

## Student's Perspective: Using Minimal Pairs Technique To Improve Pronunciation

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**Abstract.** *The Minimal Pairs technique is a technique for investigating the existence of phonemes (language sounds that can distinguish meaning) by comparing two or more forms of speech sounds in the same environment. The minimal pairs technique is used to practice pronunciation skills, especially on similar word sounds and makes it easier for us to distinguish phoneme sounds in English. This study aims to determine student perceptions of the use of minimal pairs technique in class. This research is qualitative research using questionnaires and interviews that ask students' perceptions about the use of minimal pairs technique in class. The results of this study indicate that most students have positive perceptions of using the minimal pairs technique in improving their pronunciation skills. Then they argue that their pronunciation skills improve after using the minimal pairs technique. So that this technique can be suggested as a learning method that will be applied in class learning to improve students' pronunciation skills.*

**Keywords:** *Minimal Pairs Technique, Student's Perception*

### INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most crucial components of learning English as a second language because it is utilized for social contact and communication. In our interactions with others, we should not just own a large vocabulary while also pronouncing words clearly. In our nation, junior high school English language instruction aims to increase students' communicative ability (Silabus KTSP 2006). It implies that students are able to obtain knowledge through English instruction and are prepared to speak English effectively and accurately in social settings.

Minimal pair drills are one of the methods advocated by some linguists to help pupils with their English pronunciation. With the use of this teaching method, students will be able to recognize and compare the sounds that different words make (Levis & Cortes, 2008). According to this supposition, the researcher selected minimum pairs as a method in the teaching-learning process to enhance students' accuracy in their pronunciation skill since minimal pairs are thought to aid students in overcoming their pronunciation challenges, particularly for English sounds. It employs words that are identical save for a single syllable, such as sleep and slide and gate and get. And another for example, students struggle most with distinguishing and pronouncing the vowel sounds in the words meet (/mi:t/), mitt (/mit/), least (/li:st/), and list (/list/). The students also struggle with distinguishing and pronouncing the consonant sounds in the words live (/laɪv/) and life (/laɪf/), as well as bath (/bɑθ/) and bathe (/bæð/). They ought to have mastered this fundamental pronunciation by the end of the first year, in fact. For this reason, the researcher is eager to employ the most effective method that can aid students in bettering their English pronunciation of words with similar sounds in the hopes that method will be able to address the issue.

There are numerous issues with teaching English pronunciation, particularly when words have similar sounds. Words with similar sounds are those that have the same pronunciation but different spellings and meanings. The students' only option is to educate themselves on the various spellings. They cause the most problems since their meanings are so closely intertwined. They both relate to influence in some way. In their most typical applications, emotion and impact are verbs and nouns, respectively; but, in some more specialized contexts, the roles are inverted, which leads to further confusion.

Avery and Ehrlich (2009) state that a "minimal pair" is a pair of words with diverse meanings and different pronunciations based solely on one sound. This indicates that minimal pair is thought of as a strategy to separate English sound in words that have fairly similar sounds but actually have different meaning. In addition, Michael Ashby and John Maidment (2008) asserted that "it is important to discover a lot of words in the language that differ in only one segment in order to prove definitively that a phonetic distinction is contrastive in a specific language." It means that a minimum pair is one suitable method to demonstrate contrast between a single phonetic sound in a pair of words.

There are two different types of minimal pair teaching resources, which are illustrated in word and phrase drills. In word drills, the instructor tests the pupils' knowledge by contrasting two distinct terms, even when their pronunciations appear to be similar. Then there are two types of resources for sentence drills that can be employed in teaching and learning activities: syntagmatic drills and paradigmatic drills. Paradigmatic drills are those that compare two words across two sentences and two words within a sentence.

With some practice, children should be able to distinguish between words with similar sounds, pronounce them correctly, and improve their oral and reading fluency. Drilling in small groups of two is thought to be beneficial for kids who have trouble pronouncing English sounds.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

Research method according to Syaodih (2007:52) is “a series of methods or research activities based on basic assumptions, philosophical views, ideological, questions and issues at hand. The design of this study uses a qualitative approach because it shows a description of student responses about the use of the minimal pair technique. Qualitative approach is used for conducting implementation studies, field support capacity, and observations development process. Qualitative research according to Zainal Arifin (2011: 140) is "a research process that is carried out systematically, reasonably and naturally in accordance with objective conditions in the field without the existence of manipulation, as well as the type of data collected, especially qualitative data.”

The type of questionnaire in this study is a questionnaire closed or structured questionnaire (Closed Questionnaire). A questionnaire with alternative answers has been provided. In this research questionnaire, the questionnaire instrument uses an attitude scale using a Likert scale using a scale of A-E with a choice alternative answers include Strongly Agree (A), agree (B), undecided (C), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (E). Sugiono states (2012: 134) that the Likert scale is used to measure attitudes, opinions and perceptions of a person or a group of people about a social phenomenon.

After doing the research, the data obtained, collected and analyzed. The data collected is raw data because the data obtained is in the form of descriptions of the problem under study. The purpose of data analysis is to simplify all collected data, present it in a systematic arrangement, then process and interpret it. Miles and Huberman (1984) in Sugiyono (2011: 337), suggests that activities in qualitative data analysis are carried out interactively and continue continuously until complete so that the data is saturated. Activities in data analysis, namely data collection (data collection), reduction (data reduction), data display (data presentation) and conclusion drawing/verification (drawing conclusions/verification).

This study uses a qualitative approach in investigating students' perceptions about the use of minimal pairs in practicing pronunciation skills, especially on similar word sounds and making it easier for us to distinguish phoneme sounds in English. This study examines students of the English Department. The students were asked to participate in filling out the Google Form and direct interviews with a list of written questions as a guide that focused on students' perceptions of using minimal pairs. First, students are given a Google form questionnaire with 5 questions. All questionnaires asked students' perceptions about applying minimal pairs whether it could improve the ability to distinguish similar word sounds and whether it could make it easier to distinguish phoneme sounds in English. Second, semi-structured direct interviews were used to find the perceptions of students who had not participated in the Google form.

This researcher did this by dividing into two ways, namely there were those who answered the Google Form Questionnaire and there were those who were directly interviewed. Therefore the total score of the questionnaire is 25. The questionnaire is data using 5 essay questions, namely What do you know about minimal pairs, do you think using minimal pairs can help improve the quality of listening to your English phoneme sounds, what is your experience in using minimal pairs , the advantages and disadvantages of using minimal pairs in learning to listen to phoneme sounds, and Do you think using minimal pairs can help improve analytical and listening skills and differentiate phoneme sounds. After the questionnaire, interview data were also analyzed using the same questions for students who did not participate in filling out the Google questionnaire form.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

Students' perceptions were investigated to find out their experiences and social interactions in using the minimal pairs technique to improve students' pronunciation. The first finding is to discuss students' knowledge of the minimal pairs technique. The data shows that students understand the meaning of the minimal pairs technique. Students answer according to their understanding, which the writer can conclude that the minimal pairs technique is a technique of investigating the existence of phonemes (language sounds that can distinguish meaning) by comparing two or more forms of language sounds in the same environment.

The second finding discusses whether the pair's minimal technique can improve students' pronunciation. The data shows that this technique can help improve students' pronunciation skills, because students will practice their pronunciation more often because if the pronunciation is wrong then the meaning will also be wrong, and students who analyze difficulties will understand the speaker's intent. Because of that students will follow the rules of reading, so as not to misunderstand.

The third finding discusses students' experiences in using the minimal pairs technique in learning. The data obtained shows that students feel happy with this learning method because it does not make them bored and students become enthusiastic in practicing their pronunciation. Students can also analyze the mispronunciation of the theme together. In addition, when learning to use this method not only trains students' pronunciation in speaking but can also improve students' listening skills. So the way to do the minimal pairs technique is by pairing with friends. Then one friend reads the word and one other friend listens. The first friend read 2 words that are almost the same but with different meanings. For example, the words "it and eat" then other friends analyze. The pronunciation of the word "it" is as straightforward as it is written, namely in the format /it/. There are no letter swings or vowel touches other than the "I". while in the word "eat", the dominant vowel sound is the letter "e" with the format /ē/. There is a swing due to the combination of 2 vowels in one word.

The fourth finding is to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the minimal pair technique. The data obtained shows that each learning method has its advantages and disadvantages, these are some of the advantages and disadvantages of the minimal pairs technique.

1. Advantages:

The advantages are; (1) the minimal pairs technique is a fun technique so learning doesn't feel boring; (2) students can know the right technique as another alternative to practice pronunciation; (3) make it easier for students to pronounce words with almost the same sound but different; (4) this technique can increase learning motivation; (5) not only can we practice pronunciation but we can also train our hearing so that our listening ability increases.

2. Disadvantages:

The disadvantages of minimal pairs technique is; (1) minimal pair technique requires a long learning time; (2) the rules of the game are quite difficult; (3) because we are not native speakers so it will be difficult to interpret words that are almost the same; (4) the word pairs used must be in large enough numbers, so that they can be better understood; (5) this game technique must be played together so that it cannot be used as an alternative to practicing independently.

The fifth finding is the last finding that discusses the effectiveness of the minimal pair technique. Data shows that this technique is very effective in classroom learning because the method is interesting and not boring. This technique also makes the class atmosphere active. Students become more active when learning begins and they pay more attention to learning. Students are increasingly practicing their pronunciation. The most important thing is that this technique is effective because it can help improve students' pronunciation skills, and improve students' speaking skills.

**Table Content Analysis of Interview**

No	Transcription of Interview	Themes
1.	<i>Yes in my opinion minimal pairs Technique is techniques to train pronounce to improve pronunciation skills</i>	<i>Definition of minimal pairs technique</i>
2.	<i>Yes, because I have to read with the correct pronunciation, so I have to think about the word over and over again so that it can train me to improve my pronunciation with this technique.</i>	<i>Benefits of minimal pairs technique</i>
3.	<i>My experience is using the minimal pairs technique, I feel happy. Because this technique is not boring, besides that, I can also improve my listening skills.</i>	<i>Student's experience</i>
4.	<i>The advantage of this technique in my opinion is that it is not tedious to use, and the disadvantage is that I spend a lot of time just repeating the same word. This technique also cannot be done once so it must be repeated so that we can easily understand it.</i>	<i>Advantage and disadvantages of minimal pairs technique</i>
5.	<i>I think yes. because it can improve my pronunciation ability</i>	<i>effectiveness of the minimal pairs technique</i>

**CONCLUSION**

The researcher concluded that the students' perceptions about the absolute bare minimum pairing technique to improve pronunciation skills were positive. There are no negative perceptions. Students think that using the simplest possible method in pairs is a good and interesting technique to use because it does not make students get bored quickly in learning. This technique helps us to practice pronunciation skills, especially on similar word sounds and makes it easier for us to distinguish phoneme sounds in English. Judging from the positive student perceptions, this minimal pairs technique needs to be applied in classroom learning because it has proven effective in improving students' pronunciation skills. A teacher must effectively familiarize pronunciation in order to continuously introduce phonetic symbols and sounds to students, as this aids students' understanding in distinguishing English phonemic sounds.

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