

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a description of the study. In this chapter, the background of the study and formulation of the problem will be explored to provide insight into the context and urgency of the issue under study. Following this, operational definitions, the aim of the research and its significance will be discussed, thus clarifying the research objectives and the benefits derived from this study.

A. Background of the Study

Learning English as a foreign language remains challenging for many learners, especially for those who do not use English in daily communication. In traditional learning, issues such as linguistic, cultural, and instructional barriers often hinder conversational practice and progress in the process of language learning (Malik & Nayab, 2024). To address these challenges, the integration of technology in education has provided innovative ways to enhance opportunities for practice and support language development.

Over time, this integration has been conceptualized as Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL). TELL combines traditional learning methods with technological tools to facilitate language learning experiences (Walker & White, 2013). Among the latest technological trends, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a powerful tool that offers personalized, interactive, and accessible language learning experiences for EFL learners (Kim et al., 2019). Furthermore, a type of AI that has become highly popular recently is the AI chatbot. AI chatbots offer features that allow users to practice their language skills through interactive conversation. They can simulate real-life conversations, assisting learners in practicing their language skills in a safe and supportive environment (Grab, 2025). Thus, by utilizing AI technology, EFL learners can practice and develop their language skills within a dynamic setting.

In the context of EFL learning, the implementation of AI chatbots in language learning is being integrated into various language topics and skills. Some studies have revealed that students who learn a language using AI chatbots can enhance their fluency, comprehension, and conversational abilities (Dja'far & Hamidah, 2024; Tiwari et al., 2024). They provide immediate feedback that helps users to identify their errors and improve their accuracy.

The use of AI chatbots for language learning is also emerging at the university level in Indonesia. Character.AI has become one platform that has gained attention among students for its potential in English language learning. Unlike ChatGPT, which often functions as a direct assistant, such as for drafting and correcting text (Waziana et al., 2024), Character.AI provides a narrative partner to engage in open-ended and contextual dialogues that allow users to practice English in more natural and real conversations.

Within the same context mentioned above, preliminary observations revealed that several students in a university in Tasikmalaya frequently engaged in role-playing activities on Character.AI, interacting with a wide array of fictional characters. Through informal interviews, these students reported that the practice of crafting conversations and stories with Character.AI helped them develop their conversational skills through authentic communication and made learning English more enjoyable. This phenomenon is worth investigating further, as understanding how students perceive and engage with Character.AI can provide valuable insights into its potential as an effective language learning tool. Moreover, given that the use of Character.AI among EFL students appears to be driven by personal initiative rather than formal instruction, exploring its roles may offer educators a clearer basis for integrating the platform into language learning contexts in a more intentional and informed way.

In line with this interest, AI chatbots for English language learning have been increasingly investigated. Huang et al. (2022) in their systematic review, identified key benefits of chatbots in language learning, including technological affordances like timeliness, ease of use, and personalization. Laili et al. (2025) found that health science students positively perceived ChatGPT, valuing its ability

to explain complex topics, expand vocabulary, and assist with writing. The tool was reported to increase student motivation and confidence in using English. Fadhila & Br. Kembaren (2025) revealed that EFL students viewed Character.AI positively for writing skill development, with a majority agreeing it helped them learn new sentences and improve their grammar, thereby boosting their writing confidence.

Despite these findings, research on Character.AI, especially in the context of language learning, is still limited. While study like Fadhila and Br. Kembaren (2025) has begun exploring students' perceptions of Character.AI in a writing context; however, research in other contexts remains scarce, and further investigation is still needed to investigate the phenomenon that has occurred. To address this gap, this study is grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model 3 (TAM3) by Venkatesh and Bala (2008). This model provides a comprehensive framework to investigate two core constructs that influence technology adoption: Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease-of-Use (PEOU) with eleven additional determinants. By using this framework, this research aims to provide a better understanding of how EFL students perceive the roles of Character.AI in their language learning.

B. Formulation of the Problems

Based on the background above, the problem is formulated: What are the roles of Character.AI in EFL students' language learning?

C. Operational Definitions

To avoid misunderstanding in this study, the researcher provides an operational definition of each keyword:

1. Character.AI

Character.AI is an AI chatbot application that allows users to interact with AI characters through written and spoken conversations. In this study,

the participants used features such as chat, voice call, and selectable AI voices/accents to practice and develop their English skills interactively.

2. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), originally developed by Davis (1989), explains how users come to accept and use a technology based on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. This study specifically refers to TAM3 (Venkatesh & Bala, 2008) as the theoretical framework to examine why Character.AI plays certain roles in EFL students' language learning. The two core constructs were measured using eleven determinants from TAM3, which were operationalized into semi-structured interview questions.

3. English Language Learning

English language learning refers to the process of acquiring and improving English language skills. In this study, English language learning is defined as the EFL students' process of improving their English proficiency through their experiences, motivation, perceptions, and engagement while using Character.AI.

D. Aims of the Study

The aim of this research is to explore the roles of Character.AI in EFL students' language learning.

E. Significances of the Study

1. Practical Significance

Practically, this research offers educators a clear insight into the direct application of Character.AI as a dedicated tool for English language learning. It demonstrates how the platform's interactive AI conversations

can serve as a practical method for students to build confidence in speaking and writing and practice vocabulary in a contextual, engaging manner.

2. Empirical Significance

This study provides in-depth insight into students' experiences using Character.AI for English language learning. It reveals how learners engage in authentic conversational practice with AI personas, navigate spontaneous dialogue to improve fluency, and develop confidence through repeated, low-pressure interaction in a personalized environment.