

## THE POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT: STUDENTS' SELF CONFIDENCE IN ENGLISH COMMUNICATION AT THE EMPATHY STAGE OF THE DESIGN THINKING METHOD

**Nasywa Nathania, Ummi Khaerati Syam, Ismail Sangkala**

English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,  
Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, Makassar, Indonesia

*nasywa@bg.unismuhmakassar.ac.id*

**Abstract:** This study investigates the influence of the Empathy stage in the Design Thinking method on students' self-confidence in English communication during real-life interactions with foreign tourists in the Thematic Community Service Program in Tana Toraja. Using a Convergent Parallel Mixed-Methods Design, data were gathered through the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE), the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24), and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative analysis revealed a significant negative correlation ( $r = -0.758, p = 0.018$ ) between self-esteem and communication apprehension, indicating that higher self-confidence is associated with lower anxiety. Qualitative findings showed that students' confidence was shaped by vocabulary mastery, prior speaking experience, peer support, and coping strategies such as humor and gesture use. The Thematic Community Service environment, enriched by authentic communication with foreign tourists, provided meaningful opportunities to develop linguistic competence, intercultural understanding, and adaptive communication skills. The Empathy stage, emphasizing observation and interviews through the POEMS framework, enabled students to engage in human-centered communication, overcome fear of mistakes, and build greater self-assurance. This research highlights the value of experiential, context-based learning in enhancing students' English-speaking confidence, suggesting that integrating Design Thinking into higher education can effectively bridge the gap between language proficiency and communicative competence.

**Keywords:** Self-Confidence, English Communication, Empathy Stage, Design Thinking, Thematic KKN, Cross-Cultural Communication.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, communication skills play a crucial role as they serve as a fundamental tool for international interaction, business, and personal growth. The ability to communicate effectively is not only an important soft skill but also a necessity for achieving professional success and fostering cultural integration (Rifiyanti et al, 2025). As a global language, English enables individuals from various backgrounds to interact and exchange ideas. However, in the field of education, many students still struggle with confidence when using English, particularly in real life situations such as conversing with native speakers. One of the key psychological aspects influencing students' ability to communicate in English is selfconfidence (Sumanto et al, 2023).

Self-confidence is the belief in one's own abilities that allows an individual to act without excessive anxiety. Self-confidence is necessary for communication to be more effective. It enables individuals to interact warmly and politely with others and take responsibility for their actions (Destiawati et al, 2024). However, several factors contribute to the lack of confidence in speaking English, including limited vocabulary, lack of speaking experience, and foreign language anxiety, such as feelings of embarrassment, nervousness, and fear of making mistakes (Nety, 2020). This lack of confidence significantly affects the effectiveness of interactions, particularly in situations requiring English proficiency. For instance, in professional or academic

settings, students' ability to fully participate in discussions or negotiations may be hindered by their fear of making mistakes or being misunderstood (Hasan, 2022). Given these challenges, it is crucial to address this issue by providing learners with opportunities to develop their speaking skills in a supportive environment where they can practice without fear of judgment.

This research aimed to identify the factors that influence students' confidence in communicating in English with native speakers. According to Albert Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, understanding the factors that affect confidence allows individuals to develop effective strategies for enhancing their self-assurance in various situations. In line with this, Fitri et al. (2018) emphasized that recognizing these factors can help individuals identify areas for improvement and design measures that support the development of their confidence in communication.

Although numerous studies highlight the importance of confidence in English communication, there remains a gap in understanding how experiential learning strategies can help students overcome this challenge. Traditional language learning approaches tend to focus on technical aspects such as grammar and vocabulary, yet they often fail to provide students with real-world interaction opportunities that foster confidence (Aryal, 2024). Without sufficient practical exposure, students may struggle to apply their language skills in authentic communication settings, particularly when engaging with native speakers or foreign tourists. Thus, an alternative method is needed, one that not only teaches language proficiency but also encourages students to develop communication skills through real-world practice.

Compared to traditional language learning methods that focus heavily on grammatical accuracy, the design thinking method fosters experiential learning by immersing students in real-life situations. This method enables learners to develop communication skills holistically, incorporating both linguistic competence and socio-cultural awareness (Swallow, 2024). Design Thinking is a way to solve problems by focusing on learning what users need and how they experience things. According to Fitri (2023), Design Thinking is based on the principles of user-centered research, which focuses on deeply understanding user needs and creating effective solutions for them. The Design Thinking method has four main stages, which are *sense and sensibility, empathy, ideation, and prototyping*. The empathy stage is particularly crucial, as it requires deep understanding through active listening, keen observation, and emotional awareness. The empathy stage consists of two main methods: observation and interviews. Observations are conducted using the POEMS framework (*People, Objects, Environment, Messages, and Services*). Meanwhile, interviews involve open-ended questions directed at stakeholders in tourist locations, including foreign tourists. After data collection, researchers will analyze the findings through transcription and clustering.

The Empathy stage provides students with opportunities to observe and interact directly with native English speakers, allowing them to experience the challenges and benefits of cross-cultural communication. According to Dzhubanova (2024), exposure to different cultures significantly enhances language acquisition, particularly in vocabulary expansion, pronunciation, and understanding cultural nuances. This process not only improves their language skills but also boosts their confidence in speaking English, helping them overcome their fears and uncertainties. These interactions help students understand the role of context, intonation, and non-verbal cues, thereby strengthening their confidence in cross-cultural communication.

This research focused on understanding the self-confidence and communication apprehension experienced by students when speaking English with native speakers during their participation in the Thematic Community Service Program in Tana Toraja, held from November 20<sup>th</sup> to December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022. The research involved students from Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar and Indonesian Christian University of Toraja (UKI-T) who engaged in this collaborative program, which implemented the Design Thinking method to address local issues, especially in the tourism sector. Although the research was not conducted during the KKN program itself, it gathers data retrospectively from students' perspectives and experiences. During the program, students had the opportunity to interact directly with the local community and foreign tourists visiting several tourist destinations in Tana Toraja, including Kete Kesu, Buntu Burake, and Bori' Kalimbuang. These locations were chosen due to their high number of foreign visitors, making them an ideal environment for observing and analyzing how students adapt to cross-cultural communication.

Through the Design Thinking approach, particularly the Empathy stage, students conducted observations and interviews to identify communication challenges and develop experience-based innovative solutions. According to Swallow et al. (2024) this process allowed them to gain firsthand insights into cross-cultural communication barriers, enhance their English communication skills in real-life contexts, and build confidence in interacting with native speakers. By actively engaging with local communities and foreign tourists, students were encouraged to listen deeply, understand diverse perspectives, and respond with empathy. As a result, their learning became more meaningful and personal, fostering both linguistic growth and a stronger sense of self-efficacy in international interactions.

Thus, this research explored the factors influencing students' self confidence in English communication with foreign tourists and examined how the empathy stage in design thinking method contributes to enhancing their confidence. The findings of this research is to contribute to the development of more effective English language learning strategies, particularly in higher education institutions. By integrating experiential learning approaches such as design thinking, teachers can create more engaging and confidence-building activities for students.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Previous Related Study

Several previous studies have addressed the importance of communication skills, self-confidence, and innovative learning approaches in supporting students' English-speaking development. Kovalchuk (2021) emphasized that communication skills play a crucial role in students' personal and professional growth. Effective communication enables individuals to manage emotional and psychological challenges, show empathy, give constructive feedback, and respond appropriately in social interactions. These competencies are strongly associated with leadership and assertiveness, and assessing students' communicative abilities is considered vital for planning targeted improvements. This is especially relevant to the current research, as the skill to communicate effectively in English is essential for building self-confidence in cross-cultural interactions, such as communicating with foreign tourists.

Mega (2020) explored the relationship between students' English speaking habits, their self-confidence, and speaking performance in the context of promoting local tourism and culture. The results showed that consistent speaking practice correlated with higher speaking proficiency, and that self-confidence had a strong influence on students' ability to speak effectively. These findings support the importance of fostering both communication habits and self-assurance in language learning environments.

In a more quantitative research, Laela et al. (2024) found that students with higher levels of self-confidence tended to demonstrate better English speaking skills. With data collected from 70 students, the regression analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship between self-confidence and speaking skill. This research confirms the central role of confidence in the development of students' communicative competence, particularly in real-life interactions such as speaking with foreign language users. Similarly, Zanyar (2023) asserted that self-confidence is a key determinant of success in learning English. Students who possess higher confidence are more fluent, more capable of handling learning challenges, and tend to perform better in oral communication tasks. These findings reinforce the importance of incorporating confidence building and learner centered innovations into English language teaching.

Supporting this perspective, Kamal (2021) reported that students tend to be more confident and perform better when speaking in familiar contexts, with familiar topics and audiences. However, the research also emphasized the need to expose students to more authentic communicative situations in English to help them improve their proficiency. The research suggests that practical experience and structured support are essential in preparing students for spontaneous and meaningful communication.

Finally, Cleminson and Cowie (2021) investigated the use of Design Thinking in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Their research found that students involved in DT-based learning demonstrated creative thinking, linguistic playfulness, and insightful reflections. Survey data showed a positive correlation between DT and increased enjoyment, communicative confidence, and flexible thinking. The researchers concluded that DT can foster collaboration and support the development of communicative competence and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. These insights are especially relevant to the present research, which seeks to explore how the empathy stage of Design Thinking, implemented in a real-world community engagement context, contributes to students' self-confidence and English communication skill particularly in authentic interactions with international tourists.

## 2.2 Pertinent Ideas

### 2.2.1 English Communication Skill

Communication is the process of conveying, receiving, or exchanging ideas, information, or messages, whether verbally or nonverbally. It can be classified into verbal, written, and nonverbal communication, all of which require active listening and feedback to be effective (Alshumaimeri, 2021). Therefore, mastering strong communication skills is essential for English learners.

English communication skills encompass the ability to effectively transmit and understand messages in English through speaking, listening, reading, and writing. These skills are fundamental to achieving professional success, excelling

academically, and fostering personal growth, as they enable individuals to interact and integrate seamlessly into diverse environments. Effective English communication consists of several key elements essential for meaningful interactions. These elements involve not only articulating thoughts clearly but also accurately interpreting messages and responding appropriately. Among these components, speaking and listening hold particular importance in facilitating successful communication.

Speaking skills are crucial for expressing ideas in a structured and understandable manner. One essential aspect of speaking is clarity and pronunciation, as correctly articulating words ensures that the listener grasps the message without confusion. Moreover, fluency and confidence contribute significantly to the smooth flow of speech, reducing unnecessary pauses and fostering natural communication. Additionally, grammar and vocabulary play an important role, as employing correct sentence structures and a broad vocabulary enhances both accuracy and expressiveness. Furthermore, intonation and stress significantly impact meaning, as variations in tone and emphasis can alter a sentence's interpretation, making the speaker's message more compelling and effective.

Similarly, listening skills are equally vital in effective communication. A fundamental aspect of listening is active listening, which entails full concentration on the speaker, comprehending the conveyed message, and responding appropriately. Effective listeners must also be adept at interpreting both verbal and nonverbal cues, such as tone of voice, facial expressions, and gestures, which provide additional context to spoken words. Furthermore, the ability to understand various accents and speech patterns is essential, as English is spoken in diverse accents worldwide. Engaging in listening exercises or real-life conversations with different accents enhances adaptability and overall communication proficiency.

In conclusion, strong English communication skills, particularly in speaking and listening, are crucial for effective interactions in academic, professional, and social settings. By developing these abilities, English learners can enhance their capacity to convey ideas clearly and understand others more accurately, ultimately promoting more meaningful and successful communication.

Recognizing the significance of effective communication, it is essential to cultivate specific attributes, such as a high degree of self-confidence. Confidence plays a pivotal role in enabling individuals to communicate more effectively by reducing anxiety, improving clarity, and fostering more engaging interactions. This is especially important for students when conversing with native speakers, as self-confidence helps them overcome language barriers and engage more naturally in real-world situations.

### **a. Self-Confidence**

Becoming a good speaker requires a high level of self-confidence to communicate effectively with others. According to Suriyati et al. (2024), self-confidence is a positive way of oneself thinking about themselves, including how they are feeling about, their beliefs and skills, which help them to take action without feeling anxious. It enables them to engage freely with others, take responsibility for their actions, and interact warmly and politely. A self-confident individual is not only motivated to succeed but also aware of their strengths and weaknesses (Nety et al., 2020).

Several factors influence students' self-confidence in speaking English, particularly psychological and knowledge-related factors. Psychological factors such as anxiety, shyness, and fear of making mistakes are common barriers that hinder students from communicating effectively in English (Nety et al., 2020). These emotional challenges often cause hesitation and reluctance to speak, leading to lower confidence levels. In addition, Muqorrobin et al. (2022) found that a student's perceived ability, particularly their vocabulary knowledge, plays a significant role in their confidence. Students who feel they lack sufficient command of the language tend to avoid speaking activities (Destiawati et al., 2024). Consequently, this lack of self-confidence negatively impacts their ability to engage in meaningful conversations, especially in situations where English proficiency is crucial.

In professional and academic contexts, a student's fear of making mistakes or being misunderstood can limit their participation in discussions and negotiations. Addressing this issue requires creating opportunities for students to develop their speaking skills in a supportive environment where they can practice without the fear of judgment (Aryal, 2024). One way to build confidence in English communication is through real-life interactions, such as conversing with foreign tourist. Tran et al (2024) stated in their research that authentic conversational experiences, whether face-to-face or through online platforms, significantly enhance students' speaking skills, boost motivation, and enhance self-confidence in using English. Students who have opportunities to interact with native speakers, even virtually, report higher levels of confidence and proficiency compared to those without such experience.

Self-confidence is a crucial factor in oral communication, particularly for foreign language learners. According to Nety et al. (2020), self-confidence allows individuals to interact without excessive anxiety, engage in conversations more freely, and take responsibility for their communication. In the context of this research, self-confidence plays a significant role in students' ability to speak English with foreign tourists. Many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students, despite having a good understanding of the language, often experience anxiety that prevents them from expressing themselves effectively.

To address this issue, this research aims to explore how the empathy stage in the *Design Thinking* method can enhance students' self-confidence in English communication. Akimova et al. (2022) state that a lack of self-confidence can hinder effective communication, particularly in situations requiring active and accurate language use. Therefore, creating a supportive environment that fosters direct interaction with foreign tourists is essential in helping students develop their speaking confidence. Through such interactions, students can gradually overcome their fears, enhance their communication skills, and build the confidence needed to engage in meaningful conversations in English.

## b. Design Thinking

Design Thinking is a way to solve problems by focusing on learning what users need and how they experience things. According to Fitri (2023), *Design Thinking* is based on the principle of "human-centered research," which focuses on deeply understanding users' challenges and creating effective solutions. This method consists of several stages:

- 1) Sense and Sensibility, involves direct observation of the tourism site to gather information about its attractions and facilities that contribute to visitor satisfaction while also identifying any issues visitors may encounter.
- 2) Empathy stage is a process of gaining a deeper understanding by actively listening, observing, and experiencing situations from another person's perspective. This process is conducted through two methods: observation and interviews. The observation phase focuses on elements categorized within the POEMS framework (*People, Objects, Environment, Message, and Service*). Additionally, interviews are conducted as part of the empathy process. Once the observation and interview stages are completed, the researcher analyzes the collected data by transcribing and organizing the interview results into relevant categories.
- 3) Ideation stage is a phase focused on critical thinking to generate multiple ideas that address the need statement. During this process, the researcher engages in brainstorming. Following this, the researcher categorizes the generated ideas and concepts based on the identified issues at the tourism destination.
- 4) Prototyping is the stage of developing a basic sketch or an initial model that assists innovators in identifying areas for improvement in their designs.

Among these, the *Empathy* stage is critical, as it involves gaining an in-depth understanding of users' experiences, emotions, and challenges. In this research, the *Empathy* stage is utilized to help students build confidence in speaking English, particularly when interacting with native English-speaking tourists or educators in tourism destination. By focusing on empathy, students are encouraged to view communication from the perspective of foreign tourists, leading to a more effective and comfortable interaction. The opportunity to engage in direct conversations allows students to overcome anxiety and hesitation, fostering a sense of ease when using English in real-life situations.

The *Empathy* stage also enables students to observe and interact directly with native English speakers, experiencing both the challenges and benefits of cross-cultural communication. According to Dzhubanova (2024), exposure to different cultures significantly enhances language acquisition, particularly in expanding vocabulary, improving pronunciation, and understanding cultural nuances. This process not only improves students' language skills but also strengthens their self-confidence by helping them navigate communication barriers and develop a more natural speaking style.

Moreover, this approach allows students to gain a deeper understanding of non-verbal communication aspects such as intonation, facial expressions, and body language, which are crucial in effective communication. Through firsthand experiences with foreign tourists, students learn to appreciate the importance of context and non-verbal cues, ultimately reinforcing their confidence in speaking English. By incorporating the *Design Thinking* method, specifically the *Empathy* stage, this research aimed to provide students with meaningful, real-world experiences that contribute to their growth as confident English speakers in an international context.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design

This research used mixed-methods research approach, specifically the Convergent Parallel Design as outlined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018). This design included the simultaneous collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, which were analyzed separately and then combined later during the interpretation phase. The main goal of using this design was to obtain a comprehensive understanding of students' communication confidence and anxiety during the empathy stage of the Design Thinking method, implemented in the Thematic Community Service Program in Tana Toraja. By comparing and combining both types of data, the researcher aimed to enhance the validity and depth of the findings through cross-verification.

The mixed-methods strategy was particularly appropriate for this research, as it allowed for the exploration of both numerical patterns and personal experiences. Quantitative instruments, such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) and the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24), were used to assess the students' levels of self-confidence and communication apprehension. In parallel, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain insight into the students' real-life experiences and emotional responses when interacting with foreign tourists. The combination of these data sources provided a richer, more holistic perspective on how students perceive and respond to communicative challenges in a cross-cultural context.

#### 3.2. Data Collection

This research used both quantitative and qualitative methods, including questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaires used two standardized instruments: the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE Scale) and the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24). The RSE Scale consists of 10 items rated on a 4 point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree (3), agree (2), disagree (1), and strongly disagree (0). The PRCA-24 comprises 24 statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale, from strongly disagree (5), disagree (4), neutral (3), agree (2) to strongly agree (1). It measured communication apprehension in four contexts: *group discussion, meetings, interpersonal communication, and public speaking*. Both questionnaires were administered to assess any relation in self-confidence and communication apprehension following participants' direct interactions with foreign tourists. The instruments were distributed in person to participants from the English Education Departments of Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar and Indonesian Christian University of Toraja.

In addition to the quantitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain deeper insight into the participants' personal experiences. This interview method allowed flexibility, using a set of guiding questions while remaining open to spontaneous responses and follow-up prompts (Rotjanawongchai, 2024). Interviews were conducted online for students from the Indonesian Christian University of Toraja and Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar. The interviews aimed to uncover participants' perceptions, challenges, and self-reflections regarding their confidence in using English in real-life communication situations.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

Based on the steps in Convergent Parallel Design, the data that had been collected then were analyzed separately. For quantitative data, participants' responses first be scored using official online calculators: the Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale scores calculated through the W. W. Norton & Company scoring tool, and PRCA-24 scores processed using the Across Cultures PRCA calculator. After obtaining the raw scores, further statistical analysis conducted using SPSS to examine the correlation between participants' self-confidence levels and their communication apprehension. This step aimed to identify whether there is a statistically significant relationship between self-confidence and communication apprehension in speaking English.

Following the distribution and analysis of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. For qualitative analysis, the interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis with the aid of Nvivo software. This software facilitated the process of coding and categorizing data by identifying recurring keywords, expressions, and patterns across participants' responses. Themes were developed based on the most frequently mentioned and contextually significant factors. This approach allowed the researcher to specify key influences on students' self-confidence, such as prior speaking experience, language exposure, peer support, or perceived judgment from listeners.

To ensure validity, triangulation was applied by comparing the results of the questionnaire data (quantitative) with themes emerging from interview data (qualitative). This integration of findings from both methods helped enrich the understanding of how self-confidence and communication apprehension were experienced and interpreted by participants during the Thematic Community Service Program.

## 4. RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings on students' self-confidence in speaking English with foreign tourists based on data from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE), PRCA-24, and in-depth interviews.

### Rosenberg Self-Esteem (RSE) Scale

Table Rosenberg Self-Esteem (RSE) Scale

Participant Code	RSE SCALE	Self-Esteem Category
M1	26	High Self-Esteem
M2	14	Low Self-Esteem
M3	24	High Self-Esteem
M4	17	Normal Self-Esteem
M5	13	Low Self-Esteem
M6	15	Normal Self-Esteem
M7	11	Low Self-Esteem
M8	7	Low Self-Esteem
M9	17	Normal Self-Esteem

This data consists of nine participants, each labeled with the codes M1 through M9. Each participant was assessed using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. The

results show that four participants (M2, M5, M7, and M8) fall into the low self-esteem category, with scores ranging from 7 to 14. Three participants (M4, M6, and M9) are in the normal self-esteem category, with scores between 15 and 17. Meanwhile, only two participants (M1 and M3) are in the high self-esteem category, with scores of 26 and 24, respectively.

This distribution indicates that a significant proportion of participants experienced low self-esteem, which may reflect their underlying self-confidence levels in the context of the empathy stage of the design thinking process.

#### Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) Scale

Table Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) Scale

Participant Code	PRCA-24 SCALE	Communication Apprehension Category
M1	55	Low
M2	68	Moderate
M3	44	Low
M4	66	Moderate
M5	78	Moderate
M6	79	Moderate
M7	71	Moderate
M8	70	Moderate
M9	68	Moderate

Based on the data above the PRCA-24 scores range from 44 to 79, with the highest score recorded by participant M6 and the lowest by participant M3. The range between the highest and lowest scores is 35, indicating a noticeable variation in the levels of communication apprehension among the participants. Seven participants, who are M2, M4, M5, M6, M7, M8, and M9, scored between 66 and 79, placing them in the moderate communication apprehension category. Meanwhile, participant M1 scored 55 and participant M3 scored 44, both of which fall into the low category. These results indicate that the majority of participants tended to have a **moderate level of anxiety** when engaging in communication, which may influence their level of confidence when interacting with others, especially in a cross-cultural context such as speaking with foreign tourists.

#### 4.1. Qualitative analysis of interview transcript

In addition to the quantitative data, the researcher also conducted an interview to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences in using English, particularly during interactions with foreign tourists throughout the KKN Thematic program. From the interview responses of nine participants, five key themes emerged: (1) self-confidence in speaking English, (2) key challenges in using English, (3) coping strategies, (4) contribution of the KKN environment, and (5) motivation and progress in English practice.

##### a. Self-Confidence in Speaking English

Participants shared varying levels of confidence when speaking English. Many expressed that their self-confidence was affected by their perceived limitations in vocabulary, grammar, and experience. Several participants

mentioned feeling nervous or insecure in unfamiliar settings or when speaking to people perceived as more fluent.

*“I felt less confident speaking English because my skills are still limited.” (M1).*  
*“My confidence depends on my interlocutor’s English level.” (M3)*  
*“I’m confident with friends, but afraid of being judged when talking to someone better.” (M5).*

These responses indicate that students’ self-confidence is situational and often tied to their own linguistic ability and their perception of others’ fluency.

### **b. Key Challenges in Using English**

When asked about challenges encountered while speaking English, most participants reported difficulties with vocabulary, understanding accents, and fear of making grammatical mistakes. These obstacles sometimes led to hesitation or avoidance in conversation.

*“I struggle with advanced vocabulary.” (M3).*  
*“Some tourists have accents I don’t understand... I asked them to speak slower.” (M5).*  
*“I worry my grammar is wrong and I won’t be understood.” (M9).*

### **c. Contribution of the KKN Environment**

To manage their nervousness, participants adopted several strategies such as pausing, using gestures, simplifying their language, or directly communicating their limitations to the interlocutor. These coping methods helped reduce anxiety and allowed them to continue conversations.

*“I asked the tourist to repeat or explained myself using different words.” (M3)*  
*“I admitted I was still learning and used humor to ease the tension.” (M6)*  
*“I calmed my nerves by moving my legs or hands.” (M8)*

### **d. Motivation and Progress in English Practice**

The KKN setting provided authentic opportunities for interaction with foreign tourists and exposure to real-life communication. Students noted that the environment, particularly the presence of tour guides and peer support, contributed positively to their learning and confidence.

*“The tourist destinations gave me a chance to speak directly with foreigners.” (M4)*  
*“Presenting our ideas helped boost my confidence.” (M6)*  
*“Watching confident students from UNISMUH inspired me to learn more.” (M7)*

### **e. Motivation and Progress in English Practice**

After the KKN experience, many participants reported an increase in their motivation to continue learning and practicing English. Factors such as peer support, successful experiences with tourists, and self-reflection contributed to their progress.

*“I wanted to speak even more after interacting with tourists.” (M5)*  
*“The program helped me improve my speaking skills a lot.” (M6)*  
*“Seeing my friends speak English made me want to do the same.” (M9)*

## 5. DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the findings are examined in light of relevant theoretical frameworks and recent studies. The discussion highlights three central themes: students' self-confidence, English communication skill, and the contribution of the Empathy stage of Design Thinking method to their speaking ability.

**Table 4. 1 The Correlation between RSE Scale and PRCA-24 Scale**

Correlations		
	RSE TOTAL	PRCA TOTAL
Pearson Correlation	1	-.758*
Sig. (2-tailed)		.018
N	9	9
Pearson Correlation	-.758*	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.018	
N	9	9

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

A Pearson correlation test was conducted to examine the relationship between students' self-esteem (measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale) and their communication apprehension (measured using the PRCA-24 Scale). The analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between the two variables, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of  $r = -0.758$  and a significance level of  $p = 0.018$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that students with higher levels of self-esteem tend to have lower levels of communication apprehension. In other words, increased confidence is associated with reduced anxiety in communication, particularly in interactions such as speaking with foreigners or in unfamiliar social settings.

### 5.1. Relationship Between Self-Esteem and Communication Apprehension

The significant negative correlation ( $r = -0.758$ ,  $p = 0.018$ ) found between the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and PRCA-24 suggests that students with lower self-esteem are more likely to experience communication apprehension. This supports earlier research by McCroskey (1977), which noted that high levels of communication apprehension are commonly linked to low self-perception and poor confidence in social situations. In this study, four out of nine participants exhibited low self-esteem

and also scored in the moderate category of communication apprehension, reinforcing this theoretical relationship.

Interestingly, even participants with **normal self-esteem** still showed **moderate levels of communication apprehension**, indicating that while self-esteem is a key factor, it is not the sole determinant of anxiety in speaking situations. Contextual factors such as language environment, exposure to foreigners, and perceived judgment, also influence a participant's communicative comfort.

## 5.2. Insights from the Interview Data

The qualitative findings enrich the understanding of the statistical results by providing real-life illustrations of how students experience communication in the KKN context. Participants revealed that their self-confidence in speaking English was highly situational and dependent on whom they were speaking with. Several participants reported that their confidence fluctuated based on the perceived fluency of their interlocutors. This aligns with Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, which emphasizes that people's belief in their capabilities is influenced by contextual factors.

Participants described various challenges, such as limited vocabulary, difficulty understanding accents, and fear of making grammatical errors. They made efforts to keep their messages simple and clear to avoid misunderstandings, as illustrated by M3's statement: "I asked the tourist to repeat or explained myself using different words." This indicates an attempt to maintain clarity and coherence, two key components of effective communication (Hasan N et al., 2022).

Furthermore, as Hasan N et al. (2022) emphasize, effective communication is not merely about transferring information, but also about influencing behavior and building social connections. Within the KKN setting, participants were not only learning to speak English; they were also learning to connect with people from different cultural backgrounds. For example, M6 mentioned that watching peers confidently present their ideas in English inspired and motivated him to try as well.

Therefore, the interview responses suggest that the students' English communication experiences during KKN were not purely linguistic, but also deeply interpersonal and affective. This supports Hasan et al.'s view that communication is a complex process shaped by emotional and social factors.

## 5.3. The Role of the Empathy Stage in the Design Thinking Method

The empathy stage of design thinking, which requires students to understand the needs, behaviors, and experiences of others, offered an authentic context for real-life interaction. During KKN, participants had to interact directly with foreign tourists, prompting them to step out of their comfort zones. This immersion contributed to **experiential learning**, where participants learned by doing and reflecting, a key concept in Kolb's experiential learning theory.

Interview responses also revealed how the KKN setting, peer support, and successful communication experiences helped reduce anxiety and gradually build confidence. For example, M6 and M7 mentioned how presenting ideas and observing confident peers enhanced their motivation. These findings highlight the importance of **social learning and modeling**, as proposed by Bandura (1986), in building communicative confidence.

Moreover, the use of coping strategies such as asking for repetition, using humor, or body language, suggests that students were developing **adaptive communication skills**. This aligns with the concept of **communicative competence**, not just as grammatical accuracy but as the ability to manage real-life interactions effectively (Canale & Swain, 1980).

#### 5.4. Implications for Future Practice

The combination of low to moderate communication apprehension and fluctuating self-confidence indicates the need for structured support systems in similar community-based programs. Incorporating reflection sessions, confidence-building exercises, and pre-engagement language preparation could further enhance the impact of such initiatives.

Additionally, the findings suggest that design thinking can act as a catalyst for **both cognitive and affective development**. The empathy stage, in particular, offers rich opportunities for **language practice, emotional growth, and interpersonal skill development**, which are essential for students operating in multicultural or global contexts.

### 6. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to understand how the empathy stage in the Design Thinking process contributes to enhancing students' self-confidence in English communication during their interactions with foreign tourists in the KKN Thematic program. The findings show that the empathy stage provides students with authentic and meaningful opportunities to engage in real-life communication, which positively influences their confidence and reduces communication apprehension. Quantitative results revealed a significant negative correlation between self-esteem and communication apprehension, indicating that students with higher self-esteem tend to experience less anxiety when speaking English. This finding aligns with Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Theory, which emphasizes that individuals' beliefs in their own abilities can reduce anxiety and improve performance.

Furthermore, the qualitative data highlighted that students' self-confidence is influenced by a combination of internal factors such as language proficiency and prior experience, as well as external factors including the interlocutor's fluency, a supportive peer environment, and effective coping strategies. The empathetic understanding fostered through the Design Thinking process enables students to better connect with foreign tourists, making their communication more effective and boosting their motivation to practice English. This supports the argument by Dzhubanova (2024) that exposure to different cultures enhances language acquisition and cultural competence, which in turn strengthens communication confidence.

Overall, the empathy stage serves as an important catalyst in helping students overcome psychological barriers such as anxiety and fear of making mistakes, allowing them to develop greater self-confidence in using English in cross-cultural settings. By emphasizing human-centered communication and real-world practice, this approach addresses the limitations of traditional language learning methods that focus primarily on grammar and vocabulary, thereby fostering holistic language development.

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