

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. The Background of the Study

The background of the study is information that is systematically arranged regarding phenomena and problematic problems that are interesting to study (Puspitasari, 2016). In the current era, the English language is easily encountered in everyday life. English can be found online in various formats, including YouTube videos, games, books, movies, and websites. For this reason, being fluent in English is essential. English has become one of the most significant disciplines in Indonesia's educational system. This also has an impact on the prospects of students in obtaining higher-quality job opportunities. Nambiar et al. (cited in Safira & Azzahra, 2022) found that English language skills are important transferable skills because they can be applied in various fields. Consequently, this impacts students in vocational high schools who aim to enter the workforce directly after graduation. They can develop their English language skills to understand their respective fields in the working world.

The four fundamental language skills students must acquire while studying English are speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Speaking is one of the important productive skills to learn. Speaking is the main language utilized while interacting socially with other people. According to Bygate in Al-Roud (2016), speaking is the ability to use oral language to express ideas, intentions, thoughts, and feelings to others to make the message clearly delivered and well understood by the listener. Thus, it can be argued that speaking serves as a tool to facilitate

students in expressing their ideas, information, and feelings. Al-Hosni (2014) regards speaking as a crucial skill, as the progress in language learning depends on the learners' ability to engage in oral activities. Wael et al., (2018) also assert that to enhance their English language competence, students must be proficient in spoken English. In other words, students' English language proficiency parameters also depend on their speaking abilities. Therefore, to determine whether students possess strong English language proficiency or not, they must demonstrate their speaking skills.

In the Merdeka Curriculum, speaking ability is considered an essential communication skill that must be actively developed through verbal interaction. This curriculum emphasizes the importance of students being able to express themselves effectively in English and other languages, according to their developing abilities. These activities can include group discussions, role-playing, presentations, debates, and more. Teachers are also encouraged to create a supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable speaking and are given ample opportunities to practice and develop their speaking skills.

However, speaking English is not an easy task for a foreign-language learner. According to Tanveer (cited in Leong & Ahmadi, 2017), many EFL students express their inability to speak English fluently because speaking is challenging to master. It might be challenging for students to speak English when it is taught as a foreign language since they need to have a lot of confidence while speaking a new language. This is further supported by Azahra and Safira (2022), who found that most student perceptions indicate that speaking skills pose a

particular challenge for them in mastering the English language. These students may excel in other English language skills, but a significant portion of them face mental barriers when attempting to learn to speak English. They harbor fears of making mistakes in speaking, as they must consider grammar rules, vocabulary, and comprehension while attempting to communicate in English. Furthermore, a lack of confidence, low achievement, and awareness of their English language learning contribute to their apprehension. When asked to speak, students become afraid, anxious, and panic; they stutter and often refuse when asked to speak English by teachers or others, choosing silence rather than speaking. These characteristics indicate that students are exhibiting symptoms of language anxiety.

Anxiety is a phenomenon that has been extensively documented in the field of psychology. It is common for students to experience anxiety when they are placed in difficult circumstances. Horwitz et al. (cited in Oteir & Al Otaibi, 2019) describe "language anxiety as a complex set of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to language learning in the classroom that arise from the unique language learning process." Anxiety is defined as a subjective state of tension, anxiety, jitters, and concern brought on by the autonomic nervous system being activated. This suggests that many foreign language learners are nervous in class, which impairs their ability to speak.

The lack of practice and habit of speaking English in the classroom results in many cases of students lacking confidence and feeling anxious when asked to speak English in front of others. Students typically experience worry, lack of self-confidence, and nervousness signs of foreign language anxiety which indicate that

various factors contribute to students' anxiety when speaking English. Therefore, it is important to understand students' anxiety when speaking English. The researcher observes that anxiety indeed occurs in English-speaking classes. Many students struggle with speaking, and students at SMK Negeri 4 Medan also experience this issue.

At the vocational school level, English classes are offered, such as at SMK Negeri 4 Medan. This vocational school in Medan comprises four majors: Teknik audio-visual (TAV), Teknik Kendaraan Ringan (TKR), Teknik Bisnis Sepeda Motor (TBSM), and Teknik Pengelasan (PL). One of the goals of vocational schools is to produce individuals with high-quality skills for their professions. In the professional world, especially in large companies, English language interviews are often conducted to secure high-quality and globally competitive positions. Therefore, the researcher chose SMK Negeri 4 Medan to gain a deeper understanding of English, particularly in speaking. The researcher selected the tenth grade as it represents a transitional stage from junior high to senior high school. At this level, students still need to adapt, making the tenth grade an appropriate focus from the early stages. Without a desire to speak English, students will not become successful language learners.

Based on the preliminary data collecting conducted through observation and interviews with a teacher at SMKN 4 Medan, Ms. Kasih Indriyanti, S.Pd., the researcher found that some students cannot speak fluently and clearly in front of the class due to experiencing symptoms indicative of speaking anxiety. This is influenced by emotional dimensions referring to physiological reactions and the

autonomic nervous system responses to certain outcomes or objects. Symptoms commonly felt by students include sweating, restlessness, trembling voice, repetition of words or sentences, frequent use of filler words like "uh," "euu," and "um" when speaking, appearing pale, inability to recall facts accurately, and forgetting important points when presenting in front of the class. This is caused by feelings of embarrassment, nervousness, panic, lack of confidence, and sometimes disturbances from classmates during presentations. The researcher also interviewed students, who confirmed embarrassment, nervousness, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes when asked to speak because they had never practiced speaking English formally or informally with friends or people around them.

The researcher also observed the speaking test scores of tenth-grade students at SMK Negeri 4 Medan, where the average score only achieved the minimum passing standard (KKM), with some students scoring below it. This indicates the presence of barriers and difficulties faced by students in speaking English, leading to feelings of anxiety and fear when speaking. The researcher found that the phenomenon affecting students' speaking anxiety is due to their lack of awareness of the importance of expanding vocabulary, mastering grammar, and practicing English pronunciation correctly. Consequently, some students have low confidence in communication, cannot perform well in speaking, fear making mistakes, and are unable to develop their speaking skills, which hinders them from expressing their brilliant ideas when speaking in front of the class.

The researcher uses two previous studies to support the current investigation. First, Wulandari (2021) did a study titled "An Analysis of Students' Strategies to Cope with Speaking Anxiety at Eleventh-Grade Students of SMAN 15 Medan". The purpose of this study was to measure students' levels of speaking anxiety and to understand better the tactics they used to deal with speaking anxiety in the EFL classroom. The results showed that the majority of students, 19 out of 25 (76%), had moderate levels of speaking anxiety. Furthermore, 19 students (76%) selected positive thinking as their preferred technique for dealing with anxiety, making it the most commonly employed strategy among students.

Another study conducted by Taqwa (2022) titled "An Analysis of Students' Speaking Anxiety on Their Speaking Participation in the EFL Classroom". The goal of this study was to evaluate the level of speaking anxiety among students, identify the impact of anxiety, and investigate the factors influencing students' speaking involvement. A mixed-methods strategy was used to investigate and explain student anxiety data. The study found that speaking anxiety impacted students' speaking engagement, influencing their expressing of views, reluctance to ask questions or engage in arguments, and reticence to participate. Several other factors affecting student speaking engagement in the EFL classroom were discovered, including English language competency, low self-esteem, fear of making mistakes, a lack of preparation, motivation, instructional approaches, and teacher attitudes.

Differentiating this research from the previous studies above, the present study examines various types of speaking anxiety. Additionally, the first

preliminary study involved eleventh-grade high school students as its population, while the second preliminary study involved second-semester students majoring in English Education. In contrast, this study focuses on tenth-grade students at the vocational school SMK Negeri 4 Medan, representing specific departments and academic levels. These differences highlight the unique aspects of this research compared to previous studies. In this study, the researcher will focus on the types of speaking anxiety experienced by students and the strategies that can be implemented by students to cope their speaking anxiety in English classes. The researcher believes that this study will provide valuable insights, consistent with the reasons mentioned above. Therefore, the researcher aims to conduct a study titled **“Students' Anxiety in Speaking English at Tenth-Grade Students of SMK Negeri 4 Medan”**.

B. Problems of the Study

According to Sugiyono (cited in Abdussamad, 2021), "A research problem is a form of question that can guide researchers in collecting field data." Therefore, in drafting a problem statement, it is essential to pay attention to the techniques of problem formulation to avoid errors or failures during the research process.

To address the several issues concerning students' language anxiety as delineated above, the researcher formulated the following research questions:

1. What types of anxiety are experienced by tenth-grade students at SMK Negeri 4 Medan when speaking English?

2. What strategies are used by students in coping with their anxiety in speaking English?

C. Objectives of the Study

The research objectives are closely related to the formulated problem statement, and their answers are found in the research conclusions (Siyoto, 2015). Following the problem statement above, the aims of this study are as follows:

1. Investigating the types of students' anxiety in speaking English at tenth-grade students at SMK Negeri 4 Medan
2. Analyzing the strategies used in coping speaking anxiety among tenth-grade students at SMK Negeri 4 Medan.

D. Scope of The Study

According to Creswell & Creswell (2017), "The scope of the research is the framework of the study, which delineates the boundaries of the research, narrows down the problems, and limits the research area."

In this research, the researcher limits the scope of the study to investigate the types of speaking anxiety experienced by students related to presentations and their speaking abilities in the English language classroom as a foreign language based on Ellis's (2015). Additionally, the researcher will analyze the coping strategies to cope their speaking anxiety among tenth-grade students at SMK Negeri 4 Medan, based on Kondo and Ying-Ling's (in Indrianty, 2016)

theory of coping strategy for foreign language anxiety. In this study, the researcher also confines speaking within Indonesia's latest curriculum, namely the Merdeka curriculum, which emphasizes students' speaking performance in the context of learning English as a foreign language.

E. Significances of The Study

According to Sugiyono (2017), the significance of the study is a description that explains the benefits of the research for science and society. These benefits can include providing new contributions to existing theories and explaining how this research can be applied to solve problems in the field.

The findings of this study are predicted to be useful both theoretically and practically, as follows:

1. Theoretically, this study can help acquire preliminary information for the analysis of students' speaking anxiety based on the types of anxiety students experience when speaking English and the strategies they take to cope with it.

2. Practically the results will be useful as follows:

- a. Students

This research can help students improve their language learning in class, particularly their speaking skills.

- b. Teacher

The teachers can develop strategies to teach students to confidently learn English as a foreign language.

c. Researcher

The researcher has experience and knowledge regarding the types of speaking anxiety and strategies that can cope with foreign language anxiety. Apart from that, the researcher can expand their understanding of the world of research itself.

