

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

English plays a crucial role in advancing education in Indonesia. As a global language, English is highly valued in various professional fields. English proficiency opens greater opportunities for students to pursue higher education abroad and achieve their long-term goals. Therefore, English is crucial for those planning to study or work in an international environment. One of the primary goals of learning English is to enable students to communicate effectively. For messages to be clearly understood, students must use the language accurately and fluently to avoid miscommunication. Mastering English not only supports academic success but also enhances access to a wide range of information and knowledge. Many scientific articles, textbooks, and digital resources are published in English, making it essential for students to understand and engage with global content. In addition, English proficiency helps students participate in international discussions, collaborate with people from different cultural backgrounds, and broaden their perspectives.

In the context of the 21st century, communication skills in English are increasingly important due to globalization and technological advancements. Students are expected to be able to express their ideas, share opinions, and interact confidently in both spoken and written forms. Therefore, learning English is not only about understanding grammar and vocabulary but also about developing the ability to use the language effectively in real-life situations. This makes English an essential skill for students to compete and succeed in a rapidly

changing world. Achieving this level of communicative competence requires mastery of four core language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. According to (Indahsari, 2020), English is a compulsory subject in the Indonesian education system. English classes are considered a core subject and include assessments such as national exams, final exams, and midterm exams. These assessments typically evaluate all four language skills, although the format can vary between schools.

Furthermore, the increasing demands of globalization and technological advances have made English increasingly important for students in Indonesia. The widespread use of English in science, technology, business, and digital communication means that students with strong English skills are better prepared to access global knowledge and participate in international discourse. Therefore, schools are expected to not only teach English as a formal subject but also foster students' confidence and ability to apply the language in real-life contexts. Furthermore, the integration of English into various educational programs such as bilingual classes, international-standard schools, and extracurricular English clubs demonstrates how the Indonesian education system is increasingly prioritizing communicative competence. As a result, students are encouraged to practice English both inside and outside the classroom, which is crucial for building fluency and reducing common barriers such as fear of speaking, lack of vocabulary, and anxiety in language learning.

Speaking is a crucial skill that supports students' personal and academic growth. It allows them to express their ideas clearly, enhances their confidence, and helps build self-esteem. Strong speaking abilities enable students to take part in discussions, deliver effective

presentations, and communicate their thoughts to a broader audience. Speaking skills play an important role in developing students' critical thinking and social interaction. Through speaking activities, students learn how to organize their ideas, respond to others' opinions, and engage in meaningful conversations. This not only improves their language proficiency but also prepares them for real-life communication in various contexts, both formal and informal. In addition, the ability to speak effectively can open more opportunities for students in their future education and careers, as communication is a key competence required in many fields. Therefore, mastering speaking skills is essential for students to succeed academically and to function confidently in society. Given the importance of speaking skills in learning a foreign language, students are expected to speak English with confidence and competence. Speaking is one of the most essential skills in learning English, as it plays a vital role in enabling learners to communicate effectively in real-life situations. Speaking is not only a means of expressing ideas but also an important tool for building social relationships. In today's global era, the ability to speak English fluently is increasingly demanded, particularly in educational settings where communicative competence is one of the main goals. However, many students, especially in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts like Indonesia, still struggle to speak confidently and fluently. The Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbudristek 2022) reported that students' speaking performance in several Indonesian junior high schools remains relatively low due to various factors, including psychological barriers such as anxiety.

Language anxiety is a negative emotional state that makes it difficult for someone to learn or master a new language. Many students face various challenges when learning English, especially in speaking

activities. English is needed for almost all forms of communication, and in some cases, English is the primary means of interaction. (Sari, 2017) notes that anxiety is normal and can be experienced by anyone at any time. However, anxiety is one of the most common problems faced by students. Anxiety can affect students mentally and physically. Anxiety is manifested through emotional, cognitive, and behavioral symptoms that can include feelings such as fear or embarrassment, physical reactions such as a rapid heartbeat, and behavioral signs such as stuttering or fidgeting. In other words, students may feel nervous and unable to focus when anxious. Students can learn more effectively if they are confident in their abilities and practice regularly. (Aghajani, 2017) argue that language anxiety often occurs because students face difficulties with the language they are learning. Therefore, it is important to identify language anxiety so that students can be supported in their learning more easily. Language anxiety can negatively impact students' performance, attitudes, emotions, and even enjoyment of the learning process. Many students learning English as a second or foreign language experience anxiety due to the difficulty processing and expressing their thoughts in a new language. As a result, anxiety becomes a major problem in speaking activities.

This is in line with the findings of (Pendidikan et al., 2020), who stated that anxiety plays an important role in language learning. Students can feel nervous due to anxiety. Nervous students often experience fear and worry, which are negative emotions. These emotions can make it difficult for them to focus and remember what they have learned. Language anxiety refers to anxiety that arises specifically when learning a foreign language. Many students who learn English as a foreign language experience this type of anxiety. Language anxiety is one of the

main factors that affect students' speaking abilities. However, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers do not pay enough attention to how anxiety can impact students' speaking abilities (Saputra, 2018). Language anxiety can show up in two ways through physical reactions and behaviors. Physical symptoms may include shaking, a fast heartbeat, sweating, or blushing. This kind of anxiety can make it difficult for EFL students to speak English smoothly. As (Akkakoson, 2016) explains, anxiety in speaking a foreign language can greatly affect a learner's ability to speak fluently. Because of this, it is important to address and reduce students' anxiety during speaking classes, as it can negatively impact their performance. In recent years, foreign language speaking anxiety has become an interesting topic for research, and many studies have supported its significance. This kind of anxiety becomes even more noticeable in real-life situations, especially when students are required to speak in public or interact directly with others. Many people tend to feel uneasy, anxious, and in some cases even emotionally overwhelmed when they must speak in front of an audience. This condition, commonly referred to as speaking anxiety, is widely experienced by students across various levels of education from elementary school to university.

According to (Ansari, 2015), anxiety is a psychological response triggered by several factors such as fear, stress, nervousness, and worry, all of which are related to nervous system activity. These emotional reactions often interfere with students' performance in speaking tasks such as presentations, group discussions, or any activities that demand verbal communication. As a result, many students feel nervous or intimidated when asked to speak in front of the class, take part in discussions, or voice their opinions in front of teachers and classmates.

If not addressed properly, this anxiety can significantly reduce students' self-confidence, hinder their academic achievement, and even affect their future careers and mental well-being. The main problem faced by the students is speaking anxiety, which occurs when they feel nervous, fearful, or worried about making mistakes while speaking English. (Y. Lin et al., 2025) define foreign language anxiety as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours specifically aroused during the unique process of learning and using a foreign language in classroom settings. Factors contributing to this anxiety include a lack of vocabulary, fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, and limited speaking practice. This situation not only affects students' academic performance but also hinders the development of their communicative competence. Although several studies have explored the causes and levels of speaking anxiety among EFL learners, most have focused on quantitative measurements of anxiety levels or the identification of general factors.

In the context of MTs Pancasila Kota Bengkulu, speaking English is a challenge for many students. Initial observations revealed that some eighth-grade students often hesitated or remained silent when asked to speak in English during learning activities. They tended to avoid eye contact, give very short answers, or revert to Indonesian. Furthermore, observations in the English classes of MTs Pancasila Kota Bengkulu, indicated that students' difficulties were not only triggered by limited understanding and grammar, but also by psychological factors such as fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and anxiety about being judged by peers. During speaking activities, some students appeared restless, often paused for long periods, or whispered to their friends rather than answering aloud. The classroom atmosphere also indicated

that learning was still dominated by the teacher, providing few opportunities for students to express themselves freely in English. This situation further strengthened the researchers' interest in conducting this study, as speaking anxiety appeared to significantly hinder students' active participation and communicative development. By identifying the sources of their anxiety, the researchers hoped to propose strategies that could create a more supportive and engaging English learning environment in the classroom. This phenomenon aligns with the findings of (Sadikin et al., 2023), which states that speaking anxiety is one of the most common problems faced by junior high school students in Indonesia, thus reducing participation and limiting opportunities to practice English.

Research that specifically examines the strategies students use to overcome their anxiety is still limited, especially in the context of Islamic junior high schools (MTs) in Kota Bengkulu. Therefore, there is a need for an in-depth qualitative study to understand the coping strategies adopted by students, which could provide practical insights for teachers in designing more supportive learning environments. Understanding how students cope with speaking anxiety is crucial for improving their speaking performance. By identifying the strategies they use, teachers can provide better guidance, select more effective teaching methods, and create a more comfortable classroom atmosphere.

B. Identification of the Problems

Based on the background of the problem as described above, the problem identification is as follows:

1. Many students still experience anxiety when speaking English, especially during classroom activities such as presentations or discussions.

2. Students often show symptoms of anxiety such as nervousness, lack of confidence, avoiding eye contact, and fear of making mistakes while speaking English.
3. There is still a lack of understanding about the strategies students use to cope with their speaking anxiety.

C. Limitation of Research

1. This research is limited to Grade 8 students at MTs Pancasila Kota Bengkulu as the participants of the study.
2. This study only focuses on students' strategies to overcome anxiety in speaking English.

D. Research Questions

1. What are the strategies used by Grade 8 students at MTS Pancasila Kota Bengkulu to overcome anxiety when speaking English?
2. What is the most dominant strategy used by Grade 8 students of MTs Pancasila Kota Bengkulu to overcome anxiety in speaking English?

E. Objectives of the Research

1. To analyze the strategies used by Grade 8 students at MTs Pancasila Kota Bengkulu to overcome anxiety when speaking English in the classroom.
2. To explore and evaluate the perceptions of Grade 8 students at MTs Pancasila Kota Bengkulu regarding the effectiveness of the strategies they use to reduce speaking anxiety.

F. Benefits of the Research

This research is expected to make several important contributions both theoretically and practically:

1. Theoretical Benefits

This study contributes to the development of knowledge in the field of English language teaching, particularly in understanding the

psychological aspects of language learning such as speaking anxiety. It also enriches the literature on students' coping strategies in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts, especially at the junior high school level.

2. Practical Benefits

- a. For Students: The research can help students become more aware of their own anxiety and encourage them to apply effective strategies to reduce it, so they can improve their speaking performance and gain more confidence.
- b. For Teachers: The results may assist English teachers in identifying common problems faced by students and adapting teaching methods that support and reduce anxiety during speaking activities.
- c. For Schools: The findings can serve as input for schools to design supportive learning environments that promote communicative competence and emotional well-being.
- d. For Future Researchers: This study can serve as a foundation for those who want to explore similar issues in different contexts or apply different methodological approaches.

G. Definition of Key Terms

1. Speaking Anxiety

Speaking anxiety refers to the feelings of tension, nervousness, fear, or worry experienced by students when they are required to speak in English. This anxiety may manifest through physical symptoms such as trembling or sweating, as well as behavioural responses such as avoiding eye contact, giving minimal responses, or remaining silent. Speaking anxiety is commonly associated with

learners' fear of making mistakes, being judged by peers, or lacking confidence during oral communication activities in the classroom.

this type of anxiety can influence how students perceive their own abilities. Many students underestimate their speaking skills and assume that they are not capable of communicating effectively in English, even when they have sufficient knowledge. As a result, they become less willing to participate in speaking activities, which limits their opportunities to practice and improve. In addition, speaking anxiety is often influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors may include low self-confidence, limited vocabulary, or lack of preparation, while external factors can involve teaching methods, classroom atmosphere, or peer reactions. For example, a classroom environment that is too strict or overly focused on errors may increase students' fear of speaking. On the other hand, a supportive and encouraging environment can help reduce anxiety and make students feel more comfortable.

Speaking anxiety can also create a cycle that is difficult to break. When students feel anxious, they avoid speaking; as a result, their speaking skills do not improve, which then increases their anxiety even more. Therefore, it is important to address this issue by encouraging gradual practice, providing positive reinforcement, and creating a safe space where students feel accepted even when they make mistakes. By reducing speaking anxiety, students can become more confident and actively engaged in learning English.

2. Students' Strategies

Students' strategies refer to the deliberate actions, techniques, or methods used by learners to manage, reduce, or cope with their speaking anxiety. These strategies may include cognitive strategies

(such as rehearsal or self-talk), affective strategies (such as relaxation or building confidence), and social strategies (such as seeking peer support or asking for clarification). These strategies help students regulate their emotions and improve their performance during English speaking activities.

Cognitive strategies help students prepare themselves mentally before speaking. For example, students may practice what they want to say, organize their ideas in advance, or use positive self-talk to encourage themselves. This preparation can make them feel more ready and reduce the fear of making mistakes. By thinking more positively and focusing on what they can do, students can gradually build confidence in their speaking ability. Affective strategies are related to managing emotions and reducing anxiety. Students may try to calm themselves by taking deep breaths, relaxing their body, or reminding themselves that making mistakes is a normal part of learning. These strategies are important because when students feel more relaxed, they can think more clearly and speak more fluently. In other words, controlling emotions helps improve both confidence and performance.

Social strategies, on the other hand, involve interaction with others. Students may practice speaking with their friends, work in groups, or ask their teacher for help when they do not understand something. Support from peers and teachers can create a more comfortable learning environment and reduce the fear of being judged. When students feel supported, they are more willing to participate and take risks in speaking.

3. Speaking English

Speaking English refers to the ability of students to express ideas, thoughts, and information orally in the English language. It involves producing spoken language through pronunciation, vocabulary usage, fluency, and accuracy. In the context of this study, speaking English specifically relates to students' participation in classroom speaking activities, such as answering questions, giving opinions, or performing dialogues in English lessons. speaking English is not only about producing correct sentences, but also about how students can deliver their messages in a way that is understandable to others. This means students need to pay attention to how clearly they pronounce words, how they choose appropriate vocabulary, and how smoothly they can speak without too many long pauses. Fluency is important because it shows how naturally students can communicate, while accuracy helps ensure that their meaning is not misunderstood.

Speaking English also involves interaction between students and their teachers or peers. Through speaking activities, students learn how to respond to questions, express agreement or disagreement, and participate in discussions. These interactions help students develop communication skills that are useful not only in the classroom, but also in real-life situations. Regular practice in speaking English can help students become more confident over time. The more they practice, the more familiar they become with using the language, which can reduce hesitation and fear of making mistakes. Therefore, speaking English is an essential skill that supports students' overall language development and helps them become more active and effective communicators in English.