

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the summary of the study, the discussion and interpretation of the findings. Implications for teaching and learning, as well as recommendations for further studies are also provided as follows.

#### Summary and discussion of the study

The study investigated to what extent the use of minimal pairs compared to the traditional technique that the teacher followed the manual of the core course, had effected on learners' abilities to pronounce English consonant sounds, and to explore which English consonant sounds were more problematic to pronounce than others. The sounds studied were /r/, /v/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ð/, and /θ/. It posed the following research questions:

1. To what extent has the use of minimal pairs compared to the traditional technique effected on learners' abilities to pronounce English consonant sounds correctly?
2. Which English consonant sounds are more problematic to pronounce than others?

The study used an experimental design with a post-test to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching technique. (Hatch, E. & Farhardy, H. 1982). In this design, there were two groups- an experimental group which received the minimal pair technique treatment and a control group which did not, but they had to remember every sound in a word studied. The researchers randomly assigned the experimental group from students of grade 2/1 class, and assigned the students from grade 2/2 class as the control group. The sample size in this study consisted of 40 students in two classes which were drawn from the total number of 69 students. It was selected purposively as

the sample of the experiment. Both the experimental group and the control group were previously divided into 2 levels of English learning ability: highly-proficient students from those students who obtained grade 4, and low-proficient students from those who obtained grade 1 or 1.5, on the basis of their final English grade in the first semester of the academic year 2006. The experimental group was chosen from Grade 2/1 class for 20 students, whereas the control group was chosen from Grade 2/2 class for the same number of students. The research questions were answered using both quantitative and qualitative analysis as the following.

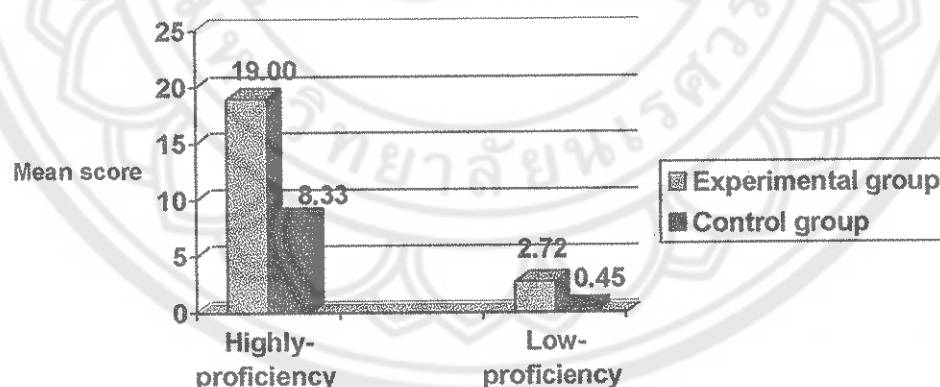
For research question 1, the instrument used to find the answer was the test on students' performance in pronouncing 30 words in a list. The test composed of five words from each English initial consonant sounds (see appendix C). All participants were asked individually to pronounce out loud each word twice so that it could be evaluated whether it was correct or incorrect from three teachers' judgement. The analysis results revealed that the use of minimal pairs had greatly improved students' abilities in pronunciation of English consonant sounds problematic to Thai students. The experimental groups' scores after receiving the treatment were significantly higher than the control group's. Therefore, it can be assumed that the students could well improve their pronunciation via the minimal pair technique.

For research question 2, there were a very small number of students from both groups who pronounced the words with most problematic consonant sounds correctly. The problems were more serious in the control group than in the experimental group. Those consonant sounds were /V/ and /θ/. These findings indicated that the /V/ and /θ/ sounds are the most difficult and problematic to pronounce for Thai participants. This phenomenon implied that the way to produce these two sounds was not easy at all for students. To produce the /V/, speakers need to use different organs within a mouth such as a lower lip was placed by upper teeth between two lips. This shape of mouth also made some students feel embarrassed. They were likely to be shy and some even kept their mouths shut. They needed more encouragement from the teacher and more exercises to get used to it since the way Thai speakers pronounce the words is totally

different. They also need more time to practice. Besides, they will be able to pronounce those sounds correctly in the near future if they can motivate themselves.

In summary, the comparison between highly-proficient students and low-proficient students as shown in Figure 1 below, it was clearly revealed that among highly-proficient students from the experimental group had higher mean score than those from the control group. The mean score were 19.0 and 8.33, respectively. This phenomenon also occurred among the students who had low proficiency, as it was indicated that low-proficient students from the experimental group still had higher mean score than the control group. (2.72 : 0.42). The statistic results (ANOVA) also showed that there was a significant difference between the scores obtained by students in the experimental group and those by students in the control group ( $F = 5.88, p < .05$ ). It could be generally said that the experimental group performed much better than the control group.

Figure 1: Mean score of students' performance in pronouncing words, based on the test given at the end of the course.



## Discussion and Interpretation of the findings

### 1. Finding 1

The purpose of this study was to determine the learners' abilities to pronounce English consonant sounds after they were trained by using the minimal pair technique.

The results of this study showed that the experimental group had higher score than the control group who were trained based on the teacher's manual book of English course (Target Student Course). However, there were some other factors that effected the students' pronunciation such as age, English competency level, and time allotment when this technique was implemented. Even though young learners were the most suitable to teach pronunciation of a foreign language, but it was also found that they were difficult to teach since they were not ready to acquire such phonemes and could not read the words as well. Besides, their concentration could be low if they did not see the importance of learning a foreign language.

In addition, the low-proficient students were not better than we expected because the treatment could not overcome the fact that they did not know how to combine some specific vowels with the target initial consonant sounds. They could not pronounce most of the words in the list.

## 2. Finding 2

The purpose of the study was also aimed to consider what consonant sounds were the most problematic to pronounce than the other sounds.

It was found that /V/ and /θ/ were the most difficult sounds when the participants were asked to perform. They very often substituted these two sounds with other similar sound in Thai, such as /W/ and /f/ for /V/, and substituted /f/, /t/ and /s/ for /θ/ because there were no segmental sounds like these in their mother tongue. These mispronounced sounds were able to communicate among their peers and teachers because all of them had the same misconception. It is in need to provide more opportunities and channels for students to expose to the target sounds, so that they can eventually differentiate the sounds.

## Implication for Teaching and Learning Pronunciation

This experimental study was designed to indicate how minimal pairs improve

pronunciation of English consonant sounds among Grade 2 students. On the basis of the finding found, there are some implications as follows.

First, a teacher need to find and figure out what sounds their students had trouble in pronunciation. They may need some time to design a good lesson and technique of teaching.

Next, a teacher should assess their students' abilities in learning the target sounds since they sometimes lack self-motivation to learn about such area of a foreign language. Otherwise, this may contribute miserable time and great failure to the teaching job.

Also, all the words obtained and proposed to be taught, must be well chosen and suitable for students' proficiency level. And it needs to be accompanied by some kinds of activities that employ the target lesson into more practice.

More importantly, this technique consumed time, so the teachers should organize the teaching syllabus of an English core course to comply with the school's curriculum.

### **Suggestions for Further Studies**

This study has brought some valuable outcomes to be shown as well as some suggestions that will make future pronunciation teaching more successful.

Firstly, the minimal pair technique can be used to improve learners' abilities in pronouncing better English consonant sounds, but it is more suitable for a little older students. It could be taught more effectively to 10 year-old students. The students of that age will get benefit from it since they already know how to combine and segment different phonemes increasingly. However, it is best to remind students about good pronunciation; thus, the minimal pair technique may be used at the beginning of any elementary course of English.

Secondly, students in this kind of research project should get familiar with the majority of the word list. This criterion will enhance students to improve their learning with best results.

Next, further research on the use of minimal pair technique with a bigger sample group is recommended in order to be able to generalize the results.

Lastly, the researchers would like to recommend that teaching pronunciation of segmental should be integrated to more communicative approach. It is worth doing so because learners who are extremely focused on pronunciation cannot communicate well in a real situation. Therefore, the teachers who teach good pronunciation should then provide more communicative skill such as implementation of speaking and listening tasks to their students in order to reach the goal of learning a foreign language.

