

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents a broad overview of the research. It contains the background of the study, formulation of the problem, operational definitions, aim of the study, and significance of the study.

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

Technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) has evolved significantly over time, incorporating advances in technology to improve and facilitate language learning. Recently, in the past years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has appeared as one of the latest technologies that are being developed not only in the field of education, but also in almost all aspects of human needs. With the emergence of Artificial Intelligence, EFL learners have a powerful assistance to support their English language learning. Artificial intelligence assistants offer personalized, interactive, and accessible language learning experiences for EFL learners (Kim et al., 2021). Recent AI such as chatbots, allows learners to practice their language skills in interactive conversations. It can simulate real-life conversations, assisting learners to practice their language skills in a safe and supportive environment (Haristiani & Rifai, 2021; Kim et al., 2021; Pérez et al., 2020). Thus, by utilizing AI technology, EFL learners can practice and develop their language skills in a supportive and dynamic environment.

In EFL learning context, the implementation of AI chatbot-assisted language learning integrated into various language topics and skills. It aims to develop self-directed learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities by providing a constructive learning environment (Kumar, 2013; Agustini, 2023). The other study revealed that learners can engage in dialogues with the chatbot which can improve their fluency, comprehension, and conversational abilities. It provides instant feedback on learners' language usage, grammar, and vocabulary. Learners receive feedback on their responses, helping them identify and correct errors,

reinforcing language rules, and improving their overall language proficiency (Fryer & Carpenter, 2006; Haristiani, 2019; Walker & White, 2013).

The use of AI Chatbot also occurred in the Indonesian junior high school level. There are EFL learners who experienced using Character AI in their English language learning. Since mid-2023, they frequently used Character AI to engage in chat or written conversations with fictional characters like Disney princesses or anime characters. They felt as if they were interacting with these characters in context-related conversations, which led them to gain many new insights into learning English. They claim that by using Character AI, they become more enjoyable in learning English, more critical in communication, and also being helped in practicing written dialogue as well as the language structure.

The urgency to investigate the role of Character AI in English language learning appear from several key factors. Firstly, the integration of AI technology in education is a rapidly growing trend, especially in language learning (Jung, 2019). Secondly, the AI chatbot technology allows learners to engage in an interactive conversation with AI that can simulate real-life conversation in a natural way which appear human-like (Kim et al., 2021). Thirdly, there are many research exploring about the impact, benefit, and implementation of AI technologies such as ChatGPT (Agustini, 2023), but Character AI still not yet explored. Therefore, it is urgent to investigate the role of Character AI in English language learning. Understanding its impact can help learners and educators utilize AI tools more effectively, enhance teaching and learning experiences, and contribute to the broader field of technology integration in education.

The investigation into the use of AI chatbots for language learning has been increasing due to its emerging trend. Most studies focus on the impact of integrating AI Chatbots in teaching and learning and improving learners' language skills (e.g. Agustini, 2023; Collie & Martin, 2024; Fitria, 2024; Reichenberg & McVee, 2019; Wang et al., 2024). However, research on other AI Chatbot applications, named Character AI, as this study focuses on, remains uncommon or underexplored in the context of English language learning. Therefore, this study is purposefully to investigate EFL learners' perceptions regarding the role of Character AI in their

English language learning. This study aims to enhance the understanding of how AI chatbots can be utilized in English learning, building on the previous AI technologies that have already been implemented in language learning and teaching contexts.

## **1.2 Formulation of the Problem**

Based on the background above, the problem is formulated: What are the EFL learners' perceptions about the role of Character AI in their English Language Learning at the Junior High School level?

## **1.3 Operational Definitions**

- 1.3.1 English Language Learning** : The learning process of acquiring English knowledge and skill as demonstrated by EFL learners to master communicative written dialog which is influenced by their learning attitude, interest, motivation and positive perceptions towards AI technology involvement in their learning of English.
- 1.3.2 Technology Enhanced Language Learning** : Technological tools and resources which facilitate EFL junior high school learners to independently develop their English language proficiency through Character AI.

### **1.3.3 Character AI**

An AI chatbot application used by EFL learners to learn English which offers an interactive and communicative environment that provides language learners practice through engaging written dialogues with artificial intelligence characters.

## **1.4 Aim of the Research**

The aim of this research is to investigate the perceptions of EFL learners regarding the role of an AI chatbot, specifically Character AI, in their English language learning at the junior high school level.

## **1.5 Significance of the Study**

- 1.5.1 Theoretical Significance** : This research enriches the literature review of technology enhanced language learning and AI chatbot assisted language learning in EFL context.
- 1.5.2 Practical Significance** : This research can be used as reference for EFL learners to construct their English language learning by using Character AI as the assisted media for language practice and development.
- 1.5.3 Empirical Significance** : This research shows an empirical understanding of how Character AI can be implemented to construct EFL learners' English language learning in a supportive and dynamic environment.