

## Social Interaction and self-Confidence Development of Students in Discussions-Based and Role-Play Speaking Learning

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### ABSTRACT

Speaking is an important skill in learning English, especially for students from non-English departments such as the Islamic Religious Education Study Program at the Az Zahra Tasikmalaya Islamic Boarding School. Students from Islamic boarding schools and rural areas generally face challenges in speaking English because they are not accustomed to using the language in their daily lives. This study aims to describe the role of social interaction in building student self-confidence through discussion-based and role-play speaking activities. This study uses a qualitative phenomenological approach, with research subjects consisting of third-semester students of the Islamic Religious Education Study Program at the Az Zahra Tasikmalaya Islamic Boarding School. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of learning activities, then analyzed using an interactive model that includes data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results show that discussion-based and role-play speaking learning can create an interactive, enjoyable learning atmosphere and support the growth of student self-confidence. Through social interaction in small groups, students become more confident in speaking, support one another, and feel safe when making mistakes. Role-play activities help students practice speaking naturally without pressure, while the lecturer's empathetic and supportive attitude strengthens motivation and reduces speaking anxiety.

**Keyword:** Social Interaction; Self-Confidence; Discussion and Role Play

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

English is an international language that plays a vital role in global communication, including in education, economics, social studies, and technology. English language proficiency, particularly speaking, is a crucial indicator for assessing a person's communication skills in the era of globalization. However, for students at Islamic religious universities, such as the Az Zahra Tasikmalaya Islamic Education College (STIT), learning English often presents unique challenges. These challenges lie not only in the linguistic realm but also in the psychological and social aspects that influence students' confidence in communicating in a foreign language (Kinanti et al., 2025).

The majority of third-semester Islamic Religious Education (PAI) students at STIT Az Zahra come from Islamic boarding school (pesantren) backgrounds, where the primary focus of learning is directed toward deepening religious knowledge, Arabic, and Islamic values. Although the Islamic boarding school education system has fostered a strong religious and disciplined character, the environment generally does not support the active use of English in daily communication, with the exception of modern Islamic boarding schools or those with specialized curricula or English-language conversational practices (Sopwandin, 2025). Furthermore, some students also come from rural areas relatively remote from the culture of English-language communication. This naturally creates a learning environment with minimal English language practice, so students often feel less confident when asked to speak the language.

In the context of English language learning in higher education, self-confidence is a psychological factor that significantly determines students' success in mastering speaking skills (Septia et al., 2021). Self-

confidence acts as an internal motivator that empowers students to try, express their opinions, and actively participate in oral communication activities. Conversely, students with low self-confidence tend to be reluctant to speak due to fear of making mistakes, embarrassment about their own abilities, or fear of negative evaluations from lecturers and classmates (Sutiasih et al., 2024). Therefore, building student self-confidence is a crucial aspect of speaking learning that cannot be ignored.

One learning strategy considered effective for improving students' self-confidence and speaking skills is through a discussion-based approach and role-play. Discussions encourage students to interact, exchange ideas, and express their thoughts in a relatively open atmosphere (Amalia et al., 2025). Meanwhile, role-playing provides students with the opportunity to practice using language in situational contexts that resemble real life, such as introducing themselves, ordering food, or engaging in formal dialogue (Mustika & Lestari, 2020). Through these activities, students not only practice linguistic aspects but also develop social and emotional skills, such as courage, empathy, and the ability to adapt to their conversation partners.

In an academic environment like STIT Az Zahra Tasikmalaya, the implementation of role-playing and discussion is highly relevant, given the nature of students, most of whom are unfamiliar with speaking English. These activities can be an effective means of overcoming psychological and social barriers that hinder their ability to speak. Through social interactions between students during discussions and role-playing activities, learning occurs not only cognitively but also affectively. Students learn to respect the opinions of their peers, provide mutual support, and practice building meaningful two-way communication (Kartiningsih, 2021).

According to Vygotsky's theory in regarding social interactionism, the language learning process occurs optimally through social interaction. This means that language learning is not only an individual process, but also a collaborative process involving interactions between learners and their social environment. In this context, role-playing and discussions provide rich interactive spaces, where students can practice speaking naturally in situations that mimic the real world. These interactions help students build self-confidence because they feel actively involved in meaningful and enjoyable learning activities (Syahira et al., 2024).

On the other hand, students from Islamic boarding schools often have different social structures and communication cultures than students from public schools. Communication patterns in Islamic boarding schools are typically formal and hierarchical, with the dominant use of classical Arabic or formal Indonesian in religious contexts. When they enter a more open foreign language learning environment, they may experience linguistic culture shock. In this case, social interaction in speaking lessons serves as an adaptive bridge, helping students adjust to a new communication culture that demands spontaneity, flexibility, and personal expression.

However, discussion-based and role-play learning cannot be effective without a conducive classroom atmosphere and healthy social interactions. Lecturers play a strategic role in creating a supportive learning climate, where students feel safe speaking up and are not afraid of making mistakes (Sopwandin & Rostiana, 2024). In an atmosphere full of support and empathy, students will more easily build self-confidence. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of social interactions in the classroom is key to understanding how student self-confidence is formed and developed during the learning process.

Various previous studies have shown a close relationship between social interaction and self-confidence in the context of language learning. For example, a study showed that the more intense the interaction between students in role-play activities, the higher their speaking confidence. This is due to an increased sense of community, social acceptance, and positive experiences in using English in real-life situations (Yulianeta et al., 2024). Thus, social interaction is not only a means of communication but also a medium for building students' linguistic identity and self-confidence.

In the context of STIT Az Zahra Tasikmalaya, English language learning plays a strategic role. It not only equips students with international communication skills but also serves as a bridge between Islamic values and global skills. Islamic Education students are expected not only to have a deep understanding of religious teachings but also to be able to convey these values in a cross-cultural context. To achieve this, the ability to speak English confidently is a crucial competency.

However, in reality, many students still experience difficulties when speaking in front of a class in English. Some feel awkward, embarrassed, or even reluctant to try. The contributing factors are varied, ranging from lack of language exposure, a lack of a supportive environment, to negative perceptions of one's own abilities. In situations like this, discussion activities and role-playing can be a learning tool that gradually facilitates speaking confidence (Nugroho et al., 2023). Students can practice in small groups, receive direct feedback, and receive social support from classmates.

From a pedagogical perspective, role-play and discussion-based learning provides students with space for active and experiential learning. Students are not merely passive recipients of information, but rather key actors involved in the real-life communication process. In this situation, the lecturer acts as a facilitator, guiding, motivating, and creating an environment that encourages active participation. Thus, the success of speaking learning is measured not only by the accuracy of language structure but also by the courage, fluency,

and authenticity of students' communication. This research is crucial for a deeper understanding of how social interaction can influence the development of student self-confidence in the context of speaking learning at an Islamic religious university.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological type of research, because it aims to understand in depth the subjective experiences of students in the process of learning speaking based on discussion and role play in the Islamic Religious Education Study Program of STIT Az Zahra Tasikmalaya (Sugiyono, 2023). The subjects of this study were third-semester students who had an educational background in Islamic boarding schools and came from a non-English-speaking environment. The researcher acted as the main instrument in data collection, focusing on the meaning and experiences experienced by students during the learning process. Data sources were obtained from two types, namely primary data in the form of results of in-depth interviews, observations of learning activities, and student reflections on the learning process, while secondary data were obtained from syllabus documents, RPS, lecturer notes, and other relevant academic archives.

Data collection techniques were conducted through participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and documentation (Sopwandin et al., 2025). Observations were used to observe students' social interaction patterns during discussions and role-play activities, while interviews aimed to explore students' perceptions, experiences, and feelings related to the development of their self-confidence. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which includes three stages: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. To ensure data validity, researchers applied source and method triangulation techniques, member checking, and observational persistence.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that discussion-based and role-play speaking learning in the Islamic Religious Education Study Program, third semester, STIT Az Zahra Tasikmalaya, has a positive impact on improving students' social interactions and self-confidence. From the results of observations during three meetings and interviews with 10 students, it was obtained that the classroom dynamics developed from a passive atmosphere to a more lively and interactive atmosphere. At the beginning of the lesson, only about 20% of students dared to speak spontaneously in English without being asked. However, after the role-play activities and group discussions were implemented repeatedly, this number increased to 65% of students who actively spoke voluntarily.

Furthermore, 70% of students stated that they felt more confident speaking English because they felt "less alone" when practicing with group members. The fear of making mistakes was reduced because the classroom atmosphere was perceived as safe and supportive. Sixty percent of students considered that role-playing helped them gain confidence in public speaking because the activity was enjoyable and less stressful than formal exams. However, psychological barriers were still found in a small number of students (around 20–25%) who still felt shy about speaking due to limited vocabulary and fear of peer judgment.

Other findings indicate that the lecturer's role is also a dominant factor in creating a positive classroom atmosphere. Based on interviews, 90% of students considered that the lecturer's friendly attitude, willingness to easily correct mistakes, and frequent light praise were very helpful in building their self-confidence. The lecturer also facilitated interactions using small group discussions and pair conversations so that each student had the opportunity to speak more. The role-play activities most favored by students were introducing others, asking and giving directions, and ordering food, as they were considered the most realistic to everyday life situations. The following table summarizes changes in student engagement before and after the implementation of problem-based learning, discussion and role play:

Table 1. changes in student engagement before and after the implementation

Observed Aspects	Before (%)	After (%)	Description of Changes
Students actively speak without being asked	20	65	Significant increase (more than 3 times)
Students who give verbal support to friends	15	60	There is a strengthening of social solidarity
Students who avoid speaking	50	20	Drastic reduction in fear of performing
Students who appear confident when speaking	25	70	Increased due to repeated practice

Fieldwork also demonstrated a direct link between social interaction and increased self-confidence. Students who actively interacted and received social support demonstrated speaking confidence more quickly than those who remained passive. In some groups, students who initially listened began to attempt speaking in simple sentences after receiving encouragement from their peers. This phenomenon demonstrates that positive social interaction (social support) is a key factor in building a sense of psychological safety during the learning process.

In addition to the social aspects, this study also identified unique affective and religious dimensions. Some students associated speaking activities with Islamic values, such as speaking politely, not interrupting, and using polite expressions. This suggests that the learning process at STIT Az Zahra not only develops linguistic skills but also instills Islamic moral values and character in communication.

Analysis of the results of interviews, observations, and documentation shows a strong relationship between social interaction and the formation of student self-confidence. Based on the analysis of the Miles and Huberman model which includes data reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions, four main patterns were found: (1) increased social interaction in small groups, (2) changes in lecturers' attitudes to be more empathetic and motivating, (3) decreased anxiety in speaking, and (4) increased student activity and courage in speaking.

Social interaction is a key element supporting successful speaking learning. Students who actively interact with their peers progress more quickly than those who learn individually. This aligns with Vygotsky's theory (Sayfullooh et al., 2023), regarding the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasizes that effective learning occurs through social interactions between more capable and less capable students. In the context of STIT Az Zahra Tasikmalaya, Islamic Religious Education students who were initially passive became more confident after receiving social support from their group mates. This interaction not only improved linguistic abilities but also created a sense of belonging and social security. Thus, social interaction serves as an affective bridge between language skills and self-confidence.

Role-play activities have been proven effective in reducing speech anxiety and increasing students' courage to express themselves. In role-playing, students don't feel like they're being tested, but rather acting out a specific situation, enabling them to speak more spontaneously and naturally. This approach aligns with Krashen's theory (Nurlaila, 2021) on the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which states that language learning will be more effective when emotional barriers such as fear, anxiety, and embarrassment are minimized. Role-play indirectly lowers students' affective filters, allowing language input to be more easily absorbed and processed into tangible communication output. Observations show that students who were initially hesitant are now able to speak fluently without text and are even starting to enjoy the learning process.

Group discussions in speaking classes create a collaborative space that facilitates the exchange of ideas and experiences. Within this dynamic, students play an active role as both learners and facilitators for their peers. This demonstrates the emergence of collaborative learning, which emphasizes the importance of working together to build shared knowledge. Horizontal interactions among students create an egalitarian atmosphere, where they feel freer to experiment, correct, and appreciate each other's opinions. Discussions also foster active listening skills, patience, and the ability to manage differences of opinion respectfully, essential social competencies for aspiring religious educators.

In this study, the lecturer played a crucial role as a social and emotional agent. The lecturer not only served as a language instructor but also as a classroom director. By using a supportive, appreciative, and empathetic approach, the lecturer successfully created a learning climate conducive to the growth of student self-confidence. Gentle praise, positive nonverbal expressions, and tolerance for mistakes were highly effective forms of reinforcement. This role of the lecturer aligns with the principles of Humanistic Language Teaching (Wicaksono & Roza, 2015), which places students' emotional well-being as the key to successful language learning. Thus, learning takes place not only at the cognitive level but also touches on students' affective and social domains.

Most students experience psychological barriers such as fear of making mistakes, shyness about speaking, and anxiety about others' judgments. These barriers arise from their environment—boarding schools and rural areas—which are not English-speaking. They are more accustomed to speaking classical Arabic or formal Indonesian. However, as the frequency of interaction through discussions and role-playing increases, students demonstrate significant adaptability. This change illustrates the process of self-efficacy development (Bandura, 1977), in which repeated small, successful experiences strengthen an individual's belief in their abilities. Thus, the more often students successfully speak, the greater their self-confidence.

One of the unique findings of this study is the emergence of the integration of religious values in the speaking learning process. Islamic Religious Education students interpret speaking not only as an academic activity, but also as a form of practicing Islamic values of *adab al-kalam* (speaking etiquette), such as speaking politely, not interrupting, and using good sentences. This religious value adds depth to the learning experience and reduces psychological stress, as students feel that speaking confidently is also part of spreading goodness. This suggests that language learning in Islamic religious universities can be a platform for integrating global competencies with local spirituality.

The most prominent transformation in this study was the change in students' attitudes toward speaking English. Previously passive and shy students became more active, confident, and open. This process reflects a shift from fear-based learning to confidence-based learning. Positive social interactions strengthened the students' emotional dimension, shifting from fear to courage, from doubt to confidence. This change not only impacted language skills but also students' character and overall way of thinking. This success confirms that humanistic and interactive language learning can produce sustainable affective transformation.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that social interaction plays a central role in shaping the self-confidence of students in the Islamic Religious Education Study Program at STIT Az Zahra Tasikmalaya in discussion- and role-play-based speaking learning. Through these activities, students not only acquire linguistic speaking skills but also experience affective development in the form of courage, a sense of security, and the ability to communicate naturally. The role-play and discussion approach has been proven effective in reducing speaking anxiety, especially for students from Islamic boarding school backgrounds and non-English-speaking environments. Lecturers who act as social and emotional facilitators contribute significantly to creating a supportive learning atmosphere, so that students are able to transform from fear to confidence.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that further research develop interactive learning approaches by expanding the context to include other skills such as listening or writing, and involving more respondents from different educational backgrounds and regions. Future research could also explore in more depth the influence of cultural factors, religiosity, and gender on English language self-confidence in religious universities. Furthermore, longer-term longitudinal studies are recommended to assess the sustainability of student confidence improvements over a longer period.

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