

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This part of the research focuses on exploring Thai students' English speaking experiences in a multilingual academic context at UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri, highlighting the challenges and opportunities they encounter. The research consists of research background, research problems, research objectives, scope and limitations, research significance, and definitions of key terms.

A. Background of the Study

International student mobility continues to increase along with the current development of globalization, particularly in Southeast Asian regions such as Thailand. One of the main focuses of ASEAN intergovernmental cooperation is educational integration that encourages cross-border student exchange. In a publication issued by the ASEAN Secretariat (2025), it is explained that since the expansion of ASEAN membership in the 1990s, regional integration continues to develop and emphasizes the importance of student mobility as an effort to strengthen cross-border cooperation and improve graduates' competitiveness. Therefore, the increasing number of international students, including Thai students who continue their studies in Indonesia, becomes part of ASEAN's strategic effort to build a collaborative and mutually beneficial higher education ecosystem in the Southeast Asian region.

English as an international language plays an important role, especially in the academic world. English proficiency becomes a key factor for international students who want to continue their studies abroad. With English proficiency, students expand their networks and access various learning resources, which in turn increase their future career opportunities (O'g'li, 2025). Hartienah and Fauzia (2024) state that in the ASEAN community, English is widely used to achieve various purposes, including in the academic field. Thus, English mastery not only supports academic success but also prepares students to face global demands, including Thai students who study abroad.

In Indonesia, Islamic universities such as UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri become one of the study destinations for international students, especially from Thailand. The presence of Thai students creates a multicultural academic environment that encourages cross-cultural interaction in campus life. In this context, English plays a role as a communication tool that is mainly used in academic settings such as lectures, while in daily life, interactions are mostly conducted in Indonesian and Javanese as the dominant local languages. This condition shows a division of language functions in the campus environment that also influences the learning experiences of international students.

More specifically, Thai students who study in Indonesia face various difficulties in the process of developing their English speaking skills. Speaking skill is one of the important aspects in language learning because it not only functions to deliver information orally in real situations but also plays a role in supporting academic success and professional opportunities (Abrar et al., 2024; Herlisya & Wiratno, 2024). However, speaking in English is not a simple skills because it involves various linguistic and communicative aspects that must be processed simultaneously in communication (Brown, 2019). Therefore, international students often face difficulties in achieving fluency and clarity in speaking.

This condition becomes more complex when English speaking skills are developed in a multilingual academic environment. In this context, students do not only use one language, but combine various languages such as Thai as their mother tongue, Indonesian, Javanese, and English in both academic and social interactions. This situation influences how students understand materials, communicate, and participate in academic activities (Poveda et al., 2026). Thus, a multilingual environment is not only a learning setting but also a factor that shapes the dynamics of students' learning experiences, especially in the development of speaking skills.

Various previous studies show that international students, especially Thai students, face several challenges in speaking English. A study by Danisti et al. (2025) finds that Thai students experience speaking anxiety,

low self-confidence, and limited exposure to English in daily life. In addition, Huayluek (2024) also identifies linguistic difficulties such as limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, and pronunciation problems, as well as non-linguistic factors such as anxiety and lack of preparation. This shows that speaking difficulties are not only related to linguistic aspects but are also influenced by psychological factors and complex communication demands (Abulhassan, 2025; Brown, 2015; Gkonou et al., 2017).

On the other hand, a multilingual academic environment also offers various opportunities that can support the development of English speaking skills. Kunaepi et al. (2024) show that international students do not only face challenges but also gain benefits through cross-cultural interaction and learning experiences in multicultural environments. In addition, Liu et al. (2023) emphasize that interaction with peers can increase engagement and self-confidence in the language learning process. In this context, the flexible use of multiple languages is also in line with the concept of translanguaging, which allows learners to utilize their full linguistic repertoire to construct meaning and improve communication fluency (García & Otheguy, 2025). Moreover, digital learning resources play a supporting role in expanding language input and promoting learner autonomy in developing language skills (Indriani et al., 2024). Thus, these opportunities are relevant to be further explored in supporting the development of speaking skills.

Although many studies have discussed speaking difficulties and international students' learning experiences, most of them still separate linguistic and psychological aspects, and have not specifically examined the speaking experiences of Thai students in Islamic universities in Indonesia within complex multilingual environments. In addition, studies that combine both challenges and opportunities in the development of speaking skills are still limited. Therefore, this study aims to explore how Thai students face challenges while also utilizing opportunities in developing English speaking skills in a multilingual academic environment at UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri.

B. Problems of the Study

Based on the background of this study, the problem of this research is formulated into the following questions:

1. What challenges do Thai students face in developing English speaking skills in a multilingual academic context at UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri?
2. What opportunities do Thai students experience in developing English speaking skills in a multilingual academic context at UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri?

C. Objectives of the Study

Based on the research problems of the study, the researcher sets up the objectives of the study as the following:

1. To identify the challenges experienced by Thai students in developing English speaking skills in a multilingual academic context at UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri.
2. To examine the opportunities experienced by Thai students in developing English speaking skills in a multilingual academic context at UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri.

D. Significance of the Study

This research contributes to the field of English language learning by providing a deeper understanding of Thai students' English speaking experiences in a multilingual academic environment. The findings are expected to provide benefits for the following parties:

1. Students

This research helps Thai students to better understand their experiences in learning English speaking in a new academic environment in order to evaluate how they learn and find strategies that better suit their needs, as well as provide a space for reflection for students to deal with language learning barriers in developing English speaking skills in an environment that uses more than one language.

2. Teachers and Lecturers

This research contributes to lecturers and teachers in designing learning methods that are more effective, communicative, and responsive to the needs of foreign students, especially in supporting the development of English speaking skills, as well as considering the diverse cultural backgrounds and language abilities of students, by understanding the difficulties faced by Thai students.

3. Institutions

This research serves as a basis for designing academic and non-academic programs that support the academic success of international students, particularly in improving their English speaking competence. It also strengthens campus internationalization policies to help international students feel more accepted and adapt effectively.

E. Scope and Limitation

The scope of this study is to explore the experiences of Thai students in developing English speaking skills in a multilingual academic setting at UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri. This study specifically focuses on Thai students in the English Education Department because they have the most relevant experience in using English for academic purposes while also adapting to a multilingual environment.

This study is limited to the subjective experiences of three Thai students who are selected purposively based on the research criteria. As a descriptive qualitative study, it aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences rather than to generalize the findings to all international students at UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri or other universities. Therefore, the findings are context-specific and describe the experiences of Thai students in developing English speaking skills in a multilingual Islamic higher education setting. These findings can serve as a reference for future studies with more participants or different educational contexts.

F. Definition of Key Terms

To avoid ambiguity and clarify meaning, this section explains the key terms used in this study in the context of English language learning for Thai students in Indonesia.

1. Thai Students

Thai students in this study refer to students from Thailand who are studying in the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah at UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri.

2. English Speaking Skills

English speaking skills refer to learners' ability to express ideas, opinions, and information orally in English.

3. Multilingual Academic Context

Multilingual academic context refers to a learning environment where more than one language is used in academic and social activities, in this case Thai (as the mother tongue), Indonesian and Javanese (as social languages), and English (as an academic language).

4. Challenges

Challenges refer to the difficulties or obstacles faced by learners in developing their English speaking ability as experienced in academic communication.

5. Opportunities

Opportunities refer to the conditions, support, or experiences that help students improve their English speaking ability, such as interaction with others, exposure to language use, and participation in academic activities.