

IMPROVING STUDENTS' PRONUNCIATION ABILITY IN FRICATIVE SOUNDS THROUGH MINIMAL PAIR DRILL

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to: (1) discover whether the use of Minimal Pair Drill can improve students' pronunciation ability in fricative sounds, and (2) identify whether the use of that technique can improve the students' motivation in English learning. The method used in this research is Classroom Action Research. The research was conducted in 2 cycles. The data were gathered by observing, interviewing the teacher and students, writing a research diary, distributing questionnaires and conducting pronunciation tests. Besides, I also used photographs, field notes and lesson plan as the documents. The data were analyzed by Burns' theory and comparing the students' means score of the tests. By implementing Minimal Pair Drill, the students' pronunciation ability in fricative sounds which consisted of /v/, /θ/, /ð/, and /ʃ/ improved. It can be seen from the tests result. In pre-test, the students' mean score was 45.42. Then, it improved to 68.33 in cycle 1 test. At last, after cycle 2 was done, the students could reach 76.25. Besides, the results showed the improvement of their motivation in English learning, in terms of: a) actively responded to my questions and did the exercises enthusiastically; b) eagerly tried to get opportunities to get extra marks; c) happier during the implementation of Minimal Pair Drill; d) willingly asked questions to clarify the lesson.

Keywords: pronunciation, fricative sounds, motivation, minimal pair drill

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation takes a vital part in communication, when we speak English, the pronunciation brings what message we want to convey. The incorrect use of pronunciation leads to the message being misunderstood by the listener. In addition, Fraser (2000: 7) stated that speaking, especially making pronunciation is the most important skill among the language skills. He argued that, with good pronunciation, a speaker is intelligible despite other errors; with bad pronunciation, a speaker can be very difficult to understand by listeners, despite accuracy in other areas. Realizing

the importance of pronunciation, teachers should be able to encourage students so that they have the willingness to improve their English pronunciation ability and help them to learn how to pronounce English sounds correct. In the pre-research that I conducted at a Junior High School in Ponorogo, I found that many students were not able to pronounce fricative sounds correctly. Many of them could not differentiate sound /f/ from /v/. They said 'very' as /feri/, whereas the correct pronunciation is /veri/ by using /v/. Besides, they made some errors in producing /t/ and /θ/. They said 'thought' as

/toug/, whereas the correct pronunciation is /θɔ:t/ by using /θ/. The students were not able either to differentiate sound /t/ from /ð/. They said 'though' as /toug/, whereas the correct pronunciation is /ðou/ by using /ð/. They were not able to differentiate sounds /s/ and /ʃ/. When they pronounced 'show', they tended to said /so/ or /soʊ/, whereas they should pronounce /ʃou/ by using /ʃ/. In short, many of the students found it difficult to differentiate some fricative sounds such as /f/ and /v/, /t/ and /θ/, /t/ and /ð/, and /s/ and /ʃ/.

The students' difficulties were caused by several factors that might come from the teacher and the students themselves. Firstly, from the teacher when she was teaching English, she sometimes made some mistakes in pronouncing words. Consequently, the students possibly tended to imitate her pronunciation. It can be seen during pre-research when the teacher said 'close' /klos/ whereas the correct pronunciation is /kloʊz/ by using /oʊ/ and /z/. The second factor was from students themselves such as their intelligent in hearing and imitating English sounds. Different people have different ability levels to receive and imitate foreign language sounds. In other words, some people are able to discriminate and imitate sounds better than others (Kenworthy, 1987: 6-7). Furthermore, there are some sounds in English that don't exist in Bahasa Indonesia, so the students often got confused to pronounce /v/, /θ/, /ð/, and /ʃ/.

Another finding I found on pre-research is that the students' motivation in learning English very needed to be improved. In fact, motivation arouses us to action, pushes us in particular directions, and keeps us engaged in certain activities (Elliot, Kratochwill, Cook, and Travers,

2000: 332). In addition, Dornyei (2005: 41) defined motivation as an inner emotion or desire driving someone to do a particular thing. It forces someone to sustain his desire in the tedious process. So, we can say that motivation is an important factor in a learning process. Students having high motivation in learning will make a significant progress in their achievements.

There were four indicators of the students' learning motivation that appeared on pre-research. Firstly, they had lack of positive task orientation. It was reflected from their unwillingness to answer questions given by the teacher. Secondly, they had lack of need for achievement. It can be seen they didn't try so hard to achieve high scores in English lesson. Thirdly, the students had lack of aspiration, so they looked uneager and tended to be passive during the learning process. Lastly, they had lack of tolerance of ambiguity. When they met a difficult question, they seemed like frustrated and gave it up easily (Naiman et al. in Ur, 1996: 275).

Those problems of the students' motivation above were caused by several factors. Based on Elliot, Kratochwill, Cook, and Travers (2000: 346), there are several factors affecting students' motivation. First is an unpleasant sensation that is experienced as feelings of apprehension and general irritability accompanied by fatigue, uneasiness, and various somatic symptoms, it is called anxiety. Second is curiosity and interest. Curiosity occurs when students meet conflict between what they believe to be true about the world and what turns actually to be true. Interest is also similar to curiosity. It is an enduring characteristic expressed by a relationship between a person and a particular activity or object.

Then, the third factor is locus of control. There are two types of locus of control; internal and external. Internal locus of control is the cause that exists within students. In contrast, external locus of control is the cause that comes from the outside of students. Fourth is learned helplessness. For some students, the best opportunity for change may be in the classroom, and if this chance is lost, they may experience a condition called learned helplessness. Fifth is Self-efficacy. It is an individual's beliefs in their own capabilities to use exert control over aspects of their lives. The last factor is classroom environment. A classroom as a medium for study contains multicultural backgrounds of students that the way they learn can give big influence to students' motivation.

I tried to implement minimal pair drill in teaching and learning process to overcome those problems. Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (1996: 3) stated that minimal pair technique is a teaching technique using words that differ by a single sound in the same position. Yule (2010: 44) stated that minimal pair is a pair of words which have identical form except for a contrast in one phoneme, occurring in the same position. Roach (2009: 62-61) explained minimal pairs are pairs of words in which meaning depends on the difference of just one phoneme. So, from those definitions above, it can be concluded that minimal pair technique is a teaching technique that provides two words that are similar in sounds but have one phonemic difference between them such as 'sheep' and 'sheep'. The contrastive phonemes in this instance are the phonemes /i:/ and /I/. This technique is used to help students to practice and to improve their pronunciation of distinct sounds in English because some

English phonemes are difficult to hear and pronounce. Minimal pair exercises can be used to provide extra practice to pronounce particularly difficult phonemes. This practice is helpful for the students because they are able to concentrate their pronunciation efforts on the areas of difficulty. The advantages of using minimal pair drill as a technique to teach pronunciation, according to Tuan (2010: 540), is that minimal pair drills can create a contrastive environment where these sounds are phonemically presented in such a way that they can be perceived with utmost ease and high motivation. Furthermore, according to Gilbert (2008: 30), he stated minimal pair drilling concentrates on individual sounds that are hard for students to hear or produce, in the hopes of achieving mastery of the English sound system. In other words, this teaching technique provides the students with a condition where they can find the contrast of two similar sounds in two or more similar words to achieve mastery of the English sound system.

RESEARCH METHOD

This Classroom Action Research was conducted in the VIII Class of a Junior High School in Ponorogo from March to May 2017. Arikunto (2010: 1) stated that action research is aimed at solving problems through a concrete action, not only by observing and describing certain phenomena. Within the teaching profession, action research can be defined as the process of studying a school situation to understand and improve the quality of the educative process (Hensen, 1996; Johnson, 2012; McTaggart, 1997 in Hine, 2013). Creswell (2008: 597) also argued that action research is a systematic procedure that is done by

teachers or other education practitioners to improve educational components such as teaching techniques or materials in teaching and learning process by collecting quantitative or qualitative data.

There are several phases in conducting an Action Research. Kemmis & McTaggart (1988) in Burns (2010:7) stated an Action Research is conducted through a dynamic and complementary process, which consists of seven steps in a cycling process including (1) Initial Reflection, (2) Fact Finding Analysis, (3) Planning the Action, (4) Implementing the Action, (5) Observing the Action, (6) Reflecting the Result, and (7) Revising Plan. I gathered the data by several ways such as conducting observation, interviewing the teacher and the students, writing a research diary, distributing questionnaires, and giving pronunciation test to the students. After the data had been gathered, I analyzed them based on Burns' theory which covers five stages including (1) assembling, (2) coding, (3) comparing, (4) building interpretation, and (5) reporting the outcomes. Besides, the students' mean scores of the test are compared in order to know the improvements of their pronunciation in fricative sounds.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

Pre-Research

In order to know the main problems in the teaching and learning process, I firstly conducted pre-research which consisted of observing teaching and learning process, interviewing the teacher and the students, giving questionnaires, writing a research diary, and also giving a pronunciation test to discover students' pronunciation ability. After doing the observation, I found that the

students had problems in pronouncing fricative sounds especially in /v/, /θ/, /ð/, and /ʃ/. Then, I interviewed the teacher and several students to gain more information about their problems in English teaching and learning. The teacher stated that the students' pronunciation ability was low and needed to be improved. In addition, the students also said that the problem they often faced was how to pronounce English words or sounds correctly. Then, in order to know the students' pronunciation level in pronouncing fricative sounds, I gave a pronunciation test where they were asked to read a text that had been modified before so that they would pronounce the target sounds. The students' mean score in pronouncing fricative sounds in pre-test was low. They only got 46.00 and 40.67 in pronouncing /v/ and /θ/. Besides, for /ð/ and /ʃ/, they could only achieve 50.00 and 45.00.

Another finding was that the students' motivation in learning English was low. There were four aspects of learning motivation that can be seen during the observation. Firstly, the students had lack of positive task orientation. It can be seen they didn't try to respond the questions given by the teacher. Secondly, their need for achievements was low. They didn't try so hard to get high scores even though they had a chance to do it. Thirdly, the students didn't have high aspiration. They were not confident and looked dispassionate to perform in front of the class. Fourthly, they also had lack of tolerance of ambiguity. They didn't try to ask something they didn't understand to the teacher. Besides, I also distributed questionnaires to the students to get more data of their motivation in learning English. In this stage, the students' questionnaires mean score was only 68.77. The questionnaire result of pre-research

showed that their mean scores of Positive Task Orientation and Need for Achievement were 68.33 and 70.50. Besides, For High Aspiration and Tolerance of Ambiguity, they could only reach 67.58 and 68.67.

Cycle 1

In order to solve those problems, I implemented minimal pair drill as a teaching technique. Cycle 1 was conducted on 6th, 12th, 13th, and 18th April 2017. It consisted of three teaching and learning meetings and one test.

The students could make better scores in every aspect of fricative sounds after minimal pair drill have been applied in cycle 1. Based on cycle 1 test, the students' pronunciation ability in fricative sounds improved. It can be proven by comparing the result of pre-test and cycle 1 test where the result of cycle 1 test was higher than pre-test. The comparison between the result of pre-test and cycle 1 test is illustrated in Chart 1.

Chart 1. The Results of Pre-Test and Cycle 1 Test

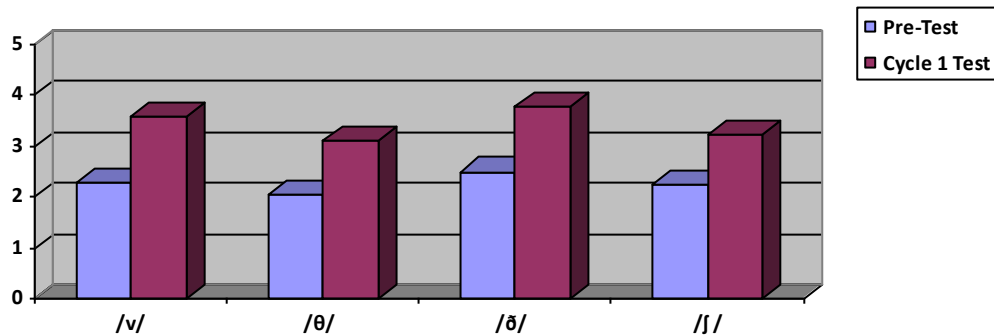


Chart 1 shows that the students made a better improvement in every aspect of fricative sound. For /v/, the mean score of pre-test was only 2.30 (46.00), but after minimal pair drill have been applied, it improved up to 3.57 (71.33). In addition, the students' score in pronouncing /θ/ got better in cycle 1 test. Although the students made an improvement on this sound, the result was still not satisfying. It can be seen that pre-test score was 2.03 (40.67), while cycle 1 test result was still considered as a low score which was only 3.10 (62.00). Then, for /ð/ sound, the students were good to pronounce it. The mean score of pre-test was 2.50 (50.00), then they could get 3.77 (75.33) in cycle 1 test. In addition, the students also made improvement in producing /f/ sound. In the pre-test, they got

2.25 (45.00), while in cycle 1 test they could get 3.22 (64.33).

In addition, by implementing Minimal Pair Drill, the students could make improvements in every aspect of motivation in learning. It can be proven by comparing the observation result of pre-research and cycle 1. The first finding of pre-research was that the students had lack of positive task orientation. There were no students who answered the teacher's questions in pre-research, while during cycle 1, there were many students who were learning actively by responding my questions. In addition, the students' needs for achievement also increased. In pre-research, they didn't try so hard to get high scores even though they had a chance to do it. It can be seen by observing the class that there were no students who wanted to present their homework even they

were offered extra marks by the teacher. But, after the treatment was applied in the cycle 1, there were several students who tried to get higher scores when I gave them opportunities to read their homework. Furthermore, in pre-research, the aspiration of the students was low. They were not confident and looked dispassionate during teaching and learning process. On the contrary, after the implementation of minimal pair drill in cycle 1, most of them learned English enthusiastically and happily. At last, tolerance of ambiguity of the students also improved. The students became more active to solve the problems they faced by asking me or the other students.

Besides, the questionnaire result also showed that the students' motivation was improving from pre-research until in the end of cycle 1. The mean score of the student's positive task orientation improved from 68.33 to 72.58. In addition, the students' need for achievement also improved significantly from 70.50 to 77.42. The improvement can also be seen in the students' aspiration. In pre-research, they only got 67.58, but in the end of cycle 1, it improved to 73.50. Furthermore, the student's tolerance of ambiguity also improved. It can be seen that the questionnaire mean score in the pre-research was 68.67, while in the end of the cycle 1, it became 74.17. At last, the comparison of the average of students' motivation score between pre-test and cycle 1 was 68.77 to 74.42.

After cycle 1 was done, the collaborator and I made some reflections related to the teaching and learning process. It aimed to evaluate whether the use of minimal pair drill was effective or not in improving the students' pronunciation

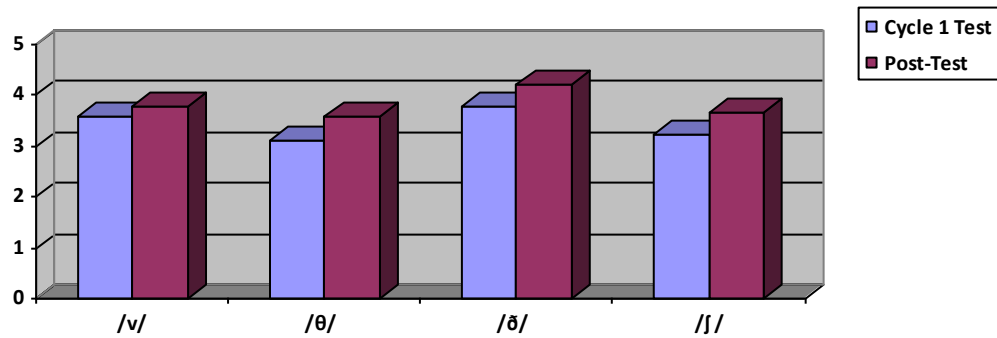
ability in fricative sounds and their motivation in English learning process. Then, we found that the students made an improvement in every aspect of fricative sounds. Although the first cycle successfully improved the students' pronunciation in fricative sounds, the improvements of /θ/ and /ʃ/ were not satisfying. They still faced difficulties and often made mistakes to pronounce those two sounds.

Besides, the students also made an improvement in every aspect of motivated students. But, there were two aspects that needed to be improved more. First is positive task orientation. There were only a few students responding to my questions and the rest was still not interested to do it. Second is their aspiration. Although, they looked happy and enthusiastic during the implementation of minimal pair drill, sometimes, many of them were still passive in learning activities. They seemed not interested by staring at the window, daydreaming and yawning during the learning process.

Cycle 2

After reflecting the teaching and learning process in Cycle 1, the collaborator and I decided to combine minimal pair drill with videos and facilitated the students to practice their pronunciation in pairs in Cycle 2. Those techniques brought positive effects to the students. They could overcome their weaknesses in their pronunciation in fricative sounds that they faced in Cycle 1. It can be seen that their mean score in pronouncing fricative sounds in post-test was higher than cycle 1 test. The comparison between both tests can be seen in Chart 2.

Chart 2. The Result of Cycle 1 Test and Pos-Test



Based on Chart 2, it can be seen that the students' mean score of every aspect of fricative sounds improved. Firstly, in pronouncing /v/, they got 3.78 (75.67) in post-test, while in cycle 1 test, they only got 3.57 (71.33). Secondly, VIII A students also made an improvement in producing /θ/. In cycle 1 test, they still often made many errors in producing this sound, they only made a small improvement in cycle 1 by reaching 3.10 (62.00). But, in the end of the research, they could make a sufficient progress by reaching 3.60 (72.00). Thirdly, in producing /ð/, the students could make a good progress. They made the best score in producing /ð/ of all fricative sounds. In cycle 1 test, they have shown a good improvement by getting 3.77 (75.33), while in post-test, it improved up to 4.20 (84.00). Fourthly, their abilities to pronounce /ʃ/ also showed an improvement. In the end cycle 1, their score was 3.23 (64.67) while in the end of cycle 2 it became 3.67 (73.33).

In addition, their motivation in English learning process improved. It can be observed from their behaviours during the learning process in cycle 2. The first aspect was that they have sufficient positive task orientation by actively responding my questions and showing good enthusiasms during the exercises. In addition, they also made an improvement in the second aspect,

need for achievements. It was proven by their desire to get high scores. Most of them raised their hands wanting to answer questions given by me. Then, the third aspect was their aspirations during the learning process. The students' aspiration during cycle 2 improved. They showed enthusiasm for minimal pair drill. Besides, they looked happy and enjoy getting involved learning process. The last aspect was tolerance of ambiguity. The students also made a significant progress on this aspect. They didn't give up easily on problems they faced by asking me to explain something they had not understood yet.

The questionnaire result in the end of cycle 2 also showed that their motivation improved. It was better than cycle 1. The students made a significant improvement in each aspect of motivated students. The students' positive task orientation as the first aspect improved from 72.58 to 81.75. In addition, they made progress on the second aspect, needing for achievements. In cycle 1 test, the mean score showed that they got 77.42. Then, it improved up to 84.33 at the end of the action. Furthermore, the third aspect also quiet increased. Their aspiration in learning showed an improvement by having a progress from 73.50 to 80.17. At last, their tolerance of ambiguity also improved from 74.42 to 82.10.

The last stage of cycle 2 was a reflection. The collaborator and I analyzed the final result of observation during cycle 2 in order to evaluate the teaching and learning process. I discovered that the students made positive progress with their pronunciation, especially in fricative sounds. Their ability to pronounce fricative sounds improved after the implementation of minimal pair drill. At the same time, this teaching technique also improved students' motivation in English learning. Each motivated student aspect they accomplished well.

Although minimal pair drills bring many benefit to the students, it also has weaknesses; this technique spends a lot of time in its implementation in order to make this technique successfully used. The students should repeat again and again so that they become accustomed to new words or sounds, while the teacher should be careful watching the students to give them corrections if they made mistakes. Besides, it requires models who drill students with acceptable sounds in English pronunciation. In other words, it needs teachers who have a good pronunciation of English as the model. Minimal pair drill should be implemented precisely. If it is not, it will bring the students to a misunderstanding pronouncing English words or sounds.

Discussion

After the use of Minimal Pair Drill as the teaching technique, the students' ability to pronounce fricative sounds improved. This technique conducive situation to learn pronunciation, especially in fricative sounds. As long as practitioners keep guiding students with appropriate activities and correcting their mistakes, it made the students become accustomed to

certain English sounds that were not familiar to them. So, eventually, the students could overcome pronunciation problems they faced, especially in fricative sounds. They could reduce or even omit the errors in pronouncing /v/, /θ/, /ð/, and /ʃ/. The research result is similar to what has been stated by Celce-Murcia (1996: 8) that minimal pair drill helps students to distinguish between similar and problematic sounds in the target language through listening discrimination and spoken practice. In addition, previous researchers who had done teaching pronunciation by using the same technique also agreed that students' pronunciation ability in certain English sounds improved through minimal pair technique. Tarmina, Basri, and Hastini have conducted a research entitled *Improving the Pronunciation of Alveopalatal Sounds through Minimal Pairs*. It was published in *e-Journal of English Language Teaching Society (ELTS) Vol. 2 No. 1 2014 – ISSN 2331-1841*. The result of this research also showed that the use of Minimal Pairs was effective to be used in teaching and English learning especially in pronunciation. The researchers stated that by showing the different pronunciation of two words focusing on one sound, the students could solve their problems in learning pronunciation and help them to pronounce English words correctly.

Besides, the use of Minimal Pair Drill improved students' motivation in English learning process. Their behavior during the action indicated that their motivation improved. They became more active to respond questions. In addition, they tried eagerly to get high scores during teaching and learning process by tackling the challenge given to them. Furthermore, when minimal pair drill was applied, they

did it enthusiastically and happily. Also, they became more active to solve the problems they faced by asking me or the other students. This is in line with a research entitled *Teaching English Discrete Sounds through Minimal Pairs conducted* by Tuan (2010) that was published in *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 1 (5), 540-561 on September 2010. He stated that minimal pair drills create a contrastive environment where these sounds are phonemically presented in such a way that they can be perceived with utmost ease and high motivation.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Research findings show that the use of Minimal Pair Drill could improve the students' pronunciation ability in fricative sounds; /v/, /θ/, /ð/, and /ʃ/. The students could accomplish all indicators. This can be seen from the improvements of the test results in every cycle. Students' mean score in pronouncing /v/ in pre-test was 2.30. Then, it improved up to 3.57 in cycle 1 test. In the last test, it could reach 3.78. Besides, their ability to pronounce /θ/ also improved. They only get 2.03 in pre-test and 3.10 in cycle 1 test. However, in the post-test, they could get 3.60 (72.00). In addition, the students showed significant progress in pronouncing /ð/. In the pre-test, they only gained 2.50. After cycle 1 was done, it improved up to 3.77. The improvement still went on until the end of the research; they reached 4.20 (84.00) in the post-test. Furthermore, the mean score in pronouncing /ʃ/ also improved. In pre-test and cycle 1 test, the students got 2.25 and 3.23. Then, it improved up to 3.67 (73.33) in the last test.

At the same time, the students' motivation in the learning process improved. They made improvements in every

motivation aspect. In the aspect of positive task orientation, the students actively responded to my questions. Furthermore, plenty of them did the exercise enthusiastically. In the aspect of need for achievement, most of them raised hands and wanted to get a chance to answer when I gave them opportunities to get extra scores by answering questions. In the aspect of high aspiration, all of them got involved enthusiastically and happily when Minimal Pair Drill was applied. At last, In the aspect of tolerance of ambiguity, most of them wanted to ask me about something unclear they faced during the teaching and learning process.

The improvements can also be seen in the results of interviews. Most of the students learned English enthusiastically. They felt happy during teaching and learning process. Furthermore, the result of the questionnaires showed that there are improvements students made in every cycle. In the pre-test, students' motivation in learning English was 68.77. Then, in the end of cycle 1, it improved into 74.42. Finally, they could get 82.10 at the end of the research.

Based on research findings and conclusion, some implications are formulated and suggestions are provided for those who are involved in English teaching and learning, namely English teacher, students, and other researchers.

Firstly, for the teacher, pronunciation is a vital part of communication. It takes important roles in delivering messages to listeners. When a speaker mispronounces certain sounds, it may lead the listeners to become misunderstand about what the speaker wants to convey. But, it seems to be a neglected part of our English lesson. Many English teachers in Indonesia are not

accustomed to teach it for many reasons. They are not native speakers; there is no need to set correct pronunciation as one of their goals, moreover, most teachers themselves do not feel perfect in this area and thus feel reluctant to show it. Realizing the importance of pronunciation, teachers should be able to encourage students so that they have the willingness to improve their English pronunciation ability and help them to learn how to pronounce English sounds correct. In order to improve students' pronunciation ability, the teachers should facilitate their students with appropriate techniques. The result of the research shows that implementing minimal pair drill can improve students' pronunciation ability especially in fricative sounds. Minimal Pair Drills are used to help students practice and improve their pronunciation of distinct sounds in English. Because some English phonemes are difficult to hear and pronounce, Minimal Pairs exercises can be used to provide extra practice to pronounce particularly difficult phonemes. This practice is helpful for the students because they are able to concentrate their pronunciation efforts on areas of difficulty. Besides, teachers are responsible to motivate their students. They have to encourage their students to be more focus on the lesson. It can be done by using Minimal Pair Drill as one of many techniques in teaching English, especially in pronunciation. In order to get satisfying results, they can run minimal pair technique with media such as tape recording or videos. However, teachers should immediately give feedback and re-play the tape recording and video to give students more opportunity to master the sounds.

Secondly, for the students, they should be aware that pronunciation is an important thing to make their

communication intelligible. They should try their best to improve their speaking ability by considering the micro aspect of it which is pronunciation. It will be much better if they also practice speaking outside the class. They can practice it with people close to them, such as relatives or friends. Besides, they should do other activities related to English, such as reading books, listening songs, watching positive TV programs in order to improve their English competence. Furthermore, I suggest students seek out something that can motivate them. They should have the desire to learn English. As long as they have something motivating them, they will get better results in learning.

Thirdly, for the other researchers, they can use this research as a reference or comparative information to conduct further researches in the future. It will be better if they focus on other aspects of pronunciation such vowels, or even suprasegmental features. Besides, I hope that there will be other techniques or methods that are applied, such as chaining, spelling, and reading. All this will enlarge the knowledge of teaching and learning process in speaking, especially in pronunciation. Therefore, it will create better teaching and learning process in our nation

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