

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the research. It delves into several key areas, including the background of the study, research questions, research objective, significance, limitations, and definitions of key terms.

A. Background of the Study

It can be said that human civilization would not have developed rapidly in terms of technology, health, and education without skilled communication abilities, especially in this era of globalization. Globally, speaking is recognized as the most critical and irreplaceable language skill, which often determines the future careers and professional involvement of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners (Wijaya, 2023). In general, achieving speaking proficiency is often hampered by linguistic difficulties, but there are also other significant barriers such as psychological or affective barriers. These barriers create a clear gap between students' theoretical knowledge and their ability to produce authentic language.

The main psychological barrier in speaking is Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA). According to Suparlan (2021), this phenomenon inhibits learners from actively participating, testing their linguistic hypotheses, and developing fluency. Speaking anxiety is not merely caused by limited linguistic ability, but more dominantly by psychological pressure related to the fear of making mistakes and negative evaluation during oral performance. In traditional classroom contexts, speaking activities are often conducted in front

of peers and lecturers, which increases students' self-awareness and emotional tension, leading them to hesitate, avoid participation, or remain silent.

Speaking anxiety can significantly influence students' willingness to communicate and participate in speaking activities. Learners who experience fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and concerns about negative evaluation often hesitate to express their ideas, even when they possess sufficient linguistic knowledge. Therefore, reducing speaking anxiety requires a learning environment that minimizes social pressure, allows learners to practice without fear of judgment, and provides supportive feedback that encourages continuous speaking practice (Wijaya, 2023).

In response to these psychological challenges, educational institutions are increasingly turning to technological solutions to support speaking practice in low-anxiety environments. Digital platforms and artificial intelligence (AI)-based applications are considered promising interventions because they provide a private, non-judgmental, and individually tailored space for interaction (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009). By allowing students to practice speaking independently without direct social evaluation, these platforms help reduce emotional pressure and create a supportive learning environment. As a result, students are more willing to experiment with language, repeat exercises, and gradually develop confidence in speaking English.

Among the various AI-powered language learning applications currently available, platforms that provide real-time corrective feedback, conversational interaction, low-pressure learning environments, and flexible accessibility have become increasingly relevant for addressing speaking anxiety

among EFL learners. These features enable students to practice speaking independently, receive immediate feedback on their performance, and engage in repeated speaking practice without the fear of social judgment (Salmanda, 2025). One application that incorporates these characteristics is Loora, an AI-powered English learning platform that offers real-time corrections on pronunciation, grammar, and fluency while simulating natural conversations. Through its private and non-judgmental learning environment, Loora allows learners to practice speaking more comfortably and confidently, making it particularly suitable for students who experience speaking anxiety.

The selection of the Loora application in this study was supported by two considerations. First, Loora provides features such as real-time corrective feedback, conversational AI, a low-pressure learning environment, and easy accessibility, which are relevant to reducing speaking anxiety. Second, preliminary observations revealed that several English Education students were already using Loora independently to prepare for academic speaking tasks.

To validate the relevance and feasibility of this research focus, the researcher conducted preliminary observations and distributed a preliminary questionnaire to two second-semester classes of the English Education Department at UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri, involving a total of 40 students. The questionnaire aimed to identify students who experienced speaking anxiety in English learning and to explore the strategies they used to cope with this issue. The preliminary findings revealed that a considerable number of students experienced speaking anxiety when participating in speaking activities and academic oral tasks.

However, the students employed different approaches to manage their anxiety, including self-practice, learning through online resources, and the use of various language learning applications. Among the respondents, three students were identified as experiencing speaking anxiety while consistently using the Loora application as a medium for independent speaking practice. Because these students met the specific criteria of the study, they were selected as the research participants. This preliminary finding further supports the relevance of investigating Loora as a tool for mediating speaking anxiety among English Education students.

Although the potential of digital platforms in facilitating instant feedback and reducing anxiety has been recognized, there is a clear gap in understanding how English Education students view and experience the process of overcoming this anxiety. Existing research tends to be quantitative (focusing on testing effectiveness), thereby neglecting the exploration of students' experiences, contextual challenges, and coping strategies. This gap is felt more strongly in academic settings, where speaking skill requirements are not only high but also greatly influence final grades.

Therefore, this study focuses on second-semester students of the English Education Department at UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri because they are still at an early stage of their academic journey in English language learning. At this level, students are beginning to engage more intensively in speaking-related courses and academic oral activities, while many are still developing their confidence, vocabulary, pronunciation, and communication skills. As a result, they are more likely to experience speaking anxiety when required to communicate in English.

Employing a qualitative approach, this study aims to investigate students' perceptions, experiences, and coping strategies in utilizing Loora as a medium for preparing academic speaking tasks. By focusing on students at this early stage of formal speaking instruction, this research, entitled **Overcoming Speaking Anxiety in English Learning through AI Platform Among the Students of English Education Department**, seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of how AI-based applications mediate speaking anxiety within an academic EFL context.

B. Research Question

Based on the background of the study, this research aims to answer the following main questions:

1. How do English Education students perceive their experience of overcoming speaking anxiety through the utilization of the Loora application?
2. What coping strategies do English Education students develop to manage their speaking anxiety while using the Loora application for academic oral tasks?

C. Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to qualitatively explore the experiences of English Education students in overcoming speaking anxiety through the Loora application. Specifically, this research aims:

1. To explore and describe the perceptions and experiences of English Education students in overcoming speaking anxiety through the utilization of the Loora application.

2. To identify and analyze the coping strategies developed by English Education students to manage their speaking anxiety while using the Loora application for academic oral tasks.

D. Significance of the Study

This qualitative study holds both theoretical and practical significance within the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) and educational technology:

1. Theoretically: This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in English Language Teaching (ELT), particularly regarding its role in addressing speaking anxiety among EFL learners. The findings provide qualitative insights into how AI-powered applications can support students in managing speaking anxiety through features such as real-time corrective feedback, conversational interaction, low-pressure learning environments, and flexible accessibility. Furthermore, this study enriches the existing literature by explaining how these technological features are perceived and utilized by students in overcoming speaking anxiety. More specifically, the findings provide contextual evidence regarding how AI-based applications such as Loora can function not only as language learning tools but also as supportive learning environments that help learners develop confidence and engage more actively in speaking practice within EFL contexts.
2. Practically: The findings offer actionable benefits to the stakeholders in the EFL learning ecosystem:

- a. For Students: The study provides tested self-regulatory strategies for managing speaking anxiety. Students gain practical value by identifying digital platforms as a safe and private practice environment to map common errors and systematically build confidence for their academic speaking performance. Specifically, the findings will be highly relevant for English Education students, especially second-semester students at UIN Syekh Wasil, to help them overcome initial anxiety when encountering their first Speaking course.
- b. For Lecturers and Educators: Lecturers gain student-centered insights into the emotional and technical struggles faced by their students. The research provides a foundation for designing effective blended learning models that strategically integrate AI tools (like Loora) as supplementary resources for personalized, corrective feedback outside of classroom hours to support academic proficiency. This insight will be very useful for Speaking lecturers at UIN Syekh Wasil in designing the curriculum and intervention strategies for second-semester students who are just beginning intensive oral practice.
- c. For Future Researchers: This study serves as a rich qualitative foundation, offering in-depth themes and contextual hypotheses that can be expanded upon through future large-scale quantitative or mixed-methods studies focusing on the efficacy and impact of specific AI features within the EFL context.

E. Limitation of the Study

To ensure the depth and focus required by this qualitative study, the research is strictly limited to exploring the experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies of English Education students in second semester regarding speaking anxiety solely through the utilization of the Loora application, specifically for the purpose of preparing for their academic oral tasks. Consequently, the findings and conclusions drawn are specific to the features and user experience of Loora, and this study does not seek to generalize the results to other available digital platforms, nor does it quantify statistical improvements in speaking accuracy.

F. Definition of Key Term

To avoid ambiguity and ensure a uniform understanding, the key terms used throughout this research are defined as follows:

1. **Speaking Skills:** Speaking skills refer to the ability to communicate ideas, thoughts, and feelings orally in English both fluently and accurately. In the context of EFL research, this skill is regarded as the final product of language learning, encompassing the essential aspects of fluency, grammatical accuracy, and comprehensibility.
2. **Speaking Anxiety:** Speaking anxiety refers to the feelings of tension, worry, and nervousness experienced by English Education students when required to communicate or perform orally in the English language. This anxiety is the affective factor that constitutes the primary focus of the research, manifesting as a fear of making mistakes, being negatively evaluated, or a general lack of

confidence, which ultimately inhibits participation and speaking performance.

3. Loora Application: Loora is an Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based language learning application used by the research participants as the primary tool. The application functions as a Digital Platform that provides conversation simulation and an AI-driven, real-time corrective feedback mechanism concerning pronunciation, fluency, and grammatical accuracy. In the context of this study, the utilization of Loora specifically refers to the students' non-supervised, independent practice for preparing for speaking class assessments and other oral tasks within their academic curriculum, serving as the specific focus of exploration in this study as an anxiety mediation tool.