



CONTEXTUAL ROLE-PLAY TO IMPROVE ESP SPEAKING IN ISLAMIC ECONOMICS EDUCATION

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Abstract : This study aims to explore the effectiveness of contextual role-play strategies in improving students' speaking skills in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes. The participants were 34 fourth-semester students from the Islamic Economics and Islamic Banking Study Programs at the Institut Agama Islam Sunan Kalijogo Malang. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach through two learning cycles: the first cycle focused on asking and responding to requests, and the second cycle focused on giving opinions in an Islamic finance context. Data were collected through observation, written reflections, and semi-structured interviews. The results indicated that contextual role-play effectively enhanced students' confidence, strengthened their mastery of Islamic finance vocabulary, and increased active participation in oral communication. Students responded positively to this method, as they found it relevant, enjoyable, and reflective of real professional situations. These findings are supported by previous studies that highlight the importance of contextualization in ESP-based speaking instruction.

Keywords : Role-play; English for Specific Purposes; Speaking Skills; Contextual

Abstrak : Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi efektivitas strategi contextual role-play dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara mahasiswa pada kelas English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Partisipan dalam penelitian ini adalah 34 mahasiswa semester empat dari Program Studi Ekonomi Islam dan Perbankan Syariah di Institut Agama Islam Sunan Kalijogo Malang. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif melalui dua siklus pembelajaran: siklus pertama berfokus pada keterampilan bertanya dan merespons permintaan, sedangkan siklus kedua berfokus pada keterampilan menyampaikan pendapat dalam konteks keuangan syariah. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, refleksi tertulis, dan wawancara semi-terstruktur. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa contextual role-play secara efektif meningkatkan kepercayaan diri mahasiswa, memperkuat penguasaan kosakata keuangan syariah, serta meningkatkan partisipasi aktif dalam komunikasi lisan. Mahasiswa memberikan respons positif terhadap metode ini karena dianggap relevan, menyenangkan, dan mencerminkan situasi profesional yang nyata. Temuan ini didukung oleh penelitian-penelitian sebelumnya yang menekankan pentingnya kontekstualisasi dalam pembelajaran berbicara berbasis ESP.

Kata Kunci : Bermain Peran; Bahasa Inggris untuk Tujuan Tertentu; Keterampilan Berbicara; Kontekstual

INTRODUCTION

The Speaking is one of the key skills in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). However, in practice, it remains a major challenge, particularly for students from non-language majors such as Islamic Economics and Islamic Banking. A total of 20 students from the Islamic Economics Study Program and 14 students from the Islamic Banking Study Program at the Institut Agama Islam Sunan Kalijogo Malang have shown difficulties in expressing their ideas in English, especially when required to speak in professional contexts. This challenge is influenced by their academic backgrounds, which are more focused on Islamic and economic studies than on foreign language acquisition.

Several studies have been conducted to address speaking difficulties using role-play strategies. Susanti (2021) found that role-play increased students' confidence in EFL classrooms at the junior high school level. Rahmawati and Setiawan (2020) showed that role-play was effective for practicing everyday communication at the senior high school level, although it did not yet address reflective or performance-based assessment. Meanwhile, Nugroho (2022) investigated role-play implementation at the tertiary level for English Education students and concluded that the method enhanced active participation, though it remained general and did not specifically target English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for non-language students.

Recent ESP literature emphasizes the importance of using relevant disciplinary contexts to support meaningful language learning. Chen and Wang (2021) asserted that contextual role-play can help students use language that is appropriate for their field of expertise. Similarly, Putri and Arifin (2021) stated that speaking instruction is more effective when linked to real professional situations. Therefore, integrating sharia academic content into role-play is crucial, so students not only learn language structures but also develop the ability to communicate Islamic economic concepts professionally in English.

Although role-play has been widely implemented at various educational levels, there is still a gap in its application within Islamic-based ESP classrooms. Few studies have specifically applied role-play in the context of Islamic Economics and Islamic Banking programs. Furthermore, no structured model has yet combined role-play with student reflection and peer assessment to holistically evaluate speaking progress. This study seeks to fill that gap, particularly in the development of English teaching strategies in Islamic college education that are relevant to students' professional contexts.

This study aims to examine the implementation of contextual role-play strategies as a medium to improve the speaking skills of fourth-semester students from the Islamic Economics and Islamic Banking programs at IAI Sunan Kalijogo Malang. The developed role-play scenarios simulate relevant professional communication situations, such as Islamic bank customer service, sharia-based job interviews, and Islamic financial consultations. The study also incorporates written reflection and peer assessment as part of the evaluation process, allowing students to understand their strengths and weaknesses in speaking. This model is expected to contribute to the development of practice-based English teaching strategies for non-language students in Islamic college education institutions.

METHOD

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach through a case study method. This approach was chosen as it is suitable for in-depth exploration of the implementation process of role-play strategies in ESP-based English learning, especially among non-language

students. The aim was to investigate the experiences, responses, and impacts of using contextual role-play in developing students' speaking skills within a sharia academic environment.

The research focused on the implementation of role-play activities during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year at Institut Agama Islam Sunan Kalijogo Malang. The role-play activities were designed based on authentic communication scenarios relevant to the sharia field, such as interactions in Islamic bank services, Islamic job interviews, and halal business consultations. The learning process was conducted over two main cycles (four sessions), with each cycle presenting a different communication theme supported by expressions and contextual vocabulary, it could be shown in the table 1.

Table 1. Contextual Role-Play Implementation

Date	Session	Learning Activity	Language Focus	Remarks
February 11, 2025	1	Introduction to Contextual Role-Play and Sharia ESP Framework	Vocabulary building (Sharia terminology), Pronunciation	Lecturer explains the purpose, gives example dialogues, and forms student pairs/groups
February 18, 2025	2	Role-Play Practice Cycle 1: Customer Service in a Sharia Bank	Speaking (fluency), Expressions for customer service	Students practice in pairs, followed by direct feedback
February 25, 2025	3	Role-Play Practice Cycle 2: Consultation on Sharia Financial Products	Asking & giving advice, Vocabulary, Pronunciation	Students create and perform more complex scenarios
March 4, 2025	4	Reflection & Assessment: Peer Evaluation and Written Reflection	Self-reflection, Assessment language	Students assess each other and write reflections on the learning experience

All procedures followed ethical research principles, such as informed consent, protection of participant identity, and voluntary participation. Through this process, students were actively engaged in using contextual English aligned with their academic disciplines.

Participants and Data Collection

The study involved 34 fourth-semester students from two study programs: 20 from Islamic Economics and 14 from Islamic Banking. Participants were selected purposively, considering active participation in ESP English classes, attendance in role-play activities, and willingness to provide data through written reflections and interviews. Students who missed more than two role-play sessions or failed to submit reflections were excluded from the main analysis to ensure data validity.

Data were collected through various techniques: direct observation during role-play sessions, audio/video documentation, peer assessment rubrics, written reflections, and semi-structured interviews with selected students from both programs. Each group performed in front of the class and was assessed by their peers using a simple rubric that included

pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and interaction. The students' reflections provided insights into their personal experiences and enriched the qualitative data in this study.

Thematic analysis was used in three stages: (1) data reduction, (2) data presentation in narrative and visual form (charts) and (3) drawing conclusions based on emerging patterns and key findings. The analysis focused on: improvement in speaking confidence, mastery of Islamic economic and Banking related vocabulary, and students' attitudes and responses to the role-play strategy. This analytical process aimed to provide a comprehensive depiction of how role-play contributed to students' oral skills in the context of contextual and applicable ESP learning.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The result section is provided before the discussion section. Each section stands alone as a subtitle.

1. Result

This study demonstrates that the implementation of contextual role-play based on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) significantly improved the speaking skills of students in the Islamic Economics and Islamic Banking programs. Thematically designed role-play activities, aligned with students' academic fields, not only enhanced their speaking fluency but also enriched their mastery of technical vocabulary, pronunciation, and content relevance.

The score improvement between Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 – ranging from an average of 12 to 14 points across each aspect – serves as a clear indicator of the model's success. These findings reinforce the idea that structured, practice-based learning yields a positive impact on students' oral communication skills in both academic and professional contexts, as illustrated in Figure 1.

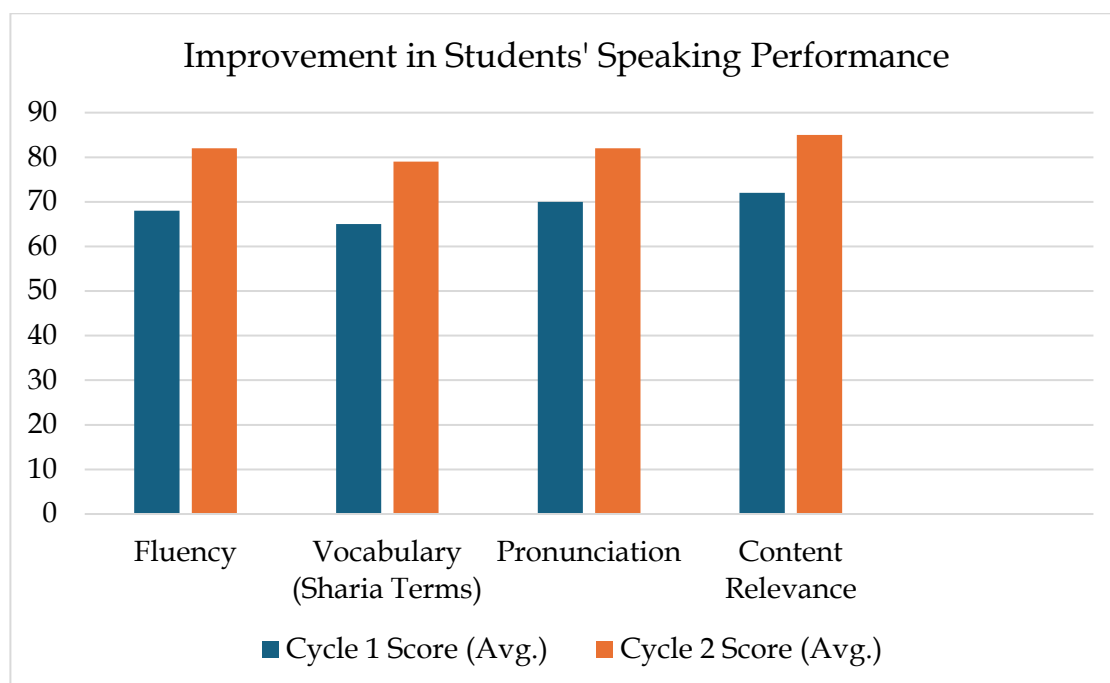


Figure 1: Improvement in students' speaking performance from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2.

As illustrated in Figure 1, all assessed aspects—fluency, vocabulary (Sharia terms), pronunciation, and content relevance showed noticeable improvements. The most significant gains were observed in vocabulary and content relevance, where average scores increased by approximately 14 points. These findings confirm that contextualized, ESP-based role-play activities not only supported general speaking fluency but also equipped learners with relevant terminology and discourse patterns appropriate for their fields of study.

In addition to these quantitative improvements, qualitative data gathered through interviews with six student participants provided deeper insights into the learning process. Several students expressed that the role-play activities helped them overcome their anxiety and build real-world communication skills. For example, one participant from the Islamic Banking program shared, *“I used to be afraid of speaking English, especially in front of the class. But when I acted as a customer service officer, it felt more like doing a real job than just learning, so I became more confident.”*

Another added, *“Now I understand how to explain Islamic banking terms like mudharabah and murabahah in English. That’s very useful for my future.”* A student from the Islamic Economics group reflected, *“We are not only learning English, but also learning how to deal with customers in Islamic finance. That makes the lesson more interesting and practical.”*

Another participant stated, *“It was easier to speak because we had prepared based on the situation, so I felt ready.”* These comments demonstrate that the role-play method improved not only language use, but also learner motivation, emotional involvement, and professional identity.

2. Discussion

This The findings above are consistent with previous studies on the effectiveness of role-play in EFL contexts. Susanti (2021) found that role-play builds learners’ speaking confidence, while Ladousse (2004) emphasized that role-play helps students overcome shyness when speaking a foreign language. However, unlike earlier studies that were mostly conducted at the high school level or in language classrooms, this research focuses on ESP within non-language academic programs – namely, Islamic Economics and Islamic Banking. Thus, the present study broadens the understanding that role-play is not only effective in general language learning but can also address the specific communicative needs of specialized disciplines.

The success of contextual role-play in ESP contexts is strongly influenced by the relevance of the topic and students’ emotional engagement with the material. When students act as professionals in the Islamic finance world, they are not merely learning the language but are also internalizing the values and terminology of their field. As one participant reflected, *“When I played the role of a finance advisor, I felt like I was already working in a bank. It wasn’t just speaking practice – it felt real.”* Another added, *“Because the topic was related to our major, I became more serious in preparing the dialogue. I wanted to sound professional, not just speak English.”*

These reflections illustrate how contextual role-play motivated students to engage deeply with both the language and the professional content. This aligns with Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of learning (1978), which emphasizes that language acquisition is more effective within meaningful social contexts. The use of scenarios that mimic real work

situations such as bank-customer interactions – allowed learners to experience language use in authentic ways. As one student put it, “It was different from regular English class. I felt like I was doing internship simulation, not just studying.” These comments confirm that contextual role-play does not merely build linguistic competence but also supports the development of professional identity and emotional connection to the task.

Despite the positive outcomes, not all students experienced the same level of improvement. Some who suffered from speaking anxiety or lacked confidence continued to face challenges, although these were less severe than in conventional teaching methods. This suggests that the role-play strategy still requires emotional support and adaptive scaffolding. This finding aligns with Nurhayati’s (2020) study, which emphasized that task-based learning should be accompanied by affective support and reflective structures to ensure that all learners benefit. Therefore, the use of peer assessment rubrics and written reflections became essential strategies for helping students track their progress and overcome personal barriers.

Academically, this study contributes significantly to the development of ESP-based English teaching methods in Islamic higher education settings. It complements prior studies (Putri & Arifin, 2021; Chen & Wang, 2021) that recommend the integration of professional contexts into language instruction to enhance student engagement and motivation. Moreover, these findings also support the principles of transformative education, which combine cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects, as discussed by Sa’adah & Kusuma (2023). By connecting language learning to Islamic finance communication practices, this study fosters not only linguistic competence but also strengthens students’ professional identity and Islamic values.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the use of contextually designed role-play strategies in English language instruction for students of Islamic Economics and Islamic Banking significantly enhances their speaking skills. Improvements were observed in aspects such as fluency, vocabulary (especially sharia-related terminology), pronunciation, and content relevance. Role-based activities rooted in professional Islamic contexts made students more confident, active, and capable of integrating their Islamic knowledge with language skills. These findings serve as concrete evidence that context-based approaches can effectively bridge the gap between academic theory and professional communication practice. Although the results are highly encouraging, this study has several limitations. First, the number of participants was limited to a single institution and two study programs, which means the findings should be generalized with caution. Second, the assessment of effectiveness focused only on speaking skills, without exploring the impact on other skills such as writing or listening. Furthermore, the relatively short duration of the study (two cycles over four sessions) limited the potential for long-term skill development. Therefore, further research with a broader scope and longer duration is highly recommended.

Based on these findings, it is suggested that English lecturers in non-language study programs implement contextual role-play strategies as part of their ESP instruction. Roles and scenarios should be tailored to the students’ respective fields of study to foster stronger engagement and motivation. It is also essential to include assessment rubrics and written reflections to help students track their progress independently. Finally, collaboration between ESP instructors and subject-matter lecturers can enrich the scenarios and deepen the learning experience.

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