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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1. Background of The Problems

Language is the primary means of communication, and English has become the most important international language in this global era. Mastery of a language typically encompasses four core skills which include listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these, speaking plays a crucial role because it is often used as a measure of language proficiency. According to Richards (2008:19), mastery of speaking skills in English is a priority for many second language or foreign language learners, as they often judge their success in learning a language based on how well they can speak.

However, in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia, speaking is often considered the most difficult skill to master. Celce-Murcia & Olshtain (2000), as cited in Burhanuddin, et al. (2021), state that speaking is the most difficult skill to master because it requires mastery of various speech production sub-skills, such as vocabulary mastery, grammar pattern selection, and sociocultural competence. This difficulty is not only caused by linguistic factors but also by psychological barriers. In line with this, Juhana (2012:100) highlights that high school students in Indonesia face significant difficulties in speaking English, mainly due to psychological factors such as fear of making mistakes, embarrassment, and anxiety.



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English lessons at SMA Negeri 1 Tembilahan Hulu aim to teach students effective communication skills, especially in speaking. Speaking is an important part of this curriculum, as it trains students to express their ideas confidently and in a structured manner in front of an audience. Ideally, students should be able to perform speaking tasks without significant psychological barriers in order to achieve optimal language proficiency.

However, reality in the classroom often shows that students face great challenges when speaking in front of other people. One of the biggest obstacles is the fear of speaking. This fear is not just a lack of vocabulary, but a psychological condition that can impair students' ability to speak. According to Horwitz et al. (1986:128), this type of fear can create a mental barrier that prevents students from understanding input and producing clear output in the target language.

Anxiety is a psychological state characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes such as increased blood pressure and muscle tension (Sari, 12:2020). It typically arises as a natural response to perceived threats, stress, or upcoming challenges, serving as a complex emotional reaction to internal or external stressors (Pratama, 23:2021). In an academic context, this condition is understood as an emotional state that directly affects an individual's cognitive focus, behavioral responses, and overall performance during stressful tasks (Aulia, 15:2022). Anxiety is a psychological state characterized by



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feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical reactions to perceived stress or threats, which can negatively affect an individual's cognitive focus and overall performance.

Based on the researchers' observations at SMA Negeri 1 Tembilahan Hulu, many students admitted that they are very nervous, afraid of making mistakes, and have little confidence when asked to speak in front of an audience. These students often suffer from physical symptoms such as trembling and stuttering, which leads to a deterioration in their performance and poorer grades in their language exams. Although they have basic English skills, their anxiety prevents them from showing their true potential. This phenomenon is further evidenced by the results of an interview with an English teacher at SMA Negeri 1 Tembilahan Hulu. The teacher stated that while students' cognitive understanding of grammar and vocabulary is relatively adequate, their performance drops significantly during oral assessments. The teacher noted that many students tend to remain silent or provide very brief answers due to their lack of confidence, confirming that speaking remains the least developed skill among students compared to reading or writing.

The negative impact of anxiety on speaking performance occurs because anxiety acts as an "affective filter." When students experience high levels of stress, their brains focus more on managing fear than on retrieving language data. This mental block disrupts the cognitive process of speech production, making it difficult for students to organize their



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thoughts and recall the vocabulary they have actually learned. Consequently, the more anxious a student feels, the more likely they are to experience "mind-blanking," which leads to poor communication quality. This correlation is supported by recent research in the Indonesian context. A study titled *"Factors generating anxiety when learning EFL speaking skills"* conducted by Hanifa (2018) demonstrated a significant negative correlation between these two variables. The research found that students with high anxiety levels consistently achieved lower scores in speaking tests. Hanifa's findings emphasize that anxiety is not just a secondary issue, but a primary factor that can determine the success or failure of a student's speaking achievement in an Indonesian EFL classroom.

The researcher's decision to investigate this issue is further driven by firsthand experience during a teaching practicum (PPL) at the school. It was observed that many students who excelled in written assignments and demonstrated a strong understanding of linguistic theories often became paralyzed when tasked with speaking. This stark contrast between their academic potential and their actual performance indicates that linguistic competence alone is insufficient if it is hindered by psychological barriers. Therefore, the researcher is motivated to explore this phenomenon more deeply, as addressing these anxieties is crucial to helping students unlock their full potential and gain the confidence necessary for effective international communication.



2. Identification of The Problems

After considering the background information, the following problems become apparent:

1. Students show physical and mental anxiety (trembling/loss of concentration) during presentations in English.
2. Student performance is hampered by a lack of confidence and fear of negative evaluation.
3. Due to psychological barriers, students often perform better in written assignments than in oral presentations.

3. Limitation of the Problems

This research focuses on the correlation between students' speaking anxiety and their speaking ability during the presentation. The study is restricted to the eleventh-grade students of SMA Negeri 1 Tembilahan Hulu.

4. Research Questions

Based on the research, the researcher only determined the research questions to be answered:

1. How is the students' speaking anxiety?
2. How is the students' speaking ability?
3. Is there any correlation between speaking anxiety and students' speaking ability in English at SMA Negeri 1 Tembilahan Hulu?



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5. Purpose of The Research

The primary purpose of this study was to comprehensively examine the relationship between speaking anxiety and speaking skills among high school students. Specifically, this study aimed to assess the levels of foreign language speaking anxiety experienced by the eleventh-grade students, evaluate their actual speaking performance, and empirically test whether a significant correlation exists between their anxiety levels and speaking capabilities to provide actionable insights for language pedagogy.

6. Significances of The Research

Hopefully this research will provide many meanings for students, lecturers and researcher a like:

1. The Students

It is hoped that this research can help students recognize and manage their fear of speaking.

2. The Teachers

This study is expected to provide strategies for teachers to reduce students' anxiety when speaking English.

3. The Researcher

It is hoped that by conducting this research, researcher can improve their understanding of the correlation between speaking anxiety and students' ability to speak English.



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7. Definition of Key Terms

1. Correlation

According to Sarwono (2006:37), correlation is an analytical technique used to analyze the relationship between two or more variables.

2. Speaking

According to Harmer (2007:284), speaking encompasses both the ability to actively process language and facts as well as the capacity to talk clearly and communicate linguistic information.

3. Anxiety

According to Barlow (in Craske et al., 2011:370), anxiety is a future-oriented mood state associated with preparation for possible, upcoming negative events.

4. Speaking Anxiety

According to Amini (2022:112) Defines speaking anxiety as a negative psychological condition that hinders a speaker's cognitive abilities, leading to difficulties in constructing coherent sentences and selecting appropriate vocabulary during oral communication.