

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **1.1. Background of the Study**

Speaking is the act of expressing ideas or thoughts. Due to Mandasari & Aminatun (2020), speaking is the process of articulating sounds or words to transmit ideas, thoughts, and feelings. In the process of learning to speak, the students faced several difficulties that make them hinders to speak. As the researcher observed when teaching vocational high school students in a teaching practice program, many students experienced difficulties speaking or communicating using English. Some students decided to be silent rather than say several words while the teacher asked them. In the other case, the students could not engage in the speaking learning activity because they are less interacted. Due to Kyaw & Hlaing (2019), in the process of learning to speak, some students are apprehensive about using language they don't understand well in front of their peers, are fearful of making mistakes, and display their lack of knowledge and thinking. This incident causes teachers to feel uncomfortable teaching curricular speaking activities because usually, students do not respond to teachers' instructions (Alaraj, 2017). Therefore, this attachment leads to speaking learning activity failing to be effectively improved.

Vocational high school is a formal education equivalent to senior high school. It is a secondary education that prepares learners especially to work in a particular field (Constitution No 20, 2003, explanation in article 15). Unlike ordinary senior high school, vocational high school has various distinguishing characteristics, such as being job-oriented, demand-driven, knowledge-based, work-field skills and values-based, and students' performance-based assessment (Fatriani, 2019). The students in vocational high school are expected to have good credibility and high competitiveness so that they can fill available job vacancies when they graduate. Nevertheless, since Indonesia faced ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015, the

vocational high school graduates compete not just with Indonesian job hopefuls, but also with those throughout Southeast Asia. Moreover, due to EF EPI (English Proficiency Index) 2021 edition, Indonesia is ranked 80<sup>th</sup> among 112 nations in the world and 14<sup>th</sup> among 24 nations in Asia with a low level of ability. This phenomenon demands the use of English skills for vocational high school students since it can help the students to compete and have more value.

The urgency of mastering English in vocational high school is indicated by the need for English as a parameter of mastered competence. A teacher in a vocational high school in Tasikmalaya stated that in *Uji Kompetensi Keahlian (UKK)* holding at the end of grade 12, the use of English is considered as the aspect to be tested, mostly in oral communication (personal communication, March 12, 2022). *UKK* is an assessment held specifically for vocational high school students to measure the achievement of student competencies (Damarjati, 2022). The existence of mastering English skills mostly orally in *Uji Kompetensi Keahlian (UKK)* shows that students urgently require English speaking skills.

There are many researchers studied EFL/ESL speaking challenges. Nevertheless, there is little known about exploring speaking challenges, particularly in vocational high school. The previous study focused on exploring speaking challenges in university (Huwari, 2019). He revealed the problem faced by Jordanian undergraduate students in speaking English as follows: linguistics matters (like pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary), psychological factors (inhibition, lack of motivation), and learning environment (topics of speaking modules, limited time), and lack of practice. However, there is a need to investigate speaking issues at all stages and levels, particularly in vocational high school, given the importance of understanding English at this level. Furthermore, in this present study, the researcher wants to explore the EFL students' speaking challenges in vocational high schools. Additionally, this would be an opportunity for teachers and academics to fully comprehend their students' conceptions of

speaking challenges experienced by students and to update their educational philosophy until they are almost able to suit their students' expectations (Akramy, 2020).

## **1.2. Formulation of the Problem(s)**

Based on the background above, the research question addressed in this present study is “What are the EFL students’ challenges in learning speaking?”.

## **1.3. Operational Definitions**

To avoid misunderstanding the term mentioned in this paper, the research provides definitions related to this study as follows:

- 1) **Speaking:** Speaking is the act of communicating information or expressing one's thoughts and feelings through the use of spoken words. It is an activity that included sharing opinions, information, and emotions.
- 2) **Speaking challenges:** Speaking challenges refers to the challenges that can be affected by the emotional state of students and prevent them from speaking in English class. In this research, challenges refer to speaking challenges on EFL students in learning speaking skills such as lack of vocabulary, fear of mistakes, shyness, anxiety, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation.
- 3) **EFL students:** EFL students are people who study English in a country where it is not the dominant language but a foreign language. In this research, the EFL students are Indonesian vocational high school students located in Tasikmalaya.

## **1.4. Aim(s) of the Research**

This research is aimed to explore the EFL students’ challenges in learning to speak in vocational high school.

### **1.5. Significances of the Study**

- 1) Theoretical Use: This research will expand on EFL students' perception of challenges in learning to speak
- 2) Practical Use: The result of this study will talk about EFL students' challenges in learning to speak so that they can be controlled if they happened in the classroom
- 3) Empirical Use: This research provides empirical insight into EFL students' challenges in learning to speak