

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the Study

English is officially taught as a foreign language in Indonesian schools following the decision of the Minister of Education and Culture in 1967. English subject at the SMP/MTs education level is designed to develop students' potential for strong communicative competence in various aspects of daily life. Students are encouraged to use English in interpersonal, transactional, and functional contexts, both orally and in writing, focusing on topics such as themselves, family, others, animals, and objects in real and imagined situations. Integrating the language into home, school, and community environments allows students to apply English in various real-life situations.

In learning English, four skills must be mastered by all of the students. They are listening, speaking, reading, and also writing. Meanwhile, speaking is the core of language learning (Kosar & Bedir, 2014). Speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols in a variety of contexts. Torkey (2006) asserted that speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information. It means that by speaking students can convey their thoughts and feelings to the teacher and others. Bahadorfar and Omidvar (2014) explained why it is important for English learners to develop their speaking skills. Firstly, speaking plays a vital role in language learning and teaching, especially in ESL/EFL contexts. Secondly, mastering speaking is a top priority for language learners. Thirdly, proficiency in speaking serves as a means to

assess learners' acquisition of a second or foreign language. Richards (2008) outlined various functions of speaking in human interaction; speaking facilitates the establishment and maintenance of social relationships within society. Additionally, it serves as a tool for exchanging information and functioning as a transactional device. Furthermore, Richards identified different purposes for speaking: interactional speech, transactional speech, and performance speech where each has distinct characteristics in terms of form and function.

The success of learning speaking skills is measured based on the ability to perform a conversation in the language (Nunan, 1991); one aspect that can be observed is speaking performance. Students' speaking performance encompasses their ability to effectively convey information or express themselves in various contexts, such as dialogue, monologue, presentation, debate, speech, or any other forms where communication is required. It involves demonstrating their speaking skills in front of the audiences. Tuan and Mai (2015) suggested that several factors influence a student's speaking performance, including the conditions under which the performance take place, emotional elements affecting the student, their listening skills, and how they respond during speaking activities. In essence, students' abilities to articulate themselves orally are influenced by a combination of external circumstances, internal emotions, and their engagement during speaking tasks.

However, although the significances of speaking skills have been asserted by many experts, the learning of this skill does not always proceed as expected, which can be attributed to various complex and diverse problems that present obstacles for students. Doris and Jesica (2007, as cited in Fitriani et al., 2015) argued "language

problems may become the obstacles reason for the students to improve their language performance” (p. 4). Research in discovering the obstacles in speaking English have been carried out previously. Riadil (2020), for example, investigated the obstacles faced by English Department Students in Tidar Magelang University referred to inhibition, nothing to say, low or uneven participation, and mother tongue use. Same goes to Chand (2021) explored the obstacles experienced by undergraduate students at the Department of English Education, Far Western University in Nepal related to inhibition, nothing to say, low or uneven participation, and mother tongue use. Meanwhile Kusumastuti and Utami (2022) probed obstacles faced by 3<sup>rd</sup> semester students who were taking Public Speaking subject in English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto by divided into linguistic issues and non-linguistic referred to inhibition, nothing to say, low or uneven participation, and the use of mother tongue. Nisya and Rahman (2023) examined obstacles experienced by students at UIN Mataram's English Study Club involved inhibition, low or uneven participation, and mother tongue use. Furthermore, Palomargareta and Astutik (2023) found out the obstacles faced by junior high school in Sidoarjo pertained to inhibition, nothing to say, low or uneven participation, and mother tongue use.

In addition to the above findings, based on the researcher's observation at SMP Swasta Muhammadiyah 1 Medan, it was also found that the process of learning speaking did not run smoothly. This was caused by various problems that led to obstacles for students, which prevented them from conveying what was intended. Ur (1996) mentioned that there are four problems, including inhibition, nothing to say, low or uneven participation, and mother tongue use.

The following are the examples of obstacles found:

**Student** : In this time, I will presentation my...

**Teacher** : I will present

**Student** : Oh ya, hmm... I will present about health. *Health is ee... by consume healthy food... and...* (pause).

**Teacher** : You can mix with Indonesia

**Student** : Health is... *eee bisa didapatkan by consuming healthy food dan ee.. olahraga. And, ee...*

The observation results showed that one of students performing in front of the class appeared silent. Despite the teacher repeated encouragements for the student to speak up, the student remained silent, and got confusion about what to say. Even when prompted to express himself in Bahasa, the student struggled, as he found himself unable to articulate his thoughts. This situation aligned with one of the problems identified by Ur, namely, "nothing to say," which reflected an obstacle where the student had difficulty organizing his ideas or expressing himself, so he felt like he had nothing to say.

This study aims to investigate more deeply the obstacles experienced by 8<sup>th</sup> grade students of Junior high School in speaking performance. However, this research is different from previous studies because the focus is on speaking performance within the context of a particular school which is SMP Swasta Muhammadiyah 1 Medan, providing a localized perspective on the obstacles experienced by students in English speaking. This specificity offers a deeper understanding of the obstacles encountered by this specific group of students in their language-learning journey.

## 1.2. Problems of the Study

Based on the background of the study, the problems of this research are formulated as follows:

- 1.2.1. What are the obstacles experienced by 8<sup>th</sup> grade Junior High School students in speaking performance at SMP Swasta Muhammadiyah 1 Medan?
- 1.2.2. Why do the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Junior High School students experience obstacles in speaking performance at SMP Swasta Muhammadiyah 1 Medan?

## 1.3. Objectives of the Study

Based on the problems in this research, the objectives of the study are as follows:

- 1.3.1. To identify the obstacles experienced by 8<sup>th</sup> grade Junior High School students in speaking performance at SMP Swasta Muhammadiyah 1 Medan.
- 1.3.2. To describe the reasons why the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Junior High School students experience obstacles in speaking performance at SMP Swasta Muhammadiyah 1 Medan.

## 1.4. Scope of the Study

Problems limitations are established by researcher for this study so that it can be conducted in line with the intended objectives. This research examines obstacles experienced by 8<sup>th</sup> grade junior high school student in speaking performances at SMP

Swasta Muhammadiyah 1 Medan particularly in the Recount Text lesson of monologue about the topic “*When I was Child*”. The analysis regarding obstacles refers to the theory presented by Ur which has four types of problems. Those types are inhibition, nothing to say, low or uneven participation and mother tongue use. Through categorizing these types, the research aims to offer clear parameters for the obstacles being investigated and finding out the reason behind them.

### **1.5. Significances of the Study**

The findings in this research are expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions and benefits as follows:

#### **1.5.1. Theoretically**

- a. This research is expected to provide information about obstacles experienced by 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in speaking performances within the context of SMP Swasta Muhammadiyah 1 Medan which can contribute to the existing knowledge on language learning and performance assessment.
- b. The research is expected to enrich the literature on speaking proficiency in junior high school settings. It serves as a point of reference for upcoming studies on language learning and teaching.

#### **1.5.2. Practically**

- a. For researchers, this study provides a framework for developing strategies to enhance speaking skills.

- b. For students, this study helps for gaining awareness of common obstacles in speaking performances, thereby empowering them to address those obstacles and improve their oral communication abilities.
- c. For teachers, can utilize the findings of this research as a resource for refining their teaching methods and designing speaking activities that effectively address the identified obstacles.
- d. For schools, particularly SMP Swasta Muhammadiyah 1 Medan, can utilize the insights from this study to inform curriculum development and extracurricular initiatives aimed at bolstering students' speaking proficiency.

