

## SHADOWING A CONVERSATION HELPS STUDENTS USE NEW WORDS IN ENGLISH SPEAKING

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Received:	18/5/2021	Teaching vocabulary plays a necessary role in helping students to learn a foreign language and improving their level. Many teachers of English have tried different approaches in bettering their vocabulary teaching quality; however, many students are still unable to express their ideas well due to the lack for topic-related words. In order to tackle this problem, the author conducted an action research project in which she asked her group of twenty-two sophomores majoring in English language to practice with the shadowing technique using the input from BBC six-minute English. Employing the action research model with qualitative analysis, the results from the two progress tests and a short survey questionnaire at the end of the semester revealed some important findings. Firstly, shadowing using BBC six-minute English is a useful way for students to learn and use the new words within a surrounding setting, which enhances their memory and turns those words theirs to include in their own speaking. In addition, shadowing was not only helpful for improving students' listening or pronunciation ability as some previous studies pointed out, but it also had significant contribution to students' vocabulary practices. Thirdly, this technique can promote students' awareness of enlarging their word banks to reach their desired targets.
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## KỸ THUẬT BẮT CHƯỚC GIÚP SINH VIÊN SỬ DỤNG TỪ MỚI TRONG KHI NÓI TIẾNG ANH

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài:	18/5/2021	Dạy học từ vựng đóng vai trò quan trọng trong việc giúp người học ngoại ngữ cải thiện năng lực của họ. Rất nhiều giáo viên tiếng Anh đã áp dụng các biện pháp khác nhau nhằm nâng cao chất lượng dạy học từ vựng; tuy nhiên, khá nhiều học sinh vẫn không thể diễn đạt ý mình muốn nói do thiếu các từ vựng theo chủ đề. Để giải quyết vấn đề này, tác giả đã tiến hành một nghiên cứu hành động với 22 sinh viên năm thứ hai chuyên ngành ngôn ngữ Anh. Tác giả yêu cầu học sinh luyện tập với phương pháp “nhắc lại” sử dụng ngữ liệu của BBC six-minute English. Sử dụng phương pháp nghiên cứu hành động với phân tích định tính, kết quả từ hai bài kiểm tra quá trình và từ các câu hỏi ngắn vào cuối khóa học đã cho thấy một số phát hiện quan trọng. Thứ nhất, kỹ thuật “bắt chước” rất hữu ích trong việc sinh viên học về cách sử dụng từ mới trong ngữ cảnh; giúp họ nhớ từ lâu hơn và có thể sử dụng những từ này khi giao tiếp. Thêm vào đó, kỹ thuật này không chỉ hữu ích cho việc luyện nghe hay phát âm như các nghiên cứu trước đã chỉ ra, nó có đóng góp to lớn cho việc học từ vựng của học sinh. Thứ ba là, khi áp dụng kỹ thuật này, học sinh nhận thức tốt hơn về việc phải cải thiện vốn từ vựng để đạt được năng lực mong muốn.
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## 1. Introduction

Since the National Foreign Languages Project (NFLP) was initiated, schools and educational institutions across Vietnam have implemented numerous methods and innovative strategies to improve the quality of English language teaching and learning. However, the results shown in the national graduation exam for high schools students in 2020 revealed a repetitively poor performance of students in their English graduation test, which was similar to the previous years, when English scores were in the second lowest group with most students achieving mark 3 out of 10. This fact has raised a concern in the way English was taught to students during their 12 years in high schools. From the author's observation when attending English classes, many students got stuck in expressing their ideas; they tended to ask for the teachers' help in translating their utterances into English; the same obstacle was seen when they did reading and writing tasks when they could neither comprehend at least 20% of the text nor communicate their ideas well. The importance of vocabulary is described in this quote "Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" [1]. For English language learners, vocabulary plays a key role in helping them achieve their desired target. People often list listening, speaking, reading and writing as the four core skills in English; in order to master those areas, students need vocabulary to support [2]. Being aware of its vital role, English teachers often spend a sufficient amount of time in their schedule teaching students vocabulary needed for their in-class tasks.

Ur [3] defined vocabulary as the words taught in a foreign language. According to Hatch and Brown [4], vocabulary refers to a list of words for a particular language, or a set of words that a speaker of a particular language might use. In mastering vocabulary, language learners do not need only the meaning of words; instead, they have to be confident in a number of aspects. Ur [3] described those aspects as 1) Form (pronunciation and spelling), 2) Grammar, 3) Collocation, 4) Aspects of meaning (denotation, connotation, appropriateness and meaning relationship). Within a 45-minute lesson, a teacher cannot cover all of those aspects as they have to spend time teaching students with skills in tackling reading, speaking, listening and writing tasks; however, form, meaning and grammar are always the key areas that students need to learn.

Unlike teaching language skills, with the popular model of Pre – While – Post, in teaching grammar and vocabulary, teachers often choose PPP (presentation – practice – production) model. In the first stage – Presentation, the teachers select what vocabulary should be taught; basically, they will choose one of the two ways to introduce the new vocabulary to students. One way is they may show the meaning in some ways (via picture, realia, visuals, etc.); another is using the language that students already know to make the meaning of new words clear to them. The author has seen quite many teachers of English using translation as a technique in teaching new vocabulary. They may use pictures or actions to support or demonstrate the meanings, but they will translate the words into Vietnamese in the end. The Practice stage – the controlled stage aims at providing opportunities for students to use the new words they have learnt in doing exercises so that they can remember the words' meaning and their use. All of the tasks are to enforce comprehension for students. In the final stage – Production, teachers use communicative activities such as role-plays, communication games, interviews, etc. for students to apply the language in a higher level with less teachers' control or interference.

Suppose a teacher always follow those steps in teaching vocabulary, what are other criteria needed to ensure the effectiveness of her teaching and her students' learning? Lightbown and Spada [5] stated that a new word must be encountered many times before a student can recognize it and use it in their own speaking or writing. For efficient learning, some features that need to be set out include designing multiple exposures, creating meaningful contexts, activating prior knowledge, learning to use context clues and dictionary. More importantly, students must have chances to see, say and use the new words.

Another crucial question a teacher should ask is, when learning and teaching are inseparable, how to teach new words effectively? Brown [6] recommended some principles for communicative treatment of instructing vocabulary. Firstly, there should be class time for teaching vocabulary as students need to pay attention to words. Secondly, having a context for teaching new words is a must as it enhances students' comprehension. Thirdly, students need to be trained on how to work out the meanings of unknown words.

Teachers who are fully aware of these guidelines and principles in teaching vocabulary also know that in-class instruction is never adequate to improve students' ability; hence, they also look for strategies or techniques that support their students' autonomy. Shadowing can be one of those.

Since the early days of language teaching, shadowing has been employed as a technique to support students in their language learning. According to Marslen-Wilson [7], shadowing is a task in which students have to repeat speech as they hear it. Listeners often do not wait until the speech is finished to start "echoing", but begin to repeat right after they hear the first word. In Lambert's definition [8], "shadowing is a paced, auditory tracking task which involves the immediate vocalization of auditorily presented stimuli in the same language, parrot-style, of a message". As the word "imitation" is controversial in linguists' opinions, some linguists differentiated shadowing from imitation. In shadowing a speech, the listener is required to repeat the utterances as quickly as possible. The focused aspects usually include both the speaker's regional dialect and his vocal mannerism. In imitating, however, the shadower seems to draw their attention to the phonetic and non-phonetic aspects of the target utterance.

In Norman's classification [9], there are two types of shadowing: "phrase shadowing" and "phonemic shadowing". In the first one, words are often delayed a bit behind the speech input. In the second one, no "waiting time" is seen, each sound is repeated at the same time when the listener hears it. As a perceptual-cognitive process, shadowing helps improve students' confidence and attention. Compared to a simple listening and speaking activity, when shadowing, students have to pay special attention to the speaker and repeat after him, which clears the hindrance, or insecure feelings, they suffer when they have to produce the language themselves. In Murphey's explanation [10], "shadowing makes a shadower hear everything twice providing more neural weight to the utterance from hearing it, producing it, and again hearing it from oneself. This involvement and awareness to do this demand more effort. Thus, it is reasonable to assume it makes a more lasting impression on the mind which may very well augment further processing through noticing" (p. 146).

So far there have been researches about the impact of shadowing on improving students' listening and speaking skills. One example is Tokada's [11], in which he showed students' mean scores of a listening test went up; they also stated shadowing was the second most contributing factor to their achievement. Another is Park's [12] study with evidence of participants' statistically higher significant achievement on their listening comprehension post - test. In terms of speaking skills, some researchers such as Acton [13] and Osburne [14] pointed out the merits that shadowing created when students practiced pronunciation. There are, however, not many studies about the effects of using this technique to help students memorize new words and use them in their speaking performances. This gap is expected to be fulfilled in the author's action research with this research question: "Can shadowing a conversation help students' use new words in English speaking?"

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Sample choosing

The author was assigned to teach a group of twenty-two sophomores majoring in English at the School of Foreign Languages, who aimed to achieve B1+ level of English proficiency. After

two weeks of teaching them, the author realized that they could not use the new words taught in class in their speaking when they were asked to do either monologues or conversations with peers. From this fact, the author decided to try out “shadowing a conversation” technique to test its impacts on their speaking performance. Due to the limited number of students in this group, action research was employed to observe the results of 11 weeks implementing the treatment. The research was then willingly participated by 22 students after they listened to their teacher explaining the aim of the study.

## **2.2 Data collection instruments**

There are two instruments used in this project. The first one was students’ recordings of their two speaking progress tests which occurred in weeks 7 and 13 of their semester. Those recordings were then analysed to count for the number of new words that had been introduced to them. The second instrument was a survey questionnaire delivered to them in week 14 to find out their evaluation after almost three months shadowing conversations in BBC six-minute English (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/features/6-minute-english>). This website teaches new words in the context of two people talking to each other about a topic. The new words are repeated throughout their talk and explained at the end. The author chose this website for students to work on their vocabulary because of a number of reasons. Firstly, the speech there was produced at a reasonable speed for students to imitate. Secondly, there were topic alignments between the website and the ones in the course book. Finally, all of the word-for-word scripts were also provided for students’ self-reference, which allowed them to control their learning pace. The questionnaire consisted of 4 questions in Vietnamese. The first 3 questions aimed to find out how the students actually did their tasks, and the last one asked for their opinions.

## **2.3. Procedures**

The participants were introduced to shadowing technique in week 3 after the author took notice of students’ habits in using the words they already know to express their ideas in accomplishing speaking homework. Many of those words were at A2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference, which was lower than their target level. Following the cycle of an action research, in the first phase - planning, the students were asked to shadow the speech in pairs as each speech lasted for 6 minutes. The teacher spent one hour in her teaching schedule explaining and demonstrating what they should do with this technique. In the action stage, the students recorded their work and submitted it to a Drive folder. Before each assignment, the teachers indicated 5 new words in the first phase, and 3 new ones in the second phase that students need to pay attention to while they were shadowing. After the practice, they had to note down the meaning, use and pronunciation of those words on a separate notebook; they then made one sentence of their own with each of the new word. After doing this activity for three weeks – the observation stage, the researcher got students’ complaints about the length of the speech which was too long for them as the Quiz part of the conversation was repeated. The teacher decided to conduct another cycle of her action research in which she planned her students to shadow only the main parts of the chosen conversations, leaving out the quiz, the introduction and the ending. This requirement was then maintained until the end of the semester. After conducting the two progress tests, with the students being paired up as they did their homework, and having the students’ recordings at hand, the author played them in an application named Otter which is a software that helps transcribe audio into words, which is mainly used at meetings for the sake of not having to take notes but still having the speaker’s opinions in written form. As the tests were operated in a quiet room, the audio quality was good enough for Otter to do its function. There were 11 pairs with 11 conversations recorded at each of the progress test.

In week 14, after the students had finished the second test, the teacher handed out the survey questionnaire via Google Form for the benefits of collecting and summarizing data. The last phase – reflection – ended here.

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1. The number of new words in students' speaking performances

Table 1 presents the number of new words counted in recordings from the first progress test. As the students were grouped in 11 pairs, their conversations were numbered from 1 to 11.

**Table 1.** *New words used in students' first speaking performances*

N <sup>o</sup> Conversation	N <sup>o</sup> new words used/ N <sup>o</sup> of words introduced		Percentage	
	Student 1	Student 2	Student 1	Student 2
1.	0/15	4/15	0%	26.7%
2.	10/15	3/15	66.7%	20.0%
3.	3/15	5/15	33.3%	33.3%
4.	1/15	2/15	6.7%	13.3%
5.	7/15	4/15	46.7%	26.7%
6.	1/15	3/15	6.7%	20.0%
7.	3/15	5/15	33.3%	33.3%
8.	4/15	0/15	26.7%	0%
9.	4/15	1/15	26.7%	6.7%
10.	4/15	2/15	26.7%	13.3%
11.	5/15	2/15	33.3%	13.3%

As can be seen from table 1, only one person could use more than half of the new words required with 66.7% of all the new vocabulary. The number of students who could use three to five words took up the largest proportion; to be exact, three of them could include five new words, five people could have four, and four students could have three words. Those who had only one or two new words in their speaking also made up of the second biggest group with three students being able to use one word, three of them having two new items in their speeches. Noticeably, there were two students who could not use any new words at all. These results, even though they indicated a positive change in the way students learned and applied new words in practice, were not up to the researchers' expectation. However, it could be explained in a way that as the test was done after only three weeks of practicing with shadowing, the students may have been adapting their learning habits to satisfy the teacher's requirements. Many of them did raise their voice to ask for reduction of shadowed speech as some parts of the model conversations were repetitive.

After the first test, the students continued practicing with shadowing technique before they came to their second test in week 13, which means they had five more weeks to change their vocabulary learning habit. Table 2 indicates results of the second test with the same pairs of students.

Overall, the data in table 2 illustrates a significant increase in the use of new words in each student's performance. Notably, there were 13 participants who could have half of the required words; this accounted for 59.1% of all the students taking part in the test. Compared to two students, which took up only 9% (shown in Table 1) of the first phase, this was a surprisingly encouraging result. It can also be seen that the number of students who could not include any new words in their speaking and those who had had from one to three words in the first test could now have at least four. Another outstanding feature observed from the two tests data was the increase in each student's inclusion of the new words they had learnt. With longer time of practicing with the technique, the students became more aware of their word choice in speaking to make sure they met the requirement.

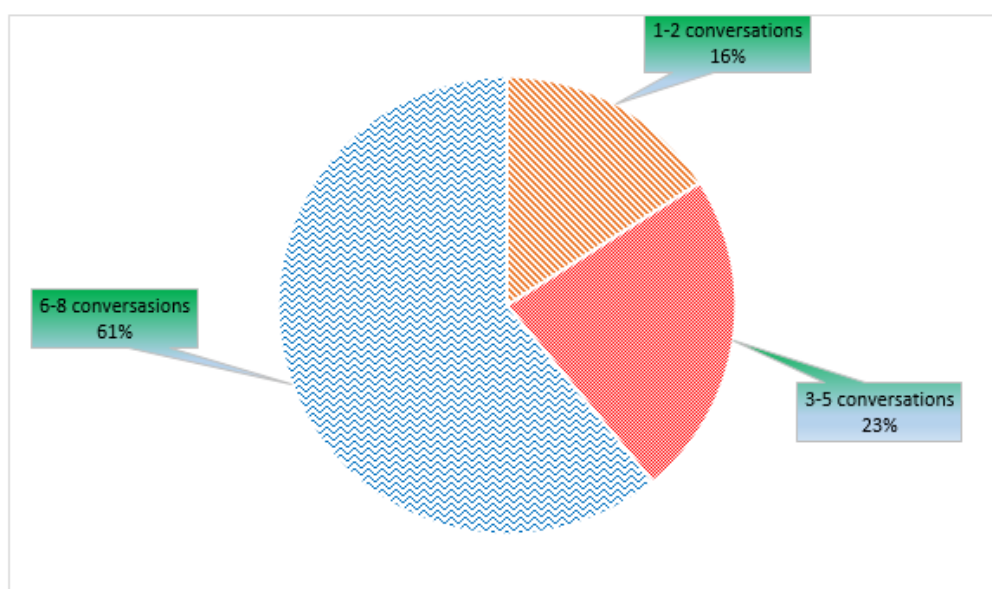
**Table 2.** *New words used in students' second speaking performances*

N <sup>o</sup> Conversation	N <sup>o</sup> new words used/ N <sup>o</sup> of words introduced		Percentage	
	Student 1	Student 2	Student 1	Student 2
1.	5/15	7/15	33.3%	46.7%
2.	8/15	6/15	53.3%	40.0%
3.	7/15	5/15	46.7%	33.3%
4.	5/15	8/15	33.3%	53.3%
5.	13/15	8/15	86.7%	53.3%
6.	7/15	5/15	46.7%	33.3%
7.	7/15	5/15	46.7%	33.3%
8.	8/15	6/15	53.3%	40.0%
9.	9/15	8/15	60%	53.3%
10.	4/15	4/15	26.7%	26.7%
11.	9/15	8/15	60 %	53.3%

### 3.2. Students' evaluation of the shadowing technique

#### 3.2.1. The number of conversations that students shadowed

Figure 1 describes the number of practices that the students completed during ten weeks.

**Figure 1.** *The number of shadowed conversations*

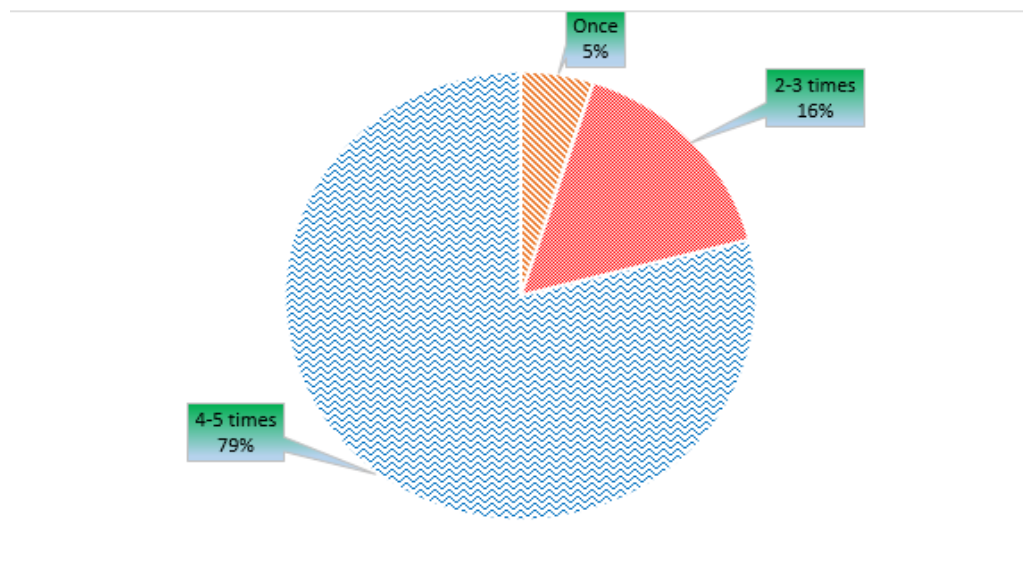
As can be seen from figure 1, most of the students fulfilled the teacher's homework assignment when 61% of them completed six to eight conversations. This data correlates with 59.1% of the students who had more than half of the required new words. The data also indicates that 16% of them shadowed only one to two conversations. This may explain for the small quantity of new words used in the first and second progress tests of some students.

#### 3.2.2. The number of times students practiced shadowing per conversation

The data gained for question 2 in the questionnaire "How many times did you practice shadowing before you recorded your work?" was described in figure 2.

According to figure 2, very few students, only 5% imitated the speech once before they started recording. The majority of them, which accounted for 79%, had to shadow two to three times for

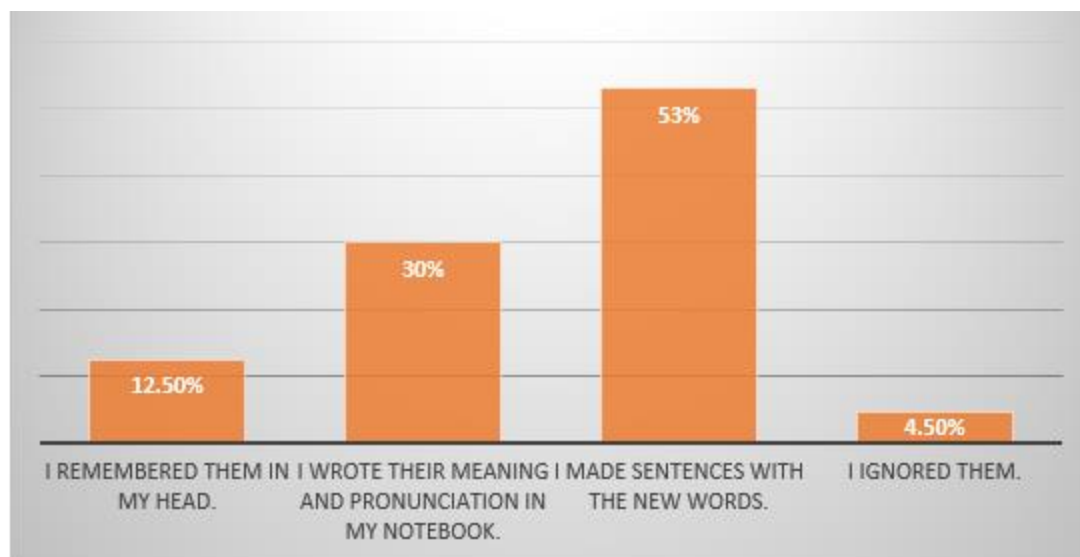
preparation before they completed their work. This shows that the students did put their efforts in doing the assignment; moreover, when they listened to the talk several times, they could hear the new words and understood their meanings clearly, which was useful for their word choice in the progress tests.



**Figure 2.** Number of times shadowing before recording

### 3.2.3. What students did with the new words

In answering the question “What did you do with the new words after you shadowed?”, there was a list of options and students ticked the one that best described their activity. The result is demonstrated in figure 3.



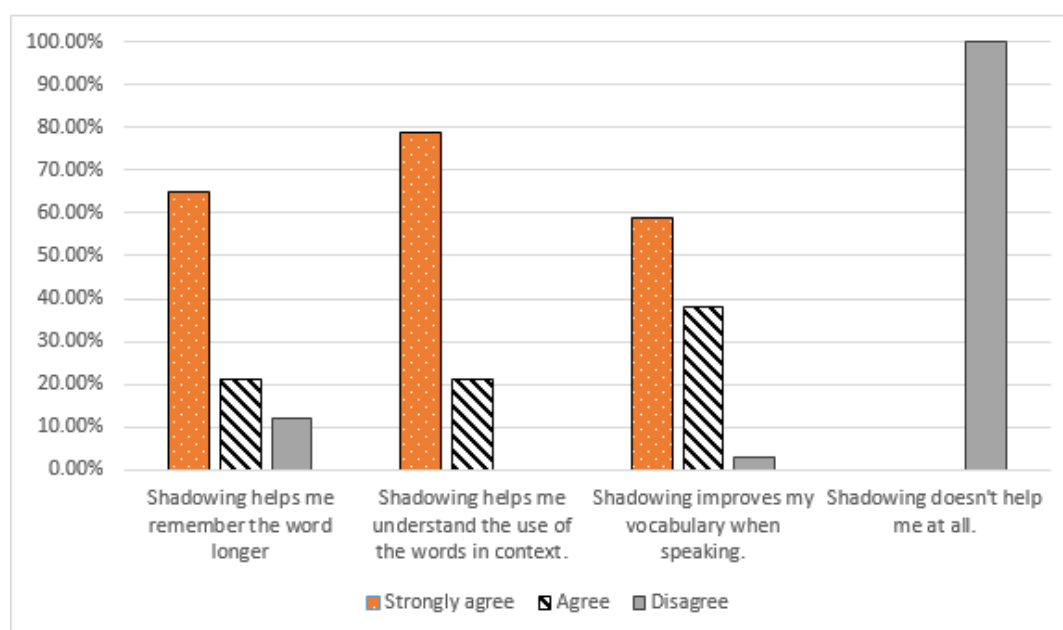
**Figure 3.** What students did with the new words

Figure 3 reveals that most of the students were really aware of the importance of learning new words for their speaking; they also did follow their teacher’s guidance on how to do it well when

53% of them made sentences with the new words. This activity helped students remember the words longer and enabled them to use the words later in their speeches. A small number of students, however, did not have follow-up action with the new words after shadowing; they just ignored them or thought that they would remember them. The second biggest group of students wrote the meanings and pronunciation of the new words in their notebook; this was also a good activity that they should do for better memory and future use.

### 3.2.4. How students evaluated the shadowing technique

To find out how the students rated the usefulness of shadowing, the author asked them to choose their relevant response. The results are shown in figure 4.



**Figure 4.** Students' evaluation of shadowing

According to figure 4, a majority of the students highly evaluated this technique in their learning. More than 60% of them said that shadowing helped them remember the words longer. Nearly 80% claimed that shadowing enabled them to understand the use of new words in contexts. As being described earlier, BBC 6-minute English repeated the new words several times; therefore, students could see how the words were used. Nearly two thirds of them confirmed that shadowing improved their vocabulary in performing their speaking skills.

## 4. Conclusion

After several weeks applying the shadowing technique, it was evident that the students could continue with this technique for their future study. They were better aware of the necessity to include new words that they had learnt in their speeches to improve their band score for the vocabulary criterion. With the completion of data analysis, this action research reached some important findings. Firstly, shadowing using BBC six-minute English is a useful way for students to learn and use the new words within a surrounding setting, which enhances their memory and turns those words theirs to include in their own speaking. In addition, shadowing was not only helpful for improving students' listening or pronunciation ability as some previous studies pointed out, but it also had significant contribution to students' vocabulary practices. Thirdly, this technique can promote students' awareness of enlarging their word banks to reach their desired targets. The



researcher believes that after the research finished, the participants could go on studying with this technique and achieve better results with the vocabulary and pronunciation criteria.

For greater success with the application of this shadowing technique in learning and teaching, there should be other research projects about this field with a larger number of participants so that the findings can be generalized and turned into a policy for a wider utilization of more teachers and learners. Also, other areas related to the word use after shadowing such as pronunciation or appropriateness when students speak should also be studied to really prove this technique's advantages.

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