

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter introduces the research, encompassing the background of the study, research problems, research objectives, scope, and limitations of the research, as well as the significance of the study and definitions of key terms.

#### **A. Background of the Study**

Speaking anxiety has been widely recognized as one of the most significant psychological barriers to learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Unlike reading or writing, speaking requires real-time language processing, which often triggers feelings of fear, nervousness, and self-doubt among learners. In the context of English-speaking proficiency, this issue is particularly pressing. Data published by the EF English Proficiency Index 2025 shows that Indonesia ranks 80th out of 113 countries, indicating a relatively low level of English proficiency compared to other nations. Furthermore, studies on EFL anxiety in the Indonesian school context consistently report that a significant proportion of students experience moderate to high levels of anxiety when required to speak English in the classroom. Damayanti and Listyani, (2020). This condition not only hinders their oral participation but also impedes the development of their overall communication skills.

The causes of speaking anxiety are diverse. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), three core components were identified: communication concerns, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Communication anxiety refers to the fear of speaking in front of others, often due to limited vocabulary or poor pronunciation. Additionally, a lack of practice speaking English at school also contributes to

students' anxiety. Therefore, assessing students' anxiety about speaking English is important, especially for improving their speaking skills.

In light of the issues that have arisen, it can be concluded that teachers play a crucial role in reducing students' anxiety about speaking. According to Anwar et al., (2020) Before implementing any strategies, teachers must first identify students' linguistic abilities, their level of English proficiency, and their psychological state. Ideal strategies include creating a comfortable and supportive classroom environment, implementing cooperative learning models, providing constructive feedback, and integrating technology-based media, such as interactive presentations and language learning apps. However, the success of implementing these strategies depends heavily on the specific educational context in which teachers operate.

Empirical research consistently shows that speaking anxiety is not an isolated phenomenon but rather a pervasive condition experienced by the majority of EFL learners. Across various educational settings, studies have confirmed that a significant proportion of students report increased anxiety, particularly during speaking tasks, as opposed to other language skills such as reading or writing. (Horwitz et al., 1986). In the Indonesian EFL context, research indicates that the majority of students in Indonesian secondary schools experience moderate to high levels of speaking anxiety, manifested through avoidance behaviors, minimal verbal responses, and decreased motivation to participate in oral activities. These cumulative effects not only hinder individual language development but also present ongoing instructional challenges for teachers who must simultaneously manage both linguistic content and students' affective states.

Despite the importance of addressing speaking anxiety, EFL teachers face significant challenges in doing so effectively. A major challenge faced by many teachers relates to the heterogeneity of students' linguistic competencies within a single class; teachers must design speaking activities that are simultaneously accessible to students with low proficiency and meaningful for more advanced students. According to Astuti et al., (2022) Beyond proficiency differences, affective and motivational barriers, including low student self-confidence, fear of peer evaluation, and a tendency to avoid communication, further complicate instructional planning. Teachers also face difficulties in providing appropriate feedback. At the institutional level, there is typically limited instructional time allocated for speaking practice and inadequate communicative teaching resources. These overlapping challenges position EFL teachers not only as language instructors but as affective mediators who must navigate the cognitive, emotional, and contextual dimensions of language learning simultaneously.

In response to these challenges, various pedagogical strategies have been documented in the EFL literature as effective in reducing students' speaking anxiety. These include cooperative learning approaches such as pair work, group discussions, and task-based collaborative activities, which are widely considered beneficial because they distribute speaking responsibilities among learners, thereby reducing the perceived risk of individual performance. The practice of strategic feedback, particularly the use of positive reinforcement, delayed error correction, and peer-supported evaluation, has also been shown to foster a psychologically safe learning environment where students feel less threatened by linguistic errors.

Furthermore, the integration of technology-based instructional media, such as interactive digital platforms and language-learning apps, has effectively increased student engagement and reduced anxiety about speaking Theriana, (2023).

However, the effectiveness of these strategies is not universal; it depends on specific educational contexts, such as student characteristics and the teacher's ability to adapt their approach to prevailing classroom conditions. The context of vocational high schools (SMK) in this study presents unique characteristics that distinguish them from general high schools (SMA). Unlike SMA students, who are primarily focused on academic abilities, SMK students are prepared to enter the workforce directly.

In line with (Rao, 2019), English-speaking skills are crucial for job interviews, customer service, and workplace communication. However, SMK students often exhibit varying levels of English proficiency and lower confidence in speaking. These contextual factors create distinct challenges for EFL teachers, including limited teaching resources, low student motivation, and the need to balance speaking practice with the demands of vocational subjects. Several previous studies have examined speaking anxiety and teacher strategies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Explored by Adriani Putri et al. (2020), The strategies used by EFL learners to cope with speaking anxiety were found to reduce anxiety levels. However, this line of research has focused primarily on the student perspective, leaving a gap in the literature regarding the role of teachers in reducing students' speaking anxiety, as well as the challenges and strategies faced by the teachers themselves.

This study addresses this gap by examining teacher-related factors in reducing students' English speaking anxiety, an aspect not covered by previous research. The research was conducted at SMK PGRI 2 Kediri, which was selected as the data collection site because the school's vision and mission emphasize the development of students' communicative skills for workplace needs. The perceived benefits of English proficiency, as explained earlier, also served as a reference for this study. Furthermore, according to Sriati et al., (2026) Comparison between high school and vocational school teachers revealed that vocational school teachers employed specific, tailored strategies to reduce students' anxiety.

Despite these valuable contributions, a clear research gap remains: very few studies have specifically examined the challenges faced by EFL teachers and the pedagogical strategies they employ to address students' speaking anxiety in the context of vocational high schools. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by conducting an in-depth qualitative investigation at SMK PGRI 2 Kediri. The study focuses on two main questions: What challenges do EFL teachers face in addressing students' speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms, and what pedagogical strategies do EFL teachers use to reduce that anxiety? By focusing on the vocational school setting, this study is expected to provide practical insights for EFL teachers working in similar contexts and to contribute to the growing literature on speaking anxiety management in student-skill-oriented educational environments.

## **B. Research Questions**

As noted in the research background, the problems of this research are as follows.

1. What challenges do EFL teachers face in addressing students' speaking anxiety in the EFL classroom?
2. What pedagogical strategies do EFL teachers employ to mitigate students' speaking anxiety in the EFL classroom?

## **C. Objectives of the Study**

1. To identify and analyse the challenges EFL teachers encounter in addressing students' speaking anxiety in the EFL classroom.
2. To analyse the pedagogical strategies employed by teachers to mitigate students' speaking anxiety.

## **D. Significance of the Study**

### **1. For Students**

This research is expected to help students understand how their teachers perceive and attempt to address their speaking difficulties. By being aware of the strategies teachers employ specifically in the vocational context, students may develop greater motivation and confidence to participate actively in English-speaking activities, ultimately reducing their anxiety over time.

## 2. For Teachers

This research is expected to provide EFL teachers, particularly those working in vocational schools, with evidence-based and context-sensitive strategies for managing students' speaking anxiety. The findings may serve as a practical reference for improving the quality of speaking instruction and for designing classroom environments that are more supportive and conducive to language learning.

## 3. For the Next Researcher

This study provides a contextualised empirical foundation that can serve as a reference for future research on speaking anxiety in similar educational settings. Researchers interested in EFL pedagogy, affective factors in language learning, or vocational education contexts may build upon the findings and methodology of this study to further advance the field.

## **E. The Scope and Limitation**

### 1. Scope

This study focuses on the challenges and strategies employed by EFL teachers at SMK PGRI 2 Kediri in addressing students' speaking anxiety during English teaching and learning activities. The scope is specifically directed at the oral communication dimension of language learning, examining how teachers identify, respond to, and manage students' anxiety in speaking activities within the vocational school environment.

## 2. Limitation

This study is limited to the perspectives and experiences of EFL teachers at one vocational high school, namely SMK PGRI 2 Kediri. Consequently, the findings may not be generalisable to other educational contexts or school types. Furthermore, the study exclusively focuses on speaking skills and does not address other language competencies such as listening, reading, or writing. The research also does not directly measure the effectiveness of the identified strategies on student learning outcomes, as its primary focus is on teacher experiences and perceptions.

## **F. Definition of Key Terms**

### 1. Students' Speaking Anxiety

In this study, speaking anxiety refers to a distinct psychological condition characterised by feelings of fear, nervousness, and apprehension that students experience specifically when required to speak in English. This condition is understood not as a fixed personality trait, but rather as a situational emotional response that arises in the context of oral language production, particularly in classroom settings. Speaking anxiety may manifest in behaviours such as silence, avoidance of participation, or hesitation during speaking tasks.

### 2. Teachers' Challenges

Teachers' challenges in this study refer to the difficulties and obstacles that EFL teachers face when attempting to reduce students' speaking anxiety and promote active oral participation in the English classroom. These challenges encompass both internal factors, such as pedagogical decision-making and classroom management, and external factors, such as limited instructional time, insufficient facilities, and

students' heterogeneous proficiency levels, particularly within the vocational school context.

### 3. Strategies in teaching speaking

The pedagogical strategies in this study refer to the deliberate instructional approaches and classroom techniques used by EFL teachers to reduce students' speaking anxiety and improve their oral communication skills. These strategies involve a safe learning environment through the use of cooperative learning methods, providing constructive feedback, and integrating technology.