

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of Study

Communication style is the way an individual or group conveys messages and interacts with others. It covers various aspects, including word choice, tone of voice, body language, and the social context of communication. According to book entitle “*When I Say No, I Feel Guilty*”, communication styles can be divided into several types, such as assertive, passive, and aggressive<sup>1</sup>. Meanwhile according to Gudykunst and Kim<sup>2</sup>, communication style can be defined as an individual's characteristic or pattern of communication formed from social and cultural factors that influence the way a person understands and conveys messages in various situations.

In the context of academic discussions, communication style becomes especially relevant, as it directly affects the clarity, confidence, and effectiveness with which students express ideas, respond to arguments, and engage in dialogue. Academic settings often demand a structured, coherent, and interactive use of language, where students are expected to participate actively and think critically. In this case, English proficiency plays a significant role. As stated by Littlejohn and Foss, language ability influences not only the effectiveness of communication but also the level of engagement in the discussion process. Students with higher English proficiency tend to

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<sup>1</sup> Manuel J. Smith, *When I Say No, I Feel Guilty*, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> William B Gudykunst and Young Yun Kim, *An Approach to Intmultural*, n.d.

demonstrate more assertive, clear, and organized communication styles, allowing them to contribute meaningfully to academic discourse. Conversely, students with lower English skills may struggle to convey their thoughts fluently, often displaying passive or hesitant communication styles, which can limit their participation and the overall quality of the discussion.

Referring to data from Education First's English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) 2023, the data shows that the level of English proficiency in Indonesia is still relatively low compared to other countries in Asia. Indonesia ranks 79th out of 113 countries with an EPI score of 473 with a global average score of 493, making Indonesia fall into the “low proficiency” category. Meanwhile, Indonesia ranks 13th in Asia out of 23 countries. The highest score in the Indonesian region is occupied by Jakarta with an EPI score of 531 and the lowest is occupied by Maluku with a score of 412. Based on Harmer's opinion, low language skills often hinder smooth communication and can create inequality in the exchange of information between group members, especially in class or group discussions. This fact shows that the English proficiency gap in Indonesia is still a big challenge that needs to be considered in the development of higher education in Indonesia.



Image source: <https://www.ef.co.id/epi/regions/asia/indonesia/>

The figure above shows that the level of English language proficiency in Indonesia based on age from 2015 to 2023 has decreased. At the age of 18-20 years, there is a significant decrease. Points in 2015-2013 reached 495 decreasing to 413. At the age of 21-35, the points achieved in 2015 reached 515, dropping to 490 in 2023. At that age, from 2019 to 2020 it experienced a fairly drastic decline, but in 2021 it increased again. At the age of 18-20 years, a person can improve their English language skills through education at an institution. There is a term that says English is a language that has inconsistent vocabulary. This may be a factor in why English is a difficult language to learn.

At Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung State Islamic University, students' level of English proficiency is quite diverse, as found from the results of the Test of English Proficiency (TOEP). This variation reflects the differences in the level of mastery of English among students, which also has an impact on their communication style. According to Brown<sup>3</sup>, zlanguage proficiency gaps often affect the participation and effectiveness of discussions,

<sup>3</sup> Stefan Frazier and H. Douglas Brown, "Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy," *TESOL Quarterly*, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587655>.

especially in academic settings that require active and responsive communication.

Several studies examine similar issues, such as the first study belonging research entitled “**From classroom interaction to academic success: tracing the mediating role of effective communication in faculty-student dynamics**”<sup>4</sup>. This research emphasizes the importance of lecturers' communication style in supporting students' academic success. However, the focus is only on vertical communication (lecturer-student), not on interactions between students in academic discussions. In contrast, this study focuses on students' communication styles in discussions, and how different levels of English language proficiency affect them. Thus, this study fills a gap by exploring horizontal communication in an academic context that has not been widely discussed before.

The second study entitled “**The Correlation Between Speaking Class Anxiety and Students' English Proficiency**”<sup>5</sup> by focused on the relationship between speaking anxiety in class and students' English proficiency, which showed that students with high anxiety in speaking tend to have lower English proficiency. This study emphasizes the impact of anxiety on language achievement, especially when speaking in class.

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<sup>4</sup> Nadia Dahmani et al., “From Classroom Interaction to Academic Success: Tracing the Mediating Role of Effective Communication in Faculty-Student Dynamics,” *Cogent Education* 11, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2377847>.

<sup>5</sup> Multi Yusan Dana and Dyah Aminatun, “Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning (JELTL),” *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning (JELTL)* 3, no. 2 (2022): 7–15, <https://jim.teknokrat.ac.id/index.php/english-language-teaching/index>.

The third belongs to research entitled “**Foreign Language Anxiety and Study Abroad: Chinese Students’ Voices of Experiencing Foreign Language Anxiety During Their Graduate Study in Australia**”<sup>6</sup>. This study explored the relationship between English proficiency and communication anxiety among Chinese students studying in Australia. It was found that students with lower English proficiency tend to experience higher communication anxiety, which may hinder their participation in academic discussions.

The fourth belongs to the study entitled “**Students’ academic culture: the mediating role of academic commitment in the relationship between academic resilience and academic performance of university students**”<sup>7</sup>, showed that academic commitment plays a partial mediating role between academic resilience and academic performance of undergraduate students. However, these studies have not explained how students' ability to deal with academic challenges is reflected through communication styles in discussions, and how academic culture plays a role in the relationship. This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on students' communication styles based on English proficiency in academic discussions, to uncover the communication mechanisms that link resilience, commitment, and academic performance-a

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<sup>6</sup> Hangyu Zhang and Hazel Tan, “Foreign Language Anxiety and Study Abroad: Chinese Students’ Voices of Experiencing Foreign Language Anxiety during Their Graduate Study in Australia,” *Cogent Education* 11, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2367303>.

<sup>7</sup> Berhanu Nigussie Worku and Dinaol Urgessa Gita, “Students’ Academic Culture: The Mediating Role of Academic Commitment in the Relationship between Academic Resilience and Academic Performance of University Students,” *Cogent Education* 11, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2377004>.

new perspective that can enrich the understanding of resilience in the context of horizontal interactions between students.

And the last one entitled “**Too Anxious to Talk: Social Anxiety, Academic Communication, and Students’ Experiences in Higher Education**”<sup>8</sup> This study aims to analyze how social anxiety affects students’ academic communication, including interactions with instructors and its impact on their academic experience at university.

However, these studies have not examined in-depth how differences in English proficiency affect communication styles in specific academic discussions. Especially with the comparison between high proficiency and low proficiency students. This phenomenon is interesting to study further, considering that effective communication is the key to success in academic discussions, both in learning and completing group assignments.

This gap is the main basis of this research, where the research focus is directed to explore the differences in English communication styles in academic discussions between high and low proficiency students.

## **B. Formulating of Research Problem**

Based on the background that has been stated, several main problems can be identified, including:

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<sup>8</sup> Kristen A. Archbell and Robert J. Coplan, “Too Anxious to Talk: Social Anxiety, Academic Communication, and Students’ Experiences in Higher Education,” *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders* 30, no. 4 (2022): 273–86, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10634266211060079>.

1. What types of English communication styles do students perceive themselves to use during academic discussions by high and low English proficiency?
2. What factors influence the differences in communication styles between high and low proficiency students?

In addition, it is important to understand the challenges that low proficiency students face in participating in academic discussions and how high proficiency students influence the dynamics of these discussions.

### **C. Purpose of The Research Study**

Based on the formulation of the problem that has been set, the purpose of this research is to find out how the differences in communication styles owned by students with high proficiency and low proficiency, including factors that can affect the differences in communication styles owned by students with high and low abilities. In addition, knowing the impact that occur by the communication style of high proficiency students and low proficiency students on the effectiveness and quality of academic discussions.

### **D. Significance of Research Study**

A benefit is something that produces a good or beneficial outcome or influence or that improves well-being. The benefits of this research are none other than to help the effectiveness in the application of methods and approaches in the implementation of learning in the classroom. But to be clear, the benefits are divided into two parts, namely:

#### **A. Theoretical benefits**

- a. To provide insight and knowledge related to the phenomenon of differences in English communication styles for students with high proficiency and low proficiency students
- b. This research is expected to provide information and be used as a reference for similar studies to continue their research on education related to students' English language skills.
- c. It can provide benefits related to development that can be done to improve the communication styles of students.

**B. Practically benefits**

- a. The results of this research can be used by universities and higher education institutions to identify the needs of students who have low English language skills and design more effective programs to support them in academic discussions.
- b. Lecturers and teaching staff can use these findings to develop more effective teaching strategies as well as use the right methods, which can help improve students' confidence and communication skills in English.
- c. This research can provide practical recommendations on how to design inclusive discussion activities, so that all students of their English language proficiency level, can actively participate in the discussion.

**E. Scope and Limitation**

This research is expected to run in accordance with the predetermined scope by setting the scope and limitations of the research so that the goals can be achieved despite the limitations of time and resources. The focus of this

research is on the analysis of certain factors that affect communication styles in academic discussions, especially in students with high English language skills and students with low skills. From the various factors that can affect communication styles, this study will focus on factors that can be analyzed and intervened through available approaches.

The researcher uses qualitative methods with observation, interview, and document analysis techniques, and focuses on interaction in academic discussions. The data collected will include transcripts of conversations, field notes, and interview responses from relevant students and lecturers. This study assumes that students' communication styles in academic discussions are largely influenced by their level of English language proficiency. In addition, it is assumed that the data from observations and interviews will reflect the actual conditions on the ground.

## **F. Definition of Key Terms**

The goal is for readers to be able to clearly understand the concepts discussed. By knowing the definitions of these terms, readers are expected to be able to follow the course of the research more easily and understand the results achieved. The following is an explanation of the key terms used in this study.

### **1. Communication style**

Methods or methods used by students in conveying ideas, opinions, and information during academic discussions. Communication styles involve both verbal and non-verbal aspects, such as intonation, word choice,

gestures, and facial expressions, all of which can be influenced by a variety of factors, including the level of language proficiency.

2. English language proficiency

*The level of student skills* in using English, both in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. This study grouped students based on their English language proficiency into high and low categories to analyze their influence on communication styles.

3. Academic discussion

An interactive process between students and students or students and lecturers to exchange information, ideas, and opinions in the context of higher education. These discussions usually take place in the form of seminars, study groups, and aim to deepen the academic understanding of the participants