

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the foundation of the study by outlining its key elements, which consist of the background of the study, research questions, research objectives, and finally the significance of this study.

A. Background of The Research

There are four skills that must be mastered in learning English language. Each skill can be categorized into two types, which are Receptive skills (Listening, and Reading) and Productive skills (Speaking, and Writing). It means these four skills are a foundation of learning English language. In Indonesian educational settings, where English serves as a foreign language, learners have to face to compounded challenges such as restricted authentic exposure, heightened anxiety, and insufficient interactive (real-world) practice. That condition had been intensified by the curriculum shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Solehudin et al. 2022). Speaking proficiency is widely acknowledge as one of the most daunting components of EFL acquisition, demanding linguistic precision, fluency, accurate pronunciation, and cultural adaptability. Empirical evidence highlights that speaking difficulties often arise from psychological barriers, including foreign language anxiety, characterized by apprehension or avoidance during oral task (Zuhri et al. 2022).

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education remains a cornerstone of Indonesia's higher education system, fostering global communication, academic advancement, and professional opportunities between the increasing digital globalization. Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Purwokerto, a higher education institution within the Nahdlatul Ulama network, provides an English Language Teaching (ELT) program aimed to equipping students with the skills to teach English effectively. Operating under the Faculty of Social, Economy, and Humanity, the program is specifically designed to equip students with the pedagogical competence and linguistic mastery required to become effective educators (Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama, 2024).

To achieve this, the ELT department in Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Purwokerto provides a comprehensive curriculum covering a wide array of specialized subjects. Students engage in foundational language skills such as Speaking, Writing, Listening, Reading, and Pronunciation Practice, alongside theoretical and analytical courses including Linguistic studies, Lexical Studies, Grammar, Translation, and Literature Studies. In contrast to the general English study program, the students are immersed in pedagogical and students' psychological knowledge through subjects such as Psychology of Education, Philosophy of Education, Student Development, Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), and Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL). The curriculum is further rounded out by Research Methodology, ensuring students are prepared for academic inquiry. Yet, despite the program focus on pedagogical competence, ELT students also equipped with essential real-world skills such as writing and speaking skill (Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Purwokerto, 2024).

The speaking obstacles appear to persist throughout the academic journey. As a student of the ELT program, the researcher has observed a recurring pattern of reluctance among his peers. Even in higher-level courses, many students remain shy and rarely initiate English conversations. The use of English is often strictly confined to the speaking classroom. even then, it is rarely used exclusively, as students frequently revert to Indonesian. This suggests that the struggle with fluency and confidence is not merely an introductory hurdle but a deep-seated issue that remains unresolved even as students approach the end of their degree.

The difficulties of speaking are also faced by the students of the ELT class in Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Purwokerto during observation. To further illustrate these phenomena, at Wednesday, December 10th 2025, a pre-research observation in a survival speaking class with ELT students from the 2025/2026 academic year revealed palpable difficulties in speaking English. The majority of students exhibited errors in grammar, hesitation

during speech, a lack of vocabulary, and a noticeable lack of confidence when speaking in front of the class. At the session's end, when asked about their challenges, students provided a candid insight that they felt “speaking English is hard”. These firsthand accounts from the observation underscore the practical hurdles ELT students face, serving as a foundation for exploring speaking difficulties in a targeted context.

Beyond linguistic achievement, speaking ability also plays a crucial role in preparing students to meet the demands of contemporary education. In the context of 21st century education, English language learning is no longer limited to mastering linguistic elements such as grammar and vocabulary, but also emphasizes the development of essential skills including communication, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and problem solving (Rahman, 2019). Speaking skill plays a central role in developing these competencies, as it requires learners to express ideas clearly, respond to others appropriately, and manage real-time communicative challenges. Through spoken interaction, students are encouraged to think critically, make decisions, and solve communicative problems that arise during conversations.

For ELT students as prospective English teachers, the ability to speak English effectively is essential not only for academic achievement but also for professional competence. Future teachers are expected to facilitate interactive learning environments, guide discussions, and address communicative challenges in the classroom using English. However, persistent speaking difficulties, such as anxiety, lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, and grammatical uncertainty may hinder students’ ability to actively participate in spoken interactions and develop problem solving skills. When students avoid speaking, opportunities to practice communication and critical thinking are reduced, which may affect their readiness to meet the demands of 21st century education.

Within classroom communication, speaking is practiced in different forms that reflect real-life language use. Speaking in English can take

various forms depending on its purpose and context (Burns & Richards as cited in Daulay et al. 2022). One form of speaking commonly used in educational and real-life communication is transactional speaking. Transactional speaking refers to spoken interaction that focuses on the exchange of information and the achievement of specific communicative goals, such as asking for clarification, giving instructions, expressing needs, or solving problems through conversation (Safitri, 2022). In this type of speaking, clarity of message and mutual understanding between speakers are emphasized rather than social bonding alone. In academic settings, transactional speaking activities are often implemented through classroom discussions, role plays, presentations, and problem-based tasks that require students to convey meaning accurately and respond appropriately to others. These activities demand not only linguistic competence but also confidence, fluency, and the ability to think and react in real time. Therefore, difficulties in speaking may significantly affect students' performance in transactional speaking contexts.

From the explanation of transactional speaking, it is clear during activities that required students to exchange information, respond to questions, and convey meaning orally, the students have to communicate the information clearly. The difficulties like hesitation, grammatical errors, limited vocabulary use, will hinder students' ability to deliver messages clearly and achieve the intended communicative goals, indicating that challenges in transactional speaking are evident in actual classroom practice. The condition leads to the big problem which is the students often avoiding to communicate in English.

Afisa (2015) and Effendi (2016) found that the students had difficulty in speaking because they have low vocabulary mastery, difficulty to pronouncing certain words, confused about arranging words and grammar, and afraid of making mistakes. This idea also supported by Nabilah et al. (2023) and Prasojo et al. (2023), who reveal that students exhibit elevated anxiety levels when speaking English, resulting in

diminished classroom engagement and persistent avoidance of conversational activities. The most often faced difficulties when speaking in English is because of the discrepancy between the writing and pronunciation of the word phrase, also the mixed of the learners' mother tongue accents that leads to a self-confidence problem while speaking English.

Dealing with the statements above, there are two previous studies that support researcher related to the students' difficulties in speaking English. The first was conducted by Rosalinda (2024), the research is about problems and difficulties of speaking based on psychological aspects that encounter English speaking performance at SMK Diponegoro 3 Kedungbanteng Banyumas. Her study explained the factors of difficulties in speaking focusing on the psychological aspects. The research used mixed method to investigate what psychological factors negatively influencing speaking performance at the 11th grade of SMK Diponegoro 3 Kedungbanteng Banyumas. The result showed the psychological factors that impacting English speaking performance are 39,03% lack of confidence, 34,79% anxiety, 15,92% fear of making mistakes and 10,26 lack of motivation.

Second research was conducted by Chand (2021), the research was about the difficulties in learning English speaking among the sixth and eighth semester, studying major English at the undergraduate level at Far Western University in Nepal. The research used qualitative approach to the difficulties in learning English speaking among the sixth and eighth semester, studying major English at the undergraduate level during the learning process. The research findings revealed four major categories of speaking difficulties: personal problems, linguistic problems, social problems, and environmental problems. Such as lack of confidence, poor vocabulary power, hesitation, anxiety towards speaking, fear of making mistakes, not having a suitable environment to practice English, no strong

motivation from teachers were some common difficulties students faced while speaking in English.

The two studies were conducted across diverse educational contexts: the first focused primarily on the psychological factors of English speaking difficulties, the second examined the higher education level. Despite this extensive body of research, there are notable gaps remains: the first research conducted by Rosalinda (2024) was only focusing on the psychological aspects from the students, while the second research by Chand (2021) was focus only on studying the kind of problems faced by the students. To fill those gaps, this study will delve deeper to investigate the difficulties and the factors contributing to English speaking difficulties among ELT students 2025/2026 academic year at UNU Purwokerto.

The discrepancy between the program's pedagogical goals and the actual communicative habits of the students serves as the primary catalyst for this research. The researcher is driven by a critical curiosity regarding why, despite years of exposure to English instruction, ELT students at Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Purwokerto continue to face such profound psychological and linguistic barriers. This persistent hesitation seen in both freshmen and seniors suggests that the root of the problem may lie deeper than mere lack of practice. Consequently, this study is initiated to move beyond surface-level observations and systematically uncover the specific factors contributing to these speaking difficulties. By identifying these hurdles within the ELT department, the researcher aims to provide a foundation for developing more effective strategies that empower future English teachers to communicate with the confidence and fluency their profession demands.

From the researcher's point of view, almost all EFL learners have difficulty in speaking English. Based on the explanation, this research is interested to delve deeper to what kind of difficulties that encountered by the students and what are the factors causing them. Therefore, this research also interested in taking the research which is entitled **“Investigating**

English Speaking Difficulties and Their Causing Factors Among ELT Students in Transactional Speaking Class” to bridge the gap. By targeting ELT students as prospective educators, it seeks to yield actionable insights for curriculum enhancements. The study leverages a mixed-method framework to encompass both the scope of experiences (through quantitative data) and the nuance of individual stories (through qualitative data).

B. Research Question

This study is guided by two central research questions:

1. What are the speaking difficulties encountered by the students of the English Language Teaching Department at Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Purwokerto in Transactional Speaking class?
2. What are the factors that cause students' difficulties in speaking English in Transactional speaking class?

C. Research Objectives

As the research questions mentioned before, the objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To identify the specific speaking difficulties experienced by ELT students at UNU Purwokerto in Transactional Speaking class.
2. To investigate the factors of the difficulties in transactional speaking class.

Through this research, the researcher seeks to identify the problems and factors of ELT students' difficulties in speaking English at Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Purwokerto, offer evidence-based recommendations for both the students and the ELT department at UNU Purwokerto, derived from the findings, to strengthen speaking pedagogy and mitigate obstacles.

D. Research Significance

This study has both theoretical and practical significance,

1. Theoretically, the study hopefully can increase and provide knowledge and insight for the writer, the teacher, the students, and the school.

Moreover, this study is expected to be able to develop the existing knowledge related to speaking in general and speaking problems in particular.

2. Practically, this research is expected to give some benefits:

a. For Curriculum

Expected to directly impact Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Purwokerto's ELT curriculum by informing reforms such as pronunciation workshops, potentially improving student retention, graduation rates, and employability.

b. For Students

- 1) Students are expected to know and realize the importance of speaking skill.
- 2) Students are expected to know the speaking problems that they have and attempt to decrease it.
- 3) Students are expected to be able to develop their speaking ability.

For ELT students as future educators, the study provides personal and professional empowerment through self-reflection on speaking challenges, encouraging strategies to overcome anxiety and build resilience (Zuhri et al. 2022). It prepares them for careers by highlighting the need for proactive skill-building to model fluent English and foster empathy for learners. Overall, this research illuminates speaking difficulties and drives positive change in EFL education.

c. For the Researcher

Through this research, the writer expects to gain new knowledge, insight and experience regarding English education in general as well as speaking problems in particular. Thus, it is can be a provision when the writer works in the future later.