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The Use of Minimal Pairs in Improving Students' Vocabulary Mastery of The Fifth Year Students of SDN 018 Rumbai Pesisir

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ABSTRACK

Vocabulary plays the most important part in learning a foreign language especially in the early stage of elementary school. Without knowing the vocabulary, students will not be able in the four language skills, such as speaking, reading, listening and writing. The students' lack of vocabulary make students cannot communicate their ideas as clearly as they would have to. The fifth year students have difficulty to follow English learning if they do not have enough English vocabulary. According to guideline of English teaching, elementary students should master 500 words. Students are not able to construct, even, a simple sentence consisting of subject and predicate. Students are also not be able to pronounce a word correctly, they pronounce a word based on what they see. According to the writer's observation in the classroom, while teacher explains the lesson, the students prefer to do something else such as drawing, writing and talking to their partner. To use minimal pair exercises as vocabulary development, the writer represented the words in each minimal pairs to teach or reinforce the meaning of vocabulary while practicing the pronunciation of the words. Students can also put the words in meaningful context sentences. The result of the research shows the students' improvement after using minimal pairs.

Key Words: Minimal Pairs, Vocabulary, Elementary Students.

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Background

Nowadays, English vocabulary has been taught since the first grade of elementary schools. It shows that one of the crucial aspects of English is vocabulary. Vocabulary as one of the language component is very important in language skills namely writing, reading, listening, and speaking. It will be very difficult to master these four basic language skills without sufficient words. Mastery of words is very important in language learning. If we listen, we listen to words, if we speak we speak or use words, if we read, we encounter words, if we write we use words. Considering the importance of words, teachers have to find ways to teach words or vocabulary.

Psychologically, we remember or study related things better. If we see or hear something, automatically we associate the thing with something else. Words can be related because they are synonyms, such as *also* and *too*, *answer* and *replay*, *beat* and *hit*, etc; because they are antonyms such as *hard* x *soft*, *high* x *low*, *give* x *take*, *big* x *small*, etc; because they are homonym, *allowed-aloud*, *ate-eight*, *bear-bare*, *ball-bawl*, etc; because the one complements the other for instance *pen* and *ink*, *lock* and *key*; because they are minimal pairs; their manner of articulation or point of articulation is almost the same. They are different simply because of a paired of sounds.

The fifth year students have difficulty to follow English learning if they do not have enough English vocabulary. According to guideline of English teaching, elementary students should master 500 words. Students are not able to construct, even, a simple sentence consisting of subject and predicate. Students are also not be able to pronounce a word correctly, they pronounce a word based on what they see. According to the writer's observation in the classroom, while teacher explains the lesson, the students prefer to do something else such as drawing, writing and talking to their partner.

Based on observation that has been done, during the writer teaches English at SDN 018 Rumbai Pesisir, it is found that students face difficulty in memorizing and pronouncing English vocabulary. Experts offer many ways to improve this difficulty. For instances: Harmer in Matriel states that teachers may use pictures to explain the meaning of vocabulary, whereas Cross in Kartini suggests teachers to apply realia in presenting a new vocabulary. According to Kenneth Beare another way to teach vocabulary is minimal pairs.

To make students easier to memorize vocabulary, the writer will use minimal pairs. A minimal pair is a pair of words whose pronunciations are almost the same. Sounds which are paired among others are long vowels versus short vowels, such as /i:/ versus /i/, /u/ versus /u:/, etc. Among consonant sound sounds are voiced consonant sounds versus voiceless consonant sounds, such as /d/ versus /t/, /k/ versus /g/, /s/ versus /z/, etc., for example sit-seat.

Based on the explanation above, the writer will do research on the use of minimal pairs in teaching vocabulary to the fifth year students of SDN 018 Rumbai Pesisir. To use minimal pair exercises as vocabulary development, the writer will represent the words in each minimal pairs to teach or reinforce the meaning of vocabulary while practicing the pronunciation of the words. Students can also put the words in meaningful context sentences.

2. The Setting of the Problem

Based on the writer's observation to the fifth year students of SDN 018 Rumbai Pesisir, while teaching and learning process, the students just listen the lecturing by the teacher; possibly, the students learn vocabulary passively due to several factors: Firstly, English is not the students' and teachers' native language. Secondly, according to the students, they feel the teacher's explanation while teaching learning process is boring that is why they prefer to talk to their partner or do something else than listen to their teacher. After all, the teaching is not interested is considered as main problem that can make the students feel that it is difficult to learn English.

3. Definition of the terms

To avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation in comprehending this research, the writer has defined the terms used in this research:

- i) Use is an action of using something or the state of being used (Hornby, 1995: 407). In this research, the use means the action of using minimal pairs.
- ii) According to Boey in Defi Rosamarlina (2007: 14) Minimal pairs are two words in a language which differ from the others by only one distinctive sound. Sounds which are paired among others are long vowels versus short vowels and among consonant sounds are voiced consonant sounds versus voiceless consonant sounds and also differ in meaning. Minimal pairs in this research is a content of teaching vocabulary.
- iii) Vocabulary is total number of words that make up a language (Hornby 1995: 1425). The term vocabulary in this research is words that are studying by the fifth year students of SDN 018 Rumbai Pesisir.

B. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

1. The Importance of Teaching Vocabulary

Teaching vocabulary should be integrated to the four language skills. The integrated teaching means to support the students' ability in developing their language skills. Moreover, achievement or acquisition vocabulary is essential for successful in second or foreign language because without an extensive and enlargement vocabulary and functions which the students may have learned for comprehensible communication society. Vocabulary plays the most important part in learning a foreign language especially in the early stage of elementary school. Without knowing the vocabulary, students will not be able in the four language skills, such as speaking, reading, listening and writing. The students' lack of vocabulary make students cannot communicate their ideas as clearly as they would have to.

There are many methods in teaching vocabulary. According to Harmer (1991:161) teachers can use presentation, discovery techniques and practice methods to teach vocabulary. One way of building English vocabulary in presentation form is by using minimal pairs. The teacher will give the students some minimal pairs and pronounce them. The students then will repeat after teacher.

There are several types of vocabulary presentation techniques.

- i) Visual techniques. These pertain to visual memory, which is considered especially helpful with vocabulary retention. Learners remember better the material that has been presented by means of visual aids (Zebrowska in Matriel 2008:6). Visual techniques lend themselves well to presenting concrete items of vocabulary-nouns; many are also helpful in conveying meaning of verbs and adjectives. They help students associate presented material in a meaningful way and incorporate it into system of language values.
- ii) Verbal explanation. This pertains to the use of illustrative situations, synonym, opposites, scales, definition, and categories.
- iii) The use of dictionaries. Using a dictionary is another technique of finding out meanings of unfamiliar words and expressions. Students can make use of

variety of dictionaries: bilingual, monolingual, pictorial, thesaurus, and the like.

According to Harmer (1991:154) that there are two criteria for the teacher in selecting words to be taught for the students; First, frequency, the teacher should teach first the words which are most commonly used (high frequency words). Second, coverage, the chosen words are most useful if they cover more things. In the 2007 curriculum (KTSP/ school based curriculum) for elementary school, ability to store English vocabulary is a basic requirement for elementary school students. Teachers, therefore, should really help the students in acquiring English vocabulary.

2. The Nature of Minimal Pairs

Boey in Defi Rosamarlina (2007: 14) states that minimal pairs are a pair of words in a language which differ from the others by only one distinctive sound. Sounds which are paired among others are long vowels versus short vowels and among consonant sounds are voiced consonant sounds versus voiceless consonant sounds and also differ in meaning. In line with Boey, John Higgins (2008) defines a minimal pair as two-words whose meanings are different simply because of pair of sounds (not pair of letters) which they have. The difference of one word with another in minimal pairs is only if one is voiced the other is voiceless or one is short, the other is long. On the other hand, points of articulation or manner of articulation must be the same. Sounds which are paired among others are long vowels versus short vowels, such as /i:/ versus /i/, /u/ versus /u:/, /ɑ/ versus /ɑ:/, etc. Among consonant sound sounds are voiced consonant sounds versus voiceless consonant sounds, such as /b/ versus /p/, /v/ versus /f/, /d/ versus /t/, /k/ versus /g/, /s/ versus /z/, etc. For example sit-seat. Minimal pairs are identical in every way except for one segment that occurs in the same place in the string. So, minimal pairs are compare difference voice that occurs in the same place and have difference meaning. For example: sheep-ship, leak lick, cheeks chicks, peel pill, etc.

3. The Importance of Using Minimal Pairs in Teaching Vocabulary

According to Chyntia (2003: 4) students remember words better when they connect new meanings to knowledge they already have. This type of active processing occurs when students work with words in some of the following ways:

- i) Produce antonyms, synonyms and minimal pairs

- ii) Rewrite definitions
- iii) Identify examples and non-examples of the word
- iv) Use more than one new word in a sentence
- v) Create sentences that contain the new word
- vi) Create scenarios or stories in which the words used.

In short, the new words will stay longer in students' memory if the teacher uses minimal pairs that one of ways to improve vocabulary. In addition to use minimal pair exercises as vocabulary development, the writer will also use pictures that represent the words in each minimal pairs to teach or reinforce the meaning of vocabulary while practicing the pronunciation of the words. Students can also put the words in meaningful context sentences. Besides, George Maclean states that minimal pairs are a useful way to highlight a sound in a meaningful context and also to show the learner how important correct pronunciation of the sound is. Activities to practice minimal pairs include reverse dictation (the teacher writes what the learners say on the board), tongue twisters and drilling.

4. The Procedure of Teaching Vocabulary through Minimal Pairs

According to Kenneth Beare (2009) minimal pairs is a paired of words that different simply because of a paired of sounds, if students can distinguish the different sounds, it will help them in pronunciation and the minimal pairs can improve their vocabulary mastery, the teaching procedure in improving students' vocabulary mastery through minimal pairs can be as follow:

- i) Write examples of minimal pairs on the board. It is a good idea to employ the phonetic transcriptions of the words on the board.
- ii) Demonstrate the correct pronunciation of the minimal pairs written on the board.
- iii) Distribute minimal pair sheet.
- iv) For lower levels: Reproduce the minimal pairs in chorus by first giving the example and then having students repeat together.

- v) For upper levels: Have students work in pairs taking turns reproducing the minimal pairs.
- vi) Repeat as many times as you feel necessary.
- vii) Have students use the minimal pairs sheet as a model to produce another, similar, minimal pair sheet.
- viii) Extend activity into a game, by having students distribute their minimal pair sheets to other pairs.

After conducting the teaching procedure as above, the writer will give exercises to assess the student's progress, this exercise will be done at the end of two meetings. The writer will apply games as minimal pairs exercises to make the class more interesting.

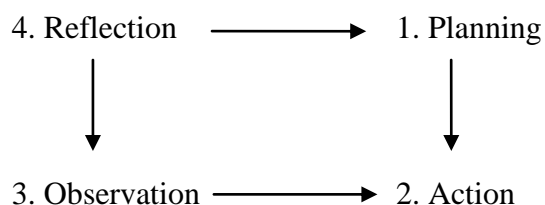
C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. The Research Design

According to Kemmis and McTaggart in Ernie Stringer (2004: 10) action research is a self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in a social 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 in which these practices and carried out.

This research is a classroom action research which is put into effect at the first semester in 2015-2016 academic year. This research is about learning vocabulary related to the use of minimal pairs in learning vocabulary for fifth year students of SDN 018 Rumbai Pesisir. The stages in doing this research are as follow:

The research procedures could be drawn as follow:



1. Planning

The writer plans to use minimal pairs in order to improve students' vocabulary mastery. Before applying this technique, it is important to make planning as preparation of action. They are:

- 1) Arrange the scenario of teaching vocabulary by using minimal pairs.
 - 2) Prepare the observation sheet to assess how the learning condition in class by using minimal pairs.
 - 3) Design the test to evaluate the vocabulary mastery of the students.
2. Action

This is a second stage where the teacher will apply the instructional planning in teaching vocabulary using minimal pairs for the students.

There were three parts in this process.

- a. Pre activities :
 - 1) Greeting
 - 2) Checking attendance list of students
 - 3) Warming up. Teacher motivates the students to find new vocabulary.
 - b. While activities
 - 1) Giving texts or sentences consist of some minimal pairs.
 - 2) Doing guided practice. The teacher pronounces the texts or sentences and the students repeat.
 - 3) Doing semi-guided practice where the students have to pronounce the words by themselves. Students, then, try to find the difficult words.
 - 4) Giving some of minimal pairs in the texts to the students, then students have to find the other minimal pairs in the text.
 - 5) Giving oral and written test.
 - 6) Collecting their answer sheets.
 - c. Post activities
 - 1) Reviewing
 - 2) Giving the chances to the students to discuss and asking about the lesson.
 - 3) Closing
3. Observation

In this stage, the writer used the observation table to observe the students in learning activity. Based on observation table of students, the writer will get percentage of students who were active in doing exercise whether in written or

oral form; paying attention and giving participation in teaching learning process.

The students' score are based on the following criteria:

- a. The students do the exercises
 1. The students don't do the exercise
 2. The students do few or about a quarter of the exercise
 3. The students do half of the exercise
 4. The students do almost all the exercises
 5. The students do all the exercises well
- b. The students pay attention to the teacher
 1. During the teaching learning process, the students do other activity, such as going out and inside the classroom, drawing, talking to their partner or disturbing other students.
 2. Students sometimes listen to the teacher; mostly do other activity during teaching learning process.
 3. The students try to pay attention to the teacher but if there is another student talks to him/her, s/he ignores the teacher.
 4. Along the first ten minutes, the students do not pay attention to the teacher.
 5. The students can focus during the teaching learning process.
- c. The students give participation
 1. The students are only silent in the classroom
 2. The students answer or give opinion but the language used is impolite
 3. The students try to answer or give opinion but the answer is incorrect
 4. The students answer or give opinion but some of their answer or opinion are incorrect
 5. The students participate actively whether in asking questions or giving opinion. The opinion and answer are correct.

At this stage the teacher observes whether the students were able to tell the minimal pairs that have been taught and wrote them on the paper. After conducting the three stages then the writer collect and analyze the result to find out the students' progress in vocabulary achievement. One of the parts in the observation is to find out their motivations in learning English vocabulary by using minimal pairs. The students'

motivation can be seen from the students' activeness appearances in learning, their interesting in following the lessons, self-concentration, and their happiness in learning, asking and answering questions about the lesson.

4. Reflection

After conducting the three previous steps the writer then collect the result and analyze it to find out the students' progress in the vocabulary achievement.

2. Data Collection Technique

The method of collecting data is an important role in doing a research for the validity or result. The teacher will give the questions based on the learning topic. There were two phases that will be done to get data:

1) Treatments by teacher

The students will be given treatment three meetings in one cycle by using minimal pairs in teaching vocabulary before the writer takes test. In this research there will be two cycles and three meetings in each cycle. It means that there are six meetings. The writer will do treatments in order to help students in learning English particularly in vocabulary.

2) Test

Test is the evaluation that will be conducted after the students got some treatments. In order to get the data for this research, the writer administrated short answer tests to the class. In this short answer tests, the students are instructed to match the correct answer and complete sentences with an appropriate word. The test will be arranged by the teacher. Besides, teacher also provides a listening test by choosing a correct word based on tape.

3. The Data Analysis Technique

To find out how easy or how difficult a particular item is in the test, the writer will use the following formula:

$$FV = \frac{R}{N} \times 100\%$$

FV= Difficulty Level

R= The Number of Correct Answer

N= The Number of Students taking the test

(Heaton, 1975)

After all the students score are obtained; the effectiveness of students in learning vocabulary can be seen. To know the average score of the students, the writer presents the data by using the following formula:

$$m = \frac{\sum x}{n}$$

Where:

m = Average Score

$\sum X$ = The total correct answer

N = the number of respondents

(Heaton, 1975)

To get the score of each students and the test, the writer will use the formula:

$$M = \frac{X}{N} \times 100$$

M = Individual Score

X = Number of Correct Answer

N = Number of Items

(Heaton, 1975)

To know the level of ability of the students, the writer uses the following table:

Table 3.1 Level of Ability

No	Score	Level of Ability
1	86 – 100	Excellent
2	76 – 85	Good
3	66 – 75	Fairly Good
4	51 – 65	Fair

5	0 -50	Poor
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D. THE PRESENTATION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. The Presentation of The Test Result

After conducting the treatment, a test was given to see the achievement of the students' vocabulary mastery. There were 28 students who did the test. The writer gave 30 test items which consists of 2 groups A and B. Part A, consists of 10 items, is asked students to match the answer from a column provided. This test is conducted to know the students' knowledge about minimal pairs. Part B is asked students to complete a sentence which consists of 20 items. The detail of the research instrument can be seen in Appendix 1 and the answers' key in Appendix 2.

2. The Presentation of the Data in the First Cycle

In the first cycle, there were three meetings. After the three meetings, the writer had given a test which consists of thirty questions, ten items for matching and twenty by completing sentences. It was done to know the students' vocabulary mastery. After evaluating the students' answer and computing the students' score, the writer calculated their percentage in order to know their vocabulary mastery.

Table 4.1 The Students' score in the first cycle

No	Score	Level of Ability	First Cycle	
			f	P
1	86 – 100	Excellent	2	7.10%
2	76 – 85	Good	1	3.60%
3	66 – 75	Fairly Good	4	14.30%
4	51 – 65	Fair	11	39.30%
5	0 -50	Poor	10	35.70%
Total			28	100.00%

Note : f = frequency

p = percentage

The table above explains that 21 students (75%) got fair and poor based on their answer. There were only 2 students (7.1%) got excellent and 1 student (3.6%) got good level.

3. The Presentation of the Data in the Second Cycle

Considering the low students' score in the first cycle, it is importance to achieve the SKBM (Standar Ketuntasan Belajar Minimum) which means that there should minimally 75 % students get score 6.5, Therefore the writer gave three meetings in the second cycle.

After conducting the three meeting for the second cycle, the writer gave the students test which the same as the test in first cycle. After evaluating the students' answer and computing the students' score, the writer calculated the percentage of the students in order to know their level of ability in vocabulary mastery.

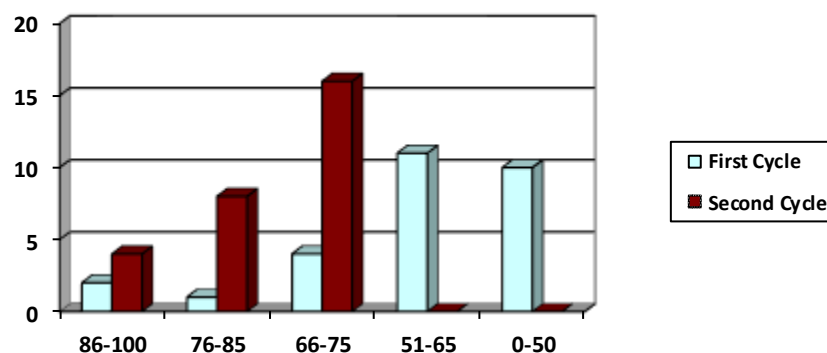
Table 4.2 The Students' Score in The Second Cycle

No	Score	Level of Ability	Second Cycle	
			f	P
1	86 - 100	Excellent	4	14.30%
2	76 - 85	Good	8	28.60%
3	66 - 75	Fairly Good	16	57.10%
4	51 - 65	Fair	0	0.00%
5	0 -50	Poor	0	0.00%
Total			28	100.00%

Note : f = frequency

p = percentage

The table above explains that 4 students or about 14.3% got score 86 - 100. 8 (28.6%) students got score between 76 - 85 or in Good level of ability. There were 16 (57.1%) students in Fairly good level of ability (51 - 65) and there is no students got score under 65 which is the standard of SKBM (Standar Ketuntasan Belajar Minimum) score.



The chart above tells the students' difference score between the first cycle and the second cycle. It can be seen that in the second cycle there is no students got score under 65 which means that all students passed the test.

Table 4.3 The Average Score in The First and Second Cycle

The average score in the first cycle	The average score in the second cycle
5.6	7.6

From the table above, it can be concluded that minimal pairs could improve students' vocabulary mastery.

4. The Result of Observation in the First Cycle

The students would be assessed about their activities in doing exercise, paying attention to the teacher, and giving participation in teaching-learning process. The students' activities during teaching and learning process were observed by the writer by using observation sheet. Below we will see the general information about students' activities in three meeting in each cycle.

Table 4.4 The Result of students' observation in the first cycle

Category	Meeting		
	1	2	3

A (Very Good) = 33 – 40	0	0	0
B (Good) = 25 – 32	0	1	3
C (Enough) = 17 – 24	10	10	12
D (Poor) = 9 – 16	14	17	13
E (Very Poor) = 8	4	0	0
	28	28	28

There is no students got A. It means that the students did not do the exercises well; the students also did not pay attention to the teacher. It affects their score. There are only 1 student got B in meeting 2 and 3 students in the third meeting. It increased about 7 %. There are 90% students got C, D and E which means that they were not serious in teaching-learning process. The teacher plays an important role in this problem, so that teacher also observed.

Teacher is assessed in using

Category	Meeting
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 examples, language used, and etc. The detail of teacher's observation sheet is explained in Appendix 6 up to 8. The table below explains the level of ability of the teacher in the first cycle.

Table 4.5 The result of teacher's observation in the first cycle

Meeting	Total	Level of ability
1	27	B
2	28	B
3	32	B

The teacher's score increased in each meeting. In the first meeting teacher's score was 27 in B level of ability, in the second meeting, the teacher got 28 which means it increased one point. In last meeting of the first cycle, teacher's score was 32, it increased four points although still in B level of ability.

	1	2	3
A (Very Good) = 33 – 40	0	1	8
B (Good) = 25 – 32	5	9	12
C (Enough) = 17 – 24	17	18	8
D (Poor) = 9 – 16	6	0	0
E (Very Poor) = 8	0	0	0
	28	28	28

5. Observation in the Second Cycle

As well as in the first cycle, students also would be assessed in doing exercise, paying attention to the teacher, and giving participation in teaching-learning process in the second cycle. The general information of the students' observation can be seen in the table above which tells that in the first meeting there is no student got A, and only five students got B. there are 17 students got C and 6 students got D. In the second meeting, one student got A, nine students got B, and the others got C which means there is no student go E. In the last meeting of the second cycle, there are eight students got A, it increased 25 % compare to the first cycle. Twelve students got B, increased 10 %. There are only eight students got C.

Table 4.6 The Result of teacher's observation in the second cycle

Meeting	Total	Level of ability
1	32	B
2	33	A
3	34	A

Teacher is also assessed in using examples, language used, and etc. The detail of teacher's observation sheet is explained in Appendix 15 up to 17. The table above explains the level of ability of the teacher in the second cycle. From the whole tables, it can be concluded that the more teacher can manage the teaching-learning process, the better the students' achievement. It can be seen that the increasing of the teacher's

observation score was equal to the increasing of students' observation score and their real score.

E. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

1. Conclusions

This research seeks to find out the use of minimal pairs in improving vocabulary mastery of the fifth year students of SDN 018 Rumbai Pesisir. Based on the result of the data, it was found that the score of students in the first cycle were different from those in second cycle. The students' mean in the first cycle was 5.6, and the students' observation score showed that only few students did exercise, paid attention and gave participation, from the teacher's observation sheet can be seen that teacher did not give enough examples and time to discuss for the students. After knowing the lack of examples and times given, teacher designed second cycle in order to improve the students' vocabulary mastery. There was 7.14 % increase. It means that minimal pairs can improve students' vocabulary mastery.

2. Suggestions

Based on the result of the study, the writer would like to give some suggestions: firstly, the teacher should be able to select a good technique in improving students' vocabulary mastery. Secondly, he teacher should have a clear pronunciation. Finallyly, since minimal pairs can improve students' vocabulary mastery, it is suggested that English teachers consider applying this technique in teaching learning process in the classroom.

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