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# THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE COURSE USING THE MINIMUM PAIR STRATEGY METHOD IN ENGLISH TEACHING

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**a b s t r a c t**

The learning of English has its level of difficulty. One of its difficulties is pronunciation practice which is influenced by several factors. This study aims to determine the factors that influence the difficulty in pronunciation practice for students of elementary school. This study aims to implement a minimal pair strategy to facilitate learning pronunciation for students in one of the elementary schools in Temanggung as the object of this study. This study uses an experimental method by dividing a class of third-grade into two groups, namely the experimental group and the control group. By using this method, two different data will be generated to compare how effective the implementation of the minimum pair strategy is for elementary school students, especially for learning pronunciation. In the end of this study, the object of this study not only would be able to implement minimal pair strategy but also improve their skills in English.

## INTRODUCTION

The learning of English in Indonesia has been going on since the early days of Indonesia's independence. The Indonesian government made English one of the subjects for students in Indonesia. It is because English is an international language. Since first declaring Indonesia's independence on August 17, 1945, English has been taught at the Junior High School (SMP) and Senior High School (SMA) levels. It has been 76 years since Indonesia's independence and now the application of learning English has attached to the elementary school's curriculum. However, some elementary schools in Indonesia still apply the learning of English using conventional methods.

One of the important things in learning English is the pronunciation of vocabulary. Pronunciation of English vocabulary has an important role in communication because whether or not the pronunciation of a word will affect the meaning of the word. According to Dalton (1998:3) Pronunciation is a significant voice income within two senses. First, the voice is important because it functions as part of a particular language code. Second, the voice is significant because of its use in achieving meaning in a context. Thus, the voice produced from the pronunciation process is consequential because it is a language code and contains a special meaning.

Students in Indonesia have challenges to pronounce English vocabulary, especially elementary school students. The diversity of languages in Indonesia makes every citizen have a unique and distinctive speaking accent. As the object of this study, third-grade students in an elementary school in Temanggung have a heavy Javanese accent which is influenced by the area of residence. We analyze the process of learning English at the school, especially for

third-grade students to find out what factors influenced their difficulties in pronunciation practice. In addition, we aim to provide innovation in learning pronunciation practice with several methods.

We apply the learning of English vocabulary pronunciation by using the minimal pair strategy to analyze the effect of applying the strategy. According to Avery and Ehrlich (2009), minimal pairs refer to pairs of words that have different meanings. The difference in pronunciation is only based on one sound or word meaning. The usage of the minimal pair strategy aims to make it easier for students to understand English vocabulary by pairing it with other words that have the same sound in Indonesian, Javanese, or English. In addition, the minimal pair strategy also implements how to pronounce English vocabulary properly and correctly. To support this study, we also apply the experimental method to the study object. This method will provide different results between the two large groups, namely the group that applies a minimum pair strategy and the group that uses the conventional strategy.

Due to this study, we could analyze several factors which affect pronunciation error of English vocabulary of third-grade students. We use several error analysis theories to identify those factors. According to Richards et.al in Sunardi (2002: 43) error analysis is a study of the errors made by learners of a language as a second language or as a foreign language. Error analysis theory could help us in analyzing some errors made in English pronunciation practice. Ellis & Arkhuizen (2005) declares error analysis as one set procedure to identify, describe, and explain errors made by the learners. Teachers or instructors use error analysis theory as a source of information in the process of identifying errors made within the learning process. Through the identification process, teachers or instructors could discover some solutions to increase the quality of pronunciation practice.

In this study, Minimal Pair Strategy aims to increase pronunciation practice especially for third-grade students in one of the elementary schools in Temanggung. Moreover, we could also understand the effectiveness of the Minimal Pair Strategy on pronunciation practice for third-grade students.

## METHOD

This study uses an experimental method which is explained by Kerlinger (1986: 315) as a scientific study in which the researcher manipulates and controls one or more independent variables and observes the dependent variables to find variations that arise along with the manipulation of the independent variables. Meanwhile, Isaac and Michael (1977: 24) conveyed that an experimental study aims to examine the possibility of causality by applying one or more treatment conditions to one or more experimental groups and comparing the results with one or more untreated groups.

Creswell (2014) claims that notion of experimental methods is used if the researcher wants to know the causal effect between the independent and dependent variables. It means that the researcher must be able to control all variables which are going to influence the outcome except the independent variable (treatment) has been appointed. The experimental method uses two kinds of groups namely the experiment group and control group. The experiment group is a kind of group which is going to be influenced by special treatment. It depends on the problem or case used. Aside from that, the control group is a kind of group which is controlled, so that it is not affected by any variables so that the results obtained are as they are.

Sutrisno (1994) explains that the experimental method has several main elements, such as two groups which are experimental group and control group. Controlled variables are factors which are controlled or equated for the two groups (experimental and control). Experimental method also has treatment variables. That variable are seen to be the cause of an expected

symtpom and given differently to the two groups. Furthermore, experimental method has behavior variables which are described as certain symtoms in terms of which the effect of the treatment will be assessed.

We use this kind of method because it suits the audience of this study. By grouping some students as the object of the study, the experimental method gets easy to be implemented. As an object of this study, the third-grade students of the elementary school in Temanggung consist of 18 students. Those students are divided into several small groups. One group consists of three students with a total of 6 groups.

We implement a minimal pair strategy into three groups, the other three groups use the conventional method. In this study, experimental groups are those with minimal pair strategy. Meanwhile, the others are called control groups because they do not use a minimal pair strategy. According to Avery dan Ehrlich (2009), minimal pair strategy refers to pairs of words that have different meanings. The difference in pronunciation is only based on one sound or the meaning of the word. Minimal pair strategy is a technique to distinguish the meaning of vocabulary by comparing two or more vocabularies in the same environment. English vocabulary has several limitations, including a language component that contains all information about the meaning and use of words in a language, engineering vocabulary of a language, and a list of words arranged like a dictionary with brief explanations. This strategy would help the students, especially third-grade elementary students in pronunciation practice. By using a minimum pair strategy, students are expected to be able to pronounce each word properly and correctly. In addition, students are also expected to understand the meaning of English vocabulary without having difficulty distinguishing them even though they have similar pronunciations.

## FINDINGS

These students are conducted for several weeks in one of the elementary schools in Temanggung, especially for grade 3 students. With the application of the minimal pair strategy, it can be seen the level of effectiveness of its use to teach English pronunciation for third-grade elementary school students in Temanggung, especially the voice of vowels and diphthongs. Prior to this study, many students had difficulty pronouncing vowels and diphthongs in English vocabulary due to various factors. We know that based on a study using error analysis theory. Ellis & Arkhuizen (2005) state that error analysis is a set of procedures to identify, describe, and explain errors made by the learner. Based on the results of the study using this theory, the factors that affect the performance of elementary school students in vocal and diphthong pronunciation can be divided into two factors, namely, internal factors and external factors as follows:

a. Internal Factor
    1. Mother tongue
    2. Motivation
b. External Factor
    1. Teaching Method
    2. Facilities
    3. Environment

This study also found some vowel sounds, consonants, and diphthongs that are difficult for students to pronounce. For example, vowel /æ/ in the word 'chat', silent consonant /s/ in the word 'island', diphthong /aɪ/ in the word 'arrive', diphthong /əʊ/ in the word 'grow', and diphthong /eɪ/ in the word 'pray'. Errors in pronunciation practice experienced by students are

generally influenced by internal factors which is the mother tongue. In connection with the holding of this study in Central Java, especially Temanggung, students have the same background, namely from Javanese ethnicity. They have a distinctive accent with the pronunciation of each word in a thick Javanese language. Some sounds have a thick emphasis on some words so that they influence the pronunciation of English vocabulary. The difference in the number of vowels, consonants, and diphthongs between Javanese and English is also an obstacle for students in pronouncing English vocabulary.

## DISCUSSION

The minimal pair strategy aims to make it easier for students to understand English vocabulary by pairing it with other vocabularies that have the same sound in both Indonesian and English. We used two media used in conducting the study, the first was a picture card, and the second was a conventional word list. Picture cards are applied to the groups using Minimal Pair Strategy, while conventional word lists are applied to the groups that do not use Minimal Pair Strategy. The choice of vocabulary in this Minimal Pair Strategy is based on the same sound when it is produced in pronunciation.

We use some of the vocabulary presented in the following list:

Table 1. English Vocabulary

| Experimental Group (using minimal pair strategy) | | Control Group (without minimal pair strategy) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| HAT | RAT | BUY | EGG |
| SEAT | SIT | CHEESE | LAND |
| WET | WAIT | WET | ISLAND |
| SEA | SHE | DUCK | JAW |
| GROW | GLOW | ARRIVE | PRAY |
| PRAY | PLAY | BROOM | GROW |
| ARRIVE | ALIVE | PLAY | ALIVE |
| BROOM | BLOOM | GLOW | BLOOM |
| TEWEL | MET | LET | CHAT |
| LEGREK | SET | POT | BETTER |
| BETTER | BITTER | CAT | HOT |
| CAT | CHAT | TELL | FILL |
| FEEL | FILL | FEEL | SET |
| SET | LET | BITTER | BELL |
| TELL | BELL | | |
| HOT | POT | | |
| ELEK | LET | | |
| COWEK | GET | | |

Note: Blue: first encounter, purple: second encounter, red: third encounter

The vocabulary chosen for the minimal pair strategy is based on the similarity of sound in each word. On the first meeting, the students are introduced to the pronunciation of the vowel sound /æ/; /I :/; /e/; /ʌ/; and also diphthong /ai/. The results obtained in the first meeting are the experimental group was able to understand the differences. At the same time, they know the similarities of the pairs of words provided. However, we found that control groups have difficulties in the pronunciation of the word 'buy' which is pronounced as /bai/. Students are

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fixated on the language spelling of the vowel /u/ in the word. So that the pronunciation error becomes /buy/ according to the Indonesian spelling.

In the second meeting, learning focused on recognizing diphthong sounds in English vocabulary. Examples of vocabularies taken are 'alive' with diphthong /ai/ and 'grow' with diphthong /əʊ/. Between the experimental group and the control group, both identified the same vocabulary. The difference between both of them is the pairing of each vocabulary. The experimental group identifies vocabulary pairs with similar sounds, while the control group identifies vocabulary pairs randomly. The results obtained at the second meeting are that students in the experimental group found it easier to understand the pronunciation and sound differences in each of the existing diphthongs. On the other hand, the control group had difficulties because they could not identify the similarities and differences in the sounds of the existing diphthongs.

At the third meeting, most of the students within the experimental group could remember and pronounce vocabulary well and correctly. Meanwhile, students from groups without a minimum pair or control group did not meet the target. They often forget how to pronounce vocabulary that has been memorized from the previous week.

These results are closely related to the factors that affect the performance of elementary school students in the pronunciation of vowels and diphthongs. We analyze the factors obtained in this study using the theory of error analysis. According to Richards et.al in Sunardi (2002: 43) error analysis is a study of the mistakes made by learners of a language as a second language or as a foreign language. Based on this theory, the obtained factors could be divided into two factors, namely, internal factors and external factors. Complex explanation of those internal and external factors, as follows:

**Internal Factor**

*Mother Tongue*

According to (Soenjono: 2003) mother tongue in English is called the native language, which is the first language mastered or acquired by children. Meanwhile (Indriyani, Ngatman, Joharman, 2014) states that the mother tongue is a language that is learned before other languages are learned. In Indonesia, there are various mother tongues according to the area of residence. The different regional languages in each tribe in Indonesia become the mother tongue for the offspring. This study is located in the province of Central Java, which is part of the Javanese tribe. So that, Javanese is generally the mother tongue for students in elementary schools in Temanggung Regency, especially the third-grade students.

English has a heavy accent and a thick sound in its speech. This makes children who use Javanese as their mother tongue have difficulty pronouncing some English vocabulary. Several English vowels have certain characteristics that must be pronounced, thinly, long, and short. These characteristics are very different from the Javanese language. most of the Javanese vocabulary is pronounced clearly and in short according to the writing.

Example:

*The pronunciation of words BEFORE and AGER-AGER*

The word BEFORE is pronounced [bɪˈfɔː] with a faint or thin r sound. Most English vocabularies pronounce the r sound so thinly or faintly that it is silent or unspoken. Other than that, the Javanese language pronounces the r sound very clearly and strongly. For example, the word AGER-AGER with an r sound at the end must be pronounced clearly.

*Motivation*

Most of the third-grade students in one of the elementary schools in Temanggung feel low self-esteem due to a lack of motivation in learning English. Sudarwan (2002:2) defines motivation as a force, drive, need, enthusiasm, pressure, or psychological mechanism that encourages a person or group of people to achieve certain achievements in accordance with what they want. The lack of role models in the surrounding environment who have good English language skills affects children's mindsets not to learn English well. In addition, the third-grade elementary school students in Temanggung feel that they have not found a moment where they need to study English seriously. The students have not realized the importance of English for their daily life and in the future. Low motivation in children is also influenced by other factors which are explained in external factors.

**External Factor**

*Teaching Method*

According to Aditya (2016), the learning method is defined as the method which is used to implement the plans that have been prepared in the form of real and practical activities to achieve learning objectives. The English learning method used for third-grade students at an elementary school in Temanggung is still conventional. The learning process only focuses on LKS books or Student Worksheets and rarely uses other media. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, students became very passive because they did what was in the LKS without a complete explanation. This makes students vulnerable to feeling lazy and bored when they have to do the assigned tasks.

Learning methods can be made more varied by using other media such as films, songs, or video clips in English. With the advancement of technology, these media can be accessed easily via the internet. on the other way, a minimal pair strategy could be implemented as the learning method. Through various media, students can learn how to pronounce English vocabulary correctly by observing the source directly. Vocabularies that have been learned can be applied in the use of a minimal pair strategy so that students can more easily understand.

*Learning Facilities*

The facilities referred to in this study are learning facilities. E. Mulyasa (2004) explains that learning facilities are equipment and supplies that are directly used and support the educational process, especially in the teaching and learning process. To be able to learn English, especially in the field of pronunciation, supportive learning facilities are needed. The learning facilities consist of facilities and infrastructure. Several elementary schools in Temanggung Regency currently have B accreditation status, so the existing facilities and infrastructure are still incomplete and not maximized. Students need learning facilities as the complement of the learning process such as picture cards containing English vocabulary or pictures followed with explanations, etc. Thus, teaching and learning activities become more interesting and students also do not get bored easily so they can be easier to understand the vocabulary given.

*Learning Environment*

In learning English, regular practice can improve skills well. To be able to have long-term memory in memorizing English vocabulary, practice is needed in this regard. A supportive learning environment is needed to be able to apply English vocabulary memorization exercises, especially those around them. According to Suwarno (2006), the learning environment is an environment that surrounds the educational process where the learning environment is one of the factors that influence the continuity of great learning activities. Unfortunately, not all of the third-grade students in one of the elementary schools in Temanggung have a supportive environment for the habituation of memorizing vocabulary. Many of their parents work as labour so they cannot always accompany their children's learning process at home. Therefore, children learn without the supervision and guidance of the closest adult.

The graphic of the development of grade 3 students in one of the elementary schools in Temanggung in increasing their English skills is presented as follows:
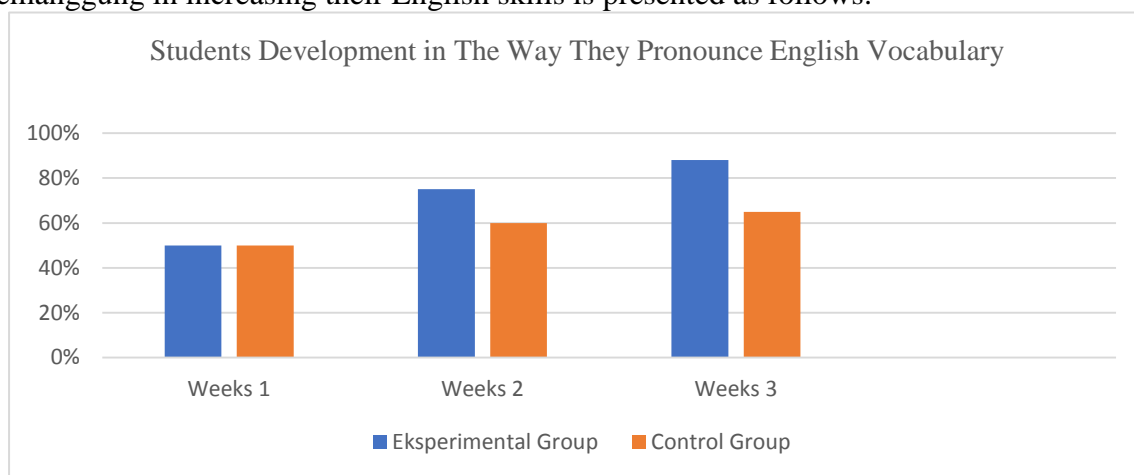


Figure 1. The development of students' understanding of how to pronounce English vocabulary

The result of this study could be seen significantly as has shown on the table above. Experimental groups could increase their progress for about 10% until 15% each week. Meanwhile, for control group only could increase their progress for about 5% until 10% each week. Using experimental method could show how fast the increase or progress of each group has made. Students in the experimental groups can observe the differences in how to read consonants and vowels in the given vocabulary. Unlike the experimental group, the students in the control group still had difficulties in understanding how to pronounce English vocabulary. Thus, the application of a minimal pair strategy in learning English, especially in the field of pronunciation, can effectively improve children's ability to pronounce English vocabulary.

**CONCLUSION**

In this study, it can be concluded that the application of a minimal pair strategy is quite effective in helping elementary school-age students. Especially the third-grade students, it helps a lot to understand and pronounce English vocabulary properly and correctly. Students can comprehend in detail the differences in the pronunciation of each word and can pronounce it correctly. In addition, students can also identify the differences between two words that have similarities in the sound produced. Thus, in learning pronunciation, we can

apply a minimum pair strategy to facilitate students and teachers in the learning process. For more complex learning, the teacher can explain further about phonetics and the sounds produced in English. English teachers can apply a minimum pair strategy to help students learn to pronounce English vocabulary because it is considered very helpful in its application.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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