

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

To enhance students' learning experiences, the Indonesian Ministry of Education launched the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM)* initiative. One of its programs is *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)*, a domestic student exchange program that allows students to study at a university in another region of Indonesia for one semester. Unlike the exchange programs limited to international settings, this program emphasizes domestic intercultural exposure that allows students to experience the diverse sociocultural and academic landscapes within Indonesia itself.

The *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* program enables students to choose between different types of exchanges: within the same study program at different universities, across different study programs, or within the same campus but different study programs (Ramadhani et al., 2021). This flexibility allows students to experience new academic settings aligned with their interests. The *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* program offers opportunities to enhance academic knowledge and perspectives, improve cross-cultural understanding, and develop leadership, self-confidence, and social awareness (Fajri et al., 2024; Lingga et al., 2023; Dewi et al., 2024). In addition, PMM also forms intercultural friendships that can serve as a positive force. Hendrickson et al. (2011) argue that intercultural friendships among students promote positive adjustment, reduce loneliness, and increase

intercultural learning. These friendships are especially valuable in helping students integrate socially and feel more comfortable in diverse educational environments.

However, this program also introduces some challenges in the area of communication, particularly for English education students. Students are placed in unfamiliar learning environments, expected to adapt to new academic cultures, and required to interact with peers from varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Differences in classroom interaction styles, the level of emphasis on oral participation, and varying levels of English use among students can heighten feelings of linguistic insecurity and social anxiety (Maher & King, 2020). This situation can create communication barriers for English Education students.

In the field of English education, speaking skills hold a fundamental role in forming the foundation for effective communication in academic, professional, and social settings. As noted by John and Yunus (2021), speaking is considered the most crucial among the four language skills. The capacity to express ideas fluently, participate actively in discussions, and deliver coherent presentations are vital competencies for English Education students, not only during their studies but also in their future careers as educators and communicators.

Although the researcher did not personally participate in a speaking class during the participation in the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* program, academic and social interactions with *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* students who were taking speaking courses at the IKIP Budi Utomo provided valuable insights. Through these interactions, it was observed that many students frequently tended to use Indonesian during discussions, both within and outside of class activities. This tendency indicated underlying challenges in maintaining English use,

particularly when confronted with academic pressure, cultural differences in communication norms, and varying levels of English proficiency and confidence. This inspires a deeper investigation into the specific speaking challenges that students face in the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* program.

These personal observations align with findings from previous studies. Lascotte and Peters (2021) emphasize that differences in teaching and learning cultures can lead to initial confusion and frustration among exchange students, impacting their participation and performance. Turco (2021) further reveals that students from diverse ethnic backgrounds often struggle with social anxiety, inhibition, and linguistic difficulties when required to use English in multicultural settings. Such challenges not only affect students' linguistic performance but also their overall academic confidence and engagement.

Several existing studies have specifically examined speaking challenges among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Abrar et al. (2018) investigated the experiences faced by Indonesian EFL student teachers in speaking English and identified four major challenges, which are Language barriers (such as vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency), psychological factors (like anxiety, attitude, and low motivation), the learning environment (influences from lecturers and peers). To address these challenges, the students adopted strategies such as consistent language practice and maintaining positive motivation. Similarly, Ratnasari (2020) found that limited vocabulary, nervousness, unsupportive environments, and lack of grammar knowledge are primary challenges to speaking English. Students in these studies adopted strategies such as code-switching, using

technology tools, and building supportive relationships with lecturers to overcome these issues.

Moreover, although research on *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* programs has emerged, it primarily focuses on general adaptation and student perceptions, without a specific emphasis on language skills. Darmawan and Aliyyah (2024) investigated students' perceptions of *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* at Djuanda University. This study found that although students appreciated the valuable experiences gained, they also encountered financial and administrative challenges. Similarly, a study conducted by Wardani et al. (2024) at UNU Yogyakarta examined the challenges PGSD students faced in adapting to new environments, social settings, and cultural differences during *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* participation. This study found that *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* participants experienced three challenges in the adaptation process. First, cultural differences that cause anxiety, confusion, and loneliness. Second, differences in education systems that present academic challenges. Third, language and lifestyle that affect physical and mental health. Although these studies contribute to understanding general *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* Program experiences, it does not address the specific academic and linguistic challenges, particularly those related to English speaking skill faced by English Education students.

Thus, there is a research gap on this issue. No study examines the speaking challenges faced by English language students in the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* program. Given the importance of speaking skills for English language students, especially for their future academic and career success, this topic is important and requires further study.

This study aims to identify the challenges faced by students in speaking English and the strategies they use to overcome them based on their experiences during the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* program at IKIP Budi Utomo Malang. The findings of this study are expected to enrich the literature on speaking challenges in the EFL context, especially in student exchange programs such as *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* program.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

The research questions can be formulated as follows:

1. What are the speaking challenges faced by English Education students during the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* Program?
2. What strategies do English Education students use to overcome the speaking challenges?

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The research objective can be formulated as follows:

1. To identify the speaking challenges faced by English Education students during the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* program.
2. To explore the strategies that English Education students employ to overcome the speaking challenges.

### **1.4 The Significance of the Research**

#### **1. For the Lecturers**

This research provides important insights for English lecturers in designing more effective lessons. By understanding the challenges and strategies that students face during *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* programs in their speaking skill,

teachers can implement appropriate approaches into teaching. The findings can help lectures create a conducive learning environment as well as develop teaching materials and methods that better suit the needs of students in a multicultural classroom.

## 2. For The Student

For students, particularly those participating in exchange programs such as the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* Program, this research serves as a guide to overcoming challenges in a multicultural learning environment. By learning the strategies used by the participants to improve their speaking skill, students can apply similar methods to improve their own language abilities.

## 3. For the Future Researcher

This study provides a basis for further research on language learning in multicultural contexts and exchange programs. It opens up opportunities for further exploration of challenges and strategies in other language skills. This research opens up opportunities for future researchers to conduct further studies on the same topic.

### **1.5 Limitation of the Research**

This study focuses on the challenges encountered by inbound students of the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* (PMM) program at IKIP Budi Utomo Malang in their speaking skill and the strategies that is use by the students to overcome these challenges. The findings may not be generalizable to those from different majors or institutions. Additionally, this study specifically examines speaking skill and does not cover other language skills such as listening, reading or writing. The study relied on qualitative data through interviews that provide rich and deep insights into

participants' experiences. Nevertheless, this method is less capable to provide numerical data-based results or statistical analysis that is objective and measurable as in quantitative research.

### **1.6 Definition of Key Terms**

**Speaking:** The process of conveying information, ideas, emotions, and intentions through spoken words, which not only involves the use of verbal language, but also includes elements of tone of voice, intonation, speed of speech, and volume to clarify and strengthen meaning.

**Challenge:** According to Cambridge dictionary, “challenge” is defined as encountering a circumstance that necessitates significant mental or physical exertion to perform successfully, which tests and examines a person's skills and endurance. This type of circumstance frequently tests people's skills, resilience, and determination as they work to overcome the obstacles that arise.

**Strategy:** According to Cambridge dictionary, “Strategy” is defined as a comprehensive plan designed to achieve success in contexts like war, politics, business, industry, or sports, or the expertise involved in crafting such plans. This entails strategically organizing resources and actions to navigate and overcome challenges in these various fields, ensuring the desired outcomes are reached.

***Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka:*** The *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* (PMM) is a student mobility initiative organized by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (*Kemendikbudristek*) with the aim of broadening national insights, strengthening integrity, building solidarity, and fostering unity and nationalism among Indonesian students.