

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### A. Speaking Skills for EFL Students

Speaking ability is one of the fundamental competencies in mastering English as a foreign language (EFL), which is often the main measure of learning success. According to Nunan (2010) and Schmitt (2020), speaking ability is not only about producing utterances, but also involves competence in the appropriate use of language according to context and skills in managing interactions. This ability is very important because through speaking, learners can express ideas, share information and build relationships, which are the essence of effective communication in both academic and social settings.

To be able to speak effectively, a learner needs to master several key components. These include fluency in speech characterized by smoothness, reasonable speed, and few pauses; accuracy in the use of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation; clarity of pronunciation that includes articulation, intonation, and word stress; and richness of vocabulary and mastery of grammatical structures. The ability to organize ideas logically and connect them through coherence and cohesion also plays an important role in producing comprehensible speech. Building upon this framework, Murcia (2007) emphasizes the significance of strategic competence, involving the speaker's ability to use verbal and non-verbal strategies to compensate for gaps in knowledge and enhance communication.

However, the development of speaking skills is often faced with various obstacles. EFL students often experience difficulties stemming from psychological aspects, such as speaking anxiety arising from fear of being judged negatively or

fear of making mistakes, as well as excessive self-consciousness that interferes with fluency. Al-Tamimi et al. (2020) identified these psychological issues as one of the main barriers. In addition, there are also linguistic barriers which include limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, and pronunciation issues. Research findings in Vietnam by Thị & Ngọc (2023) suggest that teaching methods that focus on knowledge transfer and lack of communicative practice can exacerbate these challenges. In more detail, Al-Tamimi et al. (2020) categorize these speaking barriers into lexical, phonological, syntactical, cohesion and coherence issues, as well as issues related to learner psychology.

Overall, speaking is a fundamental competency in the acquisition of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), which includes not only the production of utterances but also the appropriate use of language in context and the management of interactions. However, the development of these speaking skills is often hampered by various obstacles, both linguistic (limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, pronunciation problems) and psychological (speaking anxiety, lack of confidence, fear of criticism). The findings underscore the importance of effective teaching methods to overcome these challenges and facilitate fluent and accurate communication for EFL learners.

## **B. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)**

To address these challenges, the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach emerges as a potential solution. This approach, which is a well-established and continually refined framework within communicative language teaching (Byrne, 2019), places communicative tasks as the core unit of learning. The focus is on the authentic use of language to achieve meaningful communicative goals,

where students use language to accomplish tasks relevant to the real world. This approach emphasizes meaning over language form in isolation, and assumes that language acquisition occurs through use (Byrne, 2019).

TBLT operates based on several key principles. First, a focus on meaning is the top priority in task completion. Second, TBLT encourages the use of authentic language that reflects real-life language use. Third, the learning process follows a task cycle which generally consists of a pre-task phase, a task cycle (task, planning, reporting), and a language focus, as described in Willis' (in Chairena, 2015) framework. Fourth, this approach is learner-centred, encouraging autonomy and active participation. Fifth, a focus on form is integrated, often after the task has been completed, to address specific linguistic needs that arise.

Despite its similarities to CLT, TBLT differs in its unit of instruction. Whereas in CLT the unit is the language item, in TBLT the unit is the task itself, with language analysis conducted post-task based on emerging needs. Ellis (2003) distinguishes between task-supported language teaching and task-based language teaching, where TBLT places the task as the basic curriculum unit.

TBLT is highly effective in improving speaking skills because it provides learners with numerous opportunities to practice in meaningful contexts. By engaging in tasks that require negotiation of meaning and interaction, learners naturally develop fluency and the ability to use language spontaneously. Research by Albino (2017) shows that TBLT can enhance fluency, grammar, and interaction in transactional conversations among EFL learners. Similarly, Pham & Nguyen (in Xuyen & Trang, 2021) found that task-based speaking activities improved students' oral performance and fluency due to increased confidence and practice

opportunities.

The TBLT approach has also been shown to have a positive impact on language learners' psychological conditions. Task designs that often involve collaboration and problem-solving can foster a sense of achievement and boost students' self-confidence. Successfully completing tasks can increase motivation to continue learning. Moreover, by shifting the focus from grammatical perfection to communicative effectiveness during the task phase, TBLT can help reduce speaking anxiety and create a more supportive learning environment. Nget et al. (2020) reported that students had positive perceptions of TBLT because it enhanced their speaking skills, self-confidence, and motivation to learn. Similarly, Chua & Lin (2020) found that tasks could increase students' learning motivation by reducing anxiety through peer interaction.

The Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach has emerged as a promising solution to address the challenges in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking skills. Rooted in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), TBLT prioritizes authentic communicative tasks as the core learning unit, emphasizing language use to achieve meaningful goals. Its principles of student-centeredness, meaning-focus, and structured task cycles inherently encourage active language use, which is proven effective in improving fluency, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Furthermore, TBLT has a significant positive impact on learners' psychological aspects, such as increasing self-confidence, motivation, and reducing speaking anxiety through collaboration and problem-solving in tasks. Thus, TBLT offers a comprehensive framework for effective speaking skill development and psychological support for EFL learners.

### C. Speaking Strategies

Speaking strategies are specific actions, techniques, or behaviours consciously used by learners to facilitate their speaking performance, overcome communication difficulties, and enhance overall communicative competence. Oxford (in Khan et al., 2016) defines language learning strategies as behaviours used by students to make their learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, and more effective.

Speaking strategies can be broadly categorized. Some relevant types include the use of circumlocution or paraphrasing to explain unknown words, the use of fillers or hesitation devices such as “um” or “uh” to maintain fluency while thinking, asking for clarification when something is not understood, self-correction, using gestures or non-verbal cues, and repetition to buy time or emphasize a point. The nature of TBLT, especially its emphasis on task completion and achieving communicative goals, naturally encourages learners to apply various speaking strategies. When engaged in tasks, learners are compelled to utilize their existing linguistic resources and often need to employ strategies such as paraphrasing or fillers to ensure successful task completion. This aligns with Oxford's (1990) definition of language learning strategies as behaviours used by students to make their learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, and more effective (Khan et al., 2016).

Speaking strategies are conscious actions that learners use to facilitate speaking performance, overcome difficulties and improve overall communicative competence. The Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach, with its emphasis on task completion and communicative goal attainment, inherently

encourages learners to employ a variety of speaking strategies. This is because in the TBLT process, learners are forced to utilize the linguistic resources at hand and often need to use strategies such as paraphrasing or fillers to ensure successful task completion.

#### **D. Previous Studies**

To support the design of the questionnaire in this study, a strong theoretical foundation was identified, including an understanding of the categories of speaking problems and the effectiveness of TBLT in improving aspects such as students' fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and confidence. The questionnaire in this study was specifically designed to measure students' perceptions of these issues and how TBLT affects them.

Previous studies have consistently highlighted the positive impact of TBLT on EFL learning. It was found that students have a positive perception of TBLT as it is believed to improve speaking ability, confidence and motivation, while providing suitable conditions for language learning. For example, Nget et al. (2020) found that students perceived TBLT as enhancing their speaking skills, self-confidence, and motivation to learn. Furthermore, task-based speaking activities were shown to improve students' oral performance and fluency thanks to increased confidence and more practice opportunities. This aligns with Pham & Nguyen (2014) findings that task-based activities improved students' oral performance. Similarly, TBLT is able to improve fluency, grammar, pronunciation and interactional language among EFL learners in transactional conversations. Albino (2017) demonstrated that TBLT can enhance fluency, grammar, and interaction in transactional conversations among EFL learners.

There is also evidence to suggest that TBLT contributes to anxiety reduction and increased learning motivation through peer interaction; a study by Chua & Lin (2020) found that tasks can increase students' learning motivation by reducing anxiety through peer interaction, which is in line with the findings of Nget et al. (2020) regarding the psychological benefits of TBLT. Research conducted by Thi & Ngọc (2023) in Vietnam highlighted the common challenges faced by EFL students in speaking, which often arise from less communicative teaching methods. The TBLT framework proposed by Willis (1996) and the concept of speaking strategies described by Oxford (1990) then provide a relevant conceptual foundation for this study. Collectively, these studies support the importance of speaking skills, the challenges learners face, and the potential effectiveness of TBLT in overcoming these challenges and enhancing learners' psychological aspects.

Although various previous studies have demonstrated the positive impact of TBLT on speaking ability and psychological aspects, this research specifically focuses on students' perceptions at Universitas PGRI Madiun. Understanding these perceptions is essential for effective implementation in the Indonesian local context, filling the gap in understanding how TBLT is received and experienced by university students in this setting.

## **E. Conceptual Framework**

The framework of this study is based on the relationship between the implementation of the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach and the improvement of EFL students' speaking skills. TBLT, which emphasizes the use of language to complete meaningful tasks, is expected to help students overcome

various speaking problems they commonly face, including lexical, phonological, syntactic, cohesion-coherence, and psychological issues, as categorized by Al-Tamimi et al. (2020). Furthermore, TBLT is predicted to have a positive impact on students' psychological aspects, such as increased confidence, motivation, and reduced speaking anxiety. This study will measure students' perceptions regarding the extent to which these challenges are addressed and the positive impacts of TBLT through quantitative data analysis from the questionnaire.