además beneficios afectivos (mayor confianza y menor ansiedad), modulados por la velocidad y autenticidad del input. Actúan como moderadores la duración de la intervención, el tipo de *shadowing* (prosódico vs. eco), la dificultad de los materiales y el grado de andamiaje docente. En conjunto, el *shadowing* emerge como una estrategia eficaz para potenciar fluidez y prosodia en adultos EFL, con efectos variables en la precisión segmental.

Palabras clave: Estrategia de shadowing; competencia comunicativa; estudiantes adultos; EFL; andragogía.

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INTRODUCTION

Learning a second or foreign language can be a complex challenge and even more so when it is done at an advanced age. It is no secret that for Spanish speakers, English language acquisition is not easy. It is worth noting that, unlike younger learners, older people already have a lifetime of experiences, established cognitive patterns, and different motivational factors that influence their learning journey when approaching this new language. Even so, the relevance and importance of learning this language is becoming more apparent every day. As some authors state: “We live in a globalized and highly technological world, where the importance of knowing a language is a social necessity, regardless of age” (Corral-Robles et al., 2024, p. 381). In consideration of English's pervasive presence across diverse global contexts, including yet not limited to media, international forums, business, finance, politics, and diplomacy, it is evident that English enjoys extensive utilization on a global scale. This is an integral component of the overarching phenomenon of globalization, Betancourt & Ramos (2024). The English language is the most widely spoken international language. The present situation is the result of a combination of political, economic and cultural hegemony exercised by the United States over the last century, together with the lingering influences of the colonial British Empire, (Muñoz et al., 2025).

Considering the recent developments in the field of education, there is an imperative to devise novel pedagogical approaches that cater to the diverse needs of all demographics, including, young and older learners. These methodologies must emphasise the significance of participatory and experiential learning, fostering collaboration and equipping students with the competencies to become autonomous and effective learners, (Betancourt et al., 2025). Regarding older learners, Klimova (2018) notes that, learning a foreign language has a positive influence on white and grey matter structures in older adults, suggesting that language study offers not only communicative benefits, but also neurological advantages. This research aims to analyse effective methodologies and strategies for teaching English to elderly students, considering their specific cognitive characteristics, motivational factors and learning challenges.

Although some research has shown that language acquisition differs significantly between younger and older students, there remains a gap in our understanding of the most effective pedagogical approaches specifically tailored to older students in the Colombian context. This systematic review contributes to



this knowledge by examining actual classroom experiences, teaching methodologies, and learning outcomes at Queen's English College. Through systematic observation, analysis and evaluation of instructional strategies, this research seeks to identify best practices that can enhance the English language learning experience of one adult learner and provide educators with practical guidance for this important demographic group.

The research reviewed shows that shadowing is an effective strategy for the development of oral skills in English teaching contexts, although approached from different approaches and populations. Jeremy and Spandagou (2025) showed that ethnographic shadowing allows us to understand educational processes and professional practices that are usually invisible, which provides a useful methodological framework for studying the teaching of English to adults. Karisma (2025) found improvements in pronunciation and intonation in high school students, showing the usefulness of guided practice. Ali (2025) systematized the importance of shadowing in the activation of working memory and oral fluency, offering a central theoretical basis. Whitwortadvancese (2025) reinforced these conclusions from a systematic review that reports advances in intelligibility and prosody, although with variations in segmental precision.

On the other hand, studies in Asia and Africa provide empirical evidence on linguistic and affective effects. Mu and Wasuntarasophit (2025) demonstrated improvements in listening comprehension, pronunciation, and motivation, along with a decrease in anxiety, a key aspect in adult learners. El Moussaoui (2025) highlighted the contribution of shadowing to beginner-level listening skills, especially in phonemic segmentation and perception. Tuilan et al. (2025) offered a practical basis for integrating shadowing with fluency and pronunciation activities, aimed at overcoming emotional barriers such as speech insecurity. In the Colombian context, Robayo Acuña (2025) evidenced the need for complementary strategies to strengthen oral fluency in adults, while Duong Hong (2025) confirmed sustained improvements in fluency, pronunciation, and confidence through the continuous use of shadowing with authentic materials.

Theoretical Framework

This section aims to establish the theoretical basis for understanding the challenges inherent in the process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in the context of adult education,



specifically for individuals over 50 years old. Here, we will explore the characteristics of adult learners and the teaching methodologies best suited to their needs. This is key to addressing the particularities and challenges of this demographic group.

Shadowing strategy

To begin with, the shadowing strategy defined as the immediate or near-simultaneous repetition of auditory input in the target language has recently regained prominence in the field of adult second-language acquisition. According to Talapova and Iliyas (2024), this approach has demonstrated notable effectiveness among intermediate and advanced learners, yielding measurable gains in pronunciation, fluency, and intonation following a mixed-method intervention. These findings reinforce the theoretical linkage between auditory input, oral production, and cognitive processing in adult learners. From a theoretical standpoint, the practice aligns with Krashen's Comprehensible Input Theory and with phonological automatization processes achieved through repetition, adapted to the heightened metacognitive capacities characteristic of adult learning.

In addition, when addressing the pedagogical and didactic foundations applicable to adult learners, it is essential to acknowledge that andragogy emphasizes relevance, learner autonomy, metacognitive feedback, and self-reflective awareness throughout the learning process. Within this framework, the didactic structure of the shadowing method unfolds through three interdependent phases: (a) familiarization with auditory input, (b) active simultaneous repetition (the shadowing stage proper), and (c) reflective or metacognitive evaluation. Duong and Nguyen (2025) conceptualize this sequence through a six-step model grounded in Imitative Learning Theory, Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 2011), and the Input/Output Hypotheses.

Such integration underscores that adult learners are not merely imitators of phonological forms but active monitors of their speech, employing phonetic awareness and articulatory planning to refine their linguistic performance. Furthermore, the implementation of this strategy in adult education settings requires a thoughtful alignment between learning stages, pedagogical tasks, and instructional materials. During the familiarization phase, learners engage with authentic or pedagogically adapted audio input such as professional discourses or thematically relevant content accompanied by textual transcripts when available.



This phase encourages observation of prosodic features, including rhythm, pauses, and intonation, followed by brief reflection on emerging phonological patterns. In the active shadowing phase, learners attempt to reproduce the input in near-synchrony, focusing on matching the speaker's rhythm, fluency, and intonation. Instructor feedback or self-recording techniques facilitate targeted articulatory refinement. The final reflection and consolidation phase invites learners to compare their production with the original, identify prosodic or segmental discrepancies, and design subsequent practice cycles incorporating more complex linguistic input. This cyclical progression fosters gradual internalization and phonological automatization within adult learners.

From a broader pedagogical didactic perspective, several recommendations enhance the strategy's efficacy for adult education. First, instructional materials should be authentic and contextually meaningful to the learner's personal or professional interests. Second, complexity should increase progressively through longer utterances, accelerated speech rates, or reduced scaffolding.

Third, educators should cultivate self-regulatory habits such as recording, comparison, self-assessment, and reflective journaling. Fourth, feedback should prioritize prosodic and suprasegmental elements such as rhythm, stress, and intonation—over segmental correction alone. Finally, shadowing tasks should be integrated into communicative activities (e.g., discussions, presentations, or role-plays) to promote transferability and prevent the technique from remaining isolated. Through these principles, shadowing evolves into an andragogical model grounded in autonomy, relevance, and metacognitive reflection.

Adult Learners

The concept of adult learners refers to grown-up students who are no longer children, so this category of learners needs specific treatment and methods to meet their state of affairs, needs, interests, and expectations (Loumim, n.d.). These students are characterized by a series of principles that directly influence their learning trajectory.

Adult learners are distinguished by clearly articulated learning goals and precise, task-oriented objectives; a pronounced disposition toward self-direction in planning, monitoring, and regulating their study; and a strong sense of accountability for their own progress. Equally salient is the experiential capital they bring to instruction their prior knowledge and professional/personal experiences which can



be actively integrated and leveraged to scaffold new learning and promote transfer across contexts (Florez & Burt, 2001).

These characteristics imply that adult learners "are usually driven by certain objectives that allow them to decide how to handle their learning trajectory, until they achieve their aims" Their autonomy and defined objectives are key drivers in their educational process. Studies like Parzyck (2024), although focused on first-year university students, highlight the importance of treating them as adult learners, emphasizing their independence, self-direction, and the value of their prior experiences characteristics that are even more pronounced in the older population. This reinforces the idea that adults possess distinctive traits that demand personalized educational approaches.

The study of language learning in adulthood requires a particular consideration of the characteristics of these students, which differ significantly from those of younger learners. This distinction is fundamental for comprehending the pedagogical specificities that must be applied in their learning process to foster greater motivation, engagement, and problem-solving skills in adult learners, allowing them to personalize their education.

Teaching English to Adult Learners

In the field of adult second language acquisition (SLA), current research emphasizes the intricate interaction among cognitive, linguistic, and social dimensions, as well as the growing role of technological mediation in language development. According to Alsaedi (2024), the evolution of SLA research over the past five decades reveals a pressing need to reconceptualize language learning as a process that integrates the brain, the mind, and the learner's agency into a unified framework of cognitive engagement.

This paradigm shift encourages moving beyond traditional behaviourist or generative models toward more integrative approaches such as usage-based linguistics and complex dynamic systems (CDS) theory, which explain how variability, non-linearity, and emergent developmental trajectories characterize adult language learning. In this regard, Hulstijn (2024) extends the discussion through his Basic Language Cognition (BLC) theory, proposing that proficiency emerges from usage frequency and interactional contexts, thus underscoring the dynamic and adaptive nature of linguistic competence.



From a pedagogical standpoint, adult learners of English benefit most from instructional models that balance input, attention, and reflection. The Input–Interaction process prioritizes exposure to meaningful linguistic input and opportunities for negotiation of meaning in authentic communicative contexts. This approach, while rooted in Long’s Interaction Hypothesis, has been redefined by recent scholarship to account for adult learners’ metacognitive and strategic abilities that enhance input processing and retention.

The second process, Attention to Form, aligns with the principles of cognitive-interactionist theory, emphasizing the significance of explicit instruction, feedback, and metalinguistic awareness in helping adult learners surpass developmental thresholds. This perspective recognizes that adult learners, unlike children, can consciously direct attention to linguistic form and adjust their output based on corrective input. The third process, Reflection and Self-Regulation, integrates the principles of andragogy and metacognition, encouraging learners to set personal goals, monitor their performance, and engage in reflective cycles that consolidate procedural knowledge into fluent communication patterns.

Recent empirical findings also reveal that social and technological factors play an increasingly decisive role in adult English learning. Studies on mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) demonstrate that sustained engagement with technology-mediated platforms fosters significant improvements in linguistic competence, although such engagement often follows cyclical patterns of active use, temporary disengagement, and re-engagement (Musazadeh, et al., 2024). Furthermore, Gudmestad and Kanwit (2025) highlight the sociolinguistic dimension of adult SLA, noting that effective instruction must expose learners to variation in dialects, registers, and identities, thereby enabling them to navigate linguistic diversity and social meaning within English-speaking environments.

The integration of these theoretical and pedagogical perspectives leads to a structured and cyclical learning model for adults, consisting of three essential stages. The first stage, Familiarization and Input Exposure, involves the selection of authentic, goal-oriented materials such as professional speeches or culturally relevant content, accompanied by scaffolds like transcripts and guided listening tasks. The second stage, Form-Focused Interaction and Practice, encourages learners to participate in interactive activities that require noticing, hypothesis testing, and production under communicative pressure, thus facilitating automatization.



Finally, the Reflection and Autonomy Building phase allows learners to self-assess progress, analyze their recorded output, and plan for continued development using incrementally complex input. This cyclical design resonates with the principles of complex systems theory, where learning evolves through iterative adaptation, feedback, and self-organization. Ultimately, the pedagogical architecture of adult English learning redefines proficiency not as the accumulation of isolated linguistic elements but as an emergent, dynamic system shaped by cognitive control, social participation, motivation, and technological mediation. Instruction that promotes relevance, autonomy, and metacognitive engagement transforms language teaching into a process of empowerment, enabling adult learners to actively reconstruct their linguistic competence through continuous reflection and interaction.

Andragogy

Andragogy is defined as the theory and art of guiding adults in their learning process, a concept popularized by Malcolm Knowles (Knowles et al., 1978). This discipline fundamentally distinguishes itself from pedagogy, which has traditionally focused on child education and learning. Unlike pedagogy, andragogy centers on the particularities of the adult's personality, recognizing them as an autonomous subject with intrinsically directed learning (Wang and Farmer, 2008). Coley (2022) reinforces this idea by investigating how instructors' perception of andragogical orientation influences an autonomy supportive teaching style, highlighting the application of adult learning principles in pedagogical practices.

Key Principles and Definitions

Malcolm Knowles's principles of andragogy, as described by Knowles et al. (1998), are found on an adult student's maturity and are considered essential for understanding how adults learn. This theory has greatly influenced the field of adult learning. Complementing this, Savicevic (1999) observed that andragogy in Yugoslav universities emerged from pedagogy and, despite its development, remained an integral part of pedagogical studies. Furthermore, Hamlin (2020) emphasizes the importance of having a clear definition of adult learning to design truly effective andragogy. Na Nagara (2020) delves into the integration of these principles through "pedandragogy," a hybrid model that seeks to promote effective learning environments and self-efficacy by synthesizing key elements from both pedagogy and andragogy, suggesting that a single approach is often insufficient.



Andragagogical principles have not only been instrumental in popularizing the theory of adult learning but also offer valuable tools for diagnosing and addressing the various problems and obstacles that adult students may encounter on their path to effective learning.

METHODOLOGY

For the present research, a systematic review of the relevant literature was carried out. A total of thirteen scholarly articles were selected, identified through an in-depth search of various academic databases, such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ProQuest Central / ProQuest Ebook Central. The selection criteria for these articles focused on research related to the distinctive characteristics of adult learners, success factors in foreign language learning for older adults, the use of gamification in teaching English to this age group, the integration of digital tools and technology in teaching English to adults, including perceptions and challenges, specific language skills, such as pronunciation in older adults, experiences of older adults in online English classes, affective factors, such as communicative anxiety, perceptions of adult learners' readiness for online teaching, with direct applicability to the integration of ICT in English teaching, among others. It is worth noting that none of these articles should be older than 5 years, to maintain a current source of information.

Once selected, the articles were critically and analytically reviewed. For this purpose, a digital Excel spreadsheet was used to systematize the key information of each study, including the methodology applied, the participants involved and the direct contribution that each article made to the objectives of the present research. This process involved an in-depth analysis of previous findings and the identification of gaps in existing knowledge.

Findings

The studies reviewed, predominantly published in 2025, encompass qualitative and mixed methods designs, systematic reviews, and theoretical-documentary analyses, with participants including secondary school students (Indonesia; China), university students (Vietnam), and EFL teachers (Colombia), as well as reviews without direct sampling (United Kingdom; Morocco; Ecuador), and a qualitative inquiry into shadowing as a method with fieldwork (Australia). Secondary school-based research employing mixed and narrative methods has reported enhancements in pronunciation, fluency, intonation/rhythm, listening comprehension, and confidence.



These enhancements have been observed in conjunction with a reduction in anxiety when authentic materials and modelling are utilized (Indonesia; China). A recent study conducted at university level in Vietnam has reported an increase in pronunciation, fluency, and self-efficacy, alongside favorable attitudes towards authentic materials. In the field of education, qualitative research conducted in Colombia indicates that educators conceptualize fluency as both a global competence and a distinct skill. However, the available support materials provide minimal scaffolding. Systematic reviews (United Kingdom; Morocco) have reached a consensus on the beneficial effects of shadowing on comprehensibility, prosody, fluency, and bottom-up skills (phonemic perception, word recognition), particularly at initial levels. Concurrently, a PRISMA-based review in Ecuador underscores that comprehensible multimodal input, encompassing podcasts, audiovisuals, and gamification, enhances listening comprehension. The theoretical analysis from Vietnam integrates frameworks such as Input/Output and Cognitive Load and proposes a six-step model. By contrast, the Australian study positions shadowing as a distinctive qualitative method for exploring professional collaboration, while warning of ethical and logistical challenges. The evidence suggests that shadowing promotes key dimensions of oral and listening competence, modulated by student level, input authenticity, and instructional design.

Table 1 Previous Studies

Title	Country - Year	Methodology	Finding
Shadowing as Qualitative Inquiry: Exploring its Potential and Limitations in Educational Research	Australia, 2025	Qualitative shadowing; field observations and semi-structured interviews	Highlighted shadowing as a distinct qualitative method enabling deep insights into professional collaboration and field dynamics; identified ethical and logistical challenges.
Investigating Shadowing Technique to Reinforce	Indonesia, 2025	Qualitative narrative	Shadowing improved pronunciation, articulation,



English Pronunciation Skills for Senior High School in Jakarta		inquiry; and confidence; helped learners with intonation and and semi- rhythm. structured interviews
A Theoretical Overview of the Shadowing Technique in Developing Listening and Speaking Skills	Vietnam, 2025	Theoretical analysis; literature review Summarized theories supporting shadowing (Input/Output Hypotheses, Cognitive Load Theory); proposed six-step model to improve pronunciation, fluency, and reflexes.
A Systematic Review of Research on the Use of Shadowing for Second Language Pronunciation Teaching	United Kingdom, 2025	Systematic literature review (qualitative synthesis) Shadowing improves comprehensibility, fluency, and prosody; learners view it as enjoyable and effective.
Effects of the Shadowing Technique on English Listening Comprehension for Chinese EFL Senior High School Students	China, 2025	Mixed methods: pre-/post-tests, questionnaires, and student logs Significant improvement in listening comprehension, pronunciation, motivation, and memory; enhanced focus and reduced anxiety.
Shadowing for Developing EFL Learners' Bottom-up Listening Skills: A Systematic Review	Morocco, 2025	Systematic review of phoneme perception, word studies (1997– 2023) Shadowing improves phoneme perception, word recognition, and bottom-up listening comprehension;



The Use of Comprehensible Input to Improve Listening Comprehension in High School EFL Students: A Literature Review

The Basics of English Speaking

Developing Oral Fluency in English: EFL Teachers' Understanding, Self-Reported Practices, and Textbook Support

The Implementation of Shadowing Technique to Enhance Students' Speaking Skills at School of Foreign Languages – Thai Nguyen University

Systematic literature review (PRISMA-based)

Theoretical book (didactic analysis and pedagogical proposal)

Qualitative study (semi-structured interviews + textbook content analysis)

Mixed method (pre/post-test, questionnaire, interviews)

effective especially for beginners.

Podcasts, audiovisual materials, gamification, and interactive activities improve listening comprehension; multimodal input enhances engagement.

Explains components of speaking (pronunciation, fluency, accuracy); integrates psychological and technological perspectives to improve oral communication.

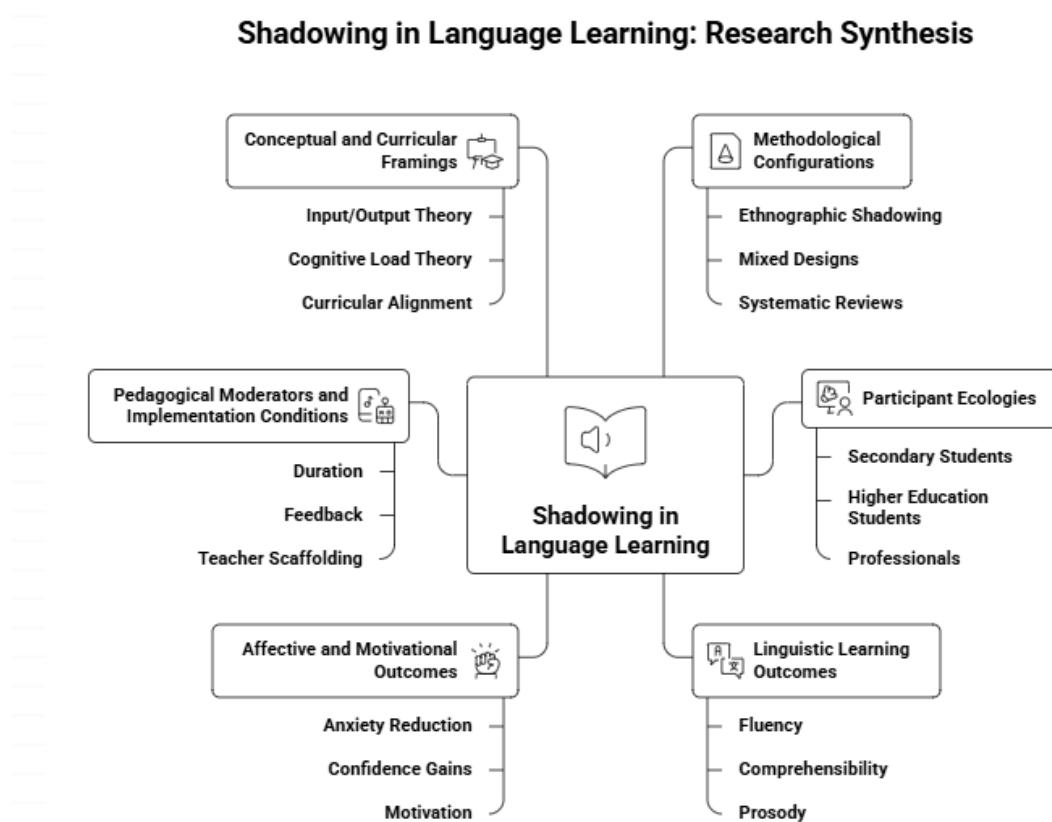
Teachers view fluency as both general proficiency and specific speech ability; use communicative activities but textbooks provide limited fluency support.

Shadowing improved pronunciation, fluency, and confidence; students had positive attitudes toward authentic materials.



Note: the table shows the conducted literature review provided foundational and contemporary insights crucial for understanding this research. The selected investigations offer diverse perspectives on the unique characteristics of adult learners, the obstacles they face, and effective pedagogical strategies.

Figure 1: Shadowing in Language Learning



The figure synthesizes the literature on shadowing in language learning into six thematic domains: methodological configurations, participant ecologies, linguistic learning outcomes, affective motivational outcomes, pedagogical moderators and implementation conditions, and conceptual-curricular framings. At the center, shadowing functions as the core construct linking empirical designs (ethnographic, mixed, systematic), learner populations (secondary, higher education, professionals), and outcome clusters (fluency, comprehensibility, prosody). Peripheral nodes specify key subthemes duration, feedback, teacher scaffolding; anxiety reduction, confidence gains, motivation; Input/Output and Cognitive Load theories thereby delineating the principal mechanisms and contexts through which shadowing exerts its effects.

1) Methodological Configurations

Across the corpus, methodological pluralism is evident. Jeremy and Spandagou (2025) position ethnographic shadowing as a qualitative method within an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, deploying prolonged participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and field diaries to access less visible dimensions of interprofessional educational practice. Their contribution goes beyond procedural description to articulate the epistemic value of shadowing for capturing situated co-construction in teacher-therapist collaboration, offering a transferable methodological scaffold for research on adult English teaching.

Applied studies frequently adopt mixed and quasi-experimental designs to triangulate performance, perceptions, and processes. Mu and Wasuntarasophit (2025) combine pre-/post-tests of listening comprehension with questionnaires and learner logs; Duong Hong (2025) implements a 15-week intervention with B1-B2 undergraduates, augmenting quantitative outcomes with interviews to probe mechanisms of change. In secondary education, Karisma (2025) integrate guided practice, direct observation, and pronunciation rubrics to estimate phonological accuracy and intonation, evidencing the feasibility of formative assessment devices in regular classrooms.

Complementing primary studies, evidence syntheses add breadth and rigor. Whitworth and Rose (2025) conduct a PRISMA-guided systematic review of 44 studies with structured extraction matrices and narrative synthesis; El Moussaoui (2025) offers a second systematic review (1997–2023) focused on bottom-up listening skills using thematic coding. Ali (2025) contributes a theoretical documentary analysis integrating Input/Output hypotheses and Cognitive Load Theory into a six-step model. Finally, Tuilan et al. (2025) present a didactic descriptive work aligning practice-oriented tasks with theoretical foundations, useful for deriving instructional protocols.

2) Participant Ecologies

The corpus spans the educational continuum, enabling cross-level inferences. In secondary settings, Karisma (2025).and Mu and Wasuntarasophit (2025) study adolescents, providing evidence for gains in pronunciation, listening comprehension, and motivation at formative stages. These populations illuminate the role of dose and authentic input in reducing anxiety and improving articulation.



In higher education, Duong Hong (2025) intervenes with intermediate undergraduates (B1–B2) over 15 weeks, documenting improvements in fluency, pronunciation, and confidence. This segment confirms the transferability of shadowing to more demanding academic environments while revealing constraints such as technological access and speech rate. Meanwhile, Jeremy and Spandagou (2025) shift the analytical lens to professionals (occupational therapists and primary teachers), broadening the understanding of shadowing as a methodological device beyond language learning *per se*.

A teacher centric perspective appears in Robayo Acuña (2025), who examines EFL instructors' conceptions and self-reported practices regarding oral fluency, contrasted with the limited scaffolding found in textbooks. This angle exposes a gap between pedagogical intent and available resources, creating a space where shadowing may function as a bridge strategy. The systematic reviews (Whitworth & Rose, 2025; El Moussaoui, 2025) integrate findings across populations, supplying a panoramic view without direct sampling.

3) Linguistic Learning Outcomes

Convergence is strong for fluency, comprehensibility, and prosody. Whitworth and Rose (2025) synthesize sustained improvements in comprehensibility and suprasegmental features; Duong Hong (2025) reports gain in fluency and pronunciation following an extended implementation with authentic materials. In secondary contexts, Karisma (2025) document advances in intonation and articulatory precision, suggesting that calibrated imitation of auditory models supports temporal and accentual adjustments.

Effects on segmental accuracy are more variable. While Karisma (2025) notes clear phonological gains, the review by Whitworth and Rose (2025) indicates that segmental improvement hinges on explicit phonetic feedback and task design (prosodic vs. echo shadowing). This variability aligns with Ali's (2025) theoretical account, which anticipates trade-offs between cognitive load and articulatory control when perception and production are synchronized.

On the listening dimension, findings highlight bottom-up components. El Moussaoui (2025) reports improvements in phonemic perception and lexical segmentation, especially for lower-proficiency learners; Mu and Wasuntarasophit (2025) add gains in vocabulary and working memory alongside



comprehension, underscoring shadowing's dual role as decoding practice and rehearsal that strengthens phonological assembly.

4) Affective and Motivational Outcomes

Applied studies frequently report anxiety reduction and confidence gains associated with shadowing, particularly when teacher modeling and authentic input are integrated. Mu and Wasuntarasophit (2025) observe heightened motivation with decreased anxiety, while Duong Hong (2025) documents favorable attitudes toward authentic materials, suggesting a virtuous cycle between perceived relevance of input and willingness to engage in intensive practice.

The didactic framework proposed by Tuilan et al. (2025) contextualizes these effects pedagogically, emphasizing the need to overcome psychological barriers (anxiety, lack of confidence) through communicative simulation and pronunciation tasks tied to clear objectives. Such proposals resonate with empirical findings and offer actionable pathways to consolidate affective benefits.

Methodologically, Jeremy and Spandagou (2025) show how shadowing, as qualitative inquiry, reveals invisible dimensions of professional interaction; transposed to classroom practice, this principle implies that fine-grained observation and guided reflection may enhance learners' self-monitoring, with collateral effects on self-efficacy and emotional regulation during demanding oral tasks.

5) Pedagogical Moderators and Implementation Conditions

Duration emerges as a critical moderator: interventions of more than 6–8 weeks (e.g., Duong Hong, 2025) tend to yield more stable gains in fluency and prosody than shorter implementations. This pattern coheres with Whitworth and Rose (2025), who associate sustained exposure and feedback with improvements in comprehensibility.

Shadowing type and feedback regime condition outcomes. Prosodic approaches foster natural temporal and stress contours, whereas echo shadowing supports segmental calibration; in the absence of explicit phonetic feedback, precision on difficult sounds fluctuates (Whitworth & Rose, 2025; Pratiwi & Hapsari, 2025). Moreover, input speed and authenticity influence cognitive load: Mu and Wasuntarasophit (2025) and Duong Hong (2025) note that high speech rates and limited technological access can dampen progress.



Teacher scaffolding and task design act as levers. Evidence supports integrating modeling, targeted rubrics, and guided practice (Pratiwi & Hapsari, 2025; Tuilan, Tuerah, & Pabur, 2025), and sequencing macro-level prosodic frames with micro-level segmental goals. These design decisions enhance transfer to communicative tasks and mitigate heterogeneity in effects, as echoed in the PRISMA-based review on multimodal comprehensible input (Ibarra-Balarezo & Guaman-Luna, 2025).

6) Conceptual and Curricular Framings

Conceptually, Thao & LY (2025) advances a theoretical scaffold that articulates Input/Output perspectives with Cognitive Load Theory, yielding a six-step model to operationalize shadowing for listening-speaking development. This framing explains why perception production simultaneity can accelerate automatization of sound sequences, provided that cognitive load is managed through graded materials.

Auricularly, Robayo Acuña (2025) documents a misalignment between teachers' conceptions of fluency and the actual support afforded by textbooks, underscoring the need for targeted materials that integrate shadowing with oral genres, performance criteria, and formative assessment. The handbook by Tuilan et al. (2025) offer a practical bridge, aligning concrete exercises with pronunciation and fluency goals suitable for adult courses.

Finally, Jeremy and Spandagou (2025) position shadowing as a research lens capable of revealing ethical and logistical tensions in professional collaboration. This perspective invites us to view shadowing not only as an instructional technique but also as a methodological instrument for designing, observing, and refining curricular interventions in adult EFL contexts.

Conclusions

The shadowing strategy is an effective pedagogical approach for developing communicative competence in adult EFL learners. Its structured, repetitive, and auditory nature aligns well with adult learning principles and promotes confidence and fluency. From a theoretical perspective, the shadowing strategy represents a coherent and empirically validated pedagogical framework that strengthens second language acquisition through the integration of active auditory processing, immediate oral reproduction, and cognitive reinforcement. The literature reviewed confirms that shadowing activates simultaneous perceptual and productive mechanisms, promoting deep processing of linguistic input.



Recent research evidence that this approach not only refines phonological awareness and prosodic accuracy but also consolidates automatization in speech production key elements in the formation of communicative competence, (Hamada, 2016). Furthermore, theoretical advances in neurolinguistics and dynamic systems theory have positioned shadowing as a practice that harmonizes with the brain's capacity for procedural learning and auditory-motor synchronization, offering a scientifically grounded method for adult EFL instruction.

From an epistemological standpoint, shadowing situates language learning within the constructivist and sociocultural paradigms that emphasize the co-construction of knowledge through interaction, imitation, and reflection. This strategy transforms input into output through a cyclical process of perception, articulation, and monitoring, allowing learners to internalize linguistic structures in meaningful contexts. In alignment with Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the Zone of Proximal Development and Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, shadowing bridges theory and practice by turning comprehension into production and practice into awareness. Consequently, the epistemic consistency of shadowing lies in its ability to merge explicit and implicit learning pathways, supporting metalinguistic growth and communicative autonomy in adult learners.

From an axiological dimension, the shadowing technique holds profound educational and ethical value by fostering autonomy, persistence, and self-efficacy essential attributes of lifelong learning. Its iterative and reflective nature cultivates learner responsibility and perseverance, encouraging adults to regulate their learning process consciously. Moreover, shadowing embodies an inclusive and equitable pedagogical principle, adaptable to diverse linguistic profiles, proficiency levels, and sociocultural identities. By promoting access, engagement, and confidence, it aligns with contemporary values of humanized and justice-oriented education, ensuring that language learning transcends technical proficiency to become an empowering experience.

In conclusion, when implemented through a principled, research-informed, and reflective pedagogical framework, shadowing transcends mechanical imitation to function as a transformative educational process. It integrates theoretical rigor, epistemological coherence, and axiological significance, leading to the development of authentic communicative competence in adult English learners. This synthesis reaffirms that effective second language pedagogy must not only target linguistic outcomes but also



cultivate cognitive awareness, emotional engagement, and ethical responsibility in the act of learning a language.

Discussion

The present systematic review yields compelling evidence regarding the multidimensional effects of shadowing on the oral competence of adult English as a Foreign Language learners. The convergent findings across diverse methodological approaches ranging from quasi-experimental designs to ethnographic inquiries substantiate the efficacy of shadowing as a pedagogical intervention, while simultaneously illuminating the contextual and instructional factors that modulate its outcomes.

The most robust finding emerging from this synthesis pertains to consistent enhancements in fluency and prosodic features among adult EFL learners. Studies conducted across varied educational settings secondary institutions in Indonesia and China, tertiary contexts in Vietnam, and professional development programs unanimously report measurable gains in speech continuity, reduced pause frequency, and improved suprasegmental control. These improvements appear intrinsically linked to the imitative nature of shadowing, which compels learners to synchronize their production with native or proficient models, thereby internalizing temporal patterns, stress placement, and intonational contours through repetitive exposure and articulation.

The theoretical underpinnings of these gains resonate with principles derived from Cognitive Load Theory and Input-Output frameworks. Shadowing operates as a bridge between receptive and productive modalities, transforming passive listening into active speech production within compressed temporal windows. This dual-channel processing facilitates the development of phonological automaticity as a prerequisite for fluent oral performance by reducing the cognitive burden associated with planning and monitoring during spontaneous communication. The documented improvements in working memory capacity and attentional focus, particularly evident in the Chinese secondary school context, further corroborate the cognitive advantages conferred by sustained shadowing practice.

Conversely, the evidence regarding segmental accuracy reveals a more nuanced and heterogeneous pattern. While certain studies document phonological refinement at the segmental level, others report minimal or inconsistent effects on the production of individual phonemes. This variability underscores a critical insight: shadowing, when implemented without explicit phonetic instruction or targeted



corrective feedback, tends to privilege suprasegmental over segmental dimensions of pronunciation. The prosodic focus inherent in shadowing emphasizing rhythm, melody, and stress may inadvertently overshadow attention to individual sound articulation, particularly for learners whose first language phonological systems diverge substantially from English.

This observation aligns with theoretical distinctions between global intelligibility and segmental precision. Comprehensibility, defined as the ease with which listeners understand a speaker, correlates more strongly with prosodic accuracy than with phonemic precision. Thus, shadowing's demonstrable effects on comprehensibility reflect its orientation toward holistic communicative effectiveness rather than native-like segmental production. For adult learners whose primary objective centers on functional communication in professional or academic contexts, this emphasis may prove pedagogically appropriate, though instructors must remain cognizant of potential gaps in phonemic mastery.

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