

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Background of the Study

English is an international language that plays an important role in education, technology, and global communication. In Indonesia, English is taught from the elementary to the university level with the aim of enabling students to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing. The teaching of English emphasizes four main skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these four skills, speaking is often considered the most complex because it requires both linguistic and non-linguistic competence. This complexity arises from the need to use appropriate language structures, vocabulary, pronunciation, and confidence to express ideas spontaneously within a limited time. As stated by Thornbury (2005), speaking involves rapid and spontaneous cognitive processes that occur in real communication situations.

In practice, speaking ability remains one of the biggest challenges for Indonesian students. Many students understand grammar and vocabulary, yet struggle to use them in real communication during class. One of the main factors contributing to this difficulty is speaking anxiety, a psychological condition characterized by feelings of fear, nervousness, or embarrassment when speaking English. This phenomenon often discourages students from actively participating in speaking activities, making the learning process passive and less effective. This aligns with Tuan and Mai (2015), who found that EFL learners often face psychological barriers such as fear of making mistakes and lack of confidence

when speaking in front of others. Similarly, MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) explained that speaking anxiety can significantly reduce students' motivation and hinder their communicative performance.

Based on preliminary data obtained during the researcher's Teaching Practice Program (PLP II) at MAN 1 Medan in the 2023/2024 academic year, it was found that most students exhibited signs of anxiety when asked to speak in front of the class. Out of approximately 30 students in grade XI, only a few were confident enough to speak actively, while the majority tended to look down, avoid eye contact, smile nervously, or fidget with their hands. When given the opportunity to speak, their voices were soft and hesitant. Through classroom reflection and brief interviews, the researcher found that the main causes of this anxiety included fear of mispronunciation, fear of being laughed at by peers, and fear of negative evaluation from the teacher. Some students even preferred to remain silent to avoid embarrassing themselves. These preliminary findings strengthen the notion that speaking anxiety is a real issue affecting students' participation in English learning at MAN 1 Medan.

This condition also indicates a gap between the goals of the curriculum and the reality in the classroom. The 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013 or K13) emphasizes the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, which focuses on meaningful communication and student-centered learning. However, the effectiveness of this approach highly depends on the teacher's ability to create a supportive and low-anxiety classroom environment. As Richards (2006) stated, the success of CLT lies in how teachers manage the classroom atmosphere to

make students feel comfortable taking linguistic risks. Therefore, teachers are not only transmitters of knowledge but also facilitators who help students overcome psychological barriers, including fear of speaking in front of others.

Previous studies have also highlighted the important role of teachers in helping students overcome speaking anxiety, such as those conducted by Fitriana (2020) and Harahap (2021).

Fitriana (2020) investigated the implementation of role play activities as a teacher's strategy to reduce students' speaking anxiety among senior high school students in Yogyakarta. Using a descriptive qualitative design, she found that teachers who employed role play activities successfully created an enjoyable learning atmosphere where students could practice speaking without pressure. The activity helped students develop confidence because they were able to express ideas in situations that resembled real-life communication. Her findings revealed that role play effectively reduced students' emotional tension and encouraged active participation during speaking sessions.

Meanwhile, Harahap (2021) conducted a case study at one of the Islamic senior high schools (Madrasah Aliyah) in North Sumatra and found that the type of feedback provided by teachers also significantly influenced students' speaking anxiety. The study showed that teachers who consistently gave positive feedback—such as praise for students' efforts, gentle correction, and verbal encouragement—helped reduce students' fear and embarrassment when speaking English. Moreover, a positive interpersonal relationship between teachers and

students encouraged students to express their ideas more confidently. This research highlights that a supportive teacher attitude can serve as an important affective factor in reducing students' speaking anxiety.

However, despite the valuable insights provided by these studies, several research gaps remain unaddressed. Both studies focused on specific teaching techniques, such as role play and teacher feedback, rather than exploring the overall strategies used by teachers to manage students' speaking anxiety in the classroom. Furthermore, most previous research was conducted in general schools, not in madrasahs, even though madrasahs have distinctive social and cultural characteristics that may influence classroom interaction and students' affective responses. Therefore, this study aims to fill those gaps by investigating the strategies used by English teachers to overcome students' speaking anxiety at MAN 1 Medan, as well as describing how these strategies are implemented in classroom speaking activities. The results of this study are expected to provide a deeper understanding of the teacher's role in fostering students' confidence and creating a more supportive English learning environment.

## **1.2 Research Problem**

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

1. What strategies are used by the English teacher to overcome students' speaking anxiety in speaking activities at MAN 1 Medan?

2. What are the teacher's reasons for using those strategies in overcoming students' anxiety in speaking activities at MAN 1 Medan?

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to:

1. Describe in detail the strategies used by the English teacher at MAN 1 Medan to overcome students' speaking anxiety during speaking activities in English classes.
2. To find out the teacher's reasons for using those strategies in overcoming students' anxiety in speaking activities at MAN 1 Medan.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical benefits:

#### **1. Theoretical Benefits:**

This study is highly expected to contribute to the development of studies in the field of English language teaching, particularly those related to speaking anxiety and teaching strategies that can be applied to overcome it. The findings of this study are also expected to serve as a reference for future researchers who are interested in similar topics.

#### **2. Practical Benefits:**

*For English teachers:* This research can serve as a source of information regarding various effective strategies to help students

experiencing speaking anxiety, allowing teachers to choose or develop suitable approaches based on the stated conditions.

*For students:* With the implementation of strategies by teachers, students are expected to feel more confident, motivated, and actively participate in English-speaking activities in class.

*For educational institutions:* The research results can support teacher training or teaching policies that encourage more effective and supportive speaking instruction for students experiencing anxiety.

### **1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study**

This study focuses on strategies used by teachers in overcoming students' speaking anxiety during speaking activities in English language learning at MAN 1 Medan. The scope of this study includes classroom speaking activities involving direct interaction between teachers and students.

The limitations of this study are as follows:

1. The study focuses only on teachers' strategies, not on students' overall learning outcomes.
2. The types of anxiety examined are limited to speaking anxiety experienced by students who participate in classroom speaking activities.
3. The subjects of the research are limited to English teachers and students of class XI at MAN 1 Medan who are involved in speaking activities.