

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Recent trends in English Language Teaching (ELT) methodology and the development of technology in teaching have led to a proliferation of studies to find an effective way of teaching second languages. The emergence of communicative language teaching (CLT) has led to the development of teaching approaches that continue to this day (Richard, 2008). The teaching of conversational skills is an extension or even further development of CLT methodology (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1994). The CLT approach emphasizes the importance of being able to communicate with others as the primary goal of learning a language (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014). This approach has gained so many tractions among educators. Many English classrooms in Indonesia, nowadays, have leaned towards the use of communicative activities. In CLT, meaningful activities take some important roles in students language development. These activities could include role-playing, information gap activities, and games. The classroom activities are intended to practice language fluency rather than accuracy and grammatical knowledge is obtained later through reflection.

As Benseler and Schulz (1981) point out, the term 'conversation' refers to the meaningful spoken exchange of ideas, information, or feelings. Although a conversation can take various forms, speakers, and settings, all conversation follows certain patterns (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1994). There is a general convention prescribing things such as how conversations should be open or closed or even

strategies that help a speaker clarify what the other speaker means. These strategies are called conversational strategies. According to Dörnyei and Thurrell (1994), conversational strategies can be defined as: 'an invaluable means of dealing with communication trouble spots, such as not knowing a particular word or misunderstanding the other speaker.'

Celce-Murcia (2007) places conversational competence directly under the umbrella of interactional competence as a part of the model of communicative competence. Conversational competence essentially is the ability of a speaker to understand the flow and patterns of a conversation and how they can maintain it by breaking it down using conversational strategies. Conversational competence is often overlooked in teaching instruction as they are not partly taught in a curriculum such as linguistics competence. Students also need some perquisites such as conversation partners for them to converse, and this sometimes comes out as a challenge in learning conversation skills.

Formulaic knowledge is very important in a conversation. In making conversations, there are language chunks often found that are represented in a number of set phrases. These are usually taught systematically through contemporary coursebooks (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1994). This set of phrases is called formulaic expressions. Formulaic expressions in conversations represent typical language functions, such as asking and answering questions, expressing and agreeing with opinions, making requests and suggestions, and reacting in various ways to what the conversation partner is saying. These expressions are an essential part of formulaic competence, which is important for the fluency of a conversation.

Wray (2000) states that formulaic language can be used to retain fluency so that a full conversational turn is taken. Still and all, a considerable amount of literature suggests that conventional textbooks provide very limited formulaic language. According to Benseler and Schulz (1981), the traditional textbook responses are invariably short and direct. Therefore, students who have memorized "classic" responses to certain English questions often have difficulty maintaining a conversation with native English speakers.

Other than this set of formulaic expressions, a speaker needs to be able to negotiate meanings in conversation. Sayer (2005) states that negotiation of meaning is the process of figuring out how to link one turn to the next. This tells how the speakers act in maintaining the flow of conversation and how they find the appropriate expressions and ideas to fit together. A conversation develops, shifts topics, becomes side-tracked or even breaks down as a result of the collaborative efforts of its participants.

Another great challenge in teaching conversation skills is the lack of conversational partners. Benseler and Schulz (1981) state that there must be a sender and receiver in the conversation to communicate ideas, information, or feelings. Therefore, if only one person does all the sending, and the receiver makes no meaningful verbal response (such as practicing with textbooks), there is no exchange, thus no conversation. Students under most circumstances have to rely on other students or any speakers to help them.

The other challenges of teaching conversation skills come from psychological problems. The study by Öztürk and Gürbüz (2014) revealed that the majority of students see speaking ability as an anxiety-inducing factor. Pronunciation, fear of making mistakes, and negative feedback were also important reasons for EFL speaking anxiety. Similarly, Mofareh (2019) stresses that many conversation problems the students face are along the lines of students' lack of confidence. These include low self-confidence around speaking in class, largely unfounded fear of embarrassment caused by potential mistakes, vague understanding of English vocabulary and grammar, and incorrect word or sentence articulation.

Recent developments in ELT have heightened modern conversational agents (also known as chatbots) to address these issues. Radziwill and Benton (2017) state that chatbots can broadly be defined as one category of conversational agents, software systems that mimic interactions with real people. Chatbots can receive natural language input and response in goal-directed behavior. Most chatbot systems also adapt to new information through machine learning. Like many other technological advancements, chatbots emerged as a powerful platform for language learning.

With the overwhelming increase of modern mobile devices, learning languages will be convenient for students through this technology. Bahadorfar and Omidvar (2014) suggest that technology gives students a chance to engage in self-directed actions, opportunities for self-paced interactions, privacy, and a safe environment in which errors get corrected, and specific feedback is given. There

are also some advantages of conversing in a chat over making oral conversation in person. Höhn (2019) suggests that chat interaction has advantages for language students because the students can re-read the chat history, have more time for production and comprehension, and even use other tools to deal with troubles in production or comprehension, which is not possible in oral conversation.

Furthermore, there seems to be a need for further investigation on using chatbots to fulfill students' communicative competence. In doing so, this study set out to explore EFL students' perspectives on the use of chatbots to fulfill communicative competence.

1.2 Research questions

The problems of this research can be formulated as follows:

- 1) What is EFL students' perspective toward using chatbots as conversation partners to fulfill students' communicative competence?
- 2) How do EFL students use chatbots to fulfill students' communicative competence?

1.3 Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the research can be stated as follows:

- 1) to understand the perspectives of EFL students towards the use of chatbots to fulfill students' communicative competence.
- 2) to explore ways of using chatbots to fulfill students' communicative competence.

1.4 Significance of the study

The research results represent a further step toward developing new pedagogical knowledge in the area of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and in the practice of teaching in general. This study will contribute to many levels of society and institutions, mainly including teachers, students, schools, and researchers.

This study is essential for teachers in providing a new alternative way of teaching conversational strategies in classrooms. It also gives a better understanding of the method's effectiveness, the problems that might be encountered, and what is needed for students to develop their communicative competence.

As for students, this study will help them provide knowledge of how to develop communicative competence and improve their conversational competence to achieve more significant learning outcomes. This will also contribute to discovering the most effective, affordable, and convenient way to practice conversation and learn English in general. This study will also help them overcome a few problems that they might encounter during the learning process.

This study will essentially contribute to improving the overall quality of education in the department. It will encourage and inspire the department to consider the new method of teaching, which results in effective training of the students.

Finally, the study helps in filling the gap in the body of knowledge in the respected area. The findings of this study will also help researchers discover a new

perspective on teaching and the use of technology that may be useful for further research.

1.5 Limitation of the research

The research limits the study on the use of the text-based mode of interactions found in chatbots, which is currently available to use. The study also focuses on the perspectives of students in the English Education program of Universitas Jambi.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

EFL Students: Students live in countries where English is not their dominant language.

Chatbots: Software systems or programs developed to engage in natural language conversations with humans (Hussain et al., 2019).

Conversational Partners: A sender and a receiver for ideas, information, or feelings to be communicated in a conversation (Benseler & Schulz, 1981).

Communicative Competence: An ability to communicate in a language comprises six main competence: socio-cultural, discourse, linguistic, formulaic, interactional, and strategic competence (Celce-Murcia & Heinle, 2001).