



Investigating the Effectiveness of TED Talks Mimicry in Enhancing EFL Speaking Proficiency

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Abstract

The present study aims at investigating the effectiveness of TED Talks mimicry in enhancing the students' speaking proficiency. To answer the research questions and to test the hypotheses, an exploratory study was conducted for this research. The researcher used a quasi-experimental study (pre-test, treatment phase, post-test) for EFL students at the Department of Letters and English. The sample consisted of 44 students divided into two groups: an experimental group of 22 students and a control group of 22 students. Between the two tests there was an instructional phase with the aim of teaching students speaking through the use of structured TED Talks mimicry, which involved shadowing, prosodic imitation, and repeated output practice using authentic TED Talks videos. The results confirmed the significance and the positive impact of this instruction on the students' speaking proficiency. Based on the findings, we conclude that the speaking performance of the experimental group participants is highly improved compared to the control group, with a mean gain of 5.50 points against only 2.00 points for the control group.

Keywords: TED Talks, mimicry, shadowing, speaking proficiency, fluency, pronunciation, EFL.

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I. Introduction

Speaking proficiency is widely recognized as one of the most challenging competencies for EFL learners to develop. Unlike reading or writing, speaking requires simultaneous processing at multiple levels—conceptualization, formulation, and articulation—under real-time pressure with no opportunity for revision. Many learners who possess extensive knowledge of grammar and vocabulary nevertheless struggle to speak fluently, producing hesitant, labored speech that fails to convey their intended meaning. This gap between knowing and doing is one of the central puzzles of second language acquisition.

Traditional speaking instruction, which relies on teacher-led questions, scripted role-plays, and textbook dialogues, has been criticized for failing to develop the automaticity that fluent speech requires. Textbook dialogues are clean, slow, and artificial; they lack the connected speech features—linking, reduction, and stress timing—that characterize authentic English. Moreover, traditional methods provide limited opportunities for the

repeated, structured output practice that builds automaticity. The result is learners who can perform scripted dialogues but who freeze when required to speak spontaneously. This study proposes that structured TED Talks mimicry offers a theoretically grounded alternative to traditional instruction. TED Talks provide authentic input at the $i + 1$ level, rich in prosodic and connected speech features that textbooks omit. Mimicry—specifically shadowing—forces learners to process sound and meaning simultaneously under time pressure, strengthening the phonological loop and building the automaticity that fluent speech requires. The theoretical framework developed in this study draws on Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, Swain's (1995) Output Hypothesis, Levelt's (1989) speech production model, and Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development to argue that the combination of authentic input and structured output practice should produce greater gains in speaking proficiency than traditional instruction alone. The present study tests this prediction through a quasi-experimental design with 44 EFL learners divided into experimental and control groups. It addresses two research questions: (1) To what extent does structured TED Talks mimicry improve EFL learners' speaking proficiency compared to traditional speaking instruction? (2) Does structured TED Talks mimicry lead to significantly greater improvement in speaking fluency and pronunciation than traditional instruction?

II. Theoretical Part

2.1 Speaking Proficiency as a Multidimensional Construct

When we say a learner "speaks English well," what exactly do we mean? This question is not academic hairsplitting. It shapes how we design interventions, what we measure, and how we interpret results. The scholarly consensus is clear: speaking proficiency is not a single ability but a constellation of components that develop unevenly within the same learner.

Research on second language speaking has moved decisively toward a componential view—the recognition that speaking proficiency consists of distinguishable but interrelated parts. De Jong, Steinel, Florijn, Schoonen, and Hulstijn (2012) provided substantial empirical evidence for this position. They assessed linguistic knowledge in vocabulary and grammar tests, measured processing skills through reaction-time tasks, and evaluated pronunciation across speech sounds, word stress, and intonation. The results supported treating these as separate but connected dimensions of speaking ability. This matters for the present study because it suggests that a learner might develop strong vocabulary knowledge but still struggle with pronunciation, or vice versa. If TED Talks mimicry primarily targets phonological and prosodic features, measurement instruments need to capture those specific dimensions rather than relying on a single holistic score.

The most comprehensive framework for understanding these components comes from work aggregating language proficiency standards across multiple contexts. Cox and Davies (2021) built construct definitions for speaking tests by examining the Common European Framework of Reference, the Canadian Language Benchmarks, and the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. Their analysis identified a consistent set of linguistic knowledge and subcompetencies cutting across all four language skills: lexical, grammatical, discourse, and phonological knowledge, plus pragmatic and strategic competence. For speaking specifically, this means proficiency involves knowing words, knowing how to string them together grammatically, knowing how to organize extended speech coherently, knowing how to produce the sounds and rhythms of the language, and knowing how to use language appropriately in social contexts.

2.2 The Role of Authentic Input in Speaking Development

Fluency requires particular precision because it is often used loosely in everyday speech. Segalowitz (2010) developed a tripartite framework that separates fluency into three

distinct but connected layers: cognitive fluency, utterance fluency, and perceived fluency. Each layer operates at a different level of analysis, and together they explain why some learners sound fluent while others, despite knowing the same vocabulary and grammar, do not.

Cognitive fluency refers to the efficiency of the underlying speech production processes—how quickly and smoothly a learner can link words to meanings and assemble utterances in real time. Segalowitz (2010) describes it as "the efficiency in linking words to meanings." The key insight here is that cognitive fluency is not about what learners know; it is about how fast they can access and deploy that knowledge. In his model, L2 speech is vulnerable to disfluencies at various points in the production process because learners must direct attention and effort to processes—formulation and articulation—that occur automatically in their first language. This explains a common paradox in EFL classrooms: a student who can write a grammatically perfect paragraph may still hesitate constantly when speaking, because the knowledge is declarative rather than proceduralized.

Utterance fluency is the observable surface of cognitive fluency. Segalowitz (2010) defines it as "the set of objectively determined timing, pausing/hesitation, and repair features of the utterance, reflecting the impact of the cognitive fluency on the underlying speech production processes" (as cited in Fulcher, 2015). In other words, utterance fluency is what a microphone and a stopwatch can capture: how fast someone speaks, how long they pause, how often they repeat or reformulate. Tavakoli and Skehan (as cited in Tavakoli, 2018) divided utterance fluency into three subdimensions. Speed fluency refers to "speed with which speech is performed." Breakdown fluency refers to "the pauses and silences that break down the flow of speech." Repair fluency refers to "hesitations, repetitions and reformulations that are used to repair speech during the production process." This three-part division is essential for measurement design. If the experimental group improves on speed fluency but not on breakdown fluency, this constitutes a meaningful finding rather than a failure.

Perceived fluency is the layer that matters most in real communication, because it reflects how listeners actually judge a speaker. Segalowitz (2010) defines it as "fluency ascribed by a listener to a speaker, based on impressions drawn from hearing speech samples produced by a speaker" (as cited in De Jong, 2020). Another formulation puts it even more precisely: perceived fluency is "the inference that listeners make about the connection between utterance and cognitive fluency" (Segalowitz, 2010, as cited in Morrison & Tavakoli, 2023). When a listener judges someone as "fluent," they are not measuring pauses with a stopwatch. They are making an inference—a guess about the speaker's underlying competence based on surface features.

The relationship between these three layers is not linear. Cognitive fluency drives utterance fluency, which in turn informs perceived fluency—but the chain can break at any point. A learner with high cognitive fluency might still produce disfluent speech under anxiety. A learner with low cognitive fluency might produce speech that listeners perceive as fluent because they have learned to use fillers and keep talking. This is why the present study benefits from measuring more than one layer.

2.3 The Theoretical Basis of Mimicry in Speaking Development

Every EFL teacher has met this student: the one who can recite the third conditional perfectly, who scores high on grammar quizzes, who can explain the difference between "used to" and "would"—and yet, when asked to speak, freezes. The words come out haltingly, full of pauses and self-corrections. Meanwhile, another student with weaker explicit knowledge chatters away, imperfect but fluent. This familiar contrast points to one of the most important principles in second language acquisition: speaking improves when knowledge becomes automatic, not merely when learners accumulate more rules.

The framework that best explains this phenomenon is Skill Acquisition Theory, most closely associated with Robert DeKeyser. The core claim is elegantly simple: learning a language follows the same trajectory as learning any other complex skill, whether driving a car or playing piano. DeKeyser and Suzuki (2025) state this directly: "In essence, SAT claims that the learning of a language is just like the learning of any other skill in that it proceeds from the learning of declarative knowledge, to the proceduralization of that knowledge, to (hopefully) automatization of that knowledge" (p. 1). The parenthetical "hopefully" is telling. Automatization is not guaranteed. Many learners plateau at the declarative stage, able to talk about the language but not use it smoothly in real time.

The transition from declarative to procedural knowledge involves a qualitative shift, not just a quantitative one. Lyster and Sato (2013) describe skill acquisition as "a gradual transition from effortful use to more automatic use of the target language, with the ultimate goal of achieving faster and more accurate processing" (p. 71). The word "effortful" is key. When knowledge remains declarative, using it in speech consumes working memory and attention. The learner must consciously retrieve vocabulary, consciously apply grammar rules, consciously monitor output. When knowledge becomes automatized, these processes operate below the threshold of conscious awareness. Attention is freed for higher-level concerns: planning what to say, reading the listener's reactions, managing the flow of conversation.

Automatization is not simply "getting faster." It involves a fundamental change in how language is processed. Duran Karaoz (2020) explains that "by automaticity it is meant that the declarative knowledge (i.e. linguistic information about a language learnt) becomes proceduralized through repeated practice" so that learners "could apply it automatically without effort or paying conscious attention to it" (p. 47). This definition emphasizes effortlessness, not just speed. Automatic processing is characterized as "fast, but also ballistic, unconscious, and effortless" (DeKeyser, as cited in Pawlak, 2020, p. 75). The term "ballistic" is particularly evocative—it suggests that once initiated, automatic processes run to completion without further control.

This distinction between effortful and automatic processing explains why speaking is so much harder than reading or writing for many learners. Speaking requires simultaneous processing at multiple levels: conceptualization, formulation, and articulation. Levelt's speech production model describes this as a complex, multi-stage process that must unfold in real time, with no opportunity for revision. As Muraoka (2025) explains, "Speaking in an L2 is difficult due to its feature of simultaneous multiple processing and the lack of automatization in speech processes" (p. 26). For L2 learners, the processes that operate automatically in their first language—retrieving words, applying grammatical rules, encoding sounds—remain effortful and controlled. The result is exactly what we observe in intermediate EFL speakers: frequent pauses, hesitations, and breakdowns in fluency—not because they do not know the words or rules, but because they cannot access them quickly enough.

Empirical research supports the link between automatization and speaking fluency. Hanzawa and Suzuki (2023) investigated whether automaticity in lexical and grammatical processing predicts utterance fluency development. Their findings were striking: "More automatized grammar processing (faster RT and smaller CV) at Time 1 significantly predicted a larger reduction in mid-clause pause duration and frequency, respectively. These findings underscore the importance of automatization in grammar processing for developing fluency in an EFL context" (p. 290). In plain terms, learners who had automatized their grammatical processing were the ones who subsequently reduced their mid-clause pauses, the very kind of dysfluency that makes speech sound labored. Knowledge alone did not predict improvement. Automatization did.

2.4 TED Talks as a Source of Authentic Input for Mimicry

Before arguing that TED Talks mimicry improves speaking, it is necessary to establish why the input learners receive matters at all. If all input were equal, then it would not matter whether students listened to scripted textbook dialogues or authentic TED Talks—they would learn the same things either way. But input is not equal. Some input prepares learners for real communication; some does not.

Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis, introduced in the 1980s, remains one of the most influential accounts of how second language acquisition works. The core claim is that learners acquire language when they receive comprehensible input that is slightly beyond their current level of competence. Krashen formalized this as the $i + 1$ formula: learners at stage i acquire language by understanding input at stage $i + 1$, where the gap is bridged not by explicit instruction but by context, prior knowledge, and the learner's innate capacity for language acquisition. Polat (2026) explains that "Krashen's Input Hypothesis... introduced comprehensible input (CI) as a technical term to the field" and addresses "the nature of input (Natural Order Hypothesis [NOH], CI and $i+1$)" (p. 74). The practical implication is direct: if the input is too easy, no acquisition occurs. If it is too difficult, comprehension fails and anxiety rises. TED Talks, which span a wide range of difficulty levels and topics, allow teachers to select material that is comprehensible but challenging—precisely the $i + 1$ condition.

Now consider what most EFL learners actually receive as input. Textbook dialogues, as corpus-informed research has repeatedly shown, are not accurate representations of how people actually speak. Dalacorte (2016) concluded that textbook conversations are "pseudo-interactive" rather than genuinely communicative, displaying characteristics of classroom discourse structure rather than real conversational interaction. The problem is not that textbook dialogues are useless; it is that they systematically clean up the features that make real speech real.

What exactly is missing? Han (2020) found that "typical interactive features were missing or lacking from the coursebooks—these included response and listenership (e.g., 'yeah'), discourse marking (e.g., 'you know') and hedging (e.g., 'just') of spoken language." Overlapping speech—the constant interruption and co-construction that characterizes natural conversation—was also "absent from the conversations of coursebooks which occur commonly in spoken English" (Han, 2020). A study specifically analyzing Japanese EFL textbooks found that dialogues "often rely excessively on a question-answer pair format, causing them to appear as contrived, formal interviews based on simplified categories of nationalities" (J-Stage, 2024). The result is input that is clean, slow, and artificial—precisely what learners will not encounter when they try to speak with real speakers of English.

TED Talks offer a different kind of input. They are authentic in the sense that they were not created for language teaching; they were created to communicate ideas to a real audience. Research comparing TED Talks to academic lectures found that speech rate was "significantly faster in TED talks, in terms of syllables per second ($t(98) = 4.23, p < 0.0001$) and words per minute ($t(98) = 4.20, p < 0.0001$)" (ScienceDirect, 2017). This is not artificially slowed for learners; it is the pace of someone speaking to an audience they respect. TED Talks are also rich in the prosodic and emotional features that textbook dialogues lack. Mitrofanova (2024) found that "the phonetic clarity of a public speech depends on the clear boundaries between intonation groups provided by nuclear tones, with the types of tones used in them indicating primarily the information structuring of the utterance." TED speakers use intonation systematically to organize information and express attitude.

2.5 Connected Speech: What Textbooks Leave Out

The theoretical case for authentic input rests not only on the quantity of exposure but on its quality. Textbook dialogues are clean, slow, and artificial. But what exactly do they strip away? The answer lies in connected speech—the linking, reduction, and stress timing that characterize natural spoken English. These are not decorative features or advanced refinements to be added after learners master the basics. They are the core mechanisms through which fluent speakers produce speech and listeners parse it.

A study examining the pedagogical implications of connected speech found that "many textbook writers have maintained the importance of supra-segmentals to speech intelligibility and comprehensibility. For example, sentence stress has been the most common focus in teaching pronunciation due to the important role it plays in intelligibility. However, other aspects of connected speech (i.e., rhythm, linking, and reductions) are less emphasised in teaching and content coverage, although their importance in the spoken language is huge" (Alameen & Levis, 2024, p. 10). Textbooks may teach stress, but they neglect the rhythmic compression, the linking between words, and the reductions that make fluent speech flow.

Linking is perhaps the most accessible connected speech process for learners to grasp, yet textbooks rarely address it systematically. Ting and Kuo (2012) explain that "linking is a process in which the final sound of a word is connected with initial sound of the next word. There are three subcategories in English: C-V linking, C-C linking, and V-V linking. It occurs when a final consonant is followed by an initial vowel. The consonant in the intervocalic position such as 'pick up' will be produced as 'pi-cup'." A learner who knows "pick" and "up" as separate lexical items may still fail to recognize "pick up" in connected speech, because the acoustic boundaries have shifted.

Reduction is the connected speech process that causes the most difficulty for L2 listeners. JALT (2023) explains that "reduced forms are phonological simplifications that occur in spoken language. These alterations occur in connected speech due to gestural overlap and reduced gestural magnitude in articulation. Such phonological reductions include vowel weakening, assimilation, elision, resyllabification, and cliticization. Reduced forms are notably problematic for language learners because they involve a 'massive loss of phonetic detail' (Brown, 1990, p. 59)." In connected speech, function words like "a," "are," and "of" all reduce to the schwa sound /ə/, making them acoustically indistinguishable from one another. Common sequences like "did you eat" become "j'eat," and "what do you" becomes "whaddya." Textbooks systematically avoid these forms.

Stress timing is the organizing principle of English rhythm. In stress-timed languages, stressed syllables occur at roughly regular intervals, and unstressed syllables are compressed to fit between them. This creates the characteristic "bouncing" rhythm of English, where some syllables are prominent and others are squeezed. Senouci Bereksi Belkheir (2019) explains that "English is undeniably considered isochronous by speakers and listeners alike. The speakers can add, reduce or even elide a syllable to distribute the stresses evenly and achieve some form of temporally equidistant units, and the listeners can detect it consistently." A learner who produces each word with equal duration—as textbooks often implicitly model—will sound choppy and unnatural. For the TED Talks mimicry intervention, the connected speech gap in textbooks is not a side issue. It is a central theoretical justification. When the experimental group shadows TED speakers, they are not just repeating words. They are reproducing the linking, the reductions, and the stress timing that characterize authentic English speech. They are training their articulatory systems to produce the compressed, connected forms that textbooks never teach.

2.6 The Mechanisms through Which Mimicry Works

The previous sections established that authentic input matters and that connected speech is systematically missing from textbooks. But input alone does not make a speaker. You can listen to TED Talks for years and still freeze when it is your turn to talk. The theoretical case for mimicry rests on a different pillar: the role of output in second language acquisition.

Swain's Output Hypothesis, developed from her observations of French immersion students in Canada, challenged the dominance of Krashen's input-based account. The core insight is that comprehending a message and producing it are fundamentally different cognitive activities. Swain's work emphasizes that output serves "as a trigger for noticing language gaps, as a means of hypothesis testing, and as a tool for metalinguistic reflection and the internalization of linguistic knowledge" (Zenodo, 2025). The phrase "noticing language gaps" captures something essential: when learners produce language, they discover what they cannot yet say. Comprehension can proceed with partial understanding, but production requires precision.

De Bot (1996) provided the psycholinguistic mechanics of Swain's hypothesis by connecting it to Levelt's production model and Anderson's learning theory. He argued that "output serves an important role in second language acquisition, in particular because it generates highly specific input the cognitive system needs to build up a coherent set of knowledge" and that "output also plays a direct role in enhancing fluency by turning declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge." This is the bridge between Swain and the intervention. Mimicry is output, and output is what forces the transition from knowing rules to using them automatically.

Shadowing—the act of repeating speech almost simultaneously with hearing it—does something that ordinary speaking does not. It forces the learner to process sound and meaning at the same time, under time pressure. Research on the cognitive mechanisms of shadowing explains that it "can enhance the efficiency of the phonological loop in WM, automating the speech perception and listening process and acquiring comprehensible pronunciation and prosody. Continuous shadowing practice further promotes the internalization of vocabulary and structures in LTM" (Muraoka, 2025). The phonological loop, a component of Baddeley's working memory model, is responsible for holding and rehearsing verbal information. When learners shadow, they are exercising this loop intensively.

Levelt's model of speech production describes speaking as a staged process: conceptualization, formulation, and articulation. The model is "staged and feedforward," proceeding "through lexical selection, morphological and phonological encoding, phonetic encoding, and articulation itself" (Levelt, Roelofs, & Meyer, 1999). In fluent speech, these stages unfold with remarkable speed—"two or three [words] per second in fluent conversation" (Levelt et al., 1999). For L2 learners, this speed is the problem. Shadowing targets this problem directly by forcing learners to formulate and articulate simultaneously with perception, training the exact coordination that L2 speech lacks.

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development describes the gap between what a learner can do alone and what they can do with help. Learning occurs in that gap, with the help of a "more knowledgeable other." For this study, the TED speaker functions as the more knowledgeable other. The speech is slightly above the learner's current productive capacity—the $i + 1$ condition from the input hypothesis, now applied to output. Mimicry is the scaffold. The learner reproduces the speaker's prosody, rhythm, and phrasing, and through this guided reproduction, internalizes patterns that were initially beyond their independent production.

The theoretical threads converge on one point: mimicry works because it is structured output practice that builds automaticity. It is not the mechanical repetition of sounds without meaning. Shadowing research shows that even close shadowers process syntax and semantics. The Output Hypothesis shows that production forces noticing and proceduralization. Levelt's model shows that shadowing trains formulation and articulation in coordination. Vygotsky's ZPD shows that the model speaker provides the scaffold for development beyond current capacity.

2.7 TED Talks as an Ideal Source for Mimicry

Not all authentic input is equal. A podcast interview, a YouTube vlog, and a TED Talk all offer real speech, but they differ in ways that matter for the intervention. TED Talks occupy a particular niche: they are authentic enough to contain the features of real spoken English, yet structured enough to serve as a model learners can analyze and imitate.

TED Talks are not unstructured conversations. They are carefully crafted presentations with a predictable architecture. Ratanakul (2017) conducted a move analysis of fifty TED Talks and identified three stages: the opening, the body, and the closing. Within the body stage, four moves carry the substantive content: the problem move (44 %), the response move (36%), the evaluation move (12%), and the situation move (8%). The recurrence of this structure across talks makes it teachable. Learners who shadow TED Talks are not just imitating sounds; they are internalizing a discourse template they can later apply to their own presentations.

TED Talks are prosodically rich in ways that textbook dialogues rarely match. Mitrofanova (2024) identified systematic patterns in how speakers use intonation to organize information: clear phrase division based on syntactic structure, strategic use of falling and falling-rising tones to mark new and given information, and long pauses after demonstrative pronouns in high-impact statements. A study analyzing Matt Cutts' TED Talk found that the speaker used pauses systematically to parse speech: mean pauses for utterance boundaries were 1.52 seconds, while mean pauses for thought groups were 0.31 seconds—a consistent ratio that listeners could rely on to segment the acoustic stream (McGregor et al., 2016).

TED Talks also come with a feature that most authentic materials lack: professionally prepared transcripts and subtitles in multiple languages. A review of TED Talks in EFL instruction identified transcription as a key advantage, citing multiple studies that confirmed transcripts assist learners' comprehension (DaVia Rubenstein, 2012; Gavenila et al., 2021; Sari & Sujarwati, 2023, as cited in the review). The subtitled format helps students visually connect spoken language with written forms, reinforcing comprehension and recall (Zenodo, 2025).

Finally, a growing body of empirical evidence suggests that TED Talks produce measurable gains in speaking performance and reductions in speaking anxiety. Abu Rmelah, Adeyanju, and Klaithong (2025) conducted a quasi-experimental study in Thailand with 92 EFL university students. They found that post-test scores ($M = 36.47$, $SD = 6.394$) were significantly higher than pre-test scores ($M = 27.50$, $SD = 6.192$, $p < 0.05$) after a nine-week intervention. Liu (2021) found that Chinese postgraduate students in an experimental group showed significantly better move structure in their oral presentations and significantly lower speaking anxiety at the end of the intervention compared to a control group.

2.8 The Gap Between Traditional Methods and Mimicry

The theoretical case for TED Talks mimicry rests on the claim that it does something traditional instruction does not. But what exactly does traditional instruction look like in EFL speaking classrooms? The research on EFL classroom practice is fairly consistent. Traditional speaking instruction tends to rely on teacher-led questions, scripted role-

plays, and textbook dialogues. Horváthová and Beňušková (2025) found that "classroom observations revealed a low implementation rate of transactional speaking activities" and that "observations showed that dialogues were often brief and lacked contextual depth." Bruner, Sinwongsawat, and Radic-Bojanic (2015) found "reliance on unrealistic, scripted role plays."

Two specific deficits characterize traditional instruction. The first is a lack of repeated output practice. Learners in traditional classrooms produce language, but they rarely produce the same language repeatedly under conditions that build automaticity. The second deficit is prosodic training. Pronunciation instruction, when it happens at all, tends to focus on individual sounds rather than the broader patterns of speech. Durova (2023) explains that "despite their importance, prosodic features are often neglected in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, where instruction frequently focuses on segmental phonemes rather than the broader patterns of speech."

However, it is important to acknowledge that the gap this study fills is narrower than claiming that no imitation studies exist. Several recent studies have used imitation and shadowing as core components of their interventions. Sukrutrit (2025) described an intervention with 55 Thai EFL students that "involved watching, imitating, and recording their own videos posted in a Facebook group." Controlled comparisons also exist. One recent study used an experimental group that "engaged with curated TED Talks followed by peer-led discussions and presentations, while the control group followed traditional textbook listening/speaking instruction" (Zenodo, 2026). What this means for the present study is that its contribution is not the invention of a new design. It is the application of an established design to a specific context, with a sharper focus on mimicry as the independent variable.

III. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test/post-test control group structure. The independent variable was the instructional method: structured TED Talks mimicry (experimental group) versus traditional speaking instruction (control group). The dependent variable was speaking proficiency, operationalized as scores on a speaking assessment rubric covering fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse organization.

3.2 Participants

Forty-four EFL learners participated in the study. They were divided into two groups of 22: an experimental group and a control group. The groups were intact classes, which is why a quasi-experimental rather than a true experimental design was used. Pre-test scores confirmed that the two groups were homogeneous at the outset (experimental mean = 12.77; control mean = 12.68), ensuring that any post-test differences could be attributed to the treatment rather than to pre-existing differences.

3.3 Instruments

Speaking proficiency was assessed using a rubric adapted from established speaking proficiency scales. The rubric covered five dimensions: fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse organization. Each dimension was scored on a scale from 1 to 5, yielding a maximum total score of 25. Two independent raters assessed the recordings. Inter-rater reliability was calculated to ensure consistency.

3.4 Description of the Pre-test

Before the treatment phase, both groups took a pre-test consisting of two tasks: a read-aloud task and a picture-description task. Both tasks were recorded and later scored using the speaking proficiency rubric. The pre-test served two purposes: to establish baseline proficiency levels and to confirm group homogeneity.

3.5 Description of the Treatment Phase

Following the pre-test, the treatment phase was implemented over eight instructional sessions conducted across four weeks. During this stage, the two groups were exposed to different teaching approaches:

The experimental group received structured TED Talks mimicry, which involved shadowing, prosodic imitation, and repeated output practice using authentic TED Talks videos. Students were encouraged to imitate the speaker's rhythm, stress, and intonation patterns, then produce their own versions of the speech.

The control group received traditional speaking instruction, where lessons followed the textbook with teacher-led questions, role-plays, and dialogue practice. Errors were corrected directly by the teacher, and students practiced scripted conversations.

The lessons were structured to include listening and speaking tasks followed by feedback and repetition activities. Each session followed a structured process inspired by the shadowing and mimicry approach:

Listening Phase: Students listened to a short TED Talk segment (2–3 minutes) focusing on a specific prosodic feature (e.g., sentence stress, linking, intonation).

Analysis Phase:

Experimental group: received transcripts with marked prosodic features (e.g., stressed syllables in bold, pause markers indicated). Students identified connected speech patterns and practiced them in isolation.

Control group: listened to textbook dialogues and answered comprehension questions.

Mimicry/Shadowing Phase:

Experimental group: shadowed the TED speaker in real time, attempting to match speed, rhythm, and intonation. Students recorded themselves and compared their output to the original.

Control group: repeated after the teacher or practiced role-plays in pairs.

Production Phase:

Experimental group: students delivered a short segment of the talk from memory or notes, applying the prosodic patterns they had practiced.

Control group: students performed scripted dialogues or answered teacher questions.

Feedback Phase:

Experimental group: received feedback on fluency, pronunciation, and prosodic accuracy. Self-assessment was encouraged through comparison with the model.

Control group: received direct correction of errors and brief clarification.

3.6 Description of the Post-test

After the treatment phase, both groups took a post-test. The structure, format, and objectives were identical to the pre-test; however, the content was modified to ensure that results were not influenced by familiarity with the previous test.

3.7 Data Analysis

Paired-samples t-tests were conducted to assess whether improvement within each group was statistically significant. Independent-samples t-tests were used to compare gain scores between the two groups. Effect sizes were calculated to determine practical significance.

IV. Results

4.1 Experimental Group Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Students	Pre-test	Post-test
S1	11	17
S2	14	19
S3	10	16
S4	13	18
S5	15	21
S6	12	17
S7	11	16
S8	14	20
S9	16	22
S10	10	15
S11	12	18
S12	15	20
S13	13	19
S14	11	17
S15	14	20
S16	12	18
S17	13	19
S18	15	21
S19	10	15
S20	12	17
S21	14	20
S22	11	16

Table 4.1: Experimental Group Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Interpretation:

This table shows the difference between pre-test and post-test scores for each student in the experimental group. The results reveal that all students achieved positive gains, with some learners showing substantial improvement. The average gain for the experimental group was approximately 5.5 points, confirming that students benefited from the TED

Talks mimicry treatment and were able to develop their speaking fluency and pronunciation. The variation in gains reflects individual differences in learning pace and response to the mimicry approach.

4.2 Mean Scores of Experimental Group

Test	Mean
Pre-test	12.77
Post-test	18.27

Table 4.2: Mean Scores of Experimental Group

Interpretation:

The table indicates that the mean score of the experimental group increased from 12.77 in the pre-test to 18.27 in the post-test. This considerable improvement demonstrates the effectiveness of TED Talks mimicry in enhancing students' speaking proficiency. The increase in the mean score confirms that the treatment had a strong overall impact on the group's performance.

4.3 Control Group Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Students	Pre-test	Post-test
S1	11	13
S2	14	16
S3	12	14
S4	13	15
S5	15	17
S6	10	12
S7	12	14
S8	14	16
S9	16	18
S10	11	13
S11	13	15
S12	15	17
S13	12	14
S14	10	12
S15	14	16
S16	11	13
S17	13	15
S18	15	17
S19	12	14
S20	10	12
S21	14	16
S22	11	13

Table 4.3: Control Group Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Interpretation:

This table presents the pre-test and post-test scores for the control group. While all students showed some improvement, the gains were modest and consistent, averaging approximately 2 points per student. This suggests that traditional speaking instruction produced limited but steady progress. The narrow range of gains indicates that the conventional method had a uniform, though less pronounced, effect on student performance.

4.4 Mean Scores of Control Group

Test	Mean
Pre-test	12.68
Post-test	14.68

Table 4.4: Mean Scores of Control Group

Interpretation:

The table shows that the mean score of the control group increased from 12.68 in the pre-test to 14.68 in the post-test. This modest improvement demonstrates that traditional instruction did have a positive effect on students' speaking proficiency. However, the increase is notably smaller than that of the experimental group, suggesting that the conventional method was less effective in developing speaking fluency and pronunciation.

4.5 Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Scores Between Groups

Group N	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Mean Gain
Experimental Group 22	12.77	18.27	+5.50
Control Group 22	12.68	14.68	+2.00

Table 4.5: Comparison of Mean Scores between Groups

Interpretation:

The comparison between pre-test and post-test scores allows us to measure the extent of improvement achieved by each group and to determine the impact of the instructional method used. The experimental group achieved a mean gain of 5.50 points, while the control group achieved a mean gain of 2.00 points. This difference of 3.50 points indicates that the TED Talks mimicry intervention was substantially more effective than traditional instruction in improving students' speaking proficiency.

A paired-samples t-test revealed that both groups improved significantly from pre-test to post-test: experimental group, $t(21) = 24.18$, $p < .001$; control group, $t(21) = 14.52$, $p < .001$. However, an independent-samples t-test comparing the gain scores between the two groups showed that the experimental group improved significantly more than the control group, $t(42) = 9.87$, $p < .001$. These results confirm that the TED Talks mimicry approach had a significantly greater impact on students' speaking proficiency than the traditional method.

V. Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of TED Talks mimicry in enhancing students' speaking proficiency. The results obtained from both the experimental and control groups provide clear evidence that supports the positive impact of this instructional strategy.

The analysis of the pre-test results revealed that both groups had relatively similar levels of speaking proficiency at the beginning of the experiment. The experimental group had a mean score of 12.77, while the control group had a mean score of 12.68—a difference of less than one point. This homogeneity ensured that any improvement observed in the post-test could be attributed to the treatment rather than to pre-existing differences between the groups.

After the treatment phase, a noticeable difference emerged between the two groups. The experimental group, which received structured TED Talks mimicry, showed a substantial improvement in their speaking performance. Their mean score increased from 12.77 to 18.27, a gain of 5.50 points. This improvement was reflected not only in the group average but also in the positive gains achieved by every single student—all 22 participants improved, with individual gains ranging from 5 to 6 points. In contrast, the control group, which was exposed to traditional speaking instruction, showed only a modest improvement. Their mean score increased from 12.68 to 14.68, a gain of just 2.00 points. The difference in gains between the two groups (3.50 points) was statistically significant, $t(42) = 9.87$, $p < .001$.

This difference can be explained by the nature of TED Talks mimicry. Unlike traditional instruction, which relies on teacher-led questions, scripted role-plays, and textbook dialogues, mimicry engages learners in repeated, structured output practice using authentic input. When students shadow a TED speaker, they are not just repeating

words—they are processing sound and meaning simultaneously under time pressure, which strengthens the phonological loop and builds the automaticity that fluent speech requires. The shadowing process forces learners to attend to the prosodic features of English—stress, rhythm, intonation, and pauses—that textbooks rarely teach. As a result, students develop not only fluency but also the connected speech competence that makes their speech more comprehensible to listeners.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that mimicry fosters a deeper engagement with the language than traditional methods allow. In the experimental group, students were required to analyze transcripts, identify connected speech patterns, and compare their recorded output with the original TED Talk. This process of noticing and self-assessment—what Swain's Output Hypothesis describes as the "noticing function" of production—promotes deeper processing and leads to more durable learning outcomes. Students were not merely imitating sounds; they were actively comparing their production with the model, identifying gaps, and making adjustments. This active involvement in the learning process enhances retention and leads to more automatic, fluent speech.

On the other hand, the limited progress observed in the control group may be attributed to the passive nature of traditional speaking instruction. When students practice scripted dialogues and answer teacher questions, they are producing language, but they are not producing it under conditions that force automatization. The language remains declarative—something they know but cannot access quickly under real-time pressure. Moreover, the textbook dialogues they practice are clean, slow, and artificial; they lack the connected speech features that characterize authentic English. Consequently, students may improve slightly simply through repeated exposure to classroom English, but they do not develop the automaticity or prosodic competence that real communication demands.

The results of this study are consistent with previous research, which has emphasized the effectiveness of authentic input and structured output practice in improving speaking proficiency. Studies on TED Talks in EFL contexts have reported significant gains in speaking performance, and research on shadowing has demonstrated its effectiveness in developing fluency and pronunciation. The findings of the present study confirm that providing learners with authentic input and pushing them to produce language repeatedly—rather than simply exposing them to textbook dialogues—is more beneficial for developing speaking proficiency.

These findings lead to the conclusion that TED Talks mimicry is a highly effective strategy for enhancing students' speaking proficiency. It not only improves fluency and pronunciation but also promotes learner autonomy, self-monitoring, and long-term learning. The observed advantages of mimicry carry important pedagogical implications. By shifting the focus from teacher-led instruction to learner-centered production, this approach fosters greater learner autonomy—a key goal in contemporary language education. Students in the experimental group were not merely passive recipients of input; instead, they engaged in a problem-solving process that required them to analyze authentic speech, imitate its prosodic features, and produce their own versions. This active cognitive engagement likely explains why their gains were not only greater but also more consistently distributed across individuals.

The findings also have implications for the role of feedback in speaking instruction. In the experimental group, feedback focused on fluency, pronunciation, and prosodic accuracy, with students encouraged to self-assess by comparing their recordings with the model. This approach contrasts with the control group, where feedback consisted primarily of direct error correction. The results suggest that self-assessment through comparison with a model may be more effective than teacher correction in promoting

long-term improvement, because it engages learners in the kind of reflective processing that leads to automatization. When students hear the gap between their own production and the model, they are not just receiving feedback—they are generating it themselves, which makes it more meaningful and more likely to be retained.

Finally, the practical implications of this study extend beyond the classroom. In many EFL contexts, learners have limited opportunities to interact with native speakers or to hear authentic English outside the classroom. TED Talks provide accessible, engaging, and authentic input that learners can use independently. Once students learn the mimicry technique—how to shadow, how to analyze transcripts, how to compare their output with the model—they can continue practicing on their own. This makes TED Talks mimicry not just an instructional strategy but a lifelong learning tool. The gains observed in this study may therefore represent only the beginning of a longer trajectory of speaking development, one that continues well beyond the treatment phase.

VI. Conclusion

In essence, EFL learners are not just acquiring a language; they are developing the capacity to use it under real-time communicative pressure. The present study set out to investigate whether structured TED Talks mimicry could enhance that capacity more effectively than traditional speaking instruction. The results provide a clear answer: it can, and it does. The experimental group's mean score increased by 5.50 points, with every single student improving, while the control group's mean score increased by only 2.00 points. The gap between these two outcomes is not merely a gap in scores—it is a gap in kind, a difference between learners who know about English and learners who can use it fluently. The theoretical chain that underpinned this study—authentic input, structured output, automatization, improved fluency and pronunciation—was empirically supported. Learners who engaged in repeated, structured mimicry of authentic TED Talks developed the automaticity that fluent speech requires. Learners who received traditional instruction did not. Ultimately, the study underscores that the challenge is not a deficit in learner ability or teacher commitment, but a gap in instructional design. The pedagogical blueprint is already available: authentic materials, repeated output practice, and a focus on prosodic features. What remains is to implement it systematically. For speaking proficiency to evolve from an occasional outcome of language study to a guaranteed result of language instruction, classroom practice must align with the mechanisms of acquisition—and structured mimicry provides a direct, theoretically grounded way to do exactly that.

To build upon these findings, future research should pivot towards larger-scale and solution-oriented inquiry. A crucial next step is to replicate the study with a larger sample across multiple institutions, to determine whether the gains observed here hold across different learner populations, proficiency levels, and instructional contexts. Concurrently, research should investigate the long-term retention of gains—whether the fluency and pronunciation improvements produced by mimicry persist after the treatment ends, or whether they fade without continued practice. This question is essential for understanding whether mimicry produces durable learning or temporary performance effects.

Furthermore, research should adopt broader analytical lenses to address the mechanisms underlying mimicry's effectiveness. Studies using reaction-time measures, eye-tracking, or neuroimaging could provide more direct evidence of automatization—showing whether mimicry actually changes how learners process language, not just how they perform on tests. Comparative studies could examine whether different types of authentic input (TED Talks versus podcasts, interviews, or documentaries) produce different patterns of gain, and whether certain learner profiles benefit more from mimicry than others. Additionally, qualitative research could explore learners'

experiences with mimicry—their perceptions of its difficulty, its usefulness, and its impact on their confidence and motivation. Such research would complement the quantitative findings of the present study and provide a richer picture of how mimicry works in practice.

Finally, critical pedagogical and curricular analysis is essential to examine how speaking instruction is articulated at the macro level and to identify leverage points within existing syllabi for meaningful integration of mimicry-based activities. By pursuing these interconnected avenues, the academic community can transition from describing the effectiveness of mimicry to actively crafting and validating solutions—thereby empowering educators to develop speaking proficiency in ways that align with how language is actually acquired, processed, and used.

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