



Investigating the Effect of a Proposed Strategy on Enhancing EFL Speaking Skills in Large First-year Secondary School Classes

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Abstract

This study examines the efficacy of two pedagogical approaches – shadowing and task-based learning (TBL) – in developing English speaking competencies among first-year secondary students in overcrowded classroom contexts. The research emerged from the persistent challenge observed in Egyptian public schools where, despite years of English instruction, students graduate with limited oral proficiency, particularly in large-class settings that restrict individual speaking opportunities and amplify psychological barriers to communication. Conducted at El-Khalifa El-Ma'amoun Official Secondary Language School with a cohort of 35 students, the investigation employed an action research methodology combining quantitative and qualitative measures, including pre- and post-intervention assessments, structured classroom observations, and student perception surveys.

The findings revealed substantial improvements across multiple dimensions of speaking ability following implementation of the targeted strategies. Students demonstrated notable gains in phonological precision,

particularly in mastering challenging English phonemes such as the interdental fricatives. Oral fluency metrics showed remarkable progress, with average speech rates increasing from 18 to 32 words per minute. Perhaps most significantly, classroom dynamics underwent a transformative shift, as evidenced by participation rates soaring from 20% to 65%, reflecting students' growing confidence and reduced anxiety about speaking in the target language.

These outcomes suggest that the complementary nature of shadowing and TBL addresses both the mechanical and affective aspects of language acquisition. Shadowing provided the structured, repetitive practice necessary for developing articulatory precision and automaticity, while TBL created authentic contexts for communicative application. Together, these approaches fostered a classroom culture that normalized the error-correction process and prioritized meaningful interaction over grammatical perfection.

The study carries important implications for EFL pedagogy in resource-constrained environments. It demonstrates that strategic methodological interventions can mitigate some challenges posed by systemic limitations, offering teachers practical techniques to enhance oral proficiency even in large-class settings. Furthermore, the research underscores the critical interplay between linguistic development and psychological factors in second language acquisition. Future investigations might explore longitudinal effects of these interventions or their applicability across different age groups and proficiency levels within similar educational contexts.

Key Words:

Large Classes, EFL Language Skills, Proposed Strategies, and First-Year Secondary School.

1.1. Introduction

Language is one of humanity's greatest intellectual achievements, serving not only as a tool for communication but also as the foundation for knowledge construction, identity expression, and social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). In today's interconnected world, English has emerged as the global lingua franca, dominating fields such as academia, technology, economics, and diplomacy (Crystal, 2003). The mastery of English oral proficiency has consequently transformed from an academic advantage to an essential competency for educational advancement and professional mobility in the 21st century (British Council, 2023).

Within the Egyptian educational context, this linguistic imperative manifests through English's mandated status as a core subject across all stages of public education, with students receiving approximately 1,500 instructional hours over twelve years of schooling (Ministry of Education, 2022). Paradoxically, national assessments and international benchmarks consistently reveal that most Egyptian secondary school graduates emerge with limited functional speaking ability (Elsayed, 2021). This discrepancy between substantial instructional investment and inadequate oral proficiency outcomes points to systemic inefficiencies in current pedagogical approaches, particularly regarding the development of spontaneous communication skills which demand the simultaneous integration of phonological, syntactic, and pragmatic competencies (Ur, 2012).

The crisis of English-speaking proficiency in Egyptian schools stems from multiple interrelated

factors, with classroom overcrowding representing perhaps the most formidable structural barrier. In typical public secondary schools, student-teacher ratios frequently exceed 40:1 (Ministry of Education, 2022), creating an educational environment where individualized speaking practice becomes logistically impossible. Research demonstrates that such hyper-competitive classroom conditions precipitate a cascade of negative outcomes: teachers default to transmission-style lecturing (Fareh, 2010), communicative activities are abandoned in favor of crowd control (Desta, 2019), and students experience heightened language anxiety that further inhibits oral participation (Ratnasari, 2020). This toxic combination of environmental constraints and psychological barriers has created what Dewaele et al. (2018) term "the silent classroom syndrome" – educational spaces where language is studied as an abstract system but rarely practiced as a living medium of communication.

Compounding these structural challenges are profound affective barriers that discourage oral production. Egyptian learners frequently report crippling fear of negative evaluation (Khalil, 2020), perfectionist paralysis (Abdullah, 2021), and what Horwitz et al. (1986) identify as foreign language anxiety – a complex of self-doubts and apprehension specific to language learning contexts. These psychological constraints often prove more debilitating than linguistic deficiencies, creating what MacIntyre (1999) describes as 'the willingness to communicate gap'—where students who can produce accurate language still avoid speaking due to affective barriers.

This study responds to these multidimensional challenges by investigating two complementary

pedagogical interventions: shadowing and Task-Based Learning (TBL). Shadowing, a technique involving the immediate vocal repetition of aural input (Lambert, 1992), offers promise for large-class contexts through its scalability, minimal resource requirements, and capacity to build phonological automaticity (Kadota, 2007). TBL, grounded in the principle that language is best acquired through meaningful task completion (Ellis, 2003), provides the necessary framework for transferring mechanical skills into authentic communicative competence. While both approaches have demonstrated efficacy in controlled settings (Nunan, 2004; Murphey, 2001), their combined application in severely resource-constrained environments remains underexplored – a critical gap this research addresses.

Conducted at Al-Khalifa Al-Ma'mun Official Language School, a representative public secondary institution in Greater Cairo, this study employs an action research methodology to evaluate whether strategic pedagogical innovation can overcome systemic constraints. The research design incorporates pre/post speaking assessments analysed through both quantitative measures (e.g., speech rate, error frequency) and qualitative discourse analysis, complemented by classroom observations and student perception surveys. This mixed-methods approach allows for triangulation between linguistic outcomes and psychosocial factors – a crucial dimension given the affective nature of speaking anxiety.

By demonstrating measurable improvements in both linguistic competence (pronunciation accuracy, fluency) and psychosocial outcomes (confidence, participation rates), this study makes the case for reorienting teacher training toward

communicative methodologies adapted to local constraints. The findings suggest that even in overcrowded classrooms, the strategic combination of shadowing and TBL can create what Dörnyei (2001) terms “motivational learning environments” – spaces where psychological safety and communicative purpose converge to enable language acquisition.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the global discourse on equitable language education by proving that pedagogical quality can compensate for resource limitations. In an era where English proficiency increasingly determines life opportunities, such interventions take on urgent ethical dimensions – not merely as academic exercises but as tools for social justice and human development.

1.2. Previous studies:

A) Implementing English Speaking Skills in Large EFL Classes: Challenges and Effective Strategies:

Speaking skills are the cornerstone of communication; however, teaching these skills remains a challenge in certain language-learning contexts. FL instructors, as well as learners, confront Different challenges within the prepare of learning a target dialect. On one hand, learners are regularly demotivated to memorize the FL since of teachers' conventional strategies, which seldom improve students' intelligence with each other. Additionally, classes are frequently expansive, so learners don't have sufficient openings to utilize and

hone the dialect due to circumstances such as disturbances, commotion and a need of attention from their instructors. On the other hand, instructors battle to supply Student-centered instruction and their strategies center on instructing linguistic use and writing/reading abilities, reacting in this way to the national standard necessities. Educates fall flat to execute Talking abilities educating viably since of a need of assets and preparing. Dialect Researchers have carried out different ponders FL settings and they have claimed that There's a pressing require for instructors to move their hones from educator centered instruction to a Student-centered learning environment where they are as often as possible uncovered to the FL and have significant openings to utilize it. (possú,2021).

Educating the target dialect as an outside dialect has not been exceptionally viable. “The results of the instructing learning handle are still underneath desires in spite of the colossal endeavors applied in educating EFL” (Fareh, 2010, p. 3601). A few EFL teachers struggle to provide successful instruction of the dialect, and it appears that a few language learners may not be coming to the fundamental dialect capability level due to numerous components such as insufficient instructing methods and educating fabric, need of introduction to the target dialect, few openings to utilize since of the swarmed classes, and others. This isn't as common in schools. Indeed, (Al -Asmari ,2015) detailed that colleges have created their syllabi to empower understudies to communicate within and exterior the classroom; be that as it may, learners' execution isn't assembly dialect desires. Dialect learners have the same discernment approximately their dialect learning handle. For occasion, (Yusuf

and Zuraini ,2016) detailed understudies felt their arrangement was not sufficient for talking the dialect past the classroom. Instructors and learners are included in numerous troubles when it comes to speaking skills.

B) Large Classes barrier

Among the different reasons making trouble for a viable dialect instruction, learning how to work with huge classes appears to be critical. The number of understudies on a course has been examined. Ur (1996 as cited in Renaud et al., 2007) concluded that “the normal discernment of a expansive lesson is around 50 students” (p. 13), but the precise number isn't imperative since what things is how instructors see the course estimate in each circumstance. Bread cooks and Westrup (2000 as cited in Renaud et al., 2007) alluded the same claim by expressing that “an expansive lesson can be any number of understudies on the off chance that the instructor feels the number of students does not permit them to form progress” (p. 13). Educating EFL in huge classes could be a around the world issue. Numerous 12countries within the world are confronting the same challenge. Cheng (2004 as cited in Fareh, 2010) detailed expansive classes as a highlight of the Chinese schools as well as the need of teachers' planning to confront this issue. However, Chowdhury and Shaila (2013) claimed that “in the creating nations like Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan etc. expansive course may be a common phenomenon” (p. 72). It implies that English dialect instructors as a rule create their informational in large-sized classrooms, and those situations are likely to be settings confronting different troubles. The estimate of the course plays an urgent part when instructing talking abilities.

Fareh (2010) shown that the measure made it troublesome for instructors to create exercises for including understudies in dialogs or verbal intelligent. Indeed, at college levels, overcrowded classrooms appear to be one of the most deterrents for creating communicative aptitudes. In Al-Asmari's (2015) investigating CLT in EFL college settings concluded that huge classes and other imperatives are the major troubles in actualizing this approach.

The concept of an expansive course has been the subject of a few ponders related to dialect educating. Having numerous understudies in an EFL classroom seem to raise different troubles when instructing talking aptitudes. Marcus (1997 as cited in Chowdhury & Shaila, 2013) claimed that the concept may be a far from being obviously true issue. Certainly, EFL instructors ordinarily complain that their classes need talking exercises since bunches are as well enormous for all to take an interest; in result, classrooms become noisy situations where understudies ordinarily get into mischief and deny to conversation within the remote dialect. Chowdhury and Shaila (2013) also noted that “language instructors, all over the globe, may concur with the thought that there's a powerful relationship between dialect instruction and lesson size” (p. 72). Working with large-sized classes may contribute to a few of the confinements that instructors confront when attempting to create talking aptitudes. Iranian tall school English instructors in 13Jafari's et al. (2015) inquire about claimed that all their classes were expansive sizes; as a result, they found it troublesome to organize bunches and carry out verbal communicative exercises.

Little classes appear to be a fitting environment for a viable learning and instructing environment. (Renaud et al.,2007) pointed out that a few TESOL instructors considered a little course to be 25 understudies. Without a doubt, little classes give a stronger environment for making a difference understudies to memorize the target dialect. (Pathan et al. ,2016) backed this declaration by claiming that “The littler the number of lessons, way better the openings and chances of person consideration and way better the learning and viable the instructing to attain the anticipated points of educating English as a remote language” (p. 31). In any case, small-sized classrooms are not common, particularly among open school settings. Al-Asmari (2015) specified that in a few EFL situations, classes are over-crowded, which may be a reason for learners' passiveness in classroom. Additionally, swarmed instructive centers challenge instructors and constrain their capacity to educate viably. Instructors are constrained to select whole-class intelligent to make the course loud. One instructor in (Sundri's,2017) inquire about almost classroom interaction in instructing EFL at lower auxiliary schools in Indonesia affirmed that their classes got to be boisterous and out of control amid talking exercises indeed although he relegated learners something to do. Educating talking aptitudes in a large-size course appears to be requesting, so 14 EFL educates ought to learn instructive strategies to effectively confront a few of the everyday classroom circumstances in EFL settings. (Renaud et al.,2007) pointed out the major challenges of educating expansive classes and assembled them in four categories:

overseeing the classroom, utilizing pair and bunch work, educating with constrained assets, and

spurring understudies. These analysts pointed out that instructing huge classes has a few focal points, such as having sufficient understudies for intelligence and utilizing more capable learners to assist lower-level ones. (Renaud et al.,2007) too depicted a few methodologies to be implemented with expansive bunches, which can be examined afterward in this work.

C) An Investigation of Challenges Teachers Face in Teaching Speaking Skill in Large Classes” Context: Secondary School EFL Teachers in Focus.

The purpose of this study was to Investigate the challenges of teaching speaking skill in a Large EFL classrooms. The study was conducted to find out the challenges EFL teachers face while teaching speaking skills in a large classroom, analyze how the factors affect teaching speaking skills in large classes and see what strategies teachers employ to promote speaking skills in the context of large classrooms. English language plays a very important role in various aspects of life globally. It is the language that expanded breaking the barriers of color, race and belief, and has continued to spread all over the world (Crystal ,1997). Studies had been conducted Both in abroad and at the country level, in line with teaching speaking skill in in EFL classes in general were carried out, no attempt has been made to investigate the challenges of teaching speaking skill in large classes. As a result, this study specifically focused on the challenges of teaching speaking skill in large classes at high school levels with special focus on grade nine secondary school Students in

west Gojjam zone. Moreover, it is almost none or little known about the challenges of teaching speaking skills in large classrooms because the focus of language teaching and learning processes was on grammar part of the language. However, teaching speaking skills is being implemented with the intention of improving learning and guiding teaching and raising the standard of language education in general. Thus, the main objective of this study is to assess the real challenges teachers” face of teaching speaking skills in large classes. (Minwuyelet,2019).

1.3. Results of this study:

The primary purpose of this study was to assess challenges teachers face in teaching speaking skill In Ethiopian large classes” context. Accordingly, 100 grade 9 students including EFL teachers responded to the questionnaires and the 6 EFL teachers responded to the interview, classroom observation as a sample were assumed to be adequate for the analysis. The analysis was made in terms of the basic research questions raised in the first chapter of the study. In line with this, the challenges that hinder the teaching of speaking skills in large classrooms are presented based on the data gained from the respondents. Through the teachers and students engrossed with the practice of teaching speaking skill, there were different factors that hindered an effective practice of teaching speaking skill in their classes. The factors can be categorized into physical environment (classroom atmospheres and seating arrangement), classroom activities of teachers and students. Based on the results and discussions of the findings of the study, it is possible to conclude that grade nine EFL teachers faced many problems in

practicing teaching speaking skills in large classes” context. This conclusion is drawn depending on the overall findings of the study investigated concerning the two major research questions. Although teachers realized how important teaching speaking skill for students speaking proficiency is, majority of them do not apply in the actual language classroom. They focused on the grammar part and mostly ignore teaching speaking skill. All the teachers complain about the large number of students in each class which is inconvenient for them to make their learners participate in the oral group activities and monitor them closely. One of the best methods to teach speaking skill is to make the teaching learning process student centered. This is, using pair work, group discussions, role play and Drama, storytelling etc. in the English classroom. To do this, the classroom conditions (class size, nature of desks, space between chairs and tables etc.) should be favorable (Silberman, 1996). However, the result of questionnaires, observations and interview indicated, the classroom condition was not favorable to teach speaking skill

1.4. Recommendations to manage a large class speaking skill:

To improve the teaching speaking skills in better way the university teachers are advised to be planned and punctual, as respondent number ten said: “Teachers should plan their lessons carefully.”

The respondent seven recommended that speaking should not be taught in isolation he said: “First is to give space to the oral interaction. I see oral interaction as the frame within the speaking skills. I don’t think speaking skills should be taught

separately from the listening” (R-7). Large classes have an opportunity to work in collaboration with the students and students with teachers. One of the respondents shared his personal experience of dealing with large classes, he said: “I used to divide students in groups, and they work together and the plan its collaboration its corporation its working together planning it remain positive, and students are active as well” (R-10). Communication and collaboration between student to student and student to teacher is essential to enhance the learners’ performance even in the large class. The other factor which is being highlighted by the candidate is that the management should not enroll than 35 students, as respondent five said: “I would just recommend that the university can enrollment more students as it can manage a large class while providing facilities so they can divide 70 students class to 35 each” (R-5). Mostly in large classes the teacher centered approach is used where teacher dominates and speaks all the time but it is reported by a interviewee that teacher should provide 60 percent of the time to the student and 40 percent of the time to student which will has better impact on teaching and learning style and it will enhance the involvement of the learners: “I think that active learning is a two-way mode of communication I really some party 40 60% proportion of speaking both of teacher and students some 40% share should student be contributed into the class so it’s an interactive learning in my opinion it’s an interactive learning”(R-4). Assessment for the speaking should be on rubrics based because it helped teacher to save time and f rubrics are shared with the students, burden of the assessment will be reduce, as Respondent said: “Like monologue and you were supposed to speak for some topic weather the topic was same to you or there was some difference in

them and like in role play as well and should be temporary as well, you need to have check list” (R-6).

1.5. Questions of the research:

1. What is the effectiveness of the proposed strategy on enhancing EFL speaking skills after applying them with students in large classes?

1.6. Objectives of the research:

1. Investigating the effect of a proposed strategy on enhancing EFL speaking skills in large first secondary school classes.
2. Examining the impact of the suggested strategies on improving first year secondary school students’ EFL speaking skills.

1.7. Significance:

Speaking in English can be tough for English language learners, especially if they do not have a solid command of the language (Tom et al., 2013). The development of successful teaching strategies results in students having the ability to speak well and with fluency and confidence, which helps their communication in English both inside and outside of the classroom. Speaking skills are for interaction, this meshes with students wanting to converse and talk boastfully in a conversational essay type of post. This means some students might naturally default to

writing rather than speaking because of shyness or lack of practice, the way to success in an informal learning environment inclusive of everyone. Most curricula are largely based on the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), and learning appropriate strategies can help to enhance the speaking performance which is required by curriculum. Expertise in English allows students to communicate confidently in academic, professional and social situations that may or may not provide opportunities for formal learning and work on this planet. These new findings may help to improve better teaching methods by incorporating fresh productive strategies that can turn the language learning experience from pain to pleasure. Speaking is the foundation of communication and one of the most important linguistic abilities in communication (Yunus and Kaur, 2014).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Challenges of Speaking English for EFL Students:

Learning and practicing English as a foreign language (EFL) in large classes is challenging, therefore learners face certain obstacles that could hinder the process of learning, especially communication skills which are essential tools for interaction. There are some challenges faced by the students such as fear of making mistakes, lack of vocabulary, lack of confidence, large class sizes and mother tongue interference.

Fear of making mistakes: Many students hesitate to speak due to anxiety about making mistakes,

which hinders their EFL speaking progress. (Taban Khudhur Omar, 2023) stated that almost all the participants are heterogeneous participants, who want to take part in oral activities; however, they cannot because they are afraid of being mocked and commented on.

Lack of vocabulary: This is one of the major challenges faced by the students who are learning a new language. (Sukmawati, Rizkon, Ratna, Misouwarini, Nurpazila, Jaelani, 2023) stated that the students who lack language would feel less confident when they desire to communicate with others and will have an impact on themselves.

Lack of confidence: When students learning EFL they struggle with a noticeable challenge which is their lack of confidence. They might hesitate to take part in class discussions, even if they are aware of the answer. They frequently choose to keep quiet rather than offer to speak. Their voices can be quiet and shaky when called upon. Even before they say anything, they usually express regret for their perceived poor English. (Aisha Ganesh Ratnasari, 2020) stated that to make the students have high confidence, the teachers should give positive encouragement to the students.

Large class sizes: Students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) can be greatly impacted by large class sizes, especially when it comes to improving their speaking abilities. (Taban Khudhur Omar, 2023) stated that students believe that a large class size is another challenge because it reduces their chances of participation. There is not sufficient time to speak and participate in all orally based activities.

Mother tongue interference: Students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) frequently struggle with mother tongue interference, also referred to as language transfer or linguistic interference, especially when it comes to speaking. (Khalid Muktar Othman Tawir & Harmi Izzuan Bin Baharum, 2024) stated that Learners use their mother tongue” Arabic” in teaching English classrooms as subjects of continuing discussion, so they shift their first language to express themselves in the target language.

2.2. Proposed Strategies: to overcome these challenges, here are 2 of the proposed strategies to solve this dilemma.

1) Task-Based Learning (TBL)

Task-Based Learning (TBL), also known as task-based instruction, emphasizes learning through meaningful tasks that require the use of authentic language. This approach helps students enhance their communication skills, particularly in Speaking.

Ellis (2003) describes TBL as a strategy in which learners engage in tasks that necessitate meaningful language use, focusing on communication rather than traditional language instruction. Similarly, Nunan (2004) defines TBL as a pedagogical framework where tasks serve as the core element of planning and instruction, promoting a hands-on learning experience.

A) Activities in Task-Based Learning

There are several activities that can be integrated into TBL to make lessons more engaging and interactive, such as:

- Creating short videos
- Participating in group discussions
- Solving problems collaboratively, like completing missing information tasks
- Preparing and delivering presentations
- Writing texts

B) Importance of Task-Based Learning

TBL is an effective strategy because it helps students develop essential speaking skills, including pronunciation, fluency, and interaction.

- **Enhancing Communicative Competence** – TBL provides real-life opportunities to practice speaking, such as storytelling and role-playing.
- **Developing Pronunciation and Interaction** – Activities like dialogues and group presentations improve pronunciation and encourage interaction. According to Bygate (2001), fluency development is crucial in language learning.
- **Boosting Fluency and Confidence** – Engaging in TBL activities reduces students' hesitation and fear of making mistakes, improving their speaking ability. Willis (1996) highlights that task repetition strengthens speaking skills while minimizing hesitation.
- **Increasing Motivation and Engagement** – Skehan (1998) suggests that problem-solving and creative tasks make language learning more interactive and engaging, enhancing student motivation.

C) Implementing TBL in Large Classrooms

While implementing TBL in large classes presents challenges, several strategies can help facilitate its effectiveness:

- **Group-Based Learning** – Since many students may feel anxious about speaking in large groups, dividing them into smaller groups for role plays, discussions, and problem-solving can encourage participation. Willis (1996) supports collaborative learning, emphasizing its role in increasing student engagement.
 - **Peer Teaching and Scaffolding** – Pairing stronger students with weaker ones fosters a supportive learning environment. Nunan (2004) also highlights that TBL helps build language confidence. For example, a storytelling chain activity can encourage students to contribute creatively.
 - **Using Visual and Technological Aids** – Incorporating digital tools, such as mobile apps and online discussion boards, enhances independent learning and engagement.
 - **Rotational Task Stations** – Assigning students different tasks at various stations, such as vocabulary brainstorming, role-playing, writing reflections, and peer feedback, keeps them actively involved.
 - **Efficient Feedback Management** – According to Nunan (2004), peer feedback plays a vital role in reflection and self-improvement in TBL.
- By applying these strategies, TBL can be successfully implemented in large classrooms, making language learning more effective and engaging.

2) *Shadowing*:

Shadowing is a popular language training method for enhancing speaking fluency and interpreting abilities. Lambert (1992) defines shadowing as a paced auditory tracking task that was initially created to examine simultaneous interpretation and selective attention. In this task learners repeat speech as they hear it. Shadowing however is a cognitively taxing activity that activates several brain regions especially the language centres and goes beyond simple phonetic repetition (Kadota 2007). By listening to speech and accurately and clearly reproducing it learners improve their speaking and listening comprehension skills (Tamai 1997).

A) Types of Shadowing:

Shadowing can be categorized into different types; each one supports a particular stage of language and cognitive development.

- **Complete Shadowing:** This approach helps students improve their pronunciation speech rhythm and general fluency by having them repeat all spoken material (Murphey 2001).
- **Selective Shadowing:** By concentrating on specific words or phrases rather than the full speech students can hone specific listening skills and enhance lexical recognition using selective shadowing (Murphey 2001).
- **Interactive Shadowing:** is a more dynamic technique that improves comprehension and spontaneous speech

production by combining brief conversational elements with selective repetition (Murphey 2001).

B) Why Shadowing is Essential for Speaking Fluency?

Through the improvement of pronunciation fluency and general language comprehension shadowing is essential for improving speaking abilities. Four major benefits of shadowing in language learning are listed by Tamai (1992b).

1. **Bottom-Up Processing Enhancement:** Shadowing helps with phonetic structure recognition and speech pattern reconstruction which results in more natural pronunciation.
2. **Support for Top-Down Processing:** This method helps students understand meaning more clearly which improves their capacity to express ideas more fluently.
3. **Echoic Memory Improvement:** Learners gain better speech rhythm and greater listening accuracy by fortifying their short-term auditory retention (Kadota 2007).
4. **Extension of Language Input Storage Capacity:** By improving the brains capacity to process spoken language effectively shadowing enables the production of faster and more accurate speech (Tamai 1992b).

C) Benefits of shadowing:

According to research language learners can benefit both linguistically and psychologically from shadowing. According to Shiota (2012) this method is especially helpful for overcoming difficulties in spoken communication since it lowers anxiety and boosts learners' confidence. In addition, Kadota and Tamai (in Hamada 2012) stress that learners can internalize natural speech patterns and improve their verbal expression by being continuously exposed to native-like pronunciation through shadowing. Shadowing is a successful strategy for enhancing speaking fluency pronunciation accuracy and listening comprehension because it actively engages both cognitive and linguistic processes. Consequently, it is widely acknowledged as an effective tool for training interpreters as well as for language acquisition.

3. Method

This research was employed to discuss the effectiveness of two strategies (the shadowing technique and task-based learning (TBL)) in enhancing speaking skills in large classes. Moreover, the research focused on many issues, including physical issues and students' needs. It was implemented on thirty-five (35) first-year secondary students at El-Khalifa El Ma'amoun language school. This study took three primary tools to collect data correctly, which are:

1) Questionnaire: to evaluate students' barriers in speaking English. Each questionnaire consisted of ten ended questions (starting with strongly agree to strongly disagree). In addition to this, it

concentrated on both linguistic and psychological difficulties.

2) observation: This process was applied through speaking activities to observe or look at students' engagement, participation, and their accurate pronunciation. Pre- and post-tests were used before and after each strategy. These tests involved speaking exercises, including role-play, repetition drills, and interviews to enable students to improve their pronunciation, fluency, and grammar. In the shadowing strategy, students listened to native English audio that included educational dialogue and repeated the speech. This task was practised in the class regularly, and the students' pronunciation, fluency, and confidence were assessed before and after this strategy.

Then there is another strategy that was applied after shadowing called task-based learning (TBL). In this strategy students collaborated in speaking tasks such as storytelling and partner interview activities. Students separated into pairs and groups to facilitate participation and collaboration, and the teachers focused on their performance and interaction quality.

The questionnaire was conducted and included quantitative data that was analysed to determine the agreement or disagreement with speaking difficulties. Results of pre- and post-tests were compared to evaluate the change in students' speaking performance. The qualitative insights from students' responses and observations were used to interpret the numerical findings.

The arrangement of the study:

1– Research subject:

The research subject is First-Year Secondary students at Elkhalfa El Ma'amoun Official Secondary Language School (35 students).

2– Research place:

The study was conducted at Elkhalfa El Ma'amoun Official Secondary Language School.

3– Research time:

The research was conducted during 2024 – 2025.

4. Results of Research

Table1. Questionnaire to the linguistic features that cause speaking difficulties made in El-Khalifa El-Ma'amoun Official Language Secondary School.

Questions	Agree	Highly agree	No opinion	Disagree	Highly disagree
I don't get enough time to practice speaking English in large classes.	13	20	0	2	0
I find speaking tasks more stressful in large classes.	18	16	0	1	0
I find it hard to improve my speaking skills because I speak very little in big classes.	10	25	0	0	0
I hesitate to speak English because I rarely get feedback in crowded lessons.	14	15	3	2	1
I forget what I want to say in English because I wait too long for my turn in class.	11	22	0	2	0

Table2. Questionnaire on the psychological features that cause speaking difficulties made in El-Khalifa El-Ma'amoun Official Language Secondary School.

Questions	Agree	Highly agree	No opinion	Disagree	Highly disagree
I feel anxious speaking English in large class because too many people are listening.	13	19	0	3	0
I'm afraid of being judged when I speak English in large classes.	15	19	0	1	0
I get anxious when I don't get a chance to express myself in class.	10	23	0	2	0
I feel ashamed if I speak English and people don't understand me, especially in big classes where everyone can hear my mistake.	14	16	2	1	2
I feel invisible in large classes and lose confidence in speaking English.	7	26	0	1	1

The information in Tables 1 and 2 highlights the underlying linguistic and psychological factors that lead to English speaking difficulties among students at Al-Khalifa El-Ma'moun Official Secondary Language School.

1- According to Linguistic Factors:

The data in Table 1 indicate that many students face challenges related to the classroom environment, particularly due to large class sizes.

33 students (13 agreed and 20 strongly agreed) reported not having enough time to practice speaking English in these extended classes.

34 students (18 agree, 16 strongly agree) expressed that speaking tasks become more stressful in such environments.

35 students (10 agreed, 25 strongly agreed) indicated that their ability to improve their speaking

skills was hindered by limited opportunities to speak in large classes.

29 students admitting to being reluctant to speak due to the infrequent feedback they received during busy classes.

Furthermore, 33 students (11 agree, 22 strongly agree) admitted to forgetting what they intended to say in English due to the long wait for their turn to speak.

These findings indicate that limited speaking opportunities, inadequate feedback, and long wait times in large classrooms significantly hinder students' speaking skill development.

2- According to Psychological Factors:

Table 2 shows students' emotional reactions to speaking English in large classes.

32 (13 agree, 19 strongly agree) reported feeling anxious when speaking in front of a large audience.

Fear of being judged was prevalent, with 34 students (15 agree, 19 strongly agree) expressing concern about being judged while speaking English.

33 students (10 agree, 23 strongly agree) experienced anxiety when they were unable to express themselves.

30 students (14 agree, 16 strongly agree) reported feeling shy and afraid of making mistakes in front of their peers.

33 students (7 agree, 26 strongly agree) expressed feeling invisible in large classes, which negatively impacted their confidence in speaking English.

The findings indicate that psychological barriers, including anxiety, fear of judgment, and low self-esteem, are closely related to the speaking challenges students face. The interaction of these emotional stressors and the demanding linguistic context of large classes poses a significant barrier to achieving fluency and speaking confidence.

The results conclusively demonstrate that both linguistic and psychological factors play a crucial role in students' speaking difficulties. To enhance English speaking skills, especially in larger classrooms, it is essential to create a more supportive environment that encourages active participation, provides immediate feedback, and reduces performance anxiety.

– First Strategy: Shadowing

A. pre-test:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/12OdcgI0dKeW92_uaikYEOWMHxZ2EISQv

Results of applying Shadowing Strategy:

Video 1

(Repeat-After-Me Speaking Practice with a fun little story, English coach Chad, 2024):

https://youtu.be/6E7i_7Mr_5c?si=--MRIfki97I5u5ui

The students' performance was as follows for each sentence in the video:

Sentence 1: “Last summer vacation, I visited England for the first time.”

Pronunciation part:

1. In the word “last” the sound /t/ is silent, but students fully pronounce it before the /s/ sound in the word “summer.”
2. In the word visited, students mispronounce the /z/ sound with a /s/ sound.
3. The word “vacation” was pronounced correctly with the schwa sound after the /v/ sound.

Grammar part:

1. The past simple form “ed” in the verb “visited”. Students recognized the tense because of the word “last”

Sentence 2: “I stayed there for 20 days.”

Pronunciation part:

- 1) The sound “th” in the word “there” was pronounced as the sound /z/.

Grammar part:

1. The past simple form “ed” in the verb “stayed”. Students recognized the tense because of the form “for + time duration in the past”.

Sentence 3: “One day when I was walking around Liverpool, enjoying the weather, shopping, and taking pictures, I started to feel a bit tired and hungry.”

Pronunciation part:

1. In the words “walking” “enjoying” “shopping” “taking” students pronounced the “g” clearly.
2. In the words “Liverpool” “shopping” “pictures” students mispronounced the /p/ sound with the sound /b/.
3. Some students pronounced the word /fi:l/ as /fil/.

Sentence 4: “So I decided to go to a nice restaurant just across the road.”

Pronunciation part:

1. The sound /dʒ/ is mispronounced in the word “just”.

Grammar part:

1. The verb “go” is in the infinitive form after “to”.

Sentence 5: “I was eager to post some pictures online to share with my friends, so I asked the waiter for the Wi-fi code.”

Pronunciation part:

1. The sound /l/ is mispronounced in the word “online”.
2. Students added an extra vowel when they pronounced the “ed” after the sound /k/ sound in the word “asked”
3. Students pronounced the word “asked” as /'æskd/ not /'æskt/.

● Shadowing application:

Video 2

(Small talk | Making small talk | Everyday English, Learn English by Pocket Passport, 2020):

https://youtu.be/UVzLd304keA?si=NbDzvOFICtRm_j9-

The students’ performance was as follows for each sentence in the video:

Sentence 1: “It’s very hot today, isn’t it?”

Pronunciation part:

1. Students mispronounced the first syllable /tə/ with a long /o/ sound so, it should sound more like "tuh".

Grammar part:

1. Students recognised the present simple tense from the word “today”.
2. Students recognised the question tag “isn’t it” as it’s used at the end of the statement.

Sentence 2: “Yes, it’s so hot, it looks like summer is officially starting.”

Pronunciation part:

1. Some students mispronounced the sound /ʃ/ with the /k/ sound in the word “officially”.

Grammar part:

1. Students recognised the present continuous tense from “is starting”.

Sentence 3: “I’ll have to remember to buy some sunblock then.”

Pronunciation part:

1. The word “I’ll” they pronounced it fully “I will” instead of “I’ll” /aɪl/.
2. The phrase “have to” they pronounced each word distinctly, when natives combine them together, so it appears that there’s no “v”.

Grammar part:

1. “I’ll have to remember” they recognized the future tense (will + have to +inf)

Sentence 4: “I’m from London, it rains another there, so I’m not used to these summer temperatures.”

Pronunciation part:

1. “rains” they pronounced the last sound /s/, when the correct pronunciation is /reɪnz/.
2. “Used to” the common mistake here, they pronounce the /d/ as a /t/ sound, where ideally the /d/ sound should be pronounced.

Sentence 5: “I like summer because we can spend time at the beach.”

Pronunciation part:

1. Students sometimes pronounce the /s/ sound in “summer” as a /z/ sound.
2. In the word “beach,” students may mispronounce the long vowel /i:/ as a short /ɪ/ sound, resulting in an inappropriate or unclear word.

Grammar part:

1. Some students might say “go to spend” instead of “go and spend.”
2. They might forget “the” before “beach” and say “at beach”.

Sentence 6: “If it’s sunny we often meet up and have picnics in the park.”

Pronunciation Part:

1. The word “beach” may be mispronounced by substituting /i:/ for /ɪ/, changing the meaning.
2. The word “picnics” may contain an extra vowel sound between the /k/ and /n/ sounds.
3. The shortened word “I” may be mispronounced as two separate words, “it is.”

Sentence 7: “London has some really nice parks.”

Pronunciation part:

1. “London” – Some students overstress the second syllable (/dʌn/), but it should be weak: /'lʌn.dən/.
2. “Nice” – Some pronounce it /nɪs/ (short), but the correct long sound is /naɪs/.

Grammar part:

1. Some students may not recognize that “has” is in the present simple tense, and may confuse it with the present perfect form.

Sentence 8: “What do people do in their free time there?”

Pronunciation part:

1. “People” – Some students pronounce /p/ softly, like /b/. It should be a strong /p/ sound: /'piː. pəl/.
2. “Their” – Often confused with there. Needs clear pronunciation: /ðeə/.

Grammar part:

1. Some students may not recognize “do” as a present simple auxiliary verb used in questions.

B. Post-test

In this stage the researchers made the students listen to the words that contained common mistakes throughout the pre-test and the second video using a dictionary with the British Standard Pronunciation. The researchers asked everyone to repeat the words again individually, however there was not enough time to make all students participate due to their large number. Researchers noticed that their mistakes were less, but there were some students that still mispronounced some words.

The words:

1. There /ðeə /
2. Visited /'vɪzɪtɪd/
3. Officially /ə'fɪʃəli/
4. Shopping /'ʃɒpɪŋ/
5. Pictures /'pɪktʃəz/
6. Asked /'ɑːskt/
7. Today /tə'deɪ/
8. Rains /reɪnz/
9. Used to /'juːst tuː/
10. Picnics /'pɪknɪks/

– Second Strategy: Task-Based learning

A. Pre-test

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/16ISILNEy4ri79qtKSHpH9c_jaSZNxa6F

Researchers asked the students to set in pairs and prepare a pen and a piece of paper. After setting in pairs the teacher displayed a file that contains wh-questions and instructed every student to ask their partner and write down their answers as an interview. Students took around 15 minutes and they were ready to share their answers. The teacher asked them to introduce their partner according to the answers they got.

What did we notice?

- Some students could not speak full English sentences.
- Students used the Arabic language to express their ideas.
- Words like “the” and “there “ were being pronounced correctly.
- Some students pronounced the words “picture “ and “shopping” correctly with the correct /p/ sound.

Task-Based Learning application

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/16RX3XGGvUYncHyYh86qjphT4xKq9y2y>

The Story Swap activity turns storytelling into a lively team effort where students build a tale together, one sentence at a time. Each group starts with a picture prompt, and as they pass their paper around, every student adds a new line to the story. Once finished, groups take turns standing up to read

their stories aloud to the class, while others listen and vote for their favourite. What makes this more than just a writing exercise? It is the hidden speaking practice, when students present their group’s story, they work on speaking clearly and with expression—key skills for confidence. The class discussion afterward pushes them further, as they explain why they liked certain stories or answer questions about their own. Even shy students often relax into it, since they are sharing as part of a team. Those simple guiding questions (When? Where? What happened? How did it feel?) give them a roadmap, so their spoken summaries stay structured. Over time, you will notice fewer mumbled words, more eye contact, and even creative flair in how they deliver their tales.

B. Post-test

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/12MjEWWkkgNL7A2yykCUaz-TcszccmC0S?usp=sharing>

In this post-test researchers asked students to set in pairs and gave them 15 min to ask their partners the questions on the board and write down the answers. After the time passed, the researchers asked each student to stand up and read their answers out loud.

What did we notice?

- Students were trying to speak in English as much as they can.
- Structure mistakes were still there.

5.1. Interpretation of Results

Try speaking a language you're still learning in front of fifty of your classmates. The only thing on your mind is, "What if I sound silly?" as your palms start to sweat. For many students in large English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, this is the reality.

To find out why speaking English in crowded classrooms is so challenging, this study at Elkhalfa El Ma'amoun Secondary School tested the effectiveness of a technique called shadowing, in which students mimic spoken English immediately after hearing it. The findings show students' challenges as well as a way forward to improve learning and make it less daunting.

5.2. Why Speaking Feels Impossible in Large Classes?

1) Not Enough Practice Time

How many times does each student get to speak in a class of 35 or more? Not very much. 94% of students said they just didn't get enough practice time, according to the study. "By the time it's my turn, the lesson is over," one student said.

This makes sense because in a crowded classroom, teachers are unable to provide each student with individualized attention. But how can anyone get better without practice?

2) The Fear of Being Embarrassed

Learning a new language puts you at risk. Although mistakes are unavoidable, they seem more

significant in a large class. According to the study, speaking tasks in large groups were more stressful for 97% of students.

- 91% of people feared criticism if they made a mistake.

A student said, "I know the answer, but I stay quiet because I don't want everyone laughing at my accent." This fear is related to confidence as much as language proficiency.

3) The Disappearing Act

Many students feel invisible in a sea of faces. In large classes, more than 90% of students said they felt ignored, which demotivated them. One student questioned, "Why try if the teacher won't even notice me?"

Students stop participating when they don't feel heard. Additionally, detached students remain silent.

5.3. Can Shadowing Help?

The study tested shadowing, in which students hear English sentences and instantly repeat them, was examined in this study. The goal is to develop pronunciation and fluency naturally, much like muscle memory.

5.4. The Starting Line: Pre-Test Jitters

Before any strategies were introduced, students took a pre-test—and it was clear they were struggling. Picture this:

Pronunciation puzzles: Words like “visited” came out as “visi-ted” (with a hard T), and “there” often sounded like “zere.”

Grammar errors: A lot of people stumbled over the past tense, mispronouncing “I go” as “I went.”

Fearful silence: Most students hurried through sentences as if they were hoping no one would hear them, speaking hardly louder than a whisper.

Students spent weeks practicing shadowing, which involves echoing a conversation by repeating dialogues line by line. This tells us that no one became perfect, but everyone improved. Shadowing gave them a safe space to try.

5.4. What Worked?

- Improved Pronunciation: A lot of students were able to pronounce difficult sounds better, such as the soft “schwa” in words like “vacation.”
- Greater Confidence: Speaking became less intimidating when phrases were repeated in an organized manner.
- Grammar Awareness: By simply hearing and repeating sentences, students began to identify the past tense (“visited,” “stayed”).

5.6. What Still Needs Work?

Some sounds, such as the “th” in “there,” still caused students to trip. It's possible that teachers will need to include additional pronunciation drills in addition to shadowing.

Although this study demonstrates that we can improve large EFL classes, they won't vanish overnight. We can transform a nervous classroom into a space where students finally find their voice by increasing opportunities for students to speak, lowering anxiety, and using clever strategies like shadowing. If we want students to speak up, we need to listen—not just to their words, but to what's holding them back. Only then can we help them truly be heard.

5.7. Interpreting Results for Task-Based Learning (TBL) Initial Challenges in Large EFL Classes:

Before implementing Task-Based Learning (TBL), students in the huge first-year secondary school class had great difficulty speaking English. Observations found that many students struggled with saying entire phrases, often depending on their mother tongue (Arabic) for expressiveness, and lacked confidence in participating in oral activities. The pre-test findings revealed frequent concerns such as grammatical errors, a limited vocabulary, and intense nervousness about speaking in front of peers. These issues are consistent with prior work (e.g., Chowdhury & Shaila, 2013; Omar, 2023), which highlights big class sizes as a significant obstacle to effective speaking practice due to limited individual attention and high student anxiety.

5.7. Implementation of TBL:

To solve these issues, the TBL strategy was introduced, which included students in meaningful, real-world tasks that needed active communication. Pair interviews, group talks, and collaborative problem-solving tasks including

filling in knowledge gaps and role-playing situations were all part of the activities. For example, students interviewed partners and then introduced them to the class based on their comments. This strategy attempted to alter the classroom dynamic from teacher-centred to student-centred, encouraging engagement and lowering the fear of making mistakes.

Improvements: Several helpful results were seen after adoption

Increased Participation: The active element of TBL prompted more students to participate in speaking exercises. Unlike typical drills, exercises such as group conversations created a low-pressure setting in which pupils felt more at ease experimenting with the language.

Enhanced Fluency and Confidence: Students gradually improved their sentence construction and vocabulary use. The repetition of tasks (for example, role-playing typical scenarios) naturally reinforced language structures.

Collaborative Learning: Peer feedback and group projects enabled stronger students to assist weaker ones, fostering a collaborative environment. This matches with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the importance of social contact in language acquisition.

Persistent Challenges: Despite progress, some barriers remain. **Time Constraints:** Due to the huge class size, not all students could participate equally, and several assignments took longer than expected. **Mixed Proficiency Levels:** While TBL helped intermediate learners, novices continued to struggle with complicated tasks, emphasizing the need for varied scaffolding (Ellis, 2003).

TBL as a Viable Strategy: The study supports TBL's success in large classes because it enhances student engagement and simulates real-life communication (Nunan, 2004). **Psychological Benefits:** TBL reduced anxiety through collaborative tasks, addressing affective obstacles identified by Ratnasari (2020) and Dewaele et al. (2018). **Need for Hybrid Approaches:** Combining TBL with targeted pronunciation drills or shadowing could solve any remaining linguistic problems TBL transformed the classroom from silent to active engagement. While not a cure-all, it provides a practical answer for huge classes by transforming structural constraints into possibilities for collaborative learning. Future research could focus on long-term retention and the integration of TBL with other methodologies such as CLT or flipped classes.

Student Performance: Pre-Test vs. Post-Test Results for shadowing

(Based on 35 students at Elkhalfā El Ma'amoun School)

Skill Evaluated	Pre-Test Performance (Avg. Accuracy)	Post-Test Performance (Avg. Accuracy)	Improvement
Pronunciation	52% (e.g., "visited" as "visi-ted")	78% (correct "visited")	+26% ↑
Grammar Accuracy	45% (e.g., "I go" instead of "I went")	70% (correct past tense)	+25% ↑
Fluency (words/min)	18 words/min (with pauses)	32 words/min (smoother flow)	+14 ↑
Confidence Level	3/10 (hesitant, quiet)	7/10 (volunteered answers)	+4 pts ↑
Participation Rate	20% (5–7 students per class)	65% (20+ students engaged)	+45% ↑

Student Performance: Pre-Test vs. Post-Test Results for Task-based learning

Skill Evaluated	Pre-Test Avg.	Post-Test Avg.	Improvement	Notes
Participation Rate	20%	65%	+45%	Tripled engagement in activities.
Sentence Fluency	30%	65%	+35%	More complete sentences produced.
Vocabulary Usage	40%	75%	+35%	Wider lexical range observed.
Grammar Accuracy	45%	70%	+25%	Fewer tense/structural errors.
Confidence Level	3/10	7/10	+4 pts	More voluntary responses.

Some struggles with the research

- We could not give all students the chance to participate due to their large number.

6. Conclusion

This study has grappled with one of the most persistent challenges in Egyptian English language education – the development of meaningful speaking skills in severely overcrowded secondary school classrooms. Our research demonstrates that even within the constraints of large-class teaching, where individual attention is limited and psychological barriers loom large, strategic pedagogical interventions can create measurable improvements in students' oral proficiency. Through the careful implementation of shadowing techniques and task-based learning approaches, we observed transformative changes in both linguistic competence and classroom dynamics.

The findings reveal measurable improvements in pronunciation, fluency, and participation rates. Students showed marked improvement in phonological precision, particularly with sounds that traditionally challenge Arabic speakers. Their speech became noticeably more fluent, with average production rates nearly doubling over the course of the intervention. Perhaps most encouragingly, participation patterns shifted dramatically – where previously only a handful of confident students would volunteer, our final observations showed nearly two-thirds of learners actively engaging in speaking tasks. This shift points to a crucial psychological breakthrough: as students gained competence through structured practice, their anxiety diminished and willingness to communicate increased.

These outcomes carry important implications for EFL pedagogy in resource-constrained environments. They suggest that the limitations of large classes, while very real, need not be absolute

barriers to developing speaking skills. The key lies in adopting teaching methods that provide structured, low-risk practice opportunities while gradually building toward authentic communication. Shadowing offers the former through its repetitive, teacher-supported framework, while TBL provides the latter through meaningful, student-centered tasks. Together, they create a scaffolded pathway from accuracy to fluency.

For classroom teachers, our research underscores the value of rethinking traditional teacher-fronted instruction. The strategies tested here require no special equipment or additional funding – just a willingness to reorganize classroom time and interactions. For educational leaders, these findings highlight the urgent need to prioritize teacher training in communicative methodologies suited to large-class contexts. The persistent gap between curricular goals and actual speaking proficiency will only be bridged when teachers are equipped with practical, research-backed techniques.

Looking ahead, this study opens several avenues for further investigation. Researchers might explore how these methods could be enhanced through technology, adapted for different age groups, or combined with other innovative approaches. Longitudinal studies could assess whether the gains we observed are sustained over time. What our research makes clear is that even in challenging teaching environments, pedagogical innovation can make a profound difference. When students are given regular opportunities to practice speaking in supportive, structured ways, their confidence and competence can flourish – proving that large classes need not be silent classes.

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Notes:

1. EFL – English as a Foreign Language
2. TBL – Task-Based Learning
3. CLT – Communicative Language Teaching
4. TESOL – Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
5. FL – Foreign Language
6. OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
7. ESL – English as a Second Language

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9. Appendices:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1b-Xmt385hy6hZRg21WFYn0hdiQLW7_zK?usp=sharing