

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

Speaking is a central skill in English language learning because it enables learners to express ideas, interact with others, and participate in meaningful communication. According to Richards (2018), speaking involves constructing meaning through the active process of producing, receiving, and interpreting messages. Brown (2000) adds that speaking requires the integration of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency at the same moment, making it one of the most demanding skills to master. These explanations show that speaking is a complex skill that demands both linguistic competence and psychological readiness.

For junior high school learners, speaking is essential because it helps them develop confidence, participate in classroom discussions, and build communicative competence at an early stage. Harmer (2001) notes that speaking activities at the secondary level aim to develop students' fluency and interactional skills, while Nation and Newton (2021) emphasize that speaking practice enables learners to apply language forms in meaningful communicative settings. Therefore, improving speaking ability is an important component of the English curriculum at the junior high school level.

From the linguistic aspect, junior high school students commonly struggle with limited vocabulary, grammatical inaccuracy, mispronunciation, and difficulty

forming clear and organized sentences when speaking English. These findings are supported by Nurmansah (2022), who found that SMP students often face challenges in producing correct grammar and appropriate vocabulary during spoken interactions. Similar results were reported by Jumatri et al. (2022), showing that pronunciation and vocabulary mastery are the most frequent linguistic barriers among eighth-grade learners. Research at SMP Plus Kasih Ibu Patumbak also indicates that students experience difficulties related to vocabulary, grammar accuracy, and pronunciation (Zannah et al., 2023). These linguistic constraints reduce fluency and hinder effective communication. Previous studies propose several solutions, such as increasing vocabulary exposure, providing explicit pronunciation practice, and implementing guided speaking tasks. However, these strategies are not always consistently applied in SMP classrooms, leaving linguistic problems unresolved.

While the studies above provide valuable insights into students' linguistic challenges, research on psychological factors reveals equally persistent difficulties. Junior high school learners often experience shyness, fear of making mistakes, anxiety, and low confidence when participating in speaking activities. A study by Perkasa et al. (2022) shows that silence and hesitation among SMP students are strongly influenced by speaking anxiety, particularly fear of negative evaluation from peers and teachers. Similarly, Hidayati et al. (2022) report that students tend to avoid speaking because they worry about making errors and being judged, which reduces their willingness to engage in oral communication tasks. These findings suggest that psychological barriers can be more dominant than linguistic ones, as

anxiety often suppresses students' motivation and readiness to speak. Although several strategies have been recommended—such as building supportive classroom environments and providing constructive feedback—many students continue to struggle because psychological factors are highly personal and vary across individuals.

However, most previous studies relied on questionnaires, surveys, or classroom observations, which identify general patterns but do not explore the deeper personal reasons behind each student's speaking difficulties. None of these studies specifically examined the speaking challenges faced by students in class IX at SMPN 6 Tanjungpinang using in-depth interviews, particularly to understand how linguistic and psychological factors interact in this classroom context. Because each school has unique characteristics—such as teacher strategies, peer dynamics, and classroom culture—students' speaking difficulties may vary.

Therefore, the present study aims to fill this gap by using deep interview techniques to explore the specific linguistic and psychological speaking difficulties experienced by ninth-grade students at SMPN 6 Tanjungpinang. This approach allows the researcher to understand not only what difficulties students face but also why those difficulties occur, offering a more detailed and contextual explanation that has not been examined in previous research.

1.2 Limitation of Problem

To make the research easier to conduct, the researcher focuses on students' difficulties in speaking English at class IX of SMPN 6 Tanjungpinang.

1.3 Research Question

Based on the identification and limitation of the problems above, the research question is formulated as follows: What are the students' difficulties in speaking English at class IX of SMPN 6 Tanjungpinang?

1.4 Objective of Study

The objective of this study is to explore students' difficulties in speaking English at class IX of SMPN 6 Tanjungpinang.

1.5 Significances of Study

Theoretically, This research is expected to provide information about the speaking difficulties experienced by students from both linguistic and psychological aspects, and it can be used as a reference for future studies related to speaking skills.

Practically, this study helps students identify their problems in learning to speak English and makes them more aware of the factors that influence their challenges in speaking. It also encourages them to spend more time practicing in order to improve their speaking skills and become better speakers.

The findings of this study are expected to provide practical benefits for teachers and school administrators. To ensure its usefulness, the researcher will provide both hardcopy and softcopy versions of the research report to the English teachers and the school. The results may guide teachers to increase structured speaking practice, provide supportive feedback, and create a classroom environment that reduces anxiety and builds students' confidence. At the school level, the findings can be considered in developing supportive programs such as speaking activities or English clubs, so that students receive more opportunities and encouragement to improve their English-speaking skills.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

1. Speaking

Speaking in this study refers to students' ability to produce English orally in classroom communication, including expressing ideas, answering questions, and participating in speaking activities. Operationally, speaking is defined as a performance that involves vocabulary use, grammatical accuracy, correct pronunciation, fluency, and the psychological readiness of students to speak without excessive anxiety or fear of making mistakes.

2. Speaking Difficulties

Speaking difficulties in this study refer to the problems experienced by students when producing spoken English during classroom activities.

Operationally, speaking difficulties are defined as any obstacles that prevent students from speaking fluently and confidently, including linguistic problems (such as limited vocabulary, grammatical inaccuracy, mispronunciation, and lack of fluency) and psychological problems (such as anxiety, nervousness, shyness, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence). These difficulties are identified through students' responses in the deep interview.

3. Students

Student is a person who goes to school to study and learn new knowledge and skills. In this study, the term refers to the students of class IX at SMPN 6 Tanjungpinang who learn English as a foreign language.

