

Adapting *Muhadharah* as a Religious Activity-Based Strategy to Develop Students' Speaking Confidence and Skills

Zumrotus Sa'diyah, State University of Surabaya, Indonesia

Zaenal Abidin, State University of Surabaya, Indonesia

✉ zumrotussadiyah.23349@mhs.unesa.ac.id

Abstract: Limited opportunities for speaking practice and low self-confidence remain common concerns in elementary classrooms. This study examines the implementation of *Muhadharah*, a religious speaking activity adapted from an Islamic school program, and explores changes in students' speaking confidence and behavior. A qualitative descriptive case study was conducted with fourth-grade students over two months. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four purposively selected students and teachers, participatory observation, field notes, and documentation. The data were analyzed thematically. Before *Muhadharah*, students reported nervousness, fear of ridicule, and limited experience with extended speaking. Observations revealed limited eye contact, stiff posture, and low voice volume. During implementation, students demonstrated gradual improvements in composure, voice projection, eye contact, and willingness to participate. Follow-up interviews indicated reduced fear of mistakes and greater readiness to speak voluntarily. Teachers considered the religious elements meaningful and familiar to students. These findings suggest that regular, structured speaking routines, role rotation, and a supportive setting may help develop speaking confidence. However, the findings are context-specific because the study involved one class and relied on interviews and observations.

Keywords: *Muhadharah*; Speaking Skills; Speaking Confidence; Religious Activities; Qualitative Case Study.

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INTRODUCTION

Language proficiency is commonly described as comprising listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In Indonesia, language instruction in elementary schools aims to develop students' ability to use the language appropriately according to its communicative functions, in line with Government Regulation No. 57 of 2014 concerning the development, guidance, and protection of language and literature and the improvement of the function of the Indonesian language. Among these skills, speaking is highly needed in education and social life, yet many students hesitate to speak before an audience in formal classroom settings.

Speaking exposes students directly to the judgment of their peers. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), anxiety in language classrooms is a situation-specific phenomenon related to communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, and the scale developed in that work includes concerns such as being laughed at by other students when speaking. A meta-analysis by Teimouri et al. (2019), covering 97 reports and 19,933 participants, found a mean correlation of $r = -.36$ between second language anxiety and language achievement, with effect sizes varying across moderators such as educational level.

Evidence from young learners shows a similar concern. Research by Liu and Hong (2021), involving 709 primary and secondary school students in China, found that around one third of participants felt anxious when speaking English, and that both learner-related and teacher-related variables were identified as causes of anxiety and enjoyment. Opportunities for oral practice also appear to be constrained by school conditions. According to Valls-Ratés et al. (2022), large class sizes and extensive curricula limit the time available for oral practice and often lead students to deliver short presentations under time pressure. In their experiment with 50 high school students in Catalonia, three weekly practice sessions were followed by significantly lower self-assessed anxiety.

Previous research has provided evidence on how anxiety can be reduced in classrooms. Reviewing 40 studies published between 2007 and 2020, Toyama and Yamazaki (2021) grouped classroom interventions for foreign language anxiety into features such as student–student interactions, student–teacher interactions, self-management, and mood boosters. Existing studies have therefore focused primarily on anxiety in foreign or second language classrooms and on interventions such as

technology-supported rehearsal. In the literature reviewed for this study, research remains limited regarding routine, culturally familiar speaking activities that are embedded in school life and implemented in elementary-level Indonesian language lessons, and regarding how students and teachers describe the changes associated with such activities.

In Islamic education, *Muhadharah* is a structured public speaking activity in which students take turns delivering short speeches and other oral performances, and it is commonly practiced in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools). The *Muhadharah* program at MI Muhammadiyah 1 Plabuhanrejo (Muhammadiyah 1 Plabuhanrejo Islamic Elementary School), a *madrasah ibtidaiyah* (Islamic elementary school) that is not a *pesantren*, is a compulsory extracurricular activity in which students take roles such as host, speaker, poetry reader, and *pantun* (rhyming verse) reciter. This program was then adopted and adapted at SDN Sumberkerep (Sumberkerep State Elementary School), a public elementary school with a different educational environment and religious culture.

This study extends previous research on classroom speaking anxiety and speaking practice by examining a religion-based, routine, role-rotation activity (*Muhadharah*), adapted from an Islamic school program into a public elementary school, using a qualitative case study that combines interviews, observation, and documentation. The novelty of this study lies in its context and focus: an adapted *Muhadharah* model, implemented in a public elementary school, examined from the perspectives of students and teachers. This study aims to examine how the adapted *Muhadharah* model was implemented and how fourth-grade students and their teachers describe changes in students' speaking confidence and speaking behavior.

Three research questions guided the study: (1) What were students' speaking conditions before they participated in *Muhadharah*? (2) How did students' speaking confidence and speaking behavior change during the implementation of *Muhadharah*? (3) How did students and teachers interpret the contribution of the structure and religious setting of *Muhadharah* to these changes?

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design within a single case study. According to Sandelowski (2000), qualitative descriptive studies seek a comprehensive summary of events in the everyday terms of those events, which makes the design suitable



when a straightforward description of a phenomenon is the goal. Bradshaw et al. (2017) describe how a qualitative description approach can be employed in applied research, and this guidance informed the present design. As outlined in the overview by Lim (2025), qualitative inquiry suits questions about experiences and meanings, which fits the aim of understanding how students experienced *Muhadharah*.

The case was the implementation of the adapted *Muhadharah* program in one fourth-grade class at SDN Sumberkerep (Sumberkerep State Elementary School). Hyett et al. (2014) reviewed published qualitative case studies and emphasized that a case should be defined as something particular within a bounded context, and that the study design should be consistent with the methods reported. In line with this view, the case boundaries were set by the school, the class, and the implementation period described below.

Setting and Period

The study was conducted at SDN Sumberkerep (Sumberkerep State Elementary School), a public elementary school in Mantup District, Lamongan Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The *Muhadharah* program was implemented for two months, from June 2 to August 27, 2025.

The Adapted *Muhadharah* Program

Muhadharah was held every week as a routine school activity for fourth-grade students. Each week, students were assigned speaking roles in turn: host, prayer leader, short speech presenter, and reciter of poetry and *pantun*. Students who were not assigned as officers took the role of attentive listeners. Each session followed a fixed sequence that began with an opening, continued with a prayer and oral presentations, and ended with closing remarks. The rotation system gave all students equal opportunities to take speaking roles and to experience different forms of oral expression.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected through purposive sampling. According to Palinkas et al. (2015), purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest. From a population of approximately 25 fourth-grade students, four students (two male and two female) were

selected. Two male and two female students were included to represent the perspectives of both genders. Each student met the following criteria:

- a. Actively participated in *Muhadharah* for at least 12 full meetings.
- b. Had direct experience speaking in front of an audience during *Muhadharah*.
- c. Were willing to take part in interviews and observations.

The sample size was considered in terms of information power. According to Malterud et al. (2016), the number of participants needed depends on the aim of the study, sample specificity, use of established theory, quality of dialogue, and analysis strategy. In this study, the aim was narrow, the participants had direct experience of the activity, and the interviews were conducted in a focused manner, which supported the use of a small sample for in-depth analysis. Teachers who managed the *Muhadharah* activities were also interviewed.

Data Collection

Three techniques were used: semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Moser and Korstjens (2018a) describe sampling, data collection, and analysis as interrelated stages in qualitative research, and the three techniques were chosen to provide complementary data.

Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the four selected students and with teachers. The initial student interviews explored their experiences of speaking in class prior to *Muhadharah*, and follow-up interviews with the same four students explored perceived changes after regular participation.

Participatory observation. The researcher observed students as they spoke in front of their peers during classroom activities and *Muhadharah* sessions, while the main role remained that of an observer. Field notes recorded posture, voice, eye contact, signs of anxiety, participation, and interaction with the audience.

Documentation. Documentation consisted of video recordings, photographs of activities, and documents related to *Muhadharah*, such as activity schedules and lecture materials. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is often used together with other qualitative methods as a means of triangulation.

Triangulation was applied across data sources (students and teachers) and across methods. According to Carter et al. (2014), triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon,

and it has also been viewed as a strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources. Santos et al. (2020) described the use of multiple triangulations as a validation strategy in a qualitative study, which supports the combined use of sources and methods adopted here.

Data Analysis

Data from interviews, observation, and documentation were analyzed using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to identifying patterns in qualitative data. The analysis proceeded in four steps. First, interviews and observation notes were transcribed and read repeatedly. Second, relevant segments were coded, with coding organized around self-confidence, fluency in speaking, and interaction with the audience. Third, similar codes were grouped into broader themes, and relationships among themes were examined. Fourth, the themes were linked to the research questions and interpreted in relation to relevant literature. Nowell et al. (2017) emphasize that analytic procedures should be recorded and disclosed in enough detail for readers to judge whether the process is credible, and the steps above are reported with that purpose.

Overview of the Research Procedures

Figure 1 presents an overview of the research procedures, including the research design, implementation of the adapted *Muhadharah* program, participant selection, data collection, and thematic analysis. The figure summarizes the methodological sequence and the relationships among the main components of the study, providing a concise representation of how the research was conducted within the bounded case.

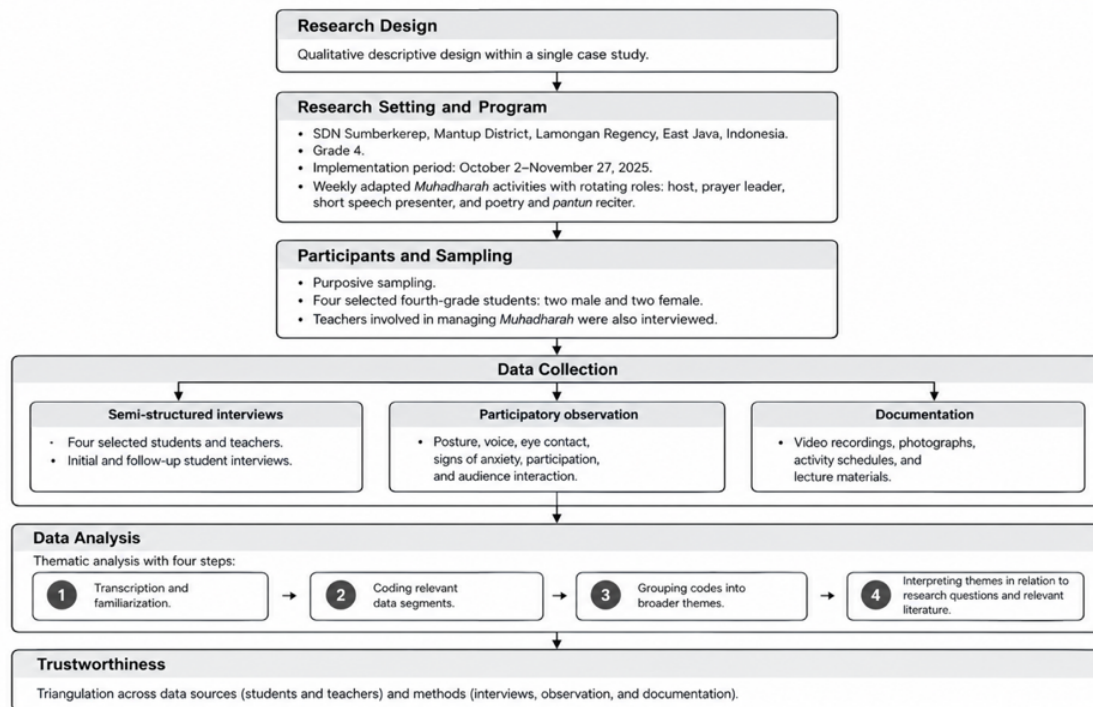


Figure 1. Overview of the Research Procedures

The figure summarizes the qualitative descriptive case study design, the implementation of the adapted *Muhadharah* program, purposive participant selection, data collection through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation, and thematic analysis. The diagram represents the research procedures described in the Method section.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was addressed mainly through triangulation of data sources and methods. According to Moser and Korstjens (2018b), trustworthiness in qualitative research is discussed in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The convergence of interview and observation data supports credibility, and the description of the setting, participants, and procedures is intended to help readers judge transferability.

RESULTS

To explore students' initial speaking conditions before the implementation of *Muhadharah*, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four fourth-grade students consisting of two male and two female students. The interviews aimed to capture students' perceptions, feelings, and experiences related to speaking activities in the

classroom. Interview data revealed that students generally experienced anxiety and low confidence when asked to speak in front of the class. One male student (Student A) stated that he often felt nervous and afraid of making mistakes when speaking publicly. He explained that speaking in front of many classmates made him uncomfortable because he worried about being laughed at if he spoke incorrectly. This feeling caused him to speak softly and avoid eye contact during classroom speaking activities.

"I feel nervous when I have to speak in front of the class. I'm afraid my friends will laugh if I make a mistake, so I usually speak quietly." (Student A, male)

Similarly, another male student (Student B) expressed that he lacked confidence due to limited speaking practice. He mentioned that he rarely spoke unless directly asked by the teacher and preferred to remain silent during discussions. According to him, speaking activities in class were usually brief and did not allow him to practice speaking at length.

"I usually don't talk unless the teacher asks me. I'm not used to speaking for a long time in front of the class." (Student B, male)

Female students also shared comparable experiences. One female student (Student C) stated that she often felt shy and forgot what to say when standing in front of her classmates. She explained that nervousness made her speech unclear and caused her to pause frequently. This condition led her to avoid volunteering for speaking tasks.

"When I stand in front of the class, I feel shy and suddenly forget what I want to say. My voice becomes small." (Student C, female)

Another female student (Student D) reported that she felt uncomfortable speaking because she lacked confidence in her pronunciation and feared making errors. She explained that this fear made her hesitant to speak loudly and express her ideas freely.

"I'm afraid my pronunciation is wrong, so I don't like speaking in front of many people." (Student D, female)

Overall, the interview data shows that students' initial difficulty in speaking is influenced by psychological factors such as fear of making mistakes, embarrassment, and lack of confidence, as well as limited opportunities for structured speaking practice. Both male and female students expressed similar concerns, indicating that speaking anxiety is

a common experience among students prior to the implementation of *Muhadharah*. These findings provide qualitative support for the observational data and serve as a basis for analyzing changes in students' speaking development after the adaptation of the *Muhadharah* model.

Triangulation of Interview and Observational Data

The interview findings were consistent with the results of classroom observations conducted prior to the implementation of *Muhadharah*, indicating strong data triangulation. Students' expressions of nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and reluctance to speak were clearly reflected in observable classroom behavior. During preliminary speaking activities, students often avoided eye contact, maintained a stiff posture, and spoke in a low voice, which was consistent with the students' statements in the interviews describing feelings of anxiety and lack of confidence. Further field notes indicate that students rarely speak voluntarily and often require direct instruction from the teacher to participate in oral activities. This behavior reinforces interview data in which students report being unfamiliar with long speaking tasks and preferring to remain silent unless explicitly called upon. In addition, frequent pauses, unclear articulation, and dependence on teacher cues observed during class activities support students' claims about forgetting what to say and feeling unsure about pronunciation.

The convergence of interview data from male and female students with the findings of the observation reinforces the credibility of the results. The consistency between what students expressed verbally during interviews and how they behaved during classroom observations confirms that students' initial speaking difficulties were influenced by psychological factors, such as fear and shyness, as well as limited exposure to structured speaking practices. This triangulation establishes a reliable basis for analyzing changes in students' speaking skills after the implementation of the *Muhadharah* model.

Changes in Students' Speaking Confidence During *Muhadharah* Activities

Observational data collected during the implementation of *Muhadharah* showed a gradual but consistent increase in students' confidence when speaking. As students became accustomed to the structure and sequence of activities, they appeared more relaxed when performing in front of their classmates. Initial signs of anxiety, such as stiff posture and avoiding eye contact, decreased over time. Students exhibited more stable posture, clearer

voice projection, and increased eye contact during oral presentations. Some students who were initially reluctant to participate began to show a willingness to participate wholeheartedly. These observational findings were reinforced by interview data obtained during the implementation process. Students reported feeling more comfortable and confident because *Muhadharah* was conducted regularly and followed a predictable routine. One student explained that repeated practice made speaking feel less intimidating and more familiar, allowing them to speak with more confidence in front of their classmates.

Further interviews with teachers supported these findings. Teachers reported that repeated exposure to *Muhadharah* activities gradually reduced students' anxiety about speaking and shifted their perception of speaking from a stressful task to a routine classroom activity. According to the teachers, students became more confident standing in front of the class and showed fewer signs of nervousness compared to their initial behavior. The integration of religious elements into *Muhadharah* was also considered to contribute to students' comfort, as the activity felt meaningful and familiar to them. The convergence of observation and interview data shows that consistency, routine, and a supportive learning environment play an important role in strengthening students' confidence in speaking. These findings indicate that *Muhadharah* not only provides an opportunity to practice speaking but also a psychologically safe space that encourages students to gradually overcome anxiety and build confidence in oral communication.

Students' Speaking Conditions After the Implementation of *Muhadharah*

To examine changes in students' speaking conditions after the implementation of *Muhadharah*, follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with the same four students who participated in the initial interviews. The interviews focused on students' experiences, feelings, and perceived changes related to speaking activities following their participation in regular *Muhadharah* sessions.

Interview results indicate a positive shift in students' perceptions toward speaking in front of the class. One male student (Student A) reported feeling more confident and less afraid of making mistakes. He stated that frequent practice during *Muhadharah* made him more accustomed to speaking publicly and helped him speak with a louder and clearer voice.

“Now I feel more confident because I often practice speaking during Muhadharah. I’m not as afraid of making mistakes as before.” (Student A, male)

Another male student (Student B) explained that he became more willing to participate in speaking activities and no longer waited to be appointed by the teacher. He mentioned that the structured routine of *Muhadharah* helped him prepare mentally before speaking.

“I feel braver now. Sometimes I want to try speaking without waiting for the teacher to choose me.” (Student B, male)

Female students also expressed noticeable improvements. One female student (Student C) stated that she felt calmer when speaking in front of her classmates and was able to remember what she wanted to say more clearly. She explained that practicing regularly helped her reduce nervousness.

“I’m not as shy as before. I can speak more calmly and remember my words better.” (Student C, female)

Similarly, another female student (Student D) reported increased confidence in her pronunciation and speaking volume. She noted that repeated speaking opportunities helped her feel more comfortable expressing her ideas aloud.

“I’m not too worried about my pronunciation anymore. I can speak louder and more clearly now.” (Student D, female).

A Conceptual Representation of Speaking Confidence Development Through *Muhadharah*

The findings from interviews, classroom observations, and documentation provide a conceptual representation of how students’ speaking confidence developed during the implementation of *Muhadharah*. Three interconnected features were identified in the data: repeated and predictable speaking practice, structured role rotation, and a familiar and supportive setting. These features were accompanied by changes in students’ reported feelings and observable speaking behaviors.

Repeated participation provided students with regular opportunities to become familiar with speaking in front of their classmates. The predictable sequence of activities helped students anticipate their speaking responsibilities, while role rotation allowed them to experience different forms of oral expression. Teachers also described the

religious elements of *Muhadharah* as meaningful and familiar to students, which appeared to contribute to their comfort during the activities.

These features were associated with a gradual shift in students' speaking experiences. Before implementation, students reported nervousness, fear of making mistakes, embarrassment, and limited experience with extended speaking. During and after implementation, interviews and observations indicated greater composure, clearer voice projection, increased eye contact, and a greater willingness to participate. Some students also reported becoming more willing to speak without waiting for the teacher to appoint them.

Figure 2 presents this conceptual representation by connecting the main features of the adapted *Muhadharah* activity with the changes reported by students and observed during the study. The figure summarizes patterns identified in this single-class case study rather than establishing a causal model. The findings therefore suggest that regular practice, structured participation, and a familiar setting may provide supportive conditions for developing speaking confidence in elementary school students.

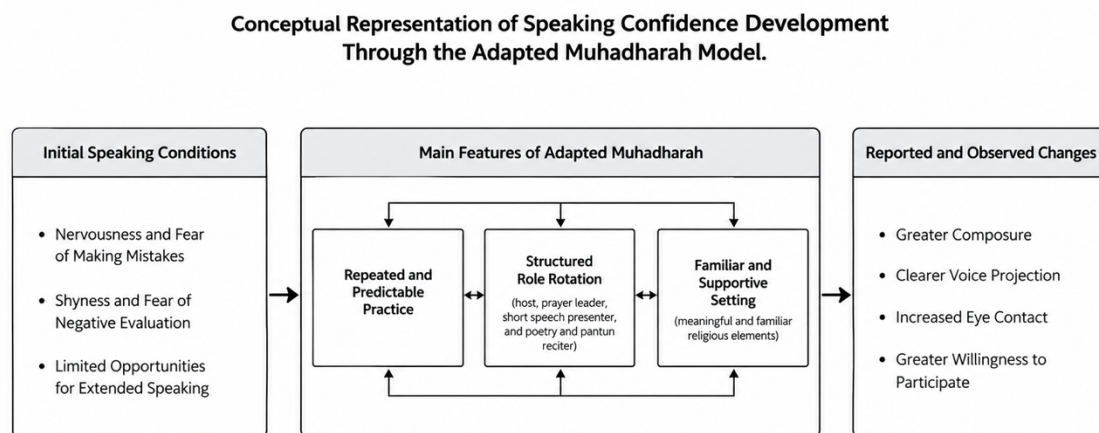


Figure 2. Conceptual Representation of Speaking Confidence Development Through the Adapted *Muhadharah* Model

The figure summarizes the relationships between the main features of *Muhadharah*, students' initial speaking difficulties, and the changes in speaking confidence and behavior identified through interviews and classroom observations. The arrows represent conceptual relationships derived from the qualitative findings and do not indicate statistically tested causal effects.

DISCUSSION

This study examined how an adapted *Muhadharah* model was implemented in a public elementary school and how students and teachers described changes in students' speaking confidence and behavior. The findings indicate that students' accounts of fear, shyness, and limited practice before *Muhadharah* were followed, during and after implementation, by accounts and observations of greater composure and willingness to speak. The discussion interprets this pattern through three themes: repeated and predictable practice, structured roles and participation, and a familiar and supportive setting.

Repeated and Predictable Practice in Relation to Speaking Anxiety

The main finding is that students who initially feared being laughed at, forgot what to say, or worried about pronunciation later reported feeling calmer and less afraid of mistakes, and observers recorded a more stable posture, clearer voice projection, and more eye contact. A plausible explanation is that weekly sessions with a fixed sequence made speaking a familiar event with known expectations, and teachers described this shift from a stressful task to a routine activity. The peer audience also remained the same across sessions, so the feared evaluation by classmates could become less unfamiliar over time.

This pattern relates to earlier work on language classroom anxiety. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), fear of negative evaluation is a central component of such anxiety, and the concern voiced by Student A about being laughed at corresponds to this component. The relevance of reducing anxiety is supported by the meta-analysis of Teimouri et al. (2019), which reported a negative mean correlation between second language anxiety and achievement. Research by Liu and Hong (2021) found that a notable share of young learners felt anxious when speaking English, so the concerns reported here are not specific to this class. Evidence on practice effects also shows a comparable direction. In the experiment by Valls-Ratés et al. (2022), self-assessed anxiety was significantly lower after three weekly practice sessions in both conditions, including the condition in which students practiced alone in a classroom.

The findings should be interpreted in relation to differences between these studies and the present one. Valls-Ratés et al. (2022) worked with high school students, used a self-rated anxiety scale, and relied on a pre-post experimental design, while the present study involved fourth-grade students, interviews and observation, and a routine embedded in school life. The anxiety literature reviewed here also concerns foreign or second

language learning, whereas this study took place in Indonesian language lessons. These differences may be associated with variation in how anxiety is expressed and reduced. A reasonable interpretation is that regular, low-stakes exposure within a familiar peer group may help students gradually reduce anxiety about speaking, although the present design cannot quantify the size of this change or separate the contribution of routine from other influences. For practice, teachers could schedule short and regular speaking routines with predictable sequences, so that students can anticipate what is expected of them.

Structured Roles and Participation

A second finding is that rotating roles (host, prayer leader, speaker, and reciter of poetry and *pantun*) accompanied growing participation. Student B described a structured routine that helped him prepare mentally, and he reported wanting to speak without waiting for the teacher to choose him. One explanation is that a clear role defines the task, gives students time to prepare, and ensures that every student takes a turn, which removes the uncertainty of being called on unexpectedly.

This interpretation can be connected to the review by Morris (2020), who identified themes in experiential learning that include learners being involved as active participants, knowledge being situated in place and time, novel experiences involving risk, and critical reflection supporting meaningful learning. The role rotation in *Muhadharah* corresponds to the first three themes, since students actively perform, in a specific setting, tasks that carry some social risk. The fourth theme, reflection, was not examined directly in this study, so the idea that students reflect on earlier performances remains a hypothesis for future research, for example through reflective journals or recorded performances. Research by Peng and Woodrow (2010) modeled willingness to communicate in the classroom in relation to factors such as classroom environment, learner beliefs, motivation, and communication confidence in Chinese university English classes. The present findings point in a similar direction for willingness to speak, yet the differences in age, language, and educational level mean that the comparison should be treated as indicative. Student B's account and the observed participation of initially reluctant students may signal a broader readiness to speak in class, but participation outside *Muhadharah* sessions was not systematically documented, and this possibility needs separate investigation. For practice, schools could use role rotation with gradually

increasing demands, moving from short opening remarks to longer speeches, and could record sessions so that students and teachers can review them together.

A Familiar and Supportive Setting

A third finding is that teachers regarded the religious elements of *Muhadharah* as contributing to students' comfort because the activity felt meaningful and familiar. A possible explanation is that prayer and recitation are content that students already know, so part of the speaking task carries less demand for new language and ideas. Teacher support and a friendly atmosphere may also have contributed, and these factors were present together with the religious content in this case.

Previous studies offer relevant but indirect evidence. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) examined enjoyment and anxiety together in foreign language classrooms, which draws attention to positive emotions as a counterpart to anxiety. Dewaele et al. (2018) examined how teacher and learner variables relate to enjoyment and anxiety, and research by Liu and Hong (2021) with young learners identified teacher-related variables among the causes of both emotions. The review by Toyama and Yamazaki (2021) grouped student–teacher and student–student interactions among the features of anxiety-reducing classroom interventions. These studies were conducted in foreign language classes and did not focus on religion-based activities, so the specific role of religious content cannot be inferred from them. Different patterns may be found in schools whose religious composition and culture differ from the school studied here, and the present data from one class do not show how the activity is experienced in such settings. The findings are therefore best read as showing that familiarity and meaningfulness, as perceived by teachers, accompanied students' comfort. For practice, language teachers could collaborate with religious education teachers to select speaking content that students find familiar, and could monitor how all students experience such activities.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations frame these interpretations. The study involved four students from one class in one school over about two months, and the accounts are based on interviews and observation without a quantitative baseline of anxiety or speaking performance. The presence of the researcher during participatory observation may have influenced students' behavior. Future studies could use longer time frames, include comparison classes,

combine interviews with validated anxiety measures and rated recordings of speeches, and examine whether changes appear in other lessons.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine how an adapted *Muhadharah* model was implemented in a public elementary school and how fourth-grade students and their teachers described changes in speaking confidence and behavior. Before *Muhadharah*, students described nervousness, fear of being laughed at, and limited practice, and these accounts matched classroom observations. During and after implementation, observations and interviews indicated more composure, clearer voice projection, more eye contact, and greater willingness to speak, and teachers described the religious elements as meaningful and familiar to students.

These findings suggest that a regular, structured, and familiar speaking routine, with rotating roles and a supportive peer audience, can provide a useful setting for developing speaking confidence in elementary Indonesian language lessons. Because the evidence comes from one class and from self-reported and observed accounts, the conclusions are limited to this context. Further research with longer observation periods, comparison groups, and measures of anxiety and speaking performance is needed to test whether and how *Muhadharah* contributes to speaking development in other schools.

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