

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

In higher education, especially within English Education Study Programs, speaking is more than just a skill to be learned. It is a core competency. It is often the primary indicator of how well someone has mastered a language and is crucial for both doing well in school and succeeding in a future career. Ounis (2017) highlights this importance, noting that speaking is not only a key part of the teaching curriculum but also a major factor in how students are assessed at the university level. For future English teachers, the stakes are even higher because communicating effectively is a professional requirement. They need to do more than just understand the material. They must be able to model the language for their own students one day. As a result, English Department students are expected to have strong speaking skill so they can handle academic presentations, teach effectively, and engage in professional discussions.

Unfortunately, achieving this level of fluency is rarely easy. Despite knowing how important speaking is, many English Education students face real challenges. A big issue is that they often lack authentic places to practice English outside of the classroom. Formal classes usually do not have enough time for everyone to practice speaking individually, which leaves students dealing with psychological barriers on their own. For instance, Prasetyo (2022) points out that students often struggle with nervousness and anxiety, which makes mastering speaking skill much harder. Similarly, Ramadhani et al. (2024) observed that even

students who have the potential often lack the courage to speak up in public. Without a supportive environment that encourages them to interact regularly, making the leap from knowing the theory to actually speaking competently remains a struggle for many.

Co-curricular organizations can be a great way to close this gap between classroom theory and real-world practice. The English Students Association, or ESA, at Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji (UMRAH) was designed with this exact purpose in mind. It aims to facilitate students to develop beyond their standard coursework. The ESA organizes various communicative activities, such as discussion forums, public speaking events, debate training, and collaborative projects, to create an immersive “English environment.” The goal is to provide a low-stress setting where students can practice freely. Yusuf & Hilmun (2021) support this approach, suggesting that joining student organizations has positive impacts on both a personal and professional level, such as developing leadership skills and building confidence in speaking.

In theory, active participation in ESA activities is expected to provide students with greater opportunities to practice English and may contribute to the development of their speaking skill by giving them consistent exposure and chances to interact with peers. When students are actively involved, they engage in practical application by using English as a real tool for communication within the organization. Yusuf & Hilmun (2021) further argue that this kind of organizational experience correlates with better speaking confidence. The supportive nature of these groups helps students overcome the confidence issues that often hold them

back in a classroom setting. Therefore, participation in ESA activities is assumed to provide learning experiences that students may perceive as contributing to their motivation and confidence in speaking English.

However, there is often a difference between what the association is supposed to do and what actually happens. Ideally, ESA members and executives, who are all English Language Education students, would use English actively in their activities and daily chats. Based on the researcher's informal observations during participation in ESA activities between 2024 and 2025, English was used more frequently during formal events than in routine organizational interactions. This observation served only as the initial rationale for conducting the study and was not treated as research data. While they do use English in formal situations, such as talking to lecturers or hosting an event as a Master of Ceremonies, it hasn't yet become the main way they communicate during regular meetings or informal gatherings.

Given this situation, it is vital to understand how the students themselves perceive the value of these activities. Perception is the lens through which students interpret their experiences. If they perceive the activities positively, they are more likely to be motivated and engaged. Qiong (2017) notes that understanding and appreciating these differences in perception is crucial if we want to improve communication abilities. Every student experiences ESA activities differently and interprets how those activities affect their skills in their own way. Armita (2019) emphasizes that exploring these student perceptions is key to evaluating whether extracurricular activities are actually effective. By digging into these perceptions,

we can get a better understanding of whether the current activities are truly meeting the students' needs.

Existing research on this topic leaves some specific gaps that this study aims to fill. For example, while Hasanah (2022) looked at student perceptions of English clubs, her research was done in a vocational high school, or SMK, which has a very different academic culture and level of student independence compared to a university. Similarly, Adiwinata (2017) explored student perceptions at the university level, but he focused strictly on a specific Public Speaking subject in the curriculum, rather than voluntary participation in an outside organization. Additionally, studies on student organizations, like the one by Astuti (2022), have often focused on general learning behaviors or academic achievement rather than specific language skills like speaking. These differences highlight a lack of research specifically looking at how active participation in a university-level English Students Association influences students' perceptions of their own speaking skill development.

Therefore, this study is necessary to provide empirical data on students' perception on the influence of English Students Association activities on their speaking skill. The findings are expected to offer valuable insights for both the English Education Study Program and the ESA board. By understanding the students' perception, the association can evaluate and improve its programs, ensuring it effectively fulfills its role as a supportive environment for growth and helps members find their voice.

1.2 Identification of The Problem

Based on the background of the research, the problems are identified as follows:

1. There is a mismatch between the expectation of active English use in ESA and the reality where English use is still rare among members.
2. There is a lack of information about students' perception on the influence of ESA activities on their speaking skill at UMRAH.

1.3 Scope and Limitation of The Research

To ensure the research is focused, the researcher establishes the following scope and limitations:

1. This research focuses on students of the English Language Education Study Program at UMRAH who are or were active in the English Students Association (ESA) for the 2024-2025 period.
2. The study is limited to the students' perceptions on the influence of ESA activities on their speaking skill.
3. The research was conducted specifically within the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, UMRAH.

1.4 Research Question

Based on the research background the researcher posed the following two research questions:

1. What are the students' perceptions of the influence of English Students Association activities on their speaking skill?
2. How do specific English Students Association activities influence students' speaking skill based on their lived experiences?

1.5 Research Objective

Based on the research question, the objectives of this research are:

1. To describe the students' perceptions of the influence of English Students Association activities on their speaking skill.
2. To explore how specific English Students Association activities influence students' speaking skill.

1.6 Significance of The Research

This research is expected to provide valuable insights and practical benefits to several stakeholders:

1. Theoretical Significance: this research enriches the literature on the influence of student organizations on language learning perceptions.
2. Practical Significance
 - 1) For Students, to encourage self-reflection on how organizational involvement affects their skills.

- 2) For Advisor of ESA, to evaluate the effectiveness of the association's activities and provide better guidance in fostering an English-speaking environment.
- 3) For Future Researchers, to serve as a reference for further research regarding student organizations and speaking skill.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

To ensure clarity and a common understanding, the following key terms are defined operationally for this research:

1. Students' Perception: The personal views and assessments of the students regarding how their involvement in the English Students Association (ESA) activities affects their ability to communicate effectively in English, particularly in overcoming speaking anxiety and building verbal proficiency.
2. ESA Activities: The various work programs and organizational initiatives conducted by the English Students Association (ESA) members at UMRAH during the 2024-2025 period. These activities include internal coordination meetings, social services, academic seminars, and competitions.
3. Speaking Skill: The ability of students to communicate verbally in English effectively within the context of ESA activities. In this research, speaking skill specifically encompasses the micro-components of fluency, vocabulary expansion, and pronunciation accuracy, alongside the psychological readiness to process language rapidly in spontaneous interactions.