

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains about background of the study, research question, objective of the study, significant of the study, scope of the study and definition of the key terms.

1.1 Background of the Study

There are four essential skills that students must master in learning English: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Among these skills, speaking is considered a productive skill because it requires learners to actively produce language in real-time communication. Speaking plays an important role in enabling students to express their thoughts, participate in academic discussions, and interact effectively in everyday situations. However, speaking English can be challenging for many students because they often experience anxiety during speaking activities, which may negatively affect their participation and performance. In the context of EFL learners, speaking is frequently regarded as the most difficult language skill due to the need for immediate responses, accurate pronunciation, appropriate vocabulary use, and grammatical accuracy.

In the study entitled “Factors Influencing Anxiety in Speaking English Among Freshmen,” Juwarta (2025) explains that speaking anxiety is a common experience among first-year students, particularly those enrolled in English Language Education programs. These students often feel nervous, fear making mistakes, and worry about being negatively evaluated by lecturers or classmates when speaking in front of the class. This situation is further intensified by the expectation that they should speak English more fluently and accurately than students from other academic programs, despite their still-developing speaking proficiency.

Fajar (2025), in his research on foreign language classroom anxiety, demonstrated that foreign language anxiety in EFL classrooms is not simply a rigid personality trait, but rather a dynamic emotional experience influenced by classroom climate, relationships with teachers, and interactions with peers.

This study also emphasized that speaking anxiety tends to arise from fear of communication apprehension, fear of negative judgment, and the pressure of being evaluated, especially when students perceive their language skills to be low. Their perspective highlights that anxiety arises particularly from communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test-related pressure, especially when students feel that their language proficiency is limited.

Speaking anxiety has been widely discussed in research especially among foreign speakers. In Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language, students often experience anxiety when speaking, writing, listening and reading in English. This phenomenon is especially noticeable among first-year college students, who are transitioning from high school to a more demanding academic environment. UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri, as an Islamic education university, admits students from various backgrounds, many of whom may have limited experience in communicative English learning. Understanding the causes of English language anxiety and the coping strategies used by students is crucial to ensure a more effective and enjoyable learning experience.

This study was conducted with four students from Class E. Participants were selected based on indications of speaking anxiety observed during in-class speaking activities, supported by records of their speaking performance. They were chosen to represent different achievement levels (C+ and B) in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of speaking anxiety across varying levels of proficiency.

Previous studies show that learners use various strategies to reduce speaking anxiety, such as preparing materials more thoroughly, using cognitive strategies (changing negative mindsets), social strategies (seeking support from friends), and repeated practice to build confidence. The significance of teaching specific learning strategies and concrete steps to enhance the effectiveness of learning and alleviate speaking anxiety is also underscored by researchers. When these strategies are implemented in the

classroom, they can promote student involvement and speed up the development of speaking skills.

Previous studies mostly focused on general EFL learners and senior high school students. Few studies have specifically examined both the causes and coping strategies of speaking anxiety among first-year students in Islamic higher education institutions, particularly at UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri. Furthermore, previous studies generally describe either the causes of anxiety or the strategies used by students, while studies that comprehensively examine both aspects simultaneously are still limited.

UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri was selected as the research site because it is the only state Islamic university in Kediri, and studies investigating speaking anxiety in this context remain limited. As an institution that accommodates students from diverse educational backgrounds, including public schools, vocational schools, and Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), it provides a unique context for investigating speaking anxiety among EFL learners. Despite its distinctive characteristics, studies examining speaking anxiety among first-year students at UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri remain limited. Therefore, this institution was considered an appropriate setting for the present study.

In addition, first-year students at UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri come from diverse educational backgrounds, including public schools, vocational schools, and pesantren-based institutions, which may influence their English proficiency, classroom confidence, and speaking performance differently. The transition from secondary school to university learning environments may also increase students' psychological pressure during English speaking activities. However, empirical research examining how these conditions contribute to students' speaking anxiety remains limited.

Preliminary observations conducted by the researcher also revealed that many first-year students experienced difficulties during speaking activities, such as hesitation, lack of confidence, nervousness, pronunciation difficulties, and fear of making mistakes during classroom presentations. Several students also tended to remain silent or avoid participation during speaking activities.

These conditions indicate that speaking anxiety may significantly influence students' speaking performance and classroom participation.

Based on the preliminary observation and academic records obtained from the English Department, Class E was selected as the focus of this study because it demonstrated a more dominant indication of speaking difficulties compared to other first-year classes. Several students in this class showed hesitation, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and difficulties in expressing ideas during speaking activities. These conditions were also reflected in their academic performance in speaking-related assessments. Therefore, Class E was considered an appropriate setting for investigating the phenomenon of speaking anxiety among first-year students.

Furthermore, four students were selected as the primary participants of this study to obtain more in-depth information regarding the causes of speaking anxiety and the strategies used to cope with it. The participants were chosen purposively based on their academic performance, particularly their relatively lower scores in speaking-related assessments compared to their classmates. Since students with lower speaking achievement may encounter greater challenges in oral communication, they were considered capable of providing rich and relevant information regarding the factors contributing to speaking anxiety and the efforts employed to overcome it.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the background above, the researcher formulated the research question as follows:

1. What are the causes of speaking anxiety among first year students in the English Department?
2. What strategies do students use to overcome speaking anxiety?

1.3 Objective of the study

Considering the problem of the study above, the researcher has the objective of the study:

1. To analyze the causes of speaking anxiety among students first year in the English Department.

2. To examine strategies employed by students to overcome speaking anxiety.

1.4 Significance of the study

Theoretically, this study is expected to contribute to the development of knowledge in the field of English language learning, particularly in understanding speaking anxiety among EFL learners. It provides empirical evidence regarding the factors that influence students' speaking anxiety and enriches existing theories, such as those proposed by Horwitz and other scholars on foreign language anxiety. Furthermore, this study may serve as a reference for future academic discussions and research related to psychological factors in language learning, especially in the context of higher education.

Practically, the results of this study are expected to be useful as a reference for identifying and understanding the level of students' anxiety in learning English, as well as providing insights into appropriate strategies to reduce it.

1. Students

This study will help first-year students recognize the factors that contribute to their speaking anxiety and identify effective coping strategies. By understanding their anxiety better, students may develop more confidence and improve their English language learning experience.

2. Lecturers

The research findings can serve as valuable insights for English language instructors at UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri. By understanding the causes of students' anxiety, educators can develop teaching methods that create a more supportive and engaging learning environment, helping students reduce their anxiety and enhance their language proficiency.

3. Institutions

The study can contribute to institutional policies and curriculum development by providing data on students' language learning challenges. This can guide UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri in designing more effective English language programs that accommodate students' needs and minimize anxiety-related barriers to learning.

4. Further Researchers

This study will serve as a reference for future researchers interested in speaking anxiety and its effects on students. It may inspire further investigations into different aspects of language learning anxiety, such as its long-term impact or the effectiveness of various mechanisms.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study focuses on students' speaking anxiety among first-year students of the English Department, specifically Class E, at UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri in the 2025/2026 academic year. This study specifically investigates the causes of speaking anxiety experienced by students during English speaking activities and the strategies they use to overcome their anxiety in classroom contexts.

The study is limited to qualitative exploration through classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. Therefore, this research does not measure students' anxiety levels quantitatively using statistical instruments or standardized anxiety scales. In addition, the participants of this study are limited to four selected students from one class only, so the findings cannot be generalized to all students of the English Department or other universities. The research mainly focuses on students' experiences, perceptions, and classroom behaviors related to speaking anxiety during English learning activities.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

This study aims to provide a reference in determining students' anxiety level in learning English. Therefore, the following definitions of key terms are necessary:

1. Speaking Anxiety

Speaking anxiety is the feeling of fear, nervousness, or worry experienced by students when they are required to speak in a foreign language, particularly in classroom situations.

2. First-Year Students of UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri

First-year students are individuals who are in their initial year of study at UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri, typically adapting to a new academic and social environment.

3. Cause of Anxiety

Causes of speaking anxiety refer to the internal and external factors, such as lack of confidence or fear of making mistakes, that trigger students' anxiety when speaking.

4. Strategies

Strategies to overcome speaking anxiety are the techniques or actions used by students to reduce their fear and increase their confidence in speaking activities.