

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

English has become an international language that plays a crucial role in academic, professional, and social contexts in this era of globalization. The ability to communicate effectively in English is no longer considered an additional skill, but rather a basic competency that college students must master in order to survive and compete in a globalized world. In higher education, English proficiency is essential because students are required to actively participate in academic discussions, seminars, presentations, and scientific forums that demand clear and effective oral communication. Among the four language skills, speaking is often considered the most important but also the most difficult to master, as it requires a balanced combination of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency (Islam & Roy, 2024). Moreover, speaking is often considered the most complex and challenging, as the simultaneous integration of linguistic knowledge, cognitive processes, and psychological readiness is required.

The ability to speak fluently is an important component of the Academic Speaking course, which is designed to provide students with the skills necessary to communicate effectively in a variety of formal and informal contexts, including conversations, discussions, and IELTS-oriented speaking tasks. In this course, students study conversation, role-playing, podcasts, IELTS Speaking, and etc. Students are expected not only to speak

fluently, but also to express ideas clearly and participate actively in structured academic interactions. The importance of being able to express things in a way that others can understand mentioned in surah abraham verse 4:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رُّسُولٍ إِلَّا بِلِسَانٍ فَؤْمِهِ لِیُبَیِّنَ لَهُمْ...

This verse emphasizes that mastery of the language used within a community is a key requirement for effective communication and for ensuring that messages are conveyed clearly. In today's increasingly global academic context, English has become the common language used within the international academic community. Therefore, students' ability to speak English effectively in the Academic Speaking class is part of the effort to fulfill the principle of the ability to explain and deliver ideas clearly, as implied in this verse. This study aims to understand the challenges students face in achieving this ability, as well as the strategies they use to overcome them.

However, despite the importance of this competency, many students still experience significant difficulties in developing their speaking skills. These challenges often hinder students in achieving the learning objectives of the Academic Speaking course and can have a negative impact on their overall academic performance.

Several studies have shown that students face various challenges in speaking English, especially in academic contexts. Common problems include limited vocabulary, incorrect pronunciation, grammatical errors, and difficulty organizing ideas coherently. A study conducted at AKM

University in Indonesia found that students face both linguistic and psychological challenges when speaking English, these linguistic challenges include difficulties in using verb forms, a lack of understanding of grammar, and difficulties in choosing the right vocabulary (Anggrisia & Robah, 2023). In addition to linguistic barriers, psychological factors such as lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and anxiety about speaking play a major role in preventing students from speaking actively. Aziz & Kashinathan (2021) found that speaking anxiety and lack of speaking opportunities significantly affect students' oral performance, causing them to avoid participating in class discussions. These challenges become more pronounced when students are required to speak in an academic setting.

Observations at several universities also show that students tend to be passive during Academic Speaking classes. Many students hesitate to ask questions, express opinions, or respond to arguments for fear of being judged by their classmates or lecturers. This fear often stems from concerns about grammatical errors, pronunciation mistakes, or an inability to convey ideas clearly. As a result, students prefer to remain silent rather than risk making mistakes. A lack of motivation and self-confidence, as well as high levels of anxiety or nervousness, have been identified as significant internal barriers that cause students to be hesitant to participate in class and to underperform in speaking skills (Khudhur Omar, 2023). This situation reflects a mismatch between the expected academic speaking competence and the reality of students' speaking performance in class.

In addition, students' speaking difficulties are influenced by differences in educational background, learning experiences, and exposure to English. Students who have limited opportunities to use English beyond the classroom often experience more difficulties in speaking activities. According to Lestari & Nugraha (2023), learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) who have less regular exposure to English tend to have lower confidence and fluency in speaking. This situation highlights the importance of providing a supportive learning environment that encourages students to practice speaking without fear of negative judgment.

Besides identifying the challenges students face in speaking English, it is also essential to examine the strategies they use to overcome these difficulties. To deal with challenges in spoken English, students need appropriate strategies that help them manage communication effectively. One important factor that supports students' speaking performance is the use of conversation strategies. Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) defined communication strategies as verbal and non-verbal techniques used by speakers to compensate for communicative breakdowns or to increase communicative effectiveness when their linguistic resources are insufficient. Conversation strategies also refer to techniques employed by speakers to maintain interaction, manage communication flow, and cope with communication breakdowns during conversation. These strategies include repetition, asking for clarification, using filler words, self-correction, and turn-taking. By applying these strategies, students are able

to sustain communication and express their ideas even when they experience linguistic limitations.

Several studies have shown that the use of effective conversation strategies can significantly improve students' speaking skills. Students who apply strategies such as paraphrasing and asking clarification are better able to express their ideas and maintain fluency during interactions. Wael et al. (2018) found that students often use memory, metacognitive, and social strategies to improve their speaking skills. Similarly, Basalama et al. (2020) reported that students use various cognitive and socio-emotional strategies to overcome speaking difficulties, suggesting that strategic competence plays a vital role in successful oral communication.

However, not all students are able to use conversation strategies effectively. Many students simply rely on memorized sentences or avoid speaking altogether when faced with difficulties. Research shows that less successful English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners tend to rely heavily on memorized phrases as a speaking strategy, which limits the flexibility and depth of their oral communication, since relying only on memorization does not equip students to handle the unpredictable and dynamic nature of real-time conversations (Shen & Chiu, 2019). This strategic inability limits their ability to overcome communication challenges and increases their anxiety about speaking. Therefore, understanding the conversation strategies used by students in Academic Speaking courses is

essential to identifying how these strategies support or hinder their speaking development.

Despite the fact that many studies have examined speaking difficulties among students, most of these studies focus on linguistic aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. However, less attention has been paid to the integration of psychological factors and conversation strategies, especially in the context of academic speaking. Research conducted by Van Thong (2023), for example, identifies speaking challenges among English majors, but does not specifically discuss academic speaking courses or the strategies students use during academic interactions. In addition, research conducted in the context of Indonesian higher education that combines speaking challenges and conversation strategies is still limited. This gap indicates the need for more comprehensive research that explores both aspects at the same time in the context of academic speaking course.

In the Islamic perspective, the ability to speak clearly and effectively is not only an academic competency, but also a moral and spiritual responsibility. This value is reflected in the prayer of Prophet Moses when he asked Allah to make it easy for him to delivered his message, as mentioned in Surah Taha verses 25-28:

قَالَ رَبِّ اشْرَحْ لِي صَدْرِي، وَيَسِّرْ لِي أَمْرِي، وَاحْلُلْ عُقْدَةً مِّن لِّسَانِي، يَفْقَهُوا قَوْلِي

In these verses, Prophet Moses prayed for his chest to be expanded, his task to be made easier, and the obstacles in his speech to be removed so

that people could understand his words. This prayer highlights the importance of clarity, confidence, and effectiveness in communication, especially when conveying important messages. In the context of education, students face challenges similar to those experienced by Prophet Moses, such as anxiety, lack of confidence, and difficulty in expressing ideas. Therefore, efforts to improve speaking skills through appropriate learning strategies and conversation strategies are in line with pedagogical goals and Islamic values. Mastering speaking skills and developing effective communication strategies can be seen as part of the etiquette of seeking and delivering knowledge.

Considering the issues discussed above, this study aims to explore the challenges faced by students in improving their English speaking skills in Academic Speaking courses, as well as to analyze the conversation strategies they use to overcome these challenges. By analyzing both the challenges and strategies, this study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' academic speaking experiences. The findings of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to English language education research and practically to the development of more effective teaching strategies, learning materials, and curriculum design that support students' academic speaking competence.

B. Definition of Key Terms

This section provides clear definitions of key terms used in the thesis to ensure clarity and prevent potential misinterpretations. Only essential terms directly related to the study are included to maintain focus.

1. Spoken English proficiency

The ability to communicate effectively and fluently in English through speech, which includes skills such as pronunciation, vocabulary use, grammar accuracy, and conversational fluency, is a reflection of how well a speaker can convey ideas and respond in a variety of contexts.

2. Students challenges in speaking

The challenges that students encounter when speaking in academic settings, include nervousness, a little vocabulary, a fear of making grammatical mistakes, insecurity, or trouble comprehending academic discourse patterns and cultural quirks.

3. Conversation strategies

Active listening, asking clarifying questions, utilizing fillers correctly, rephrasing for clarity, and using non-verbal cues to keep the discussion flowing in formal or academic settings are some strategies or used to improve spoken communication.

C. Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do students describe their experiences of facing challenges in English conversation in academic speaking courses?
2. How do students explain the strategies they use to overcome those challenges in academic speaking courses?

D. Objectives of Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To explore students' experiences of facing challenges in English conversations in an academic speaking course.
2. To examine the strategies students use to overcome speaking challenges in academic speaking contexts.

E. Significance of Study

1. Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the development of knowledge about SLA (Second Language Acquisition) by providing information on specific questions that students would encounter in an academic setting. This study expands the existing framework of conversational competencies by identifying the primary problem such as anxiety, limited vocabulary, or cultural nuances and examining the strategies used by students to solve this problem. This study demonstrates a theoretical framework for communication skills by highlighting the dynamic interactions between linguistic, cognitive, and social factors in an academic setting.

2. Practical implications

This study provides valuable guidance for educators, curriculum designer, and language instructors in developing more effective teaching methods and materials for spoken English course. By understanding the common obstacles student face, educators can implement targeted interventions, such as conversation based activities, peer feedback, and confidence building exercise, to achieve better outcomes. Additionally, the study provides students with practical methods to raise their spoken English skills, enhancing their ability to engage in academic discussions, and participate in intellectual conversations.