

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

In the era of globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, mastery of English as an international language has become an academic and professional necessity. In Indonesia, the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has been integrated into higher education curricula, with a special emphasis on developing holistic communicative competence. Oral communication skills, as a core pillar of the language competence framework, play an important role in facilitating academic interaction, research collaboration, and global career readiness. However, beneath the urgent need to master these skills lies a complex psychological phenomenon that often becomes a significant but hidden impediment, namely speaking anxiety.

Speaking anxiety is not merely a temporary manifestation of nervousness; rather, it is a persistent affective barrier that can distort learners' cognitive processes, reduce their communicative intent, and ultimately impede overall oral performance. Numerous studies in second language acquisition consistently confirm that speaking skills occupy the highest position in the hierarchy of language-anxiety triggers, primarily due to their real-time nature, public exposure, and the worry about negative evaluation from peers and instructors. If not met with adequate intervention, this anxiety can form a continuing negative cycle, in which anxious learners avoid speaking practice opportunities, which in turn leaves their fluency underdeveloped, and that condition further strengthens anxiety and avoidance behavior in subsequent situations.

Initial observations within the English Education Study Program at UINFAS Bengkulu, specifically among fourth-semester students, reveal an intriguing educational paradox. Although these students have been academically exposed to adequate language structure and vocabulary and have

completed several foundational language courses, many still exhibit psychological resistance when required to perform verbally in English within formal and semi-formal classroom settings. The symptoms vary widely, ranging from avoidance behaviors such as sitting in the back row and making minimal contributions to group discussions to physiological manifestations like a trembling voice, cold sweats, and blanking out or losing one's train of thought mid-presentation. A more in-depth analysis shows that these obstacles are not only caused by linguistic deficiencies, but also by affective-emotional factors, known in the literature as foreign language anxiety, with a particular focus on the speaking dimension.

Speaking anxiety in foreign language learning is a multidimensional construct encompassing fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test-related anxiety. According to Horwitz, et al., (1986:127), such anxiety can directly impair oral communication performance through psychological mechanisms like cognitive interference and excessive self-monitoring. For prospective English teachers, this impact is even more critical, as they must not only master speaking skills but also model them confidently for their future students.

Previous research has revealed that speaking anxiety is a critical issue in learning English as a foreign language. EFL students experience anxiety when speaking in English, both during class discussions with the teacher and when giving presentations (Alshiabani & Algraini, 2024). EFL students tend to have moderate speaking ability and experience speaking anxiety influenced by cognitive factors and the social environment (Montaño et al., 2022). These findings are in line with Suparia et al., (2022), who confirmed a strong correlation between foreign language anxiety (EFL) and speaking ability, particularly in relation to students' perceptions of their oral communication competence. Furthermore, Mustamir, (2024) in the Indonesian context identified that speaking anxiety among EFL learners is not only caused by fear of negative evaluation and lack of confidence, but is also influenced by cultural dimensions. The significant impact of this anxiety on actual performance is

confirmed by Hasibuan & Irzawati, (2020), who conclude that speaking anxiety is negatively correlated with speaking performance, thereby directly affecting the achievement of oral language competence.

Although previous studies have established a relationship between speaking anxiety and oral communication competence in general, there are limitations in the methods used to measure these two constructs in an integrated manner in the local context. The studies by Montaña et al., (2022) and Mustamir, (2024) used qualitative or mixed approaches that focused on identifying causal factors, while the studies by Hasibuan & Irzawati, (2020) and Suparia et al., (2022) measured correlations with actual performance or broader perceptions. There has been no research that specifically measures the correlation between the level of speaking anxiety and specific perceptions of oral communication competence using a standardized questionnaire instrument on a population of early semester students in the context of Islamic higher education. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by investigating the correlation between the two variables quantitatively through a questionnaire administered to fourth-semester students at UINFAS Bengkulu, thereby providing empirical data focused on the aspect of self-perception in the context of a unique institution.

Based on this identified research gap and contextual urgency, the present study is designed as quantitative research with a descriptive correlational approach, employing structured questionnaires as the primary data collection method. The anxiety instrument will be adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz et al., 1986), while perceived oral communication competence was measured using the Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC) Scale by McCroskey and McCroskey (1988). This methodological choice is grounded in careful epistemological and pragmatic considerations.

Consequently, this study is expected to address the empirical need to understand the dynamics of speaking anxiety and its impact on the perception of oral communication competence among prospective English teachers.

Specifically, it aims to identify the level of speaking anxiety among fourth-semester students in the English Education Study Program at UINFAS Bengkulu, describe their perceptions of oral communication skills, and analyze the relationship between various dimensions of speaking anxiety and aspects of perceived oral communication competence.

The findings are anticipated to contribute significantly on three levels. Theoretically, they may enrich psycholinguistic and language pedagogy studies by providing empirical evidence on the configuration of the relationship between affective factors and perceived competence in the Indonesian EFL context. Practically and pedagogically, the results will form a basis for developing more psychologically sensitive (affective-sensitive) speaking modules, formative assessment designs that reduce anxiety, and collaborative learning strategies that build linguistic confidence. Institutionally, the research will provide a diagnostic map to assist the Study Program in curricular decision-making, developing peer mentoring programs, and designing integrated academic counseling services.

Thus, this study seeks not only to document a psychological phenomenon in language learning but also to translate academic findings into actionable recommendations for enhancing the quality of English teacher education. Ultimately, this endeavor aligns with an educational vision that pursues not only cognitive-linguistic mastery but also attends to the psychological well-being of students a foundational element in shaping their professional identities as competent and resilient language educators.

B. Problem Identification

Based on the research issues described above, several research questions were formulated to guide this study:

1. **The high level of English-speaking anxiety** among fourth-semester English Education students at UINFAS Bengkulu, which serves as a primary affective barrier to the development of oral communication competence.

2. **The impact of anxiety on self-perception**, where anxiety is suspected to cause negative perceptions of students' oral communication competence regardless of their objective abilities, thereby creating a cycle that hinders learning.
3. **The absence of local empirical data** measuring the specific relationship between speaking anxiety and self-perceived oral communication competence within the context of this research population, complicating the design of appropriate learning interventions.
4. **The urgent need for a quantitative diagnostic study** to measure both variables and their relationship as a foundation for evidence-based policy development and pedagogical practices.

C. Limitation of the Problem

Based on the background description, the issues that are the focus of this study can be systematically formulated as follows :

1. This study only involved fourth-semester students of the English Education Study Program at UINFAS Bengkulu. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to students from other semesters, different study programs, or other universities, given the possible differences in academic context, curriculum, and student characteristics.
2. This study focuses only on the relationship between two main variables, namely speaking anxiety (X) and perceived oral communication ability (Y). Other variables that may have an influence, such as learning motivation, teaching style, classroom environment, or vocabulary mastery, are not included in the analysis. Thus, this study cannot explain the relative contributions of these various factors.
3. The main limitation of this study lies in the data collection method, which relies solely on self-report questionnaires. This has three implications: potential bias in responses due to social preferences or inaccurate self-assessment; the inability to measure actual verbal communication skills, which limits conclusions to the realm of perception; and a lack of depth in

the data to understand the causes or experiences behind the reported anxiety and perceptions, as can be revealed through qualitative methods.

D. Research Question

Is there a significant correlation between speaking anxiety and perceived oral communication skills among fourth-semester students in the English Education Study Program at UINFAS Bengkulu?

E. Objectivities of the Study

To determine whether there is a significant correlation between speaking anxiety and self-perceived oral communication competence among the fourth-semester students of the English Education Department at UINFAS Bengkulu.

F. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study can be viewed from two aspects: theoretical significance and practical significance :

1. Theoretical Benefits

This study is expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the fields of educational psychology and English language teaching, particularly regarding the relationship between speaking anxiety and students' self-perceived oral communication competence. The findings can enrich the theoretical framework on how psychological factors like anxiety correlate with learners' self-assessment in an EFL context. Furthermore, this study can serve as a reference and basis for further research with similar variables or more complex designs.

2. Practical Benefits

a. For Lecturers

The results of this study can provide lecturers with empirical data on the level of speaking anxiety and the self-perceived competence of their students. This awareness can help them design more supportive and less anxiety-inducing classroom activities, adopt teaching strategies

that build students' confidence, and create a learning environment that reduces psychological barriers to speaking.

b. For Students

This research can help students become more aware of their own speaking anxiety levels and how these perceptions may influence their self-judgment regarding oral communication. This self-awareness is the first step toward developing self-regulation strategies to manage anxiety and potentially improve their actual performance through increased confidence.

c. For Future Researchers

This study provides a methodological example of employing quantitative correlation design using self-report questionnaires. The findings can be used as baseline data or a comparative reference for future studies wishing to explore similar variables, incorporate additional factors (e.g., motivation, learning styles), or employ mixed-methods designs that combine questionnaires with performance tests to gain a more comprehensive understanding.