



Students' perceptions of the shadowing technique in improving pronunciation skills at SMKN 2 Padang

Salmi Arini Hasibuan¹, Salam Mairi¹

¹English Department, Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Padang

Correspondence Email: salmiarini81@gmail.com

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Abstract:

This study explores students' perceptions and experiences of using the shadowing technique in English pronunciation learning at SMKN 2 Padang. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, the study involved six eleventh-grade vocational students from class XI MPLB (Manajemen Perkantoran dan Layanan Bisnis) selected through purposive sampling based on their experience with the shadowing technique. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews consisting of 25 questions and analyzed using thematic analysis following Miles et al. (2014). Four major themes emerged: students' experiences using shadowing, students' perceptions while performing the technique, difficulties encountered, and physical experiences during practice. The findings reveal that students generally perceived shadowing as a helpful and engaging pronunciation activity. They reported improvements in pronunciation clarity, rhythm, and confidence while using the technique. However, students also experienced challenges, particularly related to fast audio speed, intonation reproduction, and the need for simultaneous listening and speaking. Physical sensations such as tongue stiffness, breath control difficulty, and articulatory awareness were also described. Overall, the study concludes that the shadowing technique is perceived positively by EFL vocational students as a meaningful pronunciation practice that fosters awareness, engagement, and confidence, though challenges remain in adapting to speech speed and prosodic features.

Keywords:

Students' perception, Shadowing technique, Vocational students

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1. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Pronunciation is a fundamental component of oral communication that strongly influences intelligibility in language use. It encompasses not only the accurate production of individual sounds but also suprasegmental features such as word stress, sentence stress, rhythm, and intonation, all of which contribute to the clarity and naturalness of speech (Derwing & Munro, 2015). For vocational high school students, particularly those at SMKN 2

Padang, English is not merely an academic subject but a practical communication skill required in professional settings such as customer service, administration, and workplace interaction. Clear and intelligible pronunciation is therefore an essential requirement for these learners, who are expected to communicate effectively in English after graduation. When pronunciation is unclear or inaccurate, even well-constructed sentences can result in miscommunication, reducing a speaker's ability to convey intended meaning and undermining listener comprehension (Derakhshan & Shakki, 2018).

Despite the recognized importance of pronunciation in oral communication, a substantial number of EFL learners continue to struggle with developing accurate pronunciation skills. Zielinski (2012) identifies pronunciation as one of the most challenging aspects of English learning for foreign language learners, noting that difficulties arise from the gap between learners' native sound systems and the phonological features of English. Indonesian students, in particular, tend to experience persistent challenges related to mother tongue interference, where habitual sound patterns from Bahasa Indonesia are unconsciously applied to English speech. These challenges include sound substitution, reading based on spelling rather than sound-letter correspondence, and difficulty with word-final consonants (Pardede, 2018). As a result, many Indonesian learners produce English with mispronounced sounds, misplaced stress, and flat intonation that can make communication difficult for interlocutors even when vocabulary and grammar are adequate.

The situation is particularly acute for vocational school students, who face a paradox in their language learning context. On one hand, vocational education places strong emphasis on practical professional communication skills, meaning that students are expected to use English in workplace contexts from an early stage. On the other hand, pronunciation instruction in many Indonesian vocational classrooms receives considerably less emphasis than grammar or vocabulary instruction, leaving students without sufficient opportunities for targeted pronunciation practice and feedback (Gilakjani, 2016). Large class sizes, limited instructional time, and insufficient classroom exposure to authentic spoken English further reduce the quality and frequency of pronunciation practice that students receive. As a consequence, many vocational students graduate with significant gaps in their spoken English proficiency, particularly in pronunciation, that may affect their professional opportunities and workplace performance.

Harmer (2007) emphasizes that effective pronunciation learning requires consistent practice, meaningful repetition, and appropriate feedback from teachers or models. Without structured opportunities to hear and imitate accurate pronunciation, learners are unlikely to develop the phonological awareness and articulatory habits necessary for clear speech. Levis (2018) further argues that pronunciation teaching has shifted its focus from achieving native-like accuracy toward developing intelligibility, which refers to how easily a listener can understand a speaker regardless of accent. This shift highlights the need for instructional strategies that expose learners to a wide range of pronunciation models, help them notice the features of spoken English, and provide opportunities for meaningful practice in context. Traditional pronunciation drills, which rely heavily on repetition without contextual meaning, have been criticized for being mechanical and disengaging. More communicative and

integrated approaches to pronunciation instruction are therefore needed, particularly in vocational school settings.

One technique that has received considerable attention in EFL pronunciation research in recent years is shadowing. Shadowing is defined as a language learning technique in which learners listen to spoken language and immediately repeat it as accurately as possible, aiming to imitate the speaker's pronunciation, intonation, rhythm, and stress patterns (Kadota, 2019). Unlike passive listening activities, shadowing requires learners to actively process spoken input while simultaneously producing speech, engaging both their auditory perception and articulatory systems. According to Hamada (2014), shadowing can be classified into several types, including prosody shadowing, which focuses on rhythm and intonation; content shadowing, which combines sound imitation with meaning comprehension; and silent shadowing, in which learners imitate mouth movements without voicing. Each type serves different learning purposes, but all variants share the core feature of integrating listening and speaking in real time.

Research on shadowing has consistently shown that it can support pronunciation development across different aspects of spoken English. Leonisa and Kirana (2022) found that shadowing was effective in improving tenth-grade students' pronunciation skills at SMAN 1 Jetis Ponorogo, with the experimental group significantly outperforming the control group in post-test scores. Petalolo et al. (2024) similarly reported that shadowing significantly improved seventh-grade students' pronunciation, particularly in interdental sounds such as /ð/ and /θ/, at SMP Negeri 3 Palu. Tazkiatun (2023) further demonstrated the effectiveness of shadowing in improving consonant pronunciation mastery among eleventh-grade students at SMAN 1 Seputih Agung. These studies collectively support the position that shadowing offers a structured and effective means of improving phonological accuracy in EFL learners. Kadota (2019) explains that shadowing supports pronunciation development by increasing automaticity in speech production, developing bottom-up listening skills, and training learners to process small linguistic details before interpreting overall meaning.

However, the effectiveness of shadowing as a pronunciation technique does not depend solely on its design or theoretical rationale. In classroom practice, how learners experience, respond to, and engage with the technique is equally important in determining whether shadowing achieves its intended outcomes. Williams and Burden (1997) argue that learners' perceptions significantly influence their learning behavior, motivation, and engagement with classroom activities. Positive perceptions tend to increase effort and participation, while negative perceptions may reduce motivation and willingness to engage. Ormrod (2019) further notes that students' perceptions of learning tasks are shaped by their previous experiences, expectations, emotions, and classroom context. Understanding how students perceive a technique is therefore essential for assessing not only whether the technique works in theory but also whether it is practically viable and meaningful in real classroom settings.

Preliminary observations at SMKN 2 Padang indicate that English teachers in Grade XI MPLB have begun introducing shadowing as a pronunciation activity. Students in this class have been observed to experience difficulties with pronunciation accuracy, word stress, and intonation, which affect their confidence in using spoken English. Despite the implementation

of shadowing in their pronunciation learning, there is currently no systematic information on how these students perceive the technique, what experiences they describe during practice, and what challenges they encounter. Without this understanding, it is difficult for teachers to evaluate whether the technique is being implemented in a way that is meaningful and motivating for students, or to make informed adjustments to their instructional approach.

Previous studies on shadowing in EFL contexts have primarily focused on measuring its effects on pronunciation outcomes using quantitative methods, such as pre- and post-test comparisons of pronunciation scores (Leonisa & Kirana, 2022; Petalolo et al., 2024; Tazkiatun, 2023). While these studies provide valuable evidence of shadowing's effectiveness, they offer limited insight into the learner's perspective and lived experience of the technique. The few qualitative studies that do exist, such as Saputro (2024) and Ulfa and Fatimah (2019), have focused primarily on general perceptions of usefulness and enjoyment, without exploring in depth the specific experiences, difficulties, and physical sensations that students describe during shadowing. Furthermore, no study to date has investigated students' perceptions of shadowing in a vocational high school context in Padang, where students face distinct learning needs and classroom conditions compared to general academic settings.

This gap is important to address because understanding students' perceptions can help teachers evaluate whether shadowing is implemented in ways that are engaging, motivating, and suitable for vocational learners' needs. Insights into students' experiences may also assist teachers in identifying challenges encountered during shadowing activities and in designing more effective pronunciation instruction strategies. Theoretically this study contributes to the growing body of the research on pronunciation learning by providing a deeper qualitative understanding of how vocational EFL learners experience shadowing as a pronunciation technique, particularly within the Indonesian vocational school context, which remains underrepresented in previous studies.

The present study therefore aims to address this gap by exploring the perceptions and experiences of Grade XI MPLB students at SMKN 2 Padang regarding the use of the shadowing technique in their pronunciation learning. Specifically, the study seeks to answer two research questions: (1) What are the students' perceptions of the shadowing technique in improving their pronunciation skills? and (2) What are students' experiences in using the shadowing technique? The findings are expected to provide empirically grounded insights into how vocational EFL students experience shadowing from a learner's perspective, which can in turn inform more effective, learner-centered pronunciation instruction. By foregrounding students' voices, the study contributes to a more complete understanding of how shadowing functions not only as a technical pronunciation tool but as a lived learning experience in the vocational EFL classroom.

2. METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to explore students' perceptions and experiences of using the shadowing technique in pronunciation learning. Qualitative research was selected because it focuses on understanding participants' experiences and perspectives in their natural learning context (Creswell, 2012). This approach allows the researcher to describe

and interpret students' subjective responses to the shadowing technique based on interview data.

The participants were six eleventh-grade students from class XI MPLB (Manajemen Perkantoran dan Layanan Bisnis) at SMKN 2 Padang. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their experience in learning pronunciation through the shadowing technique and their willingness to participate (Creswell, 2012). All participants had been involved in shadowing-based pronunciation activities conducted by their English teacher. They were selected after the learning process had taken place, ensuring that their responses were based on actual experience with the technique.

Data were collected through a semi-structured interview consisting of 25 open-ended questions. This instrument was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore participants' experiences in depth while giving them freedom to express their opinions openly (Patton, 2015). The interview questions were adapted from Pratama and Isnaini (2024) and Saputro (2024) and were adjusted to fit the context of this study. The questions focused on two main areas: students' perceptions of shadowing for pronunciation improvement and students' experiences using the technique.

To ensure instrument validity, the 25 interview questions were reviewed and validated by the research supervisor, who assessed the relevance and alignment of each question with the research objectives. Revisions were made based on the validator's feedback. Interviews were conducted individually in the classroom, with each session lasting approximately 12–15 minutes. All sessions were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis following the qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which includes three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data condensation, interview transcripts were read carefully and meaningful units of data related to students' perceptions and experiences were identified and coded. Codes were then grouped based on similarities and arranged into categories. During conclusion drawing, the researcher interpreted the grouped data and developed themes representing main patterns in the findings. Statements originally delivered in Indonesian are presented in their original form followed by English translations to maintain authenticity.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of interview data yielded four major themes: (1) students' experiences using the shadowing technique, (2) students' perceptions while performing the technique, (3) difficulties experienced during shadowing, and (4) physical experiences during pronunciation practice. Each theme is discussed below.

Students' Experiences Using the Shadowing Technique

The first theme reflects how students described their direct experiences while performing shadowing practice. Three sub-themes were identified: experience of following pronunciation models, experience of repeating spoken language, and experience of noticing pronunciation features.

Several participants described that shadowing helped them follow pronunciation examples because they could listen directly to a model and imitate it immediately. For instance, S6 explained: "Menurut aku kebantu miss, karena jadi tau cara bicara atau pelafalan yang benar" (I think it helps because I can know the correct way of speaking or pronouncing words). Similarly, S4 stated: "I think I can notice my mistakes right away, miss," and S5 added: "I think I get more English sounds, miss." These responses indicate that students experienced shadowing as a guided practice in which the pronunciation model functioned as a reference for how English should sound.

Students also described shadowing as requiring immediate repetition of spoken language. S1 explained: "I listen and immediately repeat the speaker word by word." Participants suggested that repetition helped them stay focused on pronunciation input and prevented them from losing attention during practice. Additionally, students reported becoming aware of sounds, mistakes, and pronunciation differences that they had not previously recognized. S4 stated: "I think I can notice my mistake right away, miss," while S5 explained that shadowing exposed her to new sounds she had not previously recognized. These responses indicate that shadowing was experienced as an activity encouraging awareness and self-monitoring rather than merely passive repetition.

These findings are consistent with Ormrod (2019), who explains that students' perceptions are shaped by how they experience classroom activities. When learning tasks are clear and supportive, students tend to respond positively to them. The findings also align with Hamada (2014), who states that shadowing promotes active engagement through repeated listening and speaking. Students' descriptions suggest that shadowing functioned as a guided learning process in which the pronunciation model supported their understanding of spoken English. This finding suggests that shadowing helped students become more aware of English pronunciation patterns through direct imitation of spoken models. By listening and repeating simultaneously, students appeared to pay closer attention to pronunciation details such as sounds and pronunciation differences that they had not previously noticed. This indicates that shadowing encouraged active involvement in pronunciation practice rather than passive listening.

Students' Perceptions While Using the Shadowing Technique

The second theme represents students' subjective perceptions of their pronunciation quality, rhythm, and confidence during shadowing practice. Three sub-themes emerged: perceived pronunciation quality, perceived rhythm and flow, and perceived confidence while pronouncing.

Several students perceived their pronunciation as clearer, smoother, and less stiff while practicing shadowing. S1 described: "Lebih jelas sih miss, apalagi kayak it is not like stiff before" (It feels clearer, especially it is not stiff like before). S3 stated: "Cara bicara nya jadi ga kaku kaku banget" (The way I speak is not too stiff anymore). S2 added: "Bener bener lebih mengalir miss" (It really flows more smoothly). These statements suggest that students evaluated their pronunciation based on how it felt and sounded to them, indicating subjective perceptions of improvement.

Students also described changes related to rhythm and naturalness. S1 explained: "Kayak it is not flat anymore, jadi ga datar lagi miss" (It is not flat anymore). These responses suggest that shadowing drew students' attention to prosodic features such as intonation and rhythm. This is consistent with Harmer (2007), who emphasizes that pronunciation involves not only individual sounds but also prosodic features such as rhythm and intonation.

A particularly strong perception concerned confidence. S1 stated: "Saya lebih percaya diri" (I feel more confident). S2 explained: "I'm not afraid to say word presentation anymore," and S3 added: "Saya ngucapin nya itu tanpa grogi lagi miss" (I can pronounce it without being nervous anymore). S4 extended this to classroom performance: "Yes, even I'm during presentation in front of class." These responses indicate that shadowing was experienced not only as pronunciation practice but also as confidence-building. This aligns with Tang et al. (2013), who argue that learners' self-perception influences their willingness to communicate. Students' responses suggest that confidence emerged from familiarity with sounds through repeated exposure. Repeated exposure to spoken English may have students feel more familiar with English pronunciation patterns, which gradually reduced their nervousness when speaking. As students became more accustomed to hearing and repeating English expressions, they appeared to feel more comfortable pronouncing words during classroom activities such as presentations and speaking practice.

Difficulties Experienced During Shadowing

The third theme reflects challenges students described while performing shadowing, specifically related to speech speed, intonation, and concentration. Despite generally positive perceptions, participants acknowledged several difficulties as part of their learning experience.

Speech rate was described as one of the main challenges. S1 explained: "The speed is too fast, kadang kecepatannya terlalu cepat" (The speed is sometimes too fast). S5 stated: "Ritme nya terlalu cepat, susah buat diikutin" (The rhythm is too fast and difficult to follow). These responses indicate that the temporal features of spoken language influenced how manageable students found the activity. This perception is consistent with Hamada (2014), who explains that shadowing involves simultaneous listening and speaking, which learners may experience as demanding.

Students also described difficulty with intonation. S1 stated: "Menurut kinah yang paling sulit itu intonasi sih miss" (For me, the most difficult part is intonation). This suggests that while shadowing exposed students to intonation patterns, reproducing those patterns remained challenging. Additionally, several participants described shadowing as requiring strong concentration. S2 stated: "I need more concentration miss," and S4 explained: "Agak susah menyesuaikan nya gitu miss" (It is quite difficult to adjust). These responses suggest that coordinating listening and speaking simultaneously was mentally demanding for students. Rather than describing these challenges negatively, students presented them as part of the learning experience, suggesting that perceived difficulty may reflect engagement with the task. These difficulties may be related to the nature of shadowing itself, which requires students to listen and repeat spoken language almost at the same time. Fast speech and unfamiliar intonation patterns appeared to make students concentrate more during practice. Although

students experienced difficulties, their responses suggest that they still viewed shadowing as a useful learning activity.

Physical Experiences During Pronunciation Practice

The fourth theme represents physical experiences described by students while performing shadowing. Participants described bodily responses related to mouth movement, tongue position, and breathing, indicating that pronunciation practice was experienced not only as a mental but also as a physical activity.

Several students described physical reactions when pronouncing English sounds. S1 stated: "Lidah kinah tuh kadang terasa kaku gitu miss" (My tongue sometimes feels stiff), and S2 similarly explained: "My tongue feels stiff when pronouncing English words." These responses suggest that producing unfamiliar sounds required noticeable articulatory effort. S3 described growing awareness of articulation: "Zakiya jadi lebih tau posisi lidah buat th" (I become more aware of tongue position for 'th' sounds), while S6 stated: "I know when to open my mouth." These descriptions reflect increased attention to articulation mechanics through shadowing practice.

Students also described awareness of breathing during continuous speech. S5 stated: "Like... I run out of breath miss," suggesting that sustained speech production drew attention to breathing as part of pronunciation. These findings indicate that shadowing was experienced as a holistic activity that made learners more conscious of the physical aspects of speech production. This aligns with Kadota (2019), who emphasizes that shadowing supports not only phonological accuracy but also learners' sensorimotor processing of spoken input. Students' descriptions of tongue movement, mouth position, and breathing indicate that shadowing made them more aware of the physical aspects of pronunciation. Through repeated imitation, students appeared to notice how English sounds are produced differently from sounds in their first language. This awareness may support students in improving pronunciation accuracy gradually through practice.

Overall, the findings from this study indicate that students perceived the shadowing technique as a supportive and engaging pronunciation practice. These results are comparable to previous studies. Saputro (2024) similarly found that students generally held positive perceptions of shadowing, considering it enjoyable and effective for pronunciation improvement. Ulfa and Fatimah (2019) reported that shadowing enhanced students' pronunciation, vocabulary, and speaking confidence in senior high school settings. The present study extends these findings to the vocational school context, where students' specific learning needs and classroom conditions require attention. The qualitative approach adopted here also provides richer insights into the experiential dimension of shadowing that quantitative studies do not fully capture.

4. CONCLUSION

This study explored students' perceptions and experiences of the shadowing technique in improving pronunciation skills at SMKN 2 Padang. The findings, derived from semi-structured interviews with six eleventh-grade vocational students, indicate that participants generally

perceived shadowing as a helpful and engaging activity for pronunciation practice. Students described shadowing as a guided practice in which a pronunciation model provided clear input for imitation, supported self-monitoring, and fostered active engagement through listening, repeating, and noticing pronunciation features.

Students also reported positive perceptions of changes in their pronunciation quality during shadowing. They described their speech as sounding clearer, smoother, less stiff, and more natural in terms of rhythm and flow. Additionally, participants expressed increased confidence and reduced nervousness when pronouncing English words, with some students extending this confidence to classroom presentations. These perceptions suggest that shadowing contributed to how students evaluated both their pronunciation performance and their emotional readiness to speak.

Despite these positive perceptions, students also identified challenges during shadowing, particularly related to fast audio speed, intonation reproduction, and the simultaneous demands of listening and speaking. Physical experiences such as tongue stiffness, breath control difficulty, and articulatory awareness were also described, indicating that pronunciation learning was experienced as a holistic physical and mental activity. These challenges, however, were not described as barriers but rather as part of the learning process that shadowing made students more aware of.

The study concludes that the shadowing technique is perceived positively by EFL vocational students as a meaningful pronunciation practice that fosters awareness, engagement, and confidence. For teachers, it is recommended to use shadowing as a supportive pronunciation activity by selecting audio materials with clear pronunciation and appropriate speed, and by providing brief guidance and feedback to help students focus on key pronunciation features. Students are encouraged to practice shadowing regularly using audio or video materials to increase familiarity with English sounds. Future researchers may explore students' perceptions of shadowing in different educational contexts, proficiency levels, or with focus on specific aspects of pronunciation awareness.

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