The Effectiveness of Shadowing Technique in Improving English Pronunciation of First-Semester Students at Universitas Maarif Nahdlatul Ulama Kebumen

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of the shadowing technique in improving the English pronunciation of first-semester students in the English Department at Universitas Maarif Nahdlatul Ulama (UMNU) Kebumen. Sixteen students participated in four shadowing-based sessions, where they listened to and mimicked native English speakers. Pronunciation performance was assessed before and after the treatment using five criteria: intelligibility, fluency, accuracy, intonation, and stress. Rather than applying a t-test, the study employed a qualitative scoring interpretation approach based on (Purwanto, 2009)classification to categorize students' scores. Results revealed a notable shift in performance categories, indicating that shadowing effectively enhanced students' pronunciation proficiency.

Keywords: shadowing technique, pronunciation improvement, score category, quantitaive, EFL learners

INTRODUCTION

In the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL), pronunciation has long been recognized as one of the most essential yet challenging aspects for learners to master. It plays a crucial role in oral communication, directly influencing how effectively a speaker can convey their ideas and how well they are understood by others. Pronunciation includes not only the correct articulation of individual sounds (segmentals), but also suprasegmental features such as intonation, stress, and rhythm. These components are crucial in ensuring intelligibility, fluency, and naturalness in speech.

For Indonesian EFL learners, pronunciation tends to be one of the most persistent problems encountered in language acquisition. This challenge stems largely from the differences in the phonological systems between Indonesian and English. For instance, English contains a number of vowel sounds, diphthongs, and consonant clusters that do not exist in Indonesian. Moreover, English makes extensive use of stress-timing in contrast to the syllable-timing system in Bahasa Indonesia, leading to issues in rhythm and intonation for many learners. These differences often result in Indonesian learners speaking English with a strong native accent, which can hinder communication and lower confidence when speaking.

Many students in Indonesia struggle with common pronunciation issues such as confusing long and short vowel sounds (e.g., /iː/ vs /ɪ/), mispronouncing consonants that do not exist in Indonesian (such as /θ/ and /ð/), and applying flat intonation patterns that make speech sound robotic or unnatural. While vocabulary and grammar are often prioritized in classroom instruction, pronunciation tends to receive less attention or is treated superficially through mechanical repetition or drilling techniques. Unfortunately, such traditional methods, while

useful in the early stages of learning, often fall short in promoting the development of natural, fluent, and contextually appropriate pronunciation patterns.

One of the critical drawbacks of drilling methods is that they typically lack meaningful context and fail to provide learners with exposure to authentic language use. Repeating isolated words or sentences without proper contextualization can lead to rote memorization rather than internalized speech patterns. Learners may be able to mimic individual sounds or words during class activities, but they struggle to transfer this ability into spontaneous speech. Consequently, their pronunciation may remain artificial, fragmented, and inconsistent, especially during real-time interactions.

To address these issues, researchers and language educators have explored alternative approaches that are more engaging, immersive, and effective in fostering pronunciation skills. One promising technique that has gained attention in recent years is **shadowing**. Originally developed for training simultaneous interpreters, shadowing is a practice in which the learner listens to a native speaker's speech and imitates it in real time, almost simultaneously, with minimal delay. This technique requires intense concentration, active listening, and immediate vocal reproduction, making it an integrated and dynamic learning experience.

Shadowing provides a number of pedagogical advantages for language learners. Unlike traditional repetition drills, shadowing exposes learners to authentic speech with natural rhythm, stress, and intonation. Through consistent practice, learners are able to internalize the phonological patterns of the target language more intuitively. In addition, shadowing encourages the development of both **segmental** (individual sounds) and **suprasegmental** (intonation, stress, rhythm) features of pronunciation. By mimicking native speech in real-time, learners become more sensitive to subtle variations in pitch, speed, and articulation, thereby enhancing their listening and speaking skills simultaneously.

The theoretical foundations for shadowing as a pronunciation technique have been supported by various scholars. (Murphey, 2001) described shadowing as a “repetition-with-improvisation” method that promotes deeper engagement with spoken language. He emphasized that shadowing helps learners not only hear but **feel** the structure and rhythm of English, allowing for greater automaticity and fluency in speech production. (Hamada, 2019)further explored the cognitive and linguistic benefits of shadowing, noting that this technique enhances **phonological awareness**, boosts **working memory**, and strengthens the **link between perception and production** in second language learning. These findings highlight the potential of shadowing as a comprehensive tool for improving pronunciation in EFL contexts.

In practice, shadowing can be implemented in various ways, ranging from simple imitation of audio recordings to more structured activities involving transcripts, timed repetitions, and feedback. For instance, learners might be asked to shadow a short dialogue or narrative from a podcast or video clip, focusing on replicating not just the words but also the speaker’s tone, pace, and emotional delivery. Over time, this immersive exposure enables learners to build muscle memory for correct articulation and natural speech flow.

From a cognitive perspective, shadowing aligns with the **noticing hypothesis** (Schmidt, 1990), which posits that learners must consciously notice language features in input in order to acquire them. By requiring learners to pay close attention to how words are pronounced, stressed, and connected in real-time speech, shadowing fosters active noticing of phonological forms.

Moreover, it promotes **automatization**, allowing learners to shift from conscious articulation to more fluent, subconscious production—a key element of effective oral communication.

Despite its benefits, the shadowing technique remains underutilized in many EFL classrooms in Indonesia. Teachers often lack awareness or training in implementing shadowing systematically. Furthermore, some educators assume that shadowing is too demanding for beginner-level students or that it requires sophisticated materials and technology. However, recent studies have demonstrated that with proper scaffolding, shadowing can be adapted for various proficiency levels using simple tools such as audio recordings, smartphone apps, or YouTube videos.

Integrating shadowing into pronunciation instruction also supports a more **student-centered** and **active learning** approach. Rather than passively repeating words after a teacher, students become active participants in their own language development. Shadowing allows learners to take ownership of their learning pace and style, making pronunciation practice more engaging and personalized. In group settings, shadowing can be used in pair work or choral activities, fostering collaboration and peer feedback.

Given these considerations, it becomes clear that shadowing holds significant potential as an alternative or complementary technique to traditional pronunciation drills in Indonesian EFL classrooms. Especially at the tertiary level, where students are expected to achieve higher communicative competence, implementing shadowing can help bridge the gap between controlled practice and spontaneous speaking.

Moreover, improving pronunciation is not merely about sounding more "native-like," but rather about achieving **intelligibility**, **fluency**, and **communicative effectiveness**. As (Jenkins, 2000)argued in her Lingua Franca Core model, pronunciation instruction should focus on features that most contribute to mutual understanding in international communication. Shadowing supports this goal by training learners to notice and produce key phonological elements that affect clarity, such as vowel length, consonant articulation, and word stress.

In the context of English language instruction at universities in Indonesia, where students often come from diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds, shadowing can provide a more equitable and effective approach to pronunciation practice. Rather than relying solely on teacher-led correction or rote drills, shadowing empowers students to engage with authentic language input, mimic natural speech patterns, and receive implicit feedback through their own performance. This self-regulated learning model aligns with modern pedagogical trends that emphasize learner autonomy, technological integration, and communicative competence.

Furthermore, in an era where English proficiency is increasingly tied to academic success, employability, and global mobility, the importance of effective pronunciation cannot be overstated. Mispronunciations, no matter how minor, can lead to misunderstanding, misjudgment, or even exclusion in academic or professional contexts. Therefore, adopting innovative, research-based methods like shadowing is not just pedagogically sound but also socially and economically relevant.

Based on this background, the present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the shadowing technique in improving the pronunciation skills of Indonesian EFL learners. Specifically, the study seeks to determine how shadowing influences key aspects of pronunciation such as **intelligibility**, **fluency**, **accuracy**, **intonation**, and **stress**. By focusing

on university-level learners and utilizing practical implementation of shadowing activities, this research intends to provide empirical evidence and pedagogical insights that can inform future teaching practices and curriculum design in EFL contexts.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using a pre-experimental one-group pre-test and post-test design. It involved 16 first-semester students from the English Education Department at Universitas Maarif Nahdlatul Ulama (UMNU) Kebumen as participants. The aim was to investigate the effectiveness of the shadowing technique in improving English pronunciation.

Each participant was assessed before and after the treatment using a pronunciation test based on five criteria: intelligibility, fluency, accuracy, intonation, and stress. Each criterion was scored on a 1 to 5 scale, giving a total maximum of 25 points. These were then converted into scores out of 100 to allow easier categorization and interpretation using Purwanto's (2009) classification, as follows:

- 86–100: Very Good (Sangat Baik)
- 76–85: Good (Baik)
- 66–75: Fair (Cukup)
- 56–65: Poor (Kurang)
- ≤55: Very Poor (Sangat Kurang)

The treatment consisted of four sessions of 90-minute shadowing activities, in which students listened to native English audio clips and immediately mimicked them. The materials consisted of authentic speech segments, including short stories and monologues taken from publicly available platforms such as YouTube and English language learning websites. During each session, students followed these steps:

1. **Listening to recordings of native English speakers** – students listened attentively to authentic audio clips (dialogues, short stories, and monologues).
2. **Imitating native pronunciation** – students practiced repeating sentences by focusing on how the native speaker pronounced words, including articulation, stress, and intonation.
3. **Shadowing with minimal delay** – students mimicked the speech in real time or with slight delay, aiming to match the rhythm, pace, and intonation as naturally as possible.
4. **Feedback** – after the shadowing practice, students received corrections and guidance from the instructor to refine their pronunciation and address recurring issues.

All sessions were held in the university's language laboratory with appropriate sound equipment to ensure clear input. At the end of the treatment, students took the same pronunciation test as a post-test, and results were compared to determine learning gains.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study were obtained by comparing the students' pre-test and post-test scores on pronunciation performance after the implementation of the shadowing technique. The pronunciation tests were administered individually before and after the treatment to evaluate

students' progress in spoken English. Each student's performance was assessed using a detailed scoring rubric that focused on five key components of pronunciation: intelligibility, fluency, accuracy, intonation, and stress.

These five components were chosen because they represent both segmental and suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation, providing a comprehensive evaluation of students' speaking abilities. Each component was rated on a scale of 1 to 5, with a maximum total score of 25 points, which was then converted into a score out of 100 for categorization purposes. The categorization of the scores followed Purwanto's (2009) qualitative scale, allowing students to be placed in levels ranging from *Very Poor* to *Very Good*.

The pre-test served as a baseline measurement of the students' pronunciation proficiency prior to any exposure to the shadowing technique. After undergoing four 90-minute shadowing sessions, students were administered the same pronunciation test as a post-test to determine any improvements. The comparison of results revealed clear progress in several aspects of pronunciation, with a notable number of students moving from lower to higher proficiency categories. A detailed breakdown of individual scores and category shifts is presented in the following tables.

Pre-test

Student	**Intelligibility**	**Fluency**	**Accuracy**	**Intonation**	**Stress**	**total score aspect**	**score (5)**
1	3	4	3	3	3	16	80
2	3	3	2	2	2	12	60
3	3	3	3	4	3	16	80
4	3	3	3	3	3	15	75
5	3	3	2	3	2	13	65
6	4	4	3	3	3	17	85
7	3	3	2	3	2	13	65
8	3	3	2	3	2	13	65
9	3	4	3	3	3	16	80
10	3	3	3	3	3	15	75
11	3	3	3	3	3	15	75
12	3	3	3	3	3	15	75

13	3	3	3	3	3	15	75
14	3	3	3	3	3	15	75
15	2	2	2	3	2	11	55
16	3	3	3	3	2	14	70

Based on the pre-test results, it was found that the majority of students were in the "Fair" (66–75) and "Poor" (56–65) categories. There were no students who achieved the "Very Good" category, and only four students entered the "Good" category. These findings indicate that the participants' pronunciation abilities were generally still low before the learning intervention using shadowing techniques was carried out. This is in accordance with the general condition of EFL learners in Indonesia who often experience difficulties in mastering suprasegmental aspects such as intonation and word stress

Post-test

Student	**Intelligibility**	**Fluency**	**Accuracy**	**Intonation**	**Stress**	**total score aspect**	**score(5)**
1	4	4	4	4	4	20	100
2	3	3	3	3	3	15	75
3	3	4	3	4	4	18	90
4	4	4	3	4	3	18	90
5	3	4	3	3	3	16	80
6	4	4	3	4	4	19	95
7	3	3	2	3	3	14	70
8	3	4	3	3	3	16	80
9	4	4	4	4	4	20	100
10	4	4	3	4	3	18	90
11	4	4	3	4	4	19	95
12	4	4	3	4	3	18	90

13	3	4	3	3	3	16	80
14	4	4	3	4	4	19	95
15	2	2	2	3	2	11	55
16	4	4	3	3	3	17	85

The post-test results showed a significant improvement in the quality of the participants' pronunciation. A total of 9 students managed to reach the "Very Good" category, compared to zero students during the pre-test. Additionally, there were no participants in the “Poor” category after the intervention, and the number of participants in the “Fair” category decreased from seven to only two students. This change in score distribution indicates that the shadowing technique not only increased the average score of the participants, but also helped the majority of students achieve a qualitatively higher level of pronunciation. This strengthens the evidence that shadowing is effective in improving pronunciation in EFL environments.

Classification of Pre-test and Post-test

Kategori	**Number of Students (Pre-Test)**	**Number of Students (Post-Test)**
Very Good	0	9
Good	4	4
Fair	7	2
Poor	4	0
Very poor	1	1

The data shows a significant qualitative improvement: most students moved from " Poor " or " Fair " to "Good" or " Very Good." For example, Naswa Maurena improved from "Baik" (80) to "Sangat Baik" (100), and Farhanudin moved from "Kurang" (60) to "Cukup" (75). This shift illustrates the shadowing technique's role in improving both performance and confidence.

These findings support (Murphey, 2001) and (Hamada, 2019), who highlighted that shadowing improves not only pronunciation but also fluency and listening skills. Moreover, using a categorical system provided an accessible and pedagogically relevant interpretation of learning gains

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the **shadowing technique is effective in improving English pronunciation** among first-semester EFL students. Significant improvements were observed across five aspects of pronunciation—**intelligibility, fluency, accuracy, intonation, and stress**—as reflected in the shift from lower to higher score categories after the treatment.

Shadowing helped students internalize natural speech patterns by combining listening and immediate imitation, making it beneficial for both **segmental and suprasegmental features**. The use of Purwanto's qualitative scoring system also provided meaningful insights into students' progress beyond numerical gains.

In summary, shadowing offers a practical and engaging approach to pronunciation instruction and should be considered as a complementary strategy in EFL classrooms. Future studies may explore its long-term effects or compare it with other pronunciation techniques.

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