

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter focuses on the research background, research questions, research purposes, research significance, conceptual framework, and previous studies.

#### **A. Research Background**

This study is concerned with Informal digital learning of English (IDLE). IDLE refers to how students interact with English through digital media and technology, including social media, online material, gaming, and digital communication (Nugroho, Van, Putra, & Nanda, 2022). IDLE provides learners with authentic exposure to spoken English, interactive speaking opportunities, and fluency development (Lai, 2017). The current study aims to analyze IDLE for speaking in EFL students through the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's Neo-Ecological Framework. By using this approach, this recent study expects to comprehend the factors shaping EFL students' experience of speaking practice in IDLE. This study further explores how those neo-ecological factors influence EFL students' opportunities to develop their speaking skills through IDLE.

IDLE significantly improves EFL learners' speaking skills. Toffoli and Sockett (2023) note that EFL students who watch English-language YouTube videos, vlogs, and podcasts regularly absorb natural speaking patterns. IDLE also helps students develop their conversational mechanisms and spoken language skills. Furthermore, Lee and Dressman (2018) discovered that students who actively participated in English conversations on social media platforms such as Twitter, Clubhouse, and Discord had high levels of confidence and fluency. Furthermore, as noted by Soge, Janggo, and Alinda (2023), EFL learners who engage in self-recording activities like vlogging significantly enhance their fluency, coherence, and pronunciation accuracy. As a result, IDLE substantially improves EFL learners' speaking skills by offering authentic exposure to spoken English, interactive conversational chances, and self-paced fluency improvement.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed a nested ecosystem model consisting of micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems. Navarro and Tudge (2023) extended it into the neo-ecological perspective, applying the model to digital environments. Navarro and Tudge (2023) explain that the microsystem level directly impacts learners' language development. It is defined as a set of activities, social roles, and interpersonal connections that an individual encounters in a certain physical or virtual setting. The virtual microsystem encompasses digital platform interactions and activities (Navarro & Tudge, 2023). The mesosystem refers to the interaction of several microsystems, such as home and school or digital platforms, which can substantially impact a learner's language growth (Navarro & Tudge, 2023).

The third level's exosystem includes the larger social settings that indirectly influence an individual's language learning, such as school policies, community resources, and media (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). In today's digital age, digital platforms impact the entire ecosystem (Navarro & Tudge, 2023). Finally, the macrosystem includes the broad cultural, societal, and ideological belief systems that shape an individual's language learning experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). According to Navarro and Tudge (2023), the macrosystem in neo-ecological theory represents the complex interplay of cultural, technological, and societal variables that affect a person's language learning experiences.

Elements in the neo-ecological framework significantly shape the opportunities for EFL students to develop their speaking skills. Collaborative learning among peers in the microsystem can improve speaking skills through practice and feedback (Lai, 2017). Alikhani and Bagheridoust (2017) note that student group dynamics can considerably impact individual involvement levels and speaking confidence. In the mesosystem, EFL teachers believe that a learning environment that includes interactive learning and adequate exposure to the language can improve students' speaking skills (Rahimi, 2023). Moreover, the exosystem can foster a rich learning ecology that improves students' speaking skills by providing digital platforms for speaking practice,

virtual encounters with native speakers, and online materials (Rahimi, 2023). Furthermore, the cultural attitudes toward English language learning in a student's environment can stimulate participation in speaking activities (Alvarez, Tamayo, & dos Santos, 2024). Supportive cultural environments in the macrosystem might boost confidence and motivation to practice speaking.

This study concerns second-semester students of the English Education Department at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati. These are EFL students who are expected to have strong speaking abilities. A study by Aftab, Latif, Zai, Liaqat, and Luqman (2024) involving 496 Indonesian university students found that 54% use technology daily for English learning, while 29% use it weekly. Additionally, 59% reported using language exchange or conversation partner apps to practice speaking English with native speakers or other learners. Given the growing role of digital technology in language learning, IDLE has become an essential factor in students' speaking skill development. Through exposure to digital platforms, such as YouTube, podcasts, social media, and language learning apps, students engage in self-directed speaking practice beyond formal classroom settings. Therefore, the current study intends to explore the neo-ecological factors that shape the experiences and opportunities of second-semester students of the English Education Department for speaking practice through IDLE.

In recent years, the notion of IDLE has received much attention for helping people improve their language skills. Lee (2019) evaluated the effect of IDLE on vocabulary acquisition. The results showed that IDLE has a beneficial impact on vocabulary outcomes. Following that, Alqarni (2020) examined the role of IDLE in EFL learning in Saudi Arabia through an ecological framework. The study found that virtual communities, digital platforms, and unfettered internet access all impacted their English language acquisition. Furthermore, Rezai (2023) explored the relationship between IDLE and EFL willingness to communicate. The results showed that IDLE increased students' willingness to communicate. Therefore, this research intends to thoroughly analyze the factors that shape EFL students' experience of speaking practice

in IDLE using Bronfenbrenner's neo-ecological framework in the Indonesian context. This study further explores how the neo-ecological factors influence EFL students' opportunities to develop their speaking skills through IDLE.

## **B. Research Questions**

This study strives to comprehensively understand the aspects that shape EFL students' speaking practice in informal digital learning of English, utilizing Bronfenbrenner's neo-ecological framework. It further delves deeper into the neo-ecological factors influencing EFL students' opportunities to develop their speaking skills through IDLE. Thus, this study formulates three research questions related to EFL students' IDLE.

- 1) What are neo-ecological factors that shape EFL students' experiences for speaking practice in Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE)?
- 2) How do the neo-ecological factors influence EFL students' opportunities to develop their speaking skills through IDLE?

## **C. Research Purposes**

This study intends to identify the neo-ecological factors that shape EFL students' experience of speaking practice in IDLE and investigate how these factors influence their opportunities to develop speaking skills. As a result, two research objectives have been developed for this study. It involves identifying the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem influence in speaking practice through IDLE among EFL students. It further seeks to provide insights into how the neo-ecological factors facilitate language development, particularly in speaking.

## **D. Research Scope**

This study is concerned with analyzing EFL university students speaking English in virtue of IDLE from the neo-ecological perspective. Furthermore, this study intends to explore the influence of neo-ecological factors on students' opportunities to develop their speaking skills by using IDLE. Therefore, it leads to the discussion of the

study's subject, object, and location. First, this study's subject is the university students enrolled in speaking class. Second, the object of this study is the neo-ecological influence on IDLE for speaking. Third, this study was conducted in UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung.

#### **E. Contributions Of The Study**

This study focuses on the neo-ecological factors that shape EFL students' experience of speaking practice in IDLE and analyzes how these factors influence their opportunities to develop speaking skills. Thus, this study contributes to theoretical, practical, contextual, and policy significance. Theoretically, this study extends to the body of knowledge on IDLE by applying Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to investigate the multifaceted impacts on EFL students' speaking development. It promotes a theoretical understanding of how digital settings, social relationships, and broader ecological aspects influence students' engagement in IDLE. Furthermore, it sheds light on the function of neo-ecological features in facilitating speaking practice. Practically, by identifying the essential ecological characteristics that support speaking practice in IDLE, students may construct better-informed decisions about digital learning practices. Teachers may utilize these findings to create complementing classroom activities that correspond to students' informal digital learning experiences.

Contextually, this study fills a research gap by concentrating on IDLE in Indonesia's unique cultural and technological environment, offering localized insights. Furthermore, it adds to a more comprehensive understanding of IDLE in developing countries, providing a comparative viewpoint for worldwide research. Regarding policy contributions, this study makes evidence-based recommendations to policymakers on increasing access to and quality digital learning resources for EFL learners. It pushes for the incorporation of informal learning practices into national education policy and curricula. It also influences infrastructure development initiatives to improve digital access and equity for students in both rural and urban settings.