

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Language is an essential component of human life, present in every aspect of our activities and interactions. It is a fundamental human trait that serves the primary purpose of facilitating communication. Effective communication is crucial for achieving mutual understanding between speakers and listeners or between writers and readers. Therefore, the study of foreign languages, including English, is a key part of the educational curriculum in Indonesia.

According to the Indonesian curriculum, learning English as a foreign language aims to develop Indonesians who can communicate with people from various countries around the world. English language education provides the opportunity to achieve the Pancasila Student Profile through written, visual, and oral text materials, as well as through activities incorporated into the teaching and learning process (Kurikulum Merdeka, 2022).

In high school, learning English as a foreign language necessitates students attaining communicative competence across language skills like reading, listening, writing, and speaking. According to the independent curriculum, the objectives of English learning also encompass developing communicative competence in English through diverse multimodal texts, including oral, written, visual, and audiovisual forms.

Speaking, one of the productive language skills alongside writing, is considered more challenging to acquire compared to the other three language skills (Brown, 1994). It is a fundamental means of communication in social contexts, involving the construction and exchange of meaning through verbal and non-verbal symbols in various settings (Chaney, 1998). In the Indonesian curriculum, speaking is defined as the ability to express ideas, thoughts, and feelings verbally during social interactions.

Speaking is frequently used in communication because it allows for immediate responses in a short time frame. According to Nunan, a crucial aspect of learning to speak in English as a second or foreign language is mastering the art of conversation, with communicative success being measured by the ability to effectively complete conversations in the target language (Nunan, 1995).

Despite its importance in language learning, students often find it challenging to achieve fluency in English. In 2023, the EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) ranked Indonesia 79th out of 113 countries, with an average score of 473, categorizing it as a country with low proficiency. This low proficiency level corresponds to a B1 level according to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) standards (EF EPI, 2023).

Effective communication is the primary goal of language learning, particularly when it comes to speaking in English. However, "speaking is assumed to be the most stressful among the four language skills" (Sidik, 2021). Many students in Indonesia express difficulties and sometimes even

acknowledge their failure in learning to speak English. According to Nunan (1995), speaking is an integral part of human life, yet it often presents challenges, one of which is anxiety in situations requiring communication. Al-Saraj (2011) corroborates that this phenomenon can be attributed to various factors, with anxiety being one of the most significant.

Horwitz et al. (1986) observed that while students may excel in other language skills, they often experience a 'mental block' when asked to speak English. Psychological conditions vary among students; some can speak confidently, while others feel nervous and shy, hindering their ability to speak English. Feelings of shame, fear of making mistakes, and anxiety are common reasons for this difficulty. Price (1991), as cited in Öztürk & Gürbüz (2014), found that classroom speaking activities induce anxiety because students fear making mistakes, being laughed at, or being judged by their peers.

Krashen (1980) notes that individuals with low confidence experience higher levels of anxiety compared to those with high confidence. They worry about their peers' opinions, and teachers often exacerbate this anxiety by expecting beginners to perform at a high level of speaking competence. Therefore, fostering high self-confidence is crucial for improving speaking skills, as it can mitigate the issues that hinder effective communication.

Anxiety is a well-documented phenomenon in psychology, generally described as the body's response to certain situations. Feelings of

threat, fear of impending events, tension, or worry are common manifestations of anxiety. It is a normal reaction that students may experience when confronted with challenging situations.

Previous research has investigated language anxiety, including a study by Horwitz, Howritz, and Cope (1986), which measured levels of foreign language anxiety. Their findings indicate that students with high anxiety levels are often afraid to speak in a foreign language, fear being less capable than their peers, and worry about negative judgment from others (Horwitz et al., 1986). Additionally, Aida (1994) conducted a study on the impact of anxiety on speaking ability, revealing that higher levels of anxiety in EFL students correlate with lower proficiency in speaking.

To align with the common issues that frequently occur in the process of learning to speak, the researcher conducted preliminary observations to identify the specific challenges faced by the students in question.

Preliminary data collection was involved in this study using two methods: interviews and observations with both teachers and students. These methods aimed to gather information on the speaking anxiety experienced by students, as well as the anxiety that could be observed by teachers. The results of interviews with teachers showed that students often seemed to experience difficulties and often indicated resistance when asked to speak English. Meanwhile, observation results show that when asked to speak English, students show symptoms of speaking anxiety such as nervous, sweaty palms, heart beating fast, and forgetting very important

things when going to a presentation in front of the class. The following are some preliminary data obtained by the researcher:

Data 1.

Interviewee : “*Kadang kalo udah gitu, saya suka **deg-degan**, Miss, terus **tangan saya kayak basah gitu**, makanya ga suka kalo misalnya disuruh maju kedepan sama Miss Aci”*

(Sometimes when it's like that, I like to get **nervous**, Miss, and then my **hands feel like they're so wet**, that's why I don't like it if Miss Aci asked me to talk in front of the class.”

Interviewer : “*Deg-degan gimana maksudnya?*” (What do you mean by get nervous?)

Interviewee : “*Jantungku berdebar kencang gitu, Miss.*” (My **heart is racing**, Miss)

Based on the first preliminary data, it shows that students feel something when they are asked to speak English in class. Students show symptoms of their heart beating fast and their hands feeling wet when they are asked to speak in class.

Data 2.

Interviewee : “*Takut sih, Miss. Karena saya tuh suka lupa mau ngomong apa kalo di depan, Miss, jadinya kalo mau ngomong kedepan harus bawa catatan, Miss. Kalo misalnya ga ada catatan, ya gitu, Miss, suka lupa apa yang mau diomongin.*” (I'm afraid, Miss. Because **I often forget what I want to say** in front (in front of the class), Miss, so if I want to speak in front (in front of the class” I have to bring notes, Miss. If, for example, there are no notes, that's it, Miss, I like to forget what I wanted to say”

Based on the second preliminary data, it was found that students experienced memory loss when asked to speak English in front of the class.

The student stated that he had to bring notes to help him avoid forgetting the information that would be presented. According to Roger (2004), memory loss falls into the second category that is related to mental symptoms of anxiety.

Data 3.

Interviewee : “*Saya gasuka, Miss, soalnya saya malu kalo diliatin didepan kelas gitu. Apalagi saya ga terlalu bisa bahasa Inggris, Miss, takut diejek sama kawan-kawan sih, Miss, soalnya kadang mau gitu orang itu, Miss.*” (I don't like it, Miss, because **I'm embarrassed** to be seen in front of the class like that. Moreover, I don't really speak English, Miss, I'm afraid of being ridiculed by my friends, Miss, because sometimes they're (her friends) like that, Miss.

Based on the third preliminary data, it was found that students felt embarrassed when asked to speak English because they were afraid of their friends' judgment. Embarrassment is one of the symptoms of anxiety which is included in the emotional symptoms felt by students.

However, the researcher also identified several factors contributing to students experiencing symptoms or indications of speaking anxiety. Firstly, some students lacked self-confidence in their ability to communicate. Secondly, others struggled to perform well when speaking. Thirdly, some students faced challenges in developing their speaking skills due to feelings of shyness, nervousness, and anxiety. Fourthly, fear of making mistakes while speaking was also prevalent among students. Lastly, some students reported a lack of vocabulary as a barrier.

While previous studies have explored factors contributing to foreign language anxiety, there remains a gap in research specifically focusing on students' levels of speaking anxiety, its symptoms, and how these relate to broader foreign language speaking anxiety. Despite this gap, substantial research has been conducted on strategies to help students manage anxiety in classroom settings.

Given the challenges mentioned above, it is crucial for both students and teachers to understand students' levels of speaking anxiety, their speaking achievements, the symptoms they exhibit, and the factors contributing to their anxiety when speaking English as a foreign language. Several factors have been identified as contributors to foreign language speaking anxiety.

Based on these considerations, the researcher proposes a study titled "Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety of Tenth Grade Students at SMAN 15 Medan." This descriptive qualitative research aims to address the research questions posed.

1.2 Problems of the Study

To address the various concerns related to students' language anxiety outlined earlier, the problem statement is formulated as follows:

1. What is the anxiety level of students in speaking English as a foreign language?
2. How is the students' speaking English achievement with the level of anxiety?
3. How is the speaking anxiety symptoms realized when speaking English as a foreign language?
4. Why is anxiety in speaking English as foreign language realized as the way it is?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the aforementioned problem statement, the objectives of this study are outlined as follows:

1. To categorize the students' speaking anxiety level in learning English as foreign language.
2. To gain insights about students' speaking achievements.
3. To elucidate the symptoms of speaking anxiety experienced by students when speaking English as a foreign language.
4. To elaborate the factors that caused the students to feel anxiety when they have to speak English as foreign language.

1.4 Scope of The Study

To ensure clarity in addressing the research problem, this study confines its scope to tenth-grade students at SMAN 15 Medan, focusing specifically on their levels of speaking anxiety, their speaking performance achievement, symptoms of speaking anxiety, and factors contributing to this anxiety in the context of learning English as a foreign language. The investigation aligns with Horwitz's (1986) theory of language anxiety. Importantly, the research will be conducted exclusively within classroom settings, with no exploration outside of these environments.

1.5 Significances of The Study

The results of this study are expected to be useful theoretically and practically, as follows:

1. Theoretically, the research can inform curriculum developers and teachers about the specific needs and challenges of tenth grade students in relation to speaking anxiety. This can lead to the development of more relevant and effective teaching materials, instructional strategies, and assessment methods that address the anxieties and promote speaking fluency and confidence.

2. Practically, the results will be beneficial to as follows:

a. Students

For students, this study will provide valuable insights for students themselves. By assessing their anxiety levels, students can gain self-awareness and a better understanding of their emotional state during English speaking activities. This knowledge can empower them to take proactive steps to manage their anxiety, develop coping strategies, and improve their overall speaking performance.

b. Teacher

By exploring the factors that cause speaking anxiety, teachers can develop strategies to alleviate anxiety and create a supportive learning environment. This study aims to identify the specific sources of anxiety, such as fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, or peer judgment, to develop targeted interventions that address students' needs effectively. By understanding the factors that contribute to speaking anxiety, teachers can create classroom environments that foster student engagement and active participation, ultimately improving speaking achievement.

c. Researcher

The outcomes of this study offer valuable insights for researchers in language education. They add to the current knowledge on speaking anxiety and its influence on the speaking proficiency of tenth-grade students in Indonesia. Future researchers can delve deeper into the specific factors contributing to anxiety in this particular context, enriching our comprehension of these intricate dynamics. Moreover, this research lays a groundwork for subsequent studies, providing a basis to explore effective strategies and educational methods that can mitigate speaking anxiety and improve language learning results.

