

English Foreign Language Learners' Perceptions of Artificially Intelligent as Assisted Tool

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Abstract

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This study investigates EFL learners' perceptions of Character AI as a supportive tool for enhancing reading comprehension. Using a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected from 22 participants through a Likert-scale questionnaire and open-ended responses. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), while qualitative responses were examined through thematic analysis to identify recurring perceptions and experiences. The findings indicate that most participants perceived Character AI positively as a reading support tool. A majority of learners reported that the platform helped expand vocabulary knowledge, identify important textual details, and increase engagement and motivation through interactive and contextualized reading experiences. In contrast, perceptions regarding its effectiveness in identifying main ideas, interpreting implied meanings, and promoting critical thinking were less consistent, with many participants expressing neutral views and a smaller number reporting limited benefits. These findings suggest that Character AI is particularly effective in supporting lower- and intermediate-level reading comprehension processes but may be less effective for higher-order comprehension skills that require deeper analysis and interpretation. However, its effectiveness depends on learners' reading strategies, individual proficiency levels, and appropriate pedagogical guidance. Therefore, Character AI should be integrated with complementary instructional practices rather than used as a standalone solution for improving overall reading comprehension.

1. Introduction

Due to its broad international distribution and its importance in everyday use, English has become a part of global communication. People who learn English in this way are referred as EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. Therefore, it is very important for students to be able to communicate their ideas, thoughts, and opinions in English. There are four English language skills that need to be mastered in order for EFL learners to understand English better. These skills are Speaking, Listening, Writing, and Reading.

Reading is one of the most difficult skills for EFL learners to comprehend deeply. This skill requires the application of various complex and different techniques to master it. According

to Grabe (2009), reading comprehension is a complicated cognitive skill that combines understanding the meaning of words and putting together information from language and concepts in order to make sense of a text. Furthermore, Snow (2002) defines reading comprehension as the process of evaluating information and states that readers must decide whether the information they read is meaningful and worth reading. Another definition of reading comprehension by Faridah (2008) is a social constructivist process that builds new word meanings based on prior knowledge. Based on the previous opinions, it can be inferred that reading ability is an ability acquired by students during the learning process. Therefore, students who are skilled in reading will carry out a production process that can generate new knowledge, experiences, and attitudes.

EFL learners often face challenges in reading, such as limited vocabulary, weak grammar comprehension, and underdeveloped reading comprehension skills. They also have difficulty finding main ideas, understanding important details, and drawing conclusions due to a lack of background knowledge and minimal exposure to English texts outside of class. In addition, a lack of mastery of reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, and predicting makes the reading process less effective, compounded by psychological factors such as anxiety and lack of confidence that further hinder comprehension. Overall, these various challenges indicate the need to strengthen vocabulary, grammar, and reading strategies so that EFL learners' reading skills can improve optimally.

To address these persistent challenges, Character AI offers a solution to the problem of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in improving reading comprehension. Character AI is an artificially intelligent technology designed to impersonate specific personalities, conversational styles, and thought patterns, allowing it to interact like an actual or fictional character. This form of AI is frequently trained using data from conversations, language styles, and character-specific information, allowing it to respond in a manner that feels natural, consistent, and aligned with the role it is playing. With Character AI, users can either create or interact with characters that possess an identity, traits, goals, and even emotional responses. As stated by Alarifi et al. (2025), Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools hold the potential to enhance the reading comprehension of undergraduate learners, as they offer flexible learning experiences that are personalized to each individual. This AI technology is not only used for entertainment and storytelling, but also can be used for language learning, conversation simulation, role-play, and even creative idea development. Its primary purpose is to offer a communication experience that feels more personal, engaging, and responsive compared to traditional chatbots.

Recent research has extensively discussed the importance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a powerful tool in the fields of education and day-to-day communication. Several studies have focused on commonly used AI platforms such as ChatGPT, Duolingo, and other similar applications, which have proven to be effective in supporting the learning of languages, improving grammar, boosting writing skills, as well as providing accessible learning materials. Throughout the existing literature, a pattern emerges: most studies focus on the overall effects of general-purpose AI tools on the learning process, and not on specific forms of AI.

There are only a few studies specifically exploring Character AI, and most of these tend to focus on aspects such as learner's motivation and experience, or the ability of the tool to improve speaking and writing skills. Although these studies provide valuable insights into how AI technology functions as a supportive learning tools—with its advantages and limitations—they still left important unexplored areas. In specific, there is a gap in research about how Character AI can be used as a medium to build up reading comprehension, even while it is gaining popularity and has unique features that can encourage deeper engagement, interactions, and understandings during learning activities. Considering this gap, this study is conducted to explore EFL students' perceptions of Character AI in improving reading comprehension. By drawing attention to an area that has been under-explored in the context of AI integration in language education, this study is expected to provide new and valuable insights that are pedagogically and technologically significant.

Accordingly, the aim of this study is to look into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' perceptions of Character AI as a reading comprehension enhancement tool, a field that has not been well explored in previous study. This study specifically focused on understanding learners' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of Character AI use in reading-related activities. Participants in this study were general EFL learners from various groups of age and educational backgrounds, chosen based on experience in using Character AI and being active English learners. Through analysing their perspectives, this study seeks to identify Character AI's overall effectiveness, as well as its potential benefits or challenges in supporting learners' reading comprehension skill development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 EFL definition

According to Richards and Schmidt (2011), English as a foreign language (EFL) learners refer to people who learn English in a setting where it is not generally used in everyday communications. In alignment with this, Nation (2007) also points out that these learners face limited opportunities to practice English away from the classroom, which limits their overall

development of the language. Moreover, Wang and Vásquez (2012) also emphasized that, because of the lack of authentic English language interaction, EFL learners are often highly dependent on instructional resources as well as technology to support their learning process.

2.2 Reading Comprehension

Switching to the concept of reading comprehension, Grabe and Stoller (2011) have defined it as a complex process in which learners build meaning from a written text by using their linguistic understanding, previous experience, and their reading strategies. Similar to this, according to Alderson (2000), comprehension success relies on the ability to recognize vocabulary, to interpret the grammatical structure, as well as Kintsch's Construction-Integration Model (1998) to identify the main ideas in the text. In addition, emphasized the fact that reading requires both low-level processes, like word recognition, to high-level processes, such as drawing conclusions and linking information to already existing knowledge.

2.3 Skill and Sub Skill in Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is complex and involves several sub-skills. According to Grabe (2009), the sub-skills include decoding (The ability to recognize words and connect them to meaning), vocabulary knowledge (Understanding the meaning of words), grammar processing (Interpreting sentence structure), inference (Inferring implied information), identifying main ideas and supporting details, also critical reading (evaluating and questioning the text). Perfetti (2007) further emphasizes that word recognition and reading fluency are fundamental skills that make it possible for learners to process textual information efficiently, allowing them to engage in advanced comprehension processes. Taken together, these skills enable learners of EFL to effectively comprehend, understand, and critically evaluate text written in English.

2.4 Factors Influencing Reading Comprehension

Readers' comprehension is influenced by factors including linguistic, cognitive, affective, and technological factors. Nation (2001) highlights vocabulary knowledge as a critical linguistic factor; limited vocabulary directly impedes comprehension. Cognitive factors include work memory and strategic reading behaviors such as summarizing or predicting text content (Daneman & Carpenter, 1980; Oxford, 2011). Affective factors, such as learners' motivation and engagement, are also significant (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Additionally, technological factors, including the availability of interactive learning tools or Artificial Intelligence (AI)-supported applications, may assist learners in comprehending the material and offer real-time feedback, which may improve comprehension (Wang & Vásquez, 2012).

2.5 Character AI in Context

According to Fauziah and Nasrullah (2023), Character AI refers to Artificial intelligence platforms that designed to simulate human-like conversation through role-playing, dialogue, and individualized responses. In pedagogical contexts, this tool can act as a virtual language partner, providing EFL learner a unique learning experience that enables them to practice communication skills, receive immediate feedback, and engage in interactive learning experiences that are otherwise difficult to replicate in conventional classrooms. Not similar to the general AI tool like ChatGPT, Character AI point up engagement through narrative and role-playing, making it particularly effective in motivating learners and potentially supporting cognitive learning processes such as comprehension, critical thinking, and reflection.

Artificial intelligence (AI) technology has grown rapidly that it has had and continues to have a significant impact on many different kinds of subjects, including education. The majority of previous study on AI in language learning has been on popular programs like ChatGPT, mainly looking at how it can improve writing, speaking, grammar, and student motivation (Koraishi, 2023). On the other side of the coin, there remains lack of research specifically exploring Character AI, and the majority of these study efforts have concentrated on speaking and writing abilities.

Despite the growing popularity of Character AI and its unique role-playing and interactive features, its potential to support reading comprehension has rarely been explored. This gap is particularly significant because Character AI offers immersive, personalized, and engaging experiences that may enhance learners' motivation and cognitive processing during reading activities. Therefore, the present study positions itself to fill this gap by examining EFL learners' perceptions of Character AI as a medium for improving reading comprehension, providing preliminary insights into an underexplored area of AI-assisted language learning and offering a foundation for future study in this field.

3. Method

This research employed a descriptive qualitative research method with the objective of examining the experiences of EFL learners in applying Character AI as their supportive tool for enhancing reading comprehension. This method was chosen as the examination was concentrated on the perceptions and experiences of learners instead of focusing on a particular experimental application. As noted by Creswell (2007), qualitative research is suitable for research that purposefully comprehend individuals' experiences and their insight of a specific phenomenon. Descriptive qualitative research aims to provide a detailed understanding of participants' experiences, opinions, and perspectives within a particular context. The study focused on how learners perceive the usefulness, benefits, challenges, and educational value of AI-assisted

tools in their English learning activities. Hence, this methodology enabled the researcher to access specific insights into the improvements gained by learners in their reading activity as a result of their engagement with Character AI.

3.1 Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 22 EFL learners. The study applied a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques. Initially, participants were selected based on fixed criteria, including learners who had experience using Character AI for English learning, particularly in reading activities. Afterwards, snowball sampling was used by asking initial participants to recommend other potential participants who met the same criteria. This technique enabled the researcher to reach participants who were relevant to the research focus.

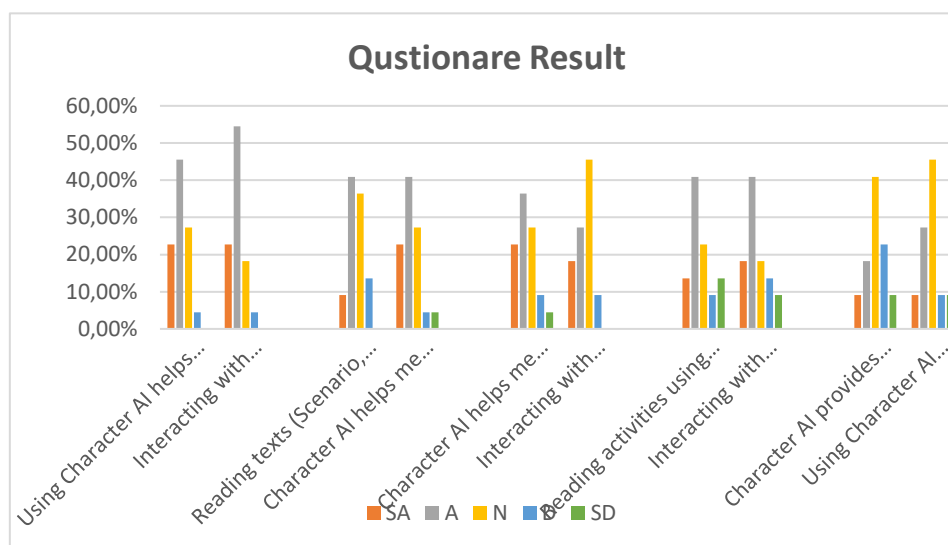
3.2 Instruments

The instruments used in this research were an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interview guidelines. The questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms and consisted of ten Likert-scale items ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD) with one open-ended essay question to enrich the data triangulation by collecting participants' initial responses regarding their experiences with using Character AI, especially related to reading comprehension sub-skills. Participation in this study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participants' identities were kept private, and the data were used exclusively for academic purposes.

4. Findings

This study aimed to explore EFL learners' perceptions of the use of Character AI in enhancing reading comprehension. Data were collected from 22 participants through a questionnaire consisting of ten Likert-scale items, with one item addressing participants' general perceptions and obtaining specific aspects of their experiences in using Character AI. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), to Strongly Disagree (SD). Several indicators were used to represent learners' perceptions, and the data were analysed descriptively based on participants' responses. The results for each statement are presented in the charts below, illustrating the distribution of participants' responses.

Figure.1 Questionnaire Result



5. Discussion

5.1. Vocabulary Understanding

The vocabulary understanding aspect indicate how most of the participant perceived Character AI is helpful in supporting the understanding of the vocabulary through activities related to reading. Most respondents agreed (45.5%) or strongly agreed (22.7%) that Character AI helped them recognize and understand unfamiliar words through interactions, scenarios, and narrative texts, while a small proportion were neutral (27.3%) or disagreed (4.5%). Similarly, (54.5%) agreed and (22.7%) strongly agreed that interacting with characters made it easier to learn new vocabulary, with only 18.2% neutral and 4.5% negative responses. The findings indicate that most participants rated Character AI as effective in helping them understand vocabulary, particularly in recognizing and understanding unfamiliar words thru interaction, scenarios, and narrative texts. Most respondents also felt that interacting with characters made the process of learning new vocabulary easier. Only a few participants were neutral or disagreed, so overall Character AI was perceived positively as a tool to support vocabulary development in reading activities. It also aligned with one of the participant's perception as well:

"When I communicate with the Character AI, sometimes it used sarcasm to know the meaning with the situation or the word it uses. It makes me to think deeply to get the meaning of what the character says. It uses some words I didn't know before, so I searched it to understand what it says, so that I can learn something new from it, the new word and make me think more deeply." (interview, January 15, 2026)

5.2. Understanding Main Ideas and Details

The results for the understanding main ideas and details aspect indicate generally positive perceptions of Character AI in supporting reading comprehension. For identifying main ideas,

(40.9%) of participants agreed and (9.1%) strongly agreed that reading texts presented through scenarios, dialogues, and role-based instructions helped them grasp the main idea, though (36.4%) were neutral and (13.6%) disagreed, suggesting some learners may need additional guidance. In recognizing important details, responses were more favourable, with (40.9%) agreeing and (22.7%) strongly agreeing that Character AI helped them notice key details, while only (9%) expressed disagreement. The findings indicate that participants generally have a positive perception of using Character AI to help understand main ideas and important details in texts. Character AI is considered quite effective in helping readers recognize important details, although some participants still feel the need for additional support to understand the main ideas. Overall, Character AI can support reading comprehension, but its effectiveness level still depends on reading strategies and individual participant abilities.

5.3. Inference and Critical Thinking

The findings indicate mixed but generally positive perceptions of Character AI in supporting inference and critical thinking during reading activities. For understanding hidden meanings in role-play-based texts, 36.4% of participants agreed and 22.7% strongly agreed that Character AI helped them interpret implied meanings, while 27.3% were neutral and 13.6% disagreed. Regarding deeper critical engagement, 27.3% agreed and 18.2% strongly agreed that interacting with Character AI encouraged reflective thinking, though 45.5% remained neutral and 9.1% disagreed.

These results indicate that the use of Character AI in reading activities received mixed but generally positive responses. Some participants felt Character AI helped them understand implied meanings and encouraged critical thinking, although many remained neutral and some did not perceive any benefits. Overall, Character AI can support high-level inference and thinking abilities, but its effectiveness is highly dependent on user engagement and individual reading strategies. One participant also emphasized that although Character AI is interactively engaging, its impact on reading comprehension is not very strong because the skill of understanding text still requires deep critical thinking from the reader. . As its state by one of the participant:

“Using Character AI feels incredibly engaging because of the waiting time and prediction of expectation you have for what reply the character would give, which might be pleasing for the user to read narration that is typed word by word like a spelling. But I don't think it has a strong role of impact within the context of reading comprehension itself. This is because reading comprehension is something someone should gain by critical thinking upon provided issues or substances. Not every conversation between a user and a character is suitable for raising one's ability to an advanced literacy comprehension.” (interview, January 15, 2026)

5.4. Reading Engagement and Motivation

The findings indicate that Character AI contributes positively to learners' reading engagement and motivation, although responses vary in intensity. For the statement regarding engagement, 40.9% of respondents agreed and 13.6% strongly agreed that reading activities using Character AI feel more engaging than traditional reading activities. Meanwhile, 22.7% of participants chose neutral, while 9.1% disagreed and 13.6% strongly disagreed, suggesting that not all learners perceive Character AI as more engaging than conventional reading methods. Regarding motivation, the results reveal similar tendencies. 40.9% of respondents agreed and 18.2% strongly agreed that interacting with Character AI motivates them to read English texts more frequently. In contrast, 18.2% selected neutral, and 13.6% disagreed along with 9.1% strongly disagreed. The results show that participants' perceptions of the instructional support and ease provided by Character AI for comprehending the reading material still differ. A few respondents felt helped by the explanations offered, but many were neutral or even disagreed, demonstrating that the clarity and consistency of Character AI's explanations have not been uniformly experienced. A comparable scenario occurred with the aspect of belief in understanding texts: although some felt more comfortable, most remained neutral. Overall, Character AI has the potential to support reading comprehension, but its effectiveness in building confidence heavily depends on how users apply it and the quality of interactions that happen.

6. Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that the use of Character AI in reading activities is generally perceived positively, yet its effectiveness varies across different aspects of comprehension. Character AI has proven to assist most participants in understanding new vocabulary, recognizing important details, and enhancing reading engagement and motivation through contextual and narrative-based interactions. However, its effectiveness in helping to find main ideas, interpret implied meanings, and encourage critical thinking is not felt uniformly, as many participants showed reactions that were neutral and a small portion felt less assisted.

This variation in perception indicates that the benefits of Character AI are highly dependent on reading strategies, individual abilities, and the quality of interaction between the user and the character. While this technology can be a potential supporting tool in developing reading comprehension, advanced reading skills still require critical thinking that cannot be fully replaced by AI-based interactions.

The findings have several implications for EFL teachers. First, teachers should consider integrating AI tools into classroom activities to promote learner autonomy and personalized learning experiences. However, teachers should also guide students in critically evaluating AI-

generated content and using AI responsibly as a supplementary learning resource rather than a substitute for independent thinking and teacher guidance.

For curriculum designers, the results suggest the importance of incorporating AI literacy and digital competence into English language curricula. Curriculum frameworks should provide opportunities for students to develop the skills needed to effectively and ethically use AI tools in language learning. Furthermore, learning activities should be designed to encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and reflective use of AI technologies.

Overall, Character AI serves as a supportive tool capable of enriching the reading experience and supporting certain aspects of comprehension, but not as an independent tool that directly improves overall reading comprehension abilities. Its potential for application will be more optimal when used in conjunction with appropriate reading strategies and sufficient educational guidance.

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