

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Speaking in the context of the English language is understood as the act of producing sound to convey thoughts, feelings, and intentions, which are fundamental components of communication (Du Tran & Khau, 2024). The speaking process involves constructing and sharing meaning through verbal and nonverbal symbols in various contexts (Houn & Em, 2022). Proficiency in speaking English is crucial as it serves as a tool for social cohesion, career advancement, and business development (Jie et al., 2024). Moreover, speaking skills in English are necessary for effective communication in both personal and professional contexts, requiring practice, confidence, language mastery, and cultural awareness (Rustamova, 2023). However, poor speaking abilities can lead to embarrassment, nervousness, and a lack of self-confidence (Gobena, 2025). Students with low speaking proficiency are often reluctant to participate because they feel uncomfortable speaking aloud or being the centre of attention (Ahmad, 2021).

Various studies have examined factors influencing English-speaking proficiency. Research by Igwe and Ligaya (2025) indicates that teachers' consideration-based leadership behaviour plays a significant role in enhancing student performance, particularly when mediated by integrative motivation. Conversely, instrumental motivation was found not to mediate this relationship. Another study by Qasim (2021) highlights challenges faced by elementary school students in learning speaking skills, including insufficient attention to sub-skills of speaking. This research identified constraints through questionnaire data analysis. Furthermore, Shawaqfeh et al. (2024) emphasise the importance of interaction strategies in the classroom to accelerate mastery of English as a foreign language, enabling teachers to effectively respond to students' cognitive needs.

Various studies have focused on strategies to enhance English speaking proficiency. Uyun (2022) found that communication-based approaches and student-centred strategies in junior high schools positively impact students' speaking skills. Similarly, Azizbek and Jaloliddinovna (2025) demonstrated that integrating technology and interactive strategies helps students overcome barriers such as a lack of confidence and limited practice opportunities. This research highlights the crucial role of teachers as facilitators in creating a supportive learning environment. Additionally, Arroba and Acosta (2021) revealed that using authentic digital storytelling as an innovative teaching strategy significantly improves students' speaking abilities, particularly in aspects of organisation, language quality, and delivery methods.

Weaknesses in English speaking proficiency have also been a focus of various studies. Aziz and Kashinathan (2021) identified internal challenges, such as anxiety and lack of self-confidence, as well as external challenges, such as limited exposure to English-speaking environments, faced by ESL students in Malaysia. Interactive strategies and technology were considered effective in addressing these challenges. Gobena (2025) noted that psychological barriers, including stage fright and shyness, contribute to low speaking abilities among students in Ethiopia. Meanwhile, Chen (2025) highlighted anxiety experienced by junior college students in China due to weak learning foundations. This study emphasises the importance of strategies to reduce anxiety and enhance the efficiency of English language learning.

English-speaking proficiency is a crucial skill that impacts an individual's success across various contexts. However, despite extensive research addressing factors influencing speaking abilities, there remains a gap in strategies focusing on building students' self-confidence in social interactions within the classroom. Ahmad (2021) notes that students with low speaking skills often experience anxiety, shyness, or a lack of confidence when asked to speak publicly. Additionally, Gobena (2025) highlights that psychological challenges, such as

stage fright, can hinder students' speaking performance. While strategies like digital storytelling (Arroba & Acosta, 2021) and communication-based approaches (Uyun, 2022) have proven effective, there is limited exploration of using social expressions to address these issues.

Previous studies have indicated that social interaction and psychological support from the learning environment contribute to students' success in speaking English. Research by Igwe and Ligaya (2025) emphasises the role of integrative motivation mediated by teachers' consideration-based leadership approach. Meanwhile, Shawaqfeh et al. (2024) demonstrate that classroom interaction strategies can accelerate students' language acquisition. However, there is still limited research specifically examining social expression-based strategies to build students' self-confidence in interactions. These strategies are believed to encourage students to participate more actively, reduce anxiety, and enhance speaking skills in both social and academic situations.

The importance of social expression-based strategies in building students' self-confidence can be observed through their impact on effective communication. Rustamova (2023) asserts that strong speaking skills not only aid students in career development but also enhance their social cohesion abilities. Strategies that support social expression can create an inclusive learning environment where students feel safe to speak without fear of negative judgment. Furthermore, integrating social expression allows students to better understand cultural contexts, improving their ability to interact authentically. Therefore, this research is pertinent to address the needs of students who frequently encounter psychological and environmental challenges in developing English speaking skills.

This study aims to explore strategies utilising social expressions to build students' self-confidence in English-speaking interactions. The research was conducted with eighth-grade students at MTs Humaira in Bengkulu City to identify the effectiveness of these strategies in enhancing student participation in classroom speaking activities. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were

collected through observations, interviews, and document analysis. The findings are expected to provide new insights into the importance of integrating social expression-based strategies as an innovative and strategic approach in English speaking instruction, particularly within the context of junior high school education.

After conducting observations and interviews with eighth-grade students of MTs Humaira on May 21, 2025, the observation results showed that students were generally able to use basic social expressions when speaking in English. Expressions such as "Thank you," "Sorry," "I agree," "Excuse me," and "Good morning" were used appropriately, especially during interactions with teachers and peers. However, students' ability to deliver these social expressions with clear and confident speech still varied, with some students appearing hesitant and less active in speaking situations such as presenting in front of the class or participating in group discussions. (See Appendix 2 for the observation instrument and the observation results in Appendix 10).

The interview findings supported the observations, with students acknowledging that using social expressions helped them feel more comfortable and confident when speaking English. They felt that having examples provided during the lessons made them braver and less afraid of making mistakes while speaking. However, some students admitted that they still faced difficulties, such as being unsure when to use certain expressions, forgetting word meanings, or feeling shy when speaking in public. (See Appendix 1 for the interview instrument and Appendix 9 for the interview results.)

Speaking skills in English are recognised as a fundamental ability for effective communication, enabling individuals to express thoughts, feelings, and intentions both verbally and nonverbally (Du Tran & Khau, 2024; Houn & Em, 2022). The importance of this skill goes beyond academic contexts, playing a role in fostering social cohesion, advancing careers, and supporting business development (Jie et al., 2024). However, many students particularly at the junior

high school level, struggle to speak confidently, clearly, and actively, often due to psychological barriers such as anxiety, shyness, and fear of making mistakes (Gobena, 2025; Ahmad, 2021).

Various previous studies have explored strategies for improving speaking skills, such as communicative approaches (Uyun, 2022), interactive methods (Shawaqfeh et al., 2024), and technology integration (Azizbek & Jaloliddinova, 2025). However, there remains a research gap in approaches that explicitly emphasize building students' confidence through social expressions. Social expressions such as greetings, apologies, agreements, and polite interruptions can serve as communication tools that not only enhance language competence but also foster a sense of safety and inclusion in classroom interactions.

Preliminary observations at MTs Humaira in Bengkulu City showed that students were able to use basic social expressions appropriately in English; however, their delivery often lacked confidence, especially in formal speaking contexts such as presentations or group discussions. Interviews confirmed that the use of social expressions made students feel more comfortable and willing to speak, although some still experienced uncertainty regarding the usage, meaning, or appropriate timing of these expressions.

Considering these findings, this research holds significant urgency and relevance for three main reasons. First, it addresses pedagogical needs by introducing strategies that integrate language skill development with the enhancement of students' psychological confidence. Second, it is socio-culturally relevant, preparing students for authentic communication in both academic and real-world contexts (Rustamova, 2023). Third, this study fills a gap in the literature by systematically examining the role of social expressions in reducing anxiety and increasing active participation in English-speaking activities. The research findings are expected to offer practical contributions for English teachers, particularly at the secondary education level, in designing speaking lessons that are more inclusive, supportive, and culturally responsive.

B. Identifications of the Problems

Based on the background and preliminary observation results, the problems identified in this study are as follows:

1. Students' low self-confidence in speaking English, particularly in formal contexts such as presentations and group discussions, due to psychological barriers such as shyness, nervousness, and fear of making mistakes.
2. The lack of learning strategies that specifically utilize social expressions to build students' confidence in verbal classroom interactions.
3. Students' delivery of social expressions still varies in terms of pronunciation clarity and intonation firmness, which reduces communication effectiveness.
4. Some students are still unable to determine the appropriate timing and context for using certain social expressions in English conversations.
5. The limited number of studies that integrate social expressions as a pedagogical strategy to overcome psychological barriers and increase students' active participation in English-speaking activities.

C. Limitations of the Problems

To maintain the focus of the study and avoid overly broad discussion, this research is limited to the following:

1. The research subjects are eighth-grade students of MTs Humaira, Bengkulu City, in the 2025/2026 academic year.
2. The targeted skill is English speaking, with an emphasis on the use of social expressions to build self-confidence.
3. The types of social expressions examined include greetings, apologies, agreements, polite interruptions, and expressions of gratitude.
4. The context of usage is limited to classroom interactions, both formal (presentations, group discussions) and informal (conversations with teachers and peers).

5. The research method focuses on a descriptive qualitative approach through observation, interviews, and document analysis, without an in-depth discussion of grammar or other English language skills outside the context of speaking.

D. Research Questions

Based on the background above, this study is designed to address the following questions:

1. How can social expression-based strategies be implemented to enhance students' self-confidence in speaking English?
2. What factors influence the success of these strategies?
3. What is the impact of these strategies on students' participation levels in classroom speaking activities?

E. The Purposes of the Research

Based on the formulated research questions, this study aims to:

1. Identify and explain how social expression-based strategies can be implemented to enhance students' self-confidence in speaking English.
2. Analyze the factors influencing the success of implementing social expression-based strategies in speaking instruction.
3. Evaluate the impact of these strategies on students' participation levels in classroom speaking activities.

F. The Significances of the Research

This study offers significant theoretical and practical contributions, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. Theoretically, the research enriches existing literature by exploring social expression-based strategies to enhance students' self-confidence in speaking English. It provides insights into how affective and social strategies can be integrated into language learning to address psychological barriers and foster a supportive learning environment. Additionally, the findings can serve as a

reference for academics and researchers in developing social interaction-based learning models that align with students' needs in the era of globalization, especially at the junior high school level.

Practically, this research provides concrete guidance for teachers in designing learning strategies based on social expression to overcome students' difficulties in speaking in class. Teachers can utilize the findings of this research to create a supportive learning environment that encourages students to communicate confidently. For students, this research can enhance their understanding of the importance of building self-confidence through socially based practice, making them more active and self-assured in speaking English. In addition, this research is also relevant for policymakers in formulating education policies based on innovation.

By understanding its theoretical and practical benefits, this research is expected to make a real contribution to improving the quality of English language learning in Indonesia. The findings are not only beneficial for students and teachers but also serve as a foundation for developing a curriculum that is more adaptive to students' needs. Thus, this research contributes not only to enhancing students' speaking competence but also to supporting the development of a young generation capable of communicating effectively at a global level.

G. Operational Definitions of Key Terms

This research employs several key terms that form the foundation for analyzing and interpreting its findings. To provide a clear understanding, the following are the operational definitions of the main terminology used in this study:

1. Social Expressions refer to verbal and nonverbal symbols used to convey emotions, thoughts, and intentions, which support interpersonal interaction in various social contexts.

2. Speaking is the ability to produce sounds to express ideas, feelings, or needs, involving both verbal and nonverbal symbols in interpersonal or group communication.
3. Strategies are planned approaches or systematic methods used to achieve specific goals, particularly in enhancing students' speaking skills in the classroom.
4. Confidence refers to an individual's belief in their own abilities or skills to communicate effectively in various situations and contexts, both formal and informal.
5. Interaction is a reciprocal process between two or more individuals involving verbal and nonverbal communication, aimed at building social relationships or achieving specific objectives.

