CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

English is one of the languages that dominate the world, so it can be said that English is an international language that plays an important role in facing globalization. With globalization and the increasing role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in development and knowledge, English is becoming increasingly important. Everyone should be prepared, especially young learners. They must prepare themselves as a generation for a better future. In learning English, speaking ability is one of the important aspects in foreign language learning, especially in the current era of globalization. Speaking involves not only the ability to construct grammatically correct sentences, but also confidence, fluency, pronunciation, and the ability to understand the context of communication. Shumin (2002)[1] states that learning to speak English as a foreign language is more than just knowing its grammar and semantic rules. Therefore, speaking ability is often considered the main indicator of one's success in mastering English.

Speaking is one of the ways of communication most often used by humans to interact with others in everyday life. Speaking is the human ability to utter articulated sounds or words to express, state, and convey thoughts, ideas, and feelings. More broadly, it can be said that in speaking activities there

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[1] Shumin, K. (2002). *Factors to Consider: Developing Adult EFL Students' Speaking Abilities*.

is a process of converting thoughts or feelings into meaningful speech or language sounds. Speaking is not just saying something without meaning, but conveying thoughts or feelings to others using speech or spoken language. Speaking is believed to be one of the important skills used to interact and communicate verbally with others. Those who can speak will be better at sending and receiving information or messages to others. Speaking is the process of constructing and sharing information through verbal and nonverbal symbols in various situations.

Through speaking we can interact with the world community. Santi Adriani, Samsul Amri, and Ahmad (2020)[2] argue that the purpose of speaking is to inform, entertain, report, persuade, and convince. In general, the purpose of speaking is to be able to do simple oral communication in English. The purpose of learning speaking cannot be separated from the purpose of learning English. The benefit of speaking is to increase self-confidence. However, speaking is the most important factor in the development of English language skills such as reading, writing and listening. For example, when learning to write or mastering different types of tenses, grammar and vocabulary selection that are not wrong. In listening, when participating in activities or just listening to hear English, the listener can pronounce it back. As mentioned by Leong and Ahmadi (2017)[3], speaking consists of five key elements: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Recognizing these aspects

[2] Santi Andriani Putri, Samsul Ari, Ahmad Dalan. 2020. *The Students' Difficulties Factors in Speaking.*
[3] Lai-Mei Leong! & Seyedeh Masoumeh Ahmadi2 (2017). *An Analysis of Factors Influencing Learners' English Speaking Skill.*

of speaking will improve students' ability to share and request information, thus making classroom speaking activities more effective.

However, in reality, many students have difficulties in speaking English, despite having studied it for years in formal institutions. According to Al Nakhalah (2016)[4] there are many factors that cause difficulties in speaking English among students. These difficulties are influenced by various factors, both internal and external factors. Internal factors include psychological aspects such as anxiety, lack of confidence, and low motivation to learn. On the other hand, external factors include the learning environment, teachers' teaching methods, limited time for speaking practice in class, and lack of opportunities to use English in daily life. Understanding these factors is crucial to designing effective learning strategies and improving students' speaking ability. In addition, some factors are also believed to trigger the problem. According to Alqahtani (2015)[5], the factor that triggers students' difficulties in speaking is that most students cannot speak English because they do not know how to convey their ideas due to the lack of vocabulary they have. Because one cannot produce grammatical sentences if they do not have enough vocabulary needed to convey what they want to say. In addition, the students also make mistakes in pronouncing English words when they speak. Most of the students want to speak English, but they have low competence in some aspects of the language,

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[4] Nakhalah, A. M. M. A. (2016). *Problems and Difficulties of Speaking That Encounter English Language Students at Al Quds Open University*. International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention, 5(12), 96–101.

[5] Alqahtani, M. (2015). *The Importance of Vocabulary in Language Learning and How to Be Taught. International Journal of Teaching and Education*, III, 21-34.

such as pronunciation, vocabulary, etc. Gilakjani & Sabouri (2016)[6] stated that acceptable pronunciation is one of the important parts of communicative competence. People who have understandable pronunciation can easily improve their language skills better than those who have low pronunciation competence. Nakhalah (2016)[7] also stated that students have difficulty in speaking due to lack of confidence. Some students think that their English skills are poor and assume that they cannot speak English well. Their lack of confidence usually occurs when they realize that their interlocutors do not understand what they are talking about or when they do not understand other speakers.

In addition, it can also be caused by the fact that speaking is often neglected by some teachers so that students do not have the opportunity in their classes to speak English. This opinion is in line with Sariakin et al. (2021)[8] who pointed out that students often struggle with pronunciation of English vocabulary and understanding proper grammar. This is exacerbated by the lack of practice and opportunities to speak in English, so their speaking skills are not optimally developed. Actually, students can read or write better, but they face some difficulties in speaking. These problems make students unable to communicate fluently and accurately because students do not have enough

[6] Gilakjani, A. P., & Sabouri, N. B. (2016). *Why is English Pronunciation Ignored by EFL Teachers in their Classes*. International Journal of English Linguistics, 6(6), 195.

[7] Nakhalah, A. M. M. A. (2016). *Problems and Difficulties of Speaking That Encounter English Language Students at Al Quds Open University*. International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention, 5(12), 96–101.

[8] Sariakin, M. R. (2021). *Teaching Vocabulary by Using Experiential Learning to The Students of MTsN 2 Banda Aceh*.

knowledge and opportunities in this area. According to Rahmawati et al. (2021)[9] many students experience anxiety when they have to speak in public, which is characterized by feelings of embarrassment and unnatural behavior. This anxiety can hinder their ability to convey information effectively.

In the context of learning in Indonesia, English speaking constraints are often a significant problem. Gilakjani & Sabouri (2016)[10] stated that as a foreign language, English is not a language used in daily life by most Indonesians. This causes students to be less accustomed to speaking in English, even though they have good reading and writing skills. In addition, learning patterns that focus more on grammar and translation, rather than oral communication exercises, contribute to students' low speaking ability.

The selection of this title is mainly based on the researcher's own experience when doing an internship at SMPN 1 Sumbergempol. The researcher found that some students had difficulties in speaking English in front of the class. Therefore, the researcher wanted to find out more about students' perceptions of what difficulties they experienced when speaking English in class.

However, there are still some gaps in this research that need to be filled. Researchers found that most studies on factors contributing to students' speaking difficulties were conducted in high school and college environments,

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[9] Rahmawati, S., Lestari, D., & Pratiwi, Y. (2021). *Students' Anxiety in Speaking English: A Case Study at Senior High School Level*. Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics, 6(2), 123–135.

[10] Gilakjani, A. P., & Sabouri, N. B. (2016). *Learners' Listening Comprehension Difficulties in English Language Learning: A Literature Review*. English Language Teaching, 9(6), 123–133.

while studies in junior high school environments were still rare. This was especially true at SMPN 1 Sumbergempol. To date, no researcher has studied students' difficulties in speaking English at SMPN 1 Sumbergempol. Another gap is that nearly all research on the factors causing students' difficulties in speaking English has used qualitative research methods; therefore, the researcher employed a quantitative method in the form of a survey in this research.

This study aims to investigate students' perceptions of difficulties in English speaking performance. This study focuses on identifying the main factors and analyzing how these factors affect students' speaking performance. The researcher also conducted interviews with students to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions of difficulties in speaking English. Additionally, this study aims to provide recommendations to teachers, students, and relevant parties in efforts to improve students' speaking abilities. Through this study, it is hoped that it will contribute to the field of English language education, particularly in improving the effectiveness of speaking instruction. By addressing the challenges faced by students, it is hoped that students will become more confident, motivated, and capable of communicating effectively in English.

Based on the explanation of the background above, the author took the title of the research thesis entitled **"Students' Perceptions on Their Difficulties in Speaking Performance of the Seventh Grade at SMPN 1 Sumbergempol Tulungagung".**

B. Research Question

In this study, researchers defined the problem to be studied in the following way:

1. What are the students' perceptions on their difficulties in speaking performance of the seventh grade at SMPN 1 Sumbergempol Tulungagung?

2. How are the students' perceptions in overcoming speaking performance difficulties of the seventh grade at SMPN 1 Sumbergempol Tulungagung?

C. Research Purpose

1. To find out the students' perceptions of their difficulties in speaking in class VII at SMPN 1 Sumbergempol Tulungagung.

2. To describe how the students' perceptions in overcoming the difficulties of speaking performance of class VII at SMPN 1 Sumbergempol Tulungagung.

D. Significance of the Research

The researcher expects that the result of this research will be useful:

1. For students

    This study can help reduce the challenges students face when speaking. In addition, this study can improve students' understanding, encourage them to practice more and gain deeper mastery of speaking skills.

2. For teachers

    English teachers can find this research useful as it can increase their awareness of the challenges students face when learning to speak. The results of this study will provide feedback to them regarding the problems encountered in English language learning, particularly in speaking, as practiced at SMPN 1 Sumbergempol Tulungagung. By understanding these challenges, teachers might be inspired to find solutions.

3. For school

    This research can contribute to the school's knowledge, helping it to improve its ability in the field of knowledge development competition.

4. For researchers

    By identifying the difficulties that students experience during speaking lessons, other researchers gain new references regarding these challenges. In addition, researchers can choose various strategies to help overcome students' difficulties.

E. Definition of Key Terms

1. Students Perceptions

    Student perceptions refer to how students view, understand, interpret, and evaluate certain phenomena or experiences related to their learning process. This involves their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs about something—in this case, their difficulties in speaking

performance. Woolfolk (2010)[11] argues that student perceptions refer to students' interpretations or understandings of their educational experiences, which in turn influence how they learn and behave in the school environment. Perceptions play a crucial role in educational research because they can influence motivation, behavior, learning strategies, and ultimately, students' academic outcomes.

2. Speaking

    Baron (2020)[12] explains that speaking involves creating meaning through different phases, which include producing, receiving, and interpreting information, thus making it a two-way process.

3. Students' Difficulties in Speaking

    Zhang (2009)[13] mentions that for almost every English learner, sspeaking is the most difficult skill to master, and they struggle to communicate effectively in English. Chens (2009)[14] notes that among the challenges often faced by students when speaking English are low confidence, limited fluency, and little vocabulary. In this study, the term "speaking difficulties" relates to seventh grade students of SMPN 1 Sumbergempol Tulungagung.

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[11] Woolfolk, A. (2010). *Educational Psychology* (11th ed.). Columbus, OH: Pearson/Merrill.
[12] Baron, M. (2020). *Students' Perception on Online Application in Speaking Skill*. VELT: Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics, 5(1), 1–10.
[13] Zhang, Y. (2009). *Reading to Speak: Integrating Oral Communication Skills*. English Teaching Forum, 47(1), 32–34.
[14] Chen, J. (2009). *An Analysis of Students' Difficulties in Speaking English*. International Journal of English Language Education, 7(2), 45–58.