

## Exploring the English learners' experience in speaking by using the shadowing technique

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### Abstract

*Although English has been taught for more than twelve years in schools, speaking remains the most challenging skill for beginner learners. This persistent difficulty arises from the dominance of traditional and ineffective teaching practices that rarely encourage active participation, learner confidence, and real-life communication. In response, this study explores students' experiences in applying the shadowing technique during the speaking learning process. A qualitative approach was adopted to gain in-depth understanding of learners' perceptions. The research subjects consisted of five students enrolled in an intensive speaking course at a language school. Data were collected through interviews and classroom observations, both of which captured students' responses, challenges, and reflections throughout the learning process. The data were then analyzed thematically using coding and categorization to identify key themes emerging from the participants' experiences. The findings reveal that the shadowing technique plays a significant role in improving learners' speaking competence. Students reported notable progress in pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary use, and intonation. In addition, shadowing was found to foster greater confidence, as learners gradually overcame anxiety and hesitation when speaking English. Despite initial challenges, such as dealing with fast speech and unfamiliar vocabulary, learners expressed positive attitudes toward the technique. This study concludes that shadowing is an effective and practical Technique to support speaking skill development. Teachers are recommended to incorporate shadowing with suitable modifications, such as simplified input and slower speech rates, to maximize its benefits for learners across varying proficiency levels.*

**Keywords:** learners' experiences; shadowing technique; speaking skills

### INTRODUCTION

Speaking ability is one of the core skills in English language learning that is essential for learners to master. Just like a strong building, it must have a solid foundation (Hussain, 2017). However, many English language learners, especially at the beginner to intermediate levels, face challenges in developing fluency and confidence in speaking. Common problems include incorrect pronunciation, limited vocabulary, and difficulty constructing sentences spontaneously. These issues often lead to a lack of self-confidence, particularly when communicating with native speakers (Nety et al., 2020). According to the EF English Proficiency Index, the English proficiency of the Indonesian population remains low, ranking 79th out of 113 countries (EPI, 2023). The data also reveal that people living on the island of Java have the highest proficiency levels, while Papua has the lowest. Specifically, Jakarta and Surabaya are the cities with the highest English proficiency. Based on the data above and the current phenomenon regarding the speaking ability of English learners, it indicates the presence of a problem possibly one related to the learning techniques used.

In recent years, speaking skills in English have become one of the biggest challenges for learners, especially among Indonesian students. Several previous studies have revealed that low speaking proficiency can be caused by various factors, such as the lack of speaking practice in real-life contexts (Hussain, 2017), the students' lack of self-confidence (Nadila et al., 2020), as well as teaching methods that still focus more on grammar and reading than on speaking practice (Dahlia & Hermanto, 2024). In addition, a learning environment that does not actively support the use of English also hinders the development of this skill (Khaerati, 2021). One of the main problems is the

lack of effective strategies to train fluency and accuracy in speaking. In response to this issue, several researchers have begun exploring various alternative learning strategies that focus on direct practice and language modelling, one of which is the shadowing technique. Shadowing is a language learning technique where learners listen to a recording of the target language and immediately imitate it simultaneously, without any pause. This technique was first introduced in the context of language learning by Alexander Arguelles and has been further developed by various researchers, such as Ginting (2019), who investigated the effect of the shadowing technique on students' listening skills achievement, and Astuti (2020), who conducted research on the effect of shadowing technique on students' intonation. The advantages of shadowing compared to other methods include its ability to improve speaking fluency through spontaneous repetition, enhance intonation, pronunciation, and speaking rhythm, and train the brain to process input and output simultaneously, similar to real conversational situations. Additionally, shadowing can be done with or without a speaking partner. In the classroom, shadowing can be incorporated as part of regular speaking activities with the following steps: selecting short audio or video materials such as everyday conversations, first listening to gain general understanding, second listening where shadowing is performed aloud simultaneously without pause, followed by repetition and reflection, and concluded with evaluation and feedback from the teacher on articulation clarity and intonation.

Several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of this technique; for example, shadowing has been proven to improve listening skills (Hamada, 2021), shadowing improves pronunciation skills (Salim et al., 2020) and shadowing helps to boost students' confidence in speaking English (Phu<sup>o</sup>ng & Ng<sup>o</sup>c, 2023). Although several studies have highlighted the benefits of the shadowing technique in improving listening and speaking skills, such as (Binarkaheni & Dewangga, 2024), (Rosyidi et al., 2022), and (Phu<sup>o</sup>ng & Ng<sup>o</sup>c, 2023), Most studies still focus on the outcomes rather than the learning experiences of the learners. However, in a qualitative approach, understanding the learning process and students' perceptions is essential to determine how effective, acceptable, and relevant a method truly is within the context of everyday learning. Therefore, this study aims to explore how helpful shadowing technique is in improving their English speaking skills. This study seeks to uncover students' perceptions of the shadowing technique in learning English speaking. It focuses on the perceived benefits, the level of helpfulness, and the challenges faced. This study aims to explore the experiences of English language learners in developing their speaking skills using the shadowing technique. To guide this research activity, the formulation of the research questions proposed is how do English learners experience in learning to speak using the shadowing technique, particularly in terms of benefits and challenges.

## METHOD

### Respondents

The participants of this study were learners in the Speaking Program for Pronunciation at an English course. The total number of learners in the class was 11 participants. However, not all were selected as research participants. Using a purposive sampling technique, only five learners were chosen because they met the specific criteria relevant to the study objectives. The criteria included learners who had participated in speaking lessons using the shadowing technique for at least two weeks, showed consistency in attending the program, and were willing to be interviewed in depth. The selected participants were aged between 22 and 27 years. Most of them were university graduates or equivalent, currently attending an intensive English course program, and some were workers. All participants had direct experience using the shadowing technique in learning to speak English, making them suitable to provide rich and meaningful insights for this study. For confidentiality purposes, the participants were referred to using their initials PF, AA, RD, SD, and RS.

## Instruments

This study used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological study design. This design was chosen to explore in depth the subjective experiences of learners in learning English speaking skills through shadowing techniques. The phenomenological approach is suitable for gaining in depth insights into participants' perceptions, feelings, and challenges in developing their speaking skills. Data collection in this study was carried out through two primary methods, namely observation and interviews. Observation was used to explore the experiences of English learners in learning to speak using the shadowing technique. This method was chosen because it allows researcher to directly observe learners' engagement and difficulties in real-time during the process. In addition, observation also provides an important contextual picture as a complement to interview data.

The interview method was used to gain deeper insights into learners' perceptions and experiences while using the shadowing technique. This study used semi structured interviews because this method gives researchers the flexibility to explore important topics flexibly, while still adhering to the question guide that has been prepared based on the research objectives. Interviews were conducted directly (face-to-face) and some were conducted online. with a certain duration until the researcher gets the answer for each participant. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants to ensure data accuracy. The data collection process through interviews includes three stages, namely preparing an interview guide, conducting interviews with all selected participants in stages, and documenting the interview results in the form of audio recordings.

## Procedures

The Speaking Program for Pronunciation was specifically designed to improve learners' speaking skills by using the shadowing technique as the main learning technique. The program consisted of several stages. In the input phase, learners listened to short audio recordings of native English speakers containing daily conversations, short stories, and monologues adapted to their level. In the shadowing phase, learners repeated the speech simultaneously with the audio, imitating pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation as closely as possible. This was followed by the practice phase, where learners repeated the same texts without audio support to check pronunciation accuracy and fluency. Finally, in the reflection phase, learners discussed the difficulties they encountered, including speed, unfamiliar vocabulary, and intonation. They shared strategies to overcome them, including replaying the audio or writing down new vocabulary. The program was conducted for two weeks with five sessions per week, each lasting 90 minutes. The program was conducted for two weeks with five sessions per week, each lasting 90 minutes. Data collection was carried out using observation and interviews. Observations were used to gain contextual insights into learners' experiences during practice. Semi-structured interviews, conducted both face-to-face and online, allowed participants to share their reflections in detail. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent to ensure data accuracy.

## Data analysis

The data in this study were analysed using thematic analysis, which is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes in qualitative data. This approach is considered appropriate because it is able to organise interview data systematically and in depth so that it can describe the subjective experiences of participants comprehensively. The analysis process in this study refers to the steps (Braun & Clarke, 2023), which includes transcribing interview data completely and accurately, reading and understanding the entire transcript to obtain an overview, providing initial coding to the data to identify essential things, grouping codes into initial themes that represent participant experiences, reviewing and refining themes to be consistent and interrelated, and compiling a narrative of the results based on the themes that have been formed as the final result. In addition, the case study theory from Hollweck (2015) used as a basis for understanding the context and depth of qualitative data, especially in exploring the real experiences of participants in using shadowing techniques. By combining thematic analysis and case study approaches, this study aims to provide a rich and nuanced interpretation of the data collected.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study were obtained from interviews and observations conducted by the researcher. These findings highlight the experiences and perceptions of English language learners regarding the benefits of the shadowing technique in improving their English speaking skills. The data collected from these two sources provided a comprehensive understanding of how learners engaged with the technique and the progress they experienced.

Thematic analysis of the interview data identified several key themes related to learners' experiences in implementing the shadowing technique during the speaking learning process. The interviews were conducted face-to-face on August 9, 2025. The purpose of this interview and observation is to obtain information from the main research question How do English learners experience in learning to speak using the shadowing technique, particularly in terms of benefits and challenges. In these interviews, the researcher posed three main questions, which were then further developed as needed. The three sub questions were as follows: 1) What benefits do learners perceive from using the shadowing technique in speaking practice; 2) What challenges do learners face when applying the shadowing technique? 3) How do learners describe their overall experiences with shadowing in learning English speaking skills?

### Perceived improved areas

The first sub question was: "what benefits do you feel after using the shadowing technique in speaking practice?". The purpose of this question was to explore participants' experiences and initial perceptions of using the shadowing technique in speaking practice. This question was important because the responses such as which aspects improved, perceived benefits, and challenges often serve as early indicators of the effectiveness of a language learning method. Thus, this question acted as an entry point for understanding the relationship between the technique's effectiveness and learners' subjective acceptance of it in a real learning context. The following are the table and conclusions drawn from the interview results:

This is a summary table of aspects that improved after studying speaking using the shadowing technique.

**Table 1.** Aspects of Speaking Ability that Improved After Using the Shadowing Technique

Improved Aspects	Number of Participants (n=5)	Percentage (%)
Pronunciation	5	100%
Confidence	3	60%
Vocabulary	2	40%
Accent	2	40%
Fluency	1	20%
Intonation	1	20%

Most participants reported significant improvement in various aspects of their English-speaking skills after using the shadowing technique. The most frequently mentioned aspect was pronunciation, which all respondents highlighted. This is also highly relevant to the classroom observations. Based on the classroom observations, it was apparent that most students were able to imitate word pronunciation more clearly after participating in shadowing exercises over several sessions. Initially, some students still frequently mis stressed syllables, but after the fourth session, consistent improvement was seen, particularly in words with initial stress. This improvement was also accompanied by progress in other areas such as speaking fluency, vocabulary acquisition, accent refinement, and natural intonation.

PF stated that "this technique has improved my pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and confidence." AA added that "shadowing corrected my previously inaccurate pronunciation while also improving my accent." RD emphasised the development of natural intonation, while SD and RS highlighted the technique's contribution to building self-confidence. Overall, these findings demonstrate that shadowing has a multidimensional positive effect on speaking ability.

Then the interviewer asked follow-up questions, “What evidence make you believe that your speaking skills have improved after using the shadowing technique? The purpose of this question is to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' reasons for the improvements in these aspects. The majority of respondents attributed this improvement to the nature of shadowing, which involves listening to and imitating native speakers directly. PF explained that almost daily practice helps with habituation. AA and RD emphasized the combination of listening and imitating intonation, which naturally improves pronunciation. SD cited familiarization with English through shadowing as a crucial factor, while RS saw it as an effective solution to his speaking challenges. The above statements are supported by the participants' answers below:

PF “Because I practice it almost every day listening and imitating how native speakers speak.” AA “Because with the shadowing method, we can improve our listening, which significantly impacts our speaking. Furthermore, shadowing increases vocabulary.” RS “Based on the challenges I encountered in improving my speaking skills, the shadowing technique offered a more efficient approach. By directly listening to native speakers' speaking styles, I then observed and gradually imitated them”. SD “Because after learning the shadowing technique, I am more frequent and fluent in English, both listening and imitating the way they speak.” RS “Because this technique trains not only listening but also imitating the inflection of native speakers directly combined with understanding.”

Then the interviewer asked follow-up questions: “How do shadowing techniques help you in these aspects?”. Respondents revealed that the shadowing technique directly helped them to master pronunciation, accent, intonation, and vocabulary development. RD highlighted the benefits of strengthening auditory memory and increasing response speed in conversations. SD and RS emphasised that imitating native speakers' intonation builds confidence, while PF emphasised its role in mastering pronunciation. The above statements are supported by the participants' answers below:

RD “The habit of pronouncing intonation and rhythm quickly, training and strengthening auditory memory, speaking more fluently, understanding conversations faster and naturally”. SD “This shadowing technique allows me to imitate native intonation. It gets me used to speaking with native intonation and makes me more confident.” PF “Through this technique, I can directly imitate the intonation and way of speaking of native speakers, so that I can better master the pronunciation.”

These findings indicate that the shadowing technique does not merely serve as a repetition-based activity but provides a comprehensive learning experience that integrates listening, speaking, and cognitive processing simultaneously. The improvement across multiple aspects such as pronunciation, confidence, vocabulary, and intonation suggest that shadowing effectively addresses key challenges commonly faced by EFL learners. This aligns with previous research highlighting that shadowing can improve speech rhythm, and foster automaticity in language production (Sabirovich, 2024). Therefore, the findings of this study reinforce the pedagogical value of incorporating shadowing as a regular practice in speaking classes, particularly for beginner learners, as it provides both linguistic benefits and psychological support in reducing speaking-related anxiety.

## Perceived challenges

The second sub question was: “What challenges do you face when using shadowing techniques?”. The purpose of asking this question was to identify the specific obstacles learners encounter when applying the shadowing technique, so that the researcher could better understand both the limitations and areas that require pedagogical adjustment. By exploring students' challenges, the researcher aimed to gain insight into the factors that might hinder the effectiveness of shadowing, such as the fast pace of native speakers' audio, the difficulty of unfamiliar vocabulary, or fatigue caused by repetitive practice.

**Table 2.** Perceived Challenges in Using the Shadowing Technique

Challenges Identified	Number of Participants (n=5)	Percentage (%)
Speed of native speaker speech	4	80%
Unfamiliar/new vocabulary	2	40%
Initial difficulty (adaptation)	1	20%
Need for repetition/slowing	1	20%
Fatigue	1	20%

The most frequently mentioned challenges were the native speaker's speaking speed and the use of unfamiliar vocabulary. Some participants complained of fatigue due to screen time or repeated repetition. RD and RS both mentioned difficulties following audio at native speed, which required repetition or slowing down. This finding is in line with the results of observations; students on the first day of learning this technique experienced difficulties in balancing the process of imitating sounds in audio because they were not yet accustomed to the speed of native speakers. Those statements are supported by the participants' answers below: RD "Native is too fast to follow, has to slow down the audio, and repeats certain parts that can't be followed." RS "The biggest challenge is that I'm not used to imitating native speakers at such a fast pace, so I missed some words."

Then the interviewer asked follow-up questions: "How do you overcome these challenges?". Participants employed various strategies, including repeating difficult sections, slowing down the audio, and taking note of new vocabulary. AA emphasised the importance of daily practice, while SD noted that repetition also helped develop new vocabulary. RS combined slowing down the audio with practice focusing on pronunciation details. PF "I can repeat parts that are too difficult and write down vocabulary that I don't understand to re-understand". AA "My way of dealing with it is by continuously practicing every day". RD "I repeat certain parts that I can't follow". SD "I keep repeating until they become familiar to me and write down vocabulary that I don't know. This also increases my vocabulary". RS: "I repeat it continuously until I can follow it well. Then I also lower the audio speed so I can focus more on the details of the pronunciation".

Then the interviewer asked again follow-up questions: "Are there any situations where the shadowing technique feels less effective for you?". Several respondents reported that shadowing was less effective when they were tired, busy, or lacking focus. PF mentioned that physical fatigue could be disruptive, while RD and SD noted that boredom could set in if the session lasted too long without a break. RS cited the fear of mispronunciation when imitating directly as a psychological barrier. Those statements are supported by the participants' answers below:

PF "Yes, sometimes I feel a little tired and overwhelmed trying to imitate the way native speakers speak. It can make me thirsty when shadowing. So, I take a break by just watching the video and listening without imitating". AA "So far, I've never experienced that". RD "When I'm tired or lack focus, my desire to learn is less than optimal, or I feel bored. SD "Because of my busy schedule, sometimes the technique can bore me, but I always try to take time and rest before continuing". RS "Yes, when I imitate native speakers, I worry that I'll make a lot of pronunciation mistakes".

These findings suggest that while the shadowing technique offers valuable opportunities for improving listening and speaking fluency, its effectiveness can be hindered by learners' struggles with native speaker speed, unfamiliar vocabulary, and psychological barriers such as fatigue or anxiety. This indicates that scaffolding is necessary when applying shadowing, particularly for beginner learners. Providing pre-teaching of key vocabulary, using graded audio materials, and allowing controlled repetition may help minimize these challenges. Previous studies (Hamada, 2019) also emphasize the importance of gradual exposure and learner autonomy in shadowing practice to prevent frustration and disengagement. Thus, integrating shadowing with supportive pedagogical strategies not only enhances its effectiveness but also helps sustain learners' motivation, making it a more adaptable technique in EFL contexts.

## Levels of helpfulness

The Third sub question was: “How much do you think shadowing techniques help your overall speaking skills?”. The purpose of asking this question was to explore the extent to which students perceived the shadowing technique as beneficial for their overall speaking ability, beyond specific aspects such as pronunciation or fluency. By asking this, the researcher aimed to capture a more holistic understanding of the learners’ experiences with shadowing and how it influenced their confidence, public speaking performance, and ability to imitate natural speech patterns.

**Table 3.** The level of usefulness of the shadowing technique in helping to improve speaking skills

Category	Number of Participants (n=5)	Percentage (%)
Very helpful	5	100%
Helpful	0	0%
Less helpful	0	0%

All respondents considered shadowing a technique that significantly improved their overall speaking skills. PF stated that shadowing made it easier for her to imitate native speakers' speaking styles of native speakers through audio. AA experienced significant improvements in her public speaking skills, while RD, SD, and RS emphasised the method's significant contribution to improving intonation, pronunciation, and confidence. This finding aligns with observations that initially passive students began to speak more confidently in complete sentences during group shadowing practice. For example, in the second session, two students who were usually a little shy about following or imitating audio aloud began to try to follow along, albeit with hesitant intonation. Those statements are supported by the participants' answers below:

PF “really helps me learn English more easily because I can follow the way native speakers speak even though I only hear it through audio”. AA “Before I learned the shadowing technique, I often made mistakes in pronouncing vocabulary, and after I learned the shadowing technique. I can confidently have conversations or speeches or presentations in front of people or in front of study partners in class”. RS “It is very big because shadowing offers an integrated way. Just by listening via audio, this has direct implications for improving the skills needed by someone in speaking”.

Then the interviewer asked follow-up questions: "Do you think this technique is more effective than other speaking learning methods you've learned? Why?". The majority of participants considered shadowing more effective than methods like memorising texts or reading dialogues. The main reason is that shadowing combines listening and speaking practice simultaneously, involves more sensory coordination, and emphasises correct pronunciation. RS believes this technique is less monotonous than other methods, which tend to be repetitive without direct audio interaction. Those statements are supported by the participants' answers below:

AA “Yes, it's more effective than other techniques because when we learn using shadowing, we're not only practising our listening but also our pronunciation. Our two senses work together, resulting in faster improvement”. RS “Of course. This technique isn't as monotonous as simply reading or memorising text.” Then the interviewer asked again follow-up questions: “Which level of learner do you think this technique is best suited for: beginner, intermediate, or advanced?”. Most respondents stated that shadowing is best suited for intermediate learners, as it requires basic skills to keep up with native speakers. Some mentioned it's also suitable for advanced learners. RS disagreed, stating that shadowing can be used at all levels, with adjusted goals for each stage. Those statements are supported by the participants' answers below:

PF “intermediate level, because it might be enough to catch up with the speed of a native speaker and understand the vocabulary being conveyed”. SD “Intermediate or advanced level, because if it is used for beginners, it will be difficult to follow the pronunciation, usually beginners are not familiar with English”. RS “I find it suitable for all levels. Beginners get used to hearing how English sentences are pronounced in their entirety. Intermediate allows them to improve their skills. Advanced allows them to compare and refine their skills.”

The findings of this study revealed that learners experienced both benefits and challenges in learning to speak using the shadowing technique. The most significant benefit reported was an improvement in pronunciation, as all participants highlighted progress in this area. Other improvements included confidence, vocabulary, accent, fluency, and intonation. These are consistent with the findings of Rosyidi et al. (2022) and Hamada (2019), who emphasised the role of shadowing in accelerating oral performance. Moreover, this study also revealed an increase in learners' self-confidence, which supports Niimoto (2024). The argument that practising shadowing can reduce speaking anxiety. These findings answer the research question by showing that shadowing provides multidimensional benefits for speaking skills.

The reason shadowing is effective lies in its process of combining listening and immediate oral repetition, which strengthens the connection between auditory input and speech production. Learners reported that this practice helped them acquire natural pronunciation and intonation patterns, as well as expand their vocabulary through repeated exposure to authentic speech. This aligns with Astuti (2020), who found that shadowing improved students' oral proficiency by reinforcing accuracy and fluency, and with Yavari and Shafiee (2019), who noted its positive impact on vocabulary and listening comprehension. In addition, learners' increased confidence can be explained by the repetitive and imitative nature of shadowing, which reduces speaking anxiety a finding supported by Dsouza (2022), who argued that shadowing builds learners' willingness to speak.

However, challenges were also identified, particularly in following the fast pace of native speakers and dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary. These difficulties show that while shadowing is highly beneficial, it is not without obstacles, especially for learners with lower proficiency. Similar findings were reported by Dsouza (2022), who observed that the speed of native speech often overwhelms learners in the early stages. Participants in this study addressed these challenges by slowing down the audio, repeating difficult parts, and taking notes on new vocabulary. These strategies demonstrate how learners adapted shadowing to their own learning needs and made the technique more manageable.

Taken together, these findings suggest that shadowing is most effective when applied with scaffolding and adaptation. Learners unanimously considered it very helpful for their overall speaking skills, even more so than traditional methods like memorizing texts or reading dialogues. This perception is supported by Zarei & Alipour (2020), who found that shadowing offers more dynamic and authentic practice compared to conventional approaches. While most participants felt it was best suited for intermediate and advanced learners, one participant argued that it can also benefit beginners when appropriately adjusted. This indicates that the effectiveness of shadowing depends not only on the technique itself but also on how it is tailored to learners' proficiency levels and classroom contexts.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the shadowing technique has a significant positive impact on improving English speaking skills, particularly in areas such as pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary mastery, natural intonation, and self-confidence. The findings highlight the superiority of shadowing compared to conventional methods such as memorising texts or reading dialogues, as it integrates listening and speaking skills simultaneously. Nevertheless, its effectiveness is influenced by learners' initial proficiency levels, with most participants considering the technique most suitable for intermediate and advanced learners. Additionally, challenges such as the fast speech rate of native speakers, unfamiliar vocabulary, and learning conditions like fatigue and boredom also impact its effectiveness.

Based on the findings, English teachers are encouraged to implement shadowing in a structured manner with gradually increasing levels of difficulty, to select materials aligned with learners' proficiency levels and interests, and to integrate strategies for overcoming challenges, such



as slowing down audio or noting new vocabulary. For future researchers, studies with larger and more diverse participant groups, as well as mixed-method approaches that combine qualitative data with quantitative measurements, will provide more comprehensive insights. Furthermore, future research should explore the effectiveness of shadowing across different proficiency levels and its impact on affective factors such as motivation and speaking anxiety.

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