

## **IMPROVING STUDENTS' PRONUNCIATION BY USING MINIMAL PAIRS DRILL IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL**

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**Abstract:** This research was conducted using Classroom Action Research to improve students' English pronunciation by using minimal pairs drill technique. The subject of this research was the eight grade students in class F of SMP Negeri 2 Pontianak which consisted of 35 students. This research was done in two cycles. The first cycle was done on April 30<sup>th</sup> 2016 and the second cycle was done on May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2016 in which the meeting end for forty-five minutes. To obtain the data, the writer administered oral test to pronounced some words in every cycle. The writer also used observation checklist table and field notes were applied to reflect the students' improvement in their pronunciation in every cycle. In the first cycle, the students' mean score was 62.42 which categorized as 'good' but it was not satisfying. Then, in the second cycle, the students' mean score was 81.86 which categorized as 'excellent' and it was satisfying. Based on the students' mean score, it was found that the students' pronunciation improved from the first cycle to the second cycle.

**Keywords: Improvement, Pronunciation, Minimal Pairs Drill**

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan menggunakan Penelitian Tindakan Kelas untuk meningkatkan kemampuan pengucapan bahasa Inggris siswa dengan menggunakan teknik latihan pasangan minimal. Subjek penelitian ini adalah siswa kelas VIII F SMP Negeri 2 Pontianak yang terdiri dari 35 siswa. Penelitian ini dilakukan dalam dua siklus. Siklus yang pertama dilaksanakan pada tanggal 30 April 2016 dan siklus yang kedua dilaksanakan pada tanggal 3 Mei 2016 yang mana pertemuan diakhiri sekitar 45 menit. Untuk mendapatkan data, penulis memberikan tes lisan dalam setiap siklus. Penulis juga menggunakan daftar tabel observasi dan catatan yang diterapkan untuk mencerminkan peningkatan siswa dalam pengucapan mereka pada setiap siklus. Pada siklus yang pertama, skor rata-rata yaitu 62.42 dengan kategori 'baik' tetapi tidak memuaskan. Kemudian, pada siklus yang kedua, skor rata-rata yaitu 81.86 dengan kategori 'sangat baik' dan memuaskan. Berdasarkan skor rata-rata tersebut bahwa kemampuan pengucapan siswa meningkat dari siklus pertama ke siklus kedua.

**Kata Kunci: Peningkatan, Pengucapan, Latihan Bunyi Berpasangan**

Pronunciation is an essential component not only of learning a language but also of using that language. According to Lado (1964:70), "Pronunciation is the use of a sound system in speaking and listening." Based on his statement, pronunciation is merely treated as the act that happens in speaking and listening.

Besides that, Dalton (1998:3) stated that pronunciation is the production of significant sound in two senses. First, sound is significant because it is used as a part of a code of a particular language. Second, sound is significant because it is used to achieve meaning in contexts of use. So, the sound is very important in pronunciation because the sound is used as the code of language and contained a specific meaning.

Actually, pronunciation is not easy to define by the linguists, they have various definitions, and basically the aim of pronunciation is similar. As Kreidler (2004) viewed pronunciation is a terminology that is correlated among speech and language. He said that speech is an activity which is carried on in numerous events; language is knowledge, a code which is known and shared by people who use their knowledge for transmitting and interpreting messages in the events. It means that when someone delivers the message to the listener by his/her voice, then its message could be received by the listener clearly and understandable, but the listener sometimes does not understand and even seems confusing about what the speaker said. To catch those sounds the hearer absolutely has a sense to differentiate the word that speaker said by his/her knowledge or code. That is why the language is defined as knowledge or code.

According to Brown (1980:70), "Teaching means showing or helping someone to learn how to do something, giving instruction, guiding the knowledge, causing to know or to understand." It means that the aim of teaching is to make the students know about the material of the lesson and make them understand about it. Teaching pronunciation is very important because pronunciation can influence communication. One of the goals of teaching pronunciation is to help the students to pronounce English accurately in order to be understood by the listener. This means that their pronunciation should be at least adequate for that purpose.

Teaching pronunciation involves a variety of challenges, and the study of pronunciation became an important aspect in teaching English as a foreign language. The students may face difficulty in learning process that is crucial to be described and analyzed. Harmer (1994) said, "Pronunciation teaching not only makes the students aware of different sounds and sound features, but also improve their speaking immeasurably. Concentrating on sounds, showing where they are made in the mouth, making students aware of words should be stressed-all these things give them extra information about spoken English and help them achieve the goal of improved comprehension and intelligibility." Based on Harmer's statement, the goal of teaching pronunciation is to help students to improve their ability of speaking. Students are not only introduced the sound system of English, but they are also given the other information or aspects in pronunciation that related to the improvement of their speaking ability and that can help their communication to be understood.

Furthermore, the Content of Curriculum 13 (C-13) English syllabus mentioned that there are four language skills in English that should be learned, they are: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Besides that, there are three language components that also important to support the four skills such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. As one of the language components in

English, pronunciation is taught as one of the aspects to improve students' competence in speaking fluently and accurately. Then, the goal of teaching pronunciation at Junior High School of eighth grade is to improve the students' communicative competence. Students are involved to develop their speaking skills.

Based on writer's observation at grade VIII F of SMP Negeri 2 Pontianak, it shown 85% students making errors in pronouncing the words, especially pronouncing the words that have similar sounds. For example, the students have most difficulty in differentiating and pronouncing vowel sounds in words *meet* /mi:t/ and *mitt* /mit/ and *least* /li:st/ and *list* /list/. In addition, the students also have difficulty in differentiating and pronouncing consonant sounds in words *live* /larv/ and *life* /laif/ and words *bath* /baθ/ and *bathe* /bað/. In fact, they should have mastered this basic pronunciation in the first year. This is the reason why the researcher is interested to use the appropriate technique which can help the students in improving their English pronunciation in similar sounds of words with hope that technique can solve the problem.

There are many problems in teaching English pronunciation, especially in similar sounds of words. Similar sounds of words are the word that sounds the same, but are spelled differently and have different meanings. The only thing that the students can do is learn the differences of spellings. The most trouble that they get caused their meanings closely related. They both have something to do with influence. In their most common uses, affect is a verb and effect is a noun, but they have more obscure use where it is reversed, and it caused of additional confusion.

Avery and Ehrlich (2009) noticed some several factors to be considered in the teaching pronunciation in the EFL classroom that may influence the students' encouraging in pronouncing the English words or sentences, there are: 1) Biological factors, the influence of the students' mother tongue in acquiring native-like pronunciation in a second language. 2) Socio-cultural factors, this factors are strongly influenced the students in different culture that also influence their achievement in transferring the sound native-like pronunciation in LT. 3) Personality factors; the students who are out-going, confident, and willing to take risks probably have the more opportunities to practice their pronunciation inside and outside classroom. These factors affect the acquisition of the sound system of a foreign and second language. Based on explanation of three factors above, biological factor is very influenced in teaching pronunciation because it is related to their organ of speech especially tongue. Besides that, Avery and Ehrlich (2009) also said that biological factor is stated as the influence by the student's mother tongue. So, teaching pronunciation is biological factors that is relating to the students' way in pronouncing word and that factors affect the students' effort in developing their target language, and personality factor in line the students' desire in expand practice their target language in the daily life.

There are many techniques could be done by the language learner in improving their English pronunciation. One of the techniques recommended by some linguistics is minimal pairs drill. According to Avery and Ehrlich (2009), "Minimal pair refers to pairs of words which have different meanings and which

differ in pronunciation on the basis of one sound only.” It means that minimal pair is viewed as a technique to distinguish English sound in the words that have quite similar sounds but indeed have been different meaning. Besides that, Michael Ashby and John Maidment (2008) argued, “In order to prove conclusively that a phonetic distinction is contrastive in a particular language it is necessary to find a pair of words in the language that differ in only one segment.” It means that minimal pair as one of the appropriate technique to prove that the single phonetic sound in a pair of words is contrasted.

There are two kinds of sample teaching materials of minimal pairs, it demonstrated in words drills and sentence drills. In the word drills, the teacher drills the students by contrasting two different words but the pronunciation seems similar, but actually sound of the words is different in one sound. Then, in the sentence drills, there are two kinds of materials that can be presented in teaching learning activity, they are syntagmatic drills and paradigmatic drills. Syntagmatic drills contrast two words within a sentence, and paradigmatic drills contrast two words across two sentences.

Minimal pairs drill hopefully can help students in differentiating and pronouncing words that have similar sound and practicing their accuracy and fluency in reading aloud as well as oral ability. Minimal pairs drill is considered to help students overcome their difficulty in pronunciation of English sound.

## **METHOD**

In this research used Classroom Action Research (CAR) because it helps the teacher in solving learning problems include content quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of the learning process, and student learning outcomes. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (cited in Allwright and Bailey, 1991: 44), an action research is a form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants (teachers, students, or principles) in social (including educational) situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices, and the situations (and institutions) in which these practices are carried out.

Hewwit & Little (2005:1) also stated that action research is a model professional development that promotes collaborative inquiry, reflection, and dialogue. Within the action research process, educators study students learning related to their own teaching. It is the process that allows educators to learn about their own instructional practices and to continue in monitoring the improving students' learning.

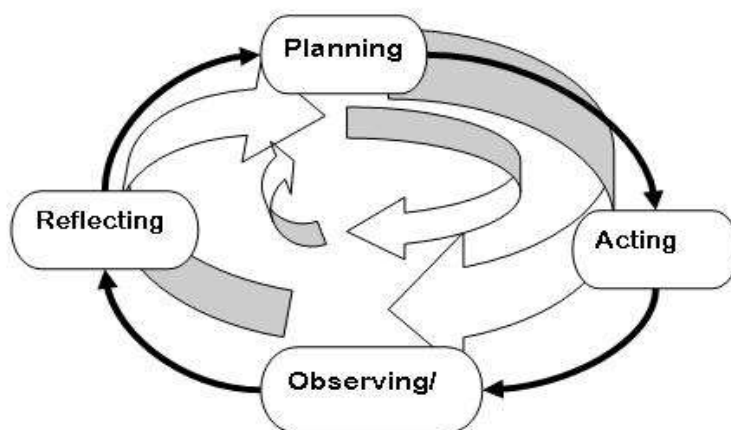
In addition, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000: 226) stated that action research may be used in almost any setting where a problem involving people, tasks and procedures carries out for solution, or where some change of feature results in a more desirable outcome.

Furthermore, the researcher prepared a lesson plan and tried to implement it during the teaching and learning process. The lesson plan explains the complete steps of how to apply minimal pairs drill technique in teaching learning process. First, the teacher is going to explain the correct way to pronounce some words that have similar sounds. After that, the teacher gives some examples of minimal

pairs drill technique and demonstrates the way to pronounce them properly. Then, the teacher asks some students to come in front of the class and do simulation in pronouncing the similar sounds of words. The teacher is going to guide the students and gives feedback based on students' performance. Feedback can be in the form of compliments or corrections.

Lewis describes action research as a spiral steps and its process into four main stages: planning, acting, observing and reflecting (cited in McNiff, 1992; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2006). The process of an action research can be represented as follows.

The cycle form:



Action research is collaborative (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000: 228) which is intended to mean the everyone's view is taken as contribution to understanding the situation. The researcher planned an activity that may overcome the problem that appears in the classroom. Put plan in action of a real treatment, then observe the process and finally reflect the treatment. The aim of action research is to make a better teaching learning process in the classroom.

The research procedures that used in this research consist of four phases such as planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The completely procedures for each phase are as follows:

1. Planning

The researcher planned an appropriate technique to solve the problem in teaching learning process, especially to improve students' English pronunciation in similar sounds of words. She arranges the preparation before the teaching learning activity included lesson plan, teaching media and also the instrument in collecting the data, including the observation table checklist, and field note. The researcher prepares some teaching instruments as follows: syllabus, learning material, lesson plan, test, and observation checklist table.

2. Acting

Acting is the implementation of the planning that has already been made by the researcher. The actions were held in a certain cycle. It consists of one meeting which in each meeting ends in about forty-five minutes. In each cycle, the researcher applies teaching English pronunciation through minimal

pairs drill technique. The procedures of improving students' English pronunciation by using minimal pairs drill technique are as follows:

- a. The researcher is conducted the research in cycle. The meeting of the cycle is conducted in one actual class duration (2 x 45 minutes).
- b. The researcher explains about minimal pair drill technique that is used in improving students' English pronunciation. The researcher divided the steps in doing the minimal pairs drill technique to make it easier for the students to be applied.

### 3. Observing

In this phase, the researcher observes and takes note during teaching learning process. The researcher observes the classroom atmosphere when the action done, then the researcher and the collaborator discuss about the result of observation. The researcher also investigates what the problem faced when teaching learning process and look for good solution to solve the problem. These activities will be recorded towards the implementation of action using observation sheet and field notes.

### 4. Reflecting

Reflection is done after teaching learning process. Reflecting is the process to evaluate the changes that happened to the students, teacher and learning activity. The researcher analyzes the result of data which is obtained from the classroom observation activities and the notes taken by them. The result of the reflection used to determine what should be done in the cycles.

The data will be collected by used triangulation technique to elaborate and provide a solution to the research focus. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000: 112) said that triangulation may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspects of human behaviour. So, the researcher used participants observation as the technique of data collecting. In participant observational study, the researcher stayed with the participants for a substantial period of time to record what is happening during the research period.

In this research, the researcher also uses the formula to know the average of students score and to check students' improvement in learning. The formula is as follows.

$$M = \frac{\sum x}{N}$$

M : The average of students' score

$\sum x$  : The sum of students' score

N : The number students

(Brown, 2001: 98)

## **RESEARCH FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

The researcher conducted the classroom action research by applying minimal pairs drill technique to improve students' English pronunciation to the eighth grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Pontianak in academic year 2015/2016. This research was conducted in two cycles. To notice whether minimal pairs drill can improve students' English pronunciation in the similar sounds of words when

it applied in the classroom, the researcher taken the result from the observation checklists and the field notes that show activities in the classroom.

The researcher computed the individual students' score based on the scoring table and the computed the students' mean score. To achieve the contrast in the research findings, the researcher elaborated the results of mean score and what was written in the field notes. The subject of this research was eight grade students of SMP Negeri 2 Pontianak.

The first cycle was done on April 30<sup>th</sup> 2016 in which the meeting end for forty-five minutes. Before the researcher does her treatment, the researcher planned the activity to help the students solve their problem in pronunciation. The researcher selected the proper material based on the syllabus and arranged it into lesson plan. The researcher prepared the observation checklist table to records the activities during teaching learning process. For the first cycle, the teacher took the material based on the students' book at school. The material was about recount text. The teacher asked the students to open their book that related with the material for today. The teacher explained the material. There was a monolog text in the book, the teacher read the text and ask the students to repeat her. Then the teacher pronounced some words that have similar sounds. The next, the teacher introduced some of phonetic symbol and explained it to the students. The teacher took some words based on the text and put them to the table of phonetic symbol. Then, the teacher also pair two words that have similar sounds. The teacher explained about English sounds and gave some examples how to pronounce the words. She asked the students to practice how to pronounce the words that the teacher has written in the whiteboard. For the exercises, the teacher gave the students a worksheet. The first exercise, the teacher asked the students to listen to the teacher to complete the text. After the students finished their work, the teacher asked them one by one to write down their answers in the whiteboard. The other students corrected their answers with the answers that have written in the whiteboard. Then, they matched their answers with the correct one. After that, the teacher asked to the students to write the monolog text about their experience and submitted it to the teacher. Then, the teacher asked some of students to present it in front of the class. The next activity, the teacher asked the students to put some words that available based on the table of phonetic symbol. Then, they continued to circle one of two words based on the sentence that the teacher read. After that, they submitted it to the teacher. The last activity for achievement test, the teacher asked the students to pronounce the words that have similar sounds one by one in front of class. Then, the teacher checked their accuracy in pronouncing the words. After that, the teacher ended the class by concluding the material together with the students.

After teaching learning, the researcher worked to compute the individual students' score to obtain the students' mean score. The students' mean score in the first meeting is 62.42. The category of students' mean score was good but it was not satisfying. It means that the researcher and the collabolor had to think the better preparation for the next cycle. The problem that the researcher found was in similar sounds of words. They were confused to differentiate the words that have similar sounds. The other problem was that the students still suffer lack of

vocabulary. As the result, they got difficulty in pronounced the words that have similar sounds. Realizing those problems, the researcher initiated a classroom action research by choosing minimal pairs drill as an appropriate technique to solve the problems. The researcher planned the activity to help the students solve their problem in pronunciation. The researcher selected the proper material based on the syllabus and arranged it into lesson plan. The researcher prepared the observation checklist table to records the activities during teaching learning process.

The researcher conducted the second cycle on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016. There were no students absent on that day. The teacher began the teaching learning process by greeting and reviewing the previous material to stimulating the students' brainstorming. All of the students responded the teachers' greeting. For the second cycle, the teacher also took the material based on the students' book at school. The material was about narrative text. The teacher asked the students to open their book that related with the material for today. The teacher explained about the material. Then, teacher asked the students to reading aloud the text together with the teacher's guidance. The next, the teacher explained again about the phonetic symbol. The teacher took some words from the text in their book and put them to the table of phonetic symbols. After that, the teacher demonstrated to pronounce some words that have similar sounds correctly and accurately. The teacher asked the students to practice in pronouncing some words that have similar sounds. The students were appreciated and showed their interesting by pronouncing some words loudly. The teacher observed their pronunciation by listen the students carefully when the students pronounced the words. For the exercises, the teacher also gave the students a worksheet. The first exercise, the teacher completed again the text based on what the teacher read. Then, she asked the students to classify the English words from the passage to the appropriate sounds of the phonetic symbol that have available in the table. She also asked the students to circle one of two words that have similar sounds based on the sentences that the teacher read. After they finished it, they submitted their exercises to the teacher. The last activity for the achievement test, the students pronounced the words that have similar sounds and performed it in front of the class. After that, the teacher ended the class by concluding the material together with the students.

After teaching learning in the class, the researcher and the collabolator discussed about the meeting. All the activities were recorded in the observation sheet. In this observation, the researcher found different atmosphere in the classroom. The condition of the class was more condusive than before. The students' mean score in the cycle 2 is 81.85. The categorized was excellent. It means that the students' mean score of pronunciation after using minimal pairs drill technique or after implementing CAR showed the improvement. In this phase, the researcher and the English teacher at SMP Negeri 2 Pontianak concluded that the second cycle had been succeeded. The students' mean score was improved and the teaching learning process was better than the first cycle.

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score was improved and the teaching learning process was better than the first cycle. It means that the cycle could be stopped.

The researcher concluded a diagram to show the significant of students' mean score in the first and the second cycle as follows:

**Chart 1**  
**Students' Mean Score**

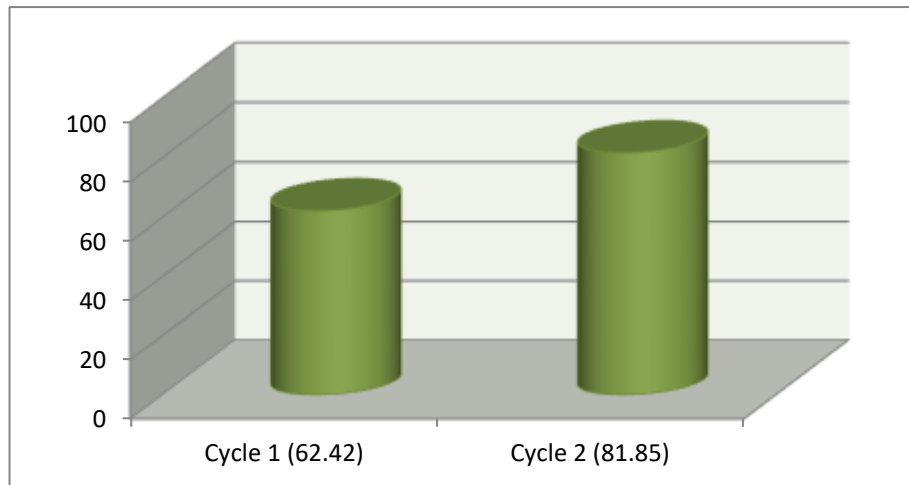


Chart 1 shows the students' mean score in the first cycle and the second cycle. As it displayed, there is an improvement from the first cycle to the second cycle. In the first cycle, the chart shows 62.42. It was categorized as good. This point showed that the students' competence in pronunciation was good, but it was not satisfying. The second cycle shows 81.86. In the second cycle, the students show the progress. The students' competence in pronunciation using minimal pairs drill became better. It could be seen from the mean score on the second cycle was 76.6 point. It was categorized excellent. This point showed great progress from the previous meeting.

The research finding of the classroom action research by using minimal pairs drill technique was satisfying. The students showed their interested in the pronunciation by using minimal pairs drill technique, and the prediction of the action hypothesis was accepted.

### **Discussion**

The researcher was conducted two cycles of the classroom action research at SMP Negeri 2 Pontianak. Each cycle consisted of 4 phases such as planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The durations of teaching learning process in the class about 2 x 45 minutes.

The researcher found some problems in the first cycle such as the condition of the class was not conducive for the teaching learning process. The students in the class was noisy, they talked each other. Then, they also got the problem in pronouncing the words that have similar sounds. They were confused to differentiate the words that have similar sounds. So, the result of the mean score of students' achievement in first cycle was not satisfying.

For the second meeting of the second cycle, the researcher applied some strategies to overcome those problems. The researcher explained more about the materials. The students was active in the class, they asked the teacher when they didn't understand. The condition of the class was condusive than before. They showed their interested in the teaching learning activity in the class. For the second cycle, the researcher has been success because she got the target of category mean score. After the researcher observed and interpreted the data, both of the researcher and the English teacher at SMP Negeri 2 Pontianak decided to stop the actions because the data showed that the indicators of success were fulfilled. The researcher worked to compute the students' individual score and the mean score. The researcher findings showed that the students' mean score in the first meeting of cycle 1 was 62.42. Then, the students' mean score in the second meeting of cycle 2 was 81.85.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

### **Conclusion**

Minimal pairs drill is one of a good and interesting technique to be applied in the teaching learning of language because it can help the students to communicate to each other directly and orally. This technique makes the students more active and pay attention in the classroom. During the application of minimal pairs drill technique in teaching English pronunciation, the students' participation in getting involved in doing the activity in the classroom improved from the first meeting to the second meeting. The students' mean score achievement in the first meeting of cycle 1 was 62.42 and the categorized as good but it was not satisfying. At the second meeting of cycle 2, the students' mean score achievement was 81.85 and the categorized as excellent. Teaching English pronunciation especially in similar sounds of words or by using minimal pairs drill technique could positively involve the students in the teaching and learning process. They could recognize the English phonetic symbols. Therefore, the students showed their progress and be able to gain the best achievement in English pronunciation.

### **Suggestion**

Minimal pairs drill technique should be a technique for English teacher in teaching because it is useful to improve the students' English pronunciation. The teacher should teach pronunciation effectively especially to continue in introducing of phonetic symbols and their sounds to the students because it helps the students' comprehension in distinguishing English phonemic sounds. Realizing that minimal pairs drill technique can improve students' English pronunciation and this technique is recommended to be applied in the classroom.

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