

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter provides a comprehensive description of research methodology. It includes a research design, research setting and participants, data collection, data analysis, and schedule of the study.

#### **A. Research Design**

A qualitative research approach was used as a research design. The qualitative approach investigated people's experiences, behavior, beliefs, attitudes, and motivation to provide textual and complicated descriptions of why and how they encountered specific phenomena (Oranga & Matere, 2023). The study design used a case study method. Yin (2018) defined a case study as a research method that thoroughly investigates a current case or phenomenon in a real-world setting. Case studies are classified into three types: exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive. Exploratory case studies are conducted when the outcome of the case is unclear or when the area has not been previously researched, while explanatory case studies aim to explore complex cause-and-effect relationships (Lucas et al., 2018). Meanwhile, a descriptive case study focuses on providing a clear and detailed description of a phenomenon within its context (Yin, 2018). In this research, the design employed was case study with the specific technique chosen was descriptive case study. It was selected because the purpose of this research was to find out the test-taking strategies used by high-achieving students in the Structure and Written Expression section of TELP. This technique ensured that the results provided not only a description of the strategies but also meaningful insights into how such strategies were applied in real test-taking situations.

#### **B. Research Setting and Participants**

This research was conducted in Department of English Education at a state university in Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia, which was chosen

because the phenomenon occurred in this university. This research took place from April to May 2025. Data collection was conducted from 22 to 28 April 2025 and was facilitated through Zoom Meeting. This study was conducted while the participants were still students in Department of English Education at the same university.

The participants for this research were selected purposively. They consisted of three students. All of them were female. Their ages ranged from 20 to 21 years old. They are sixth-semester students in Department of English Education at a state university in Tasikmalaya and had high scores in Structure and Written Expression section of TELP. Their scores ranged from 56 to 60. P1's score was 60, P2's score was 57, and P3's score was 56. The three participants considered English a foreign language and had studied English since elementary school. Three participants were selected because, as of November 29, 2024 they had maintained the highest scores in Structure and Written Expression section of TELP among all English Education students of the 2022 intake at a state university in Tasikmalaya. Two of them had taken the TELP Preparation provided by the university before taking the TELP test. The three participants took the TELP test in 2024 during their fifth semester.

The structure and written expression section of the TELP test uses the same scoring system as the TOEFL ITP Level 1, developed by ETS (Educational Testing Service). This section consists of 40 multiple-choice questions that test participants' understanding of English grammar and sentence structure. The score obtained by participants is not the number of questions answered correctly directly, but has been converted into a scale score ranging from 31 to 68. This conversion is done to adjust the level of difficulty of the questions, so that the resulting score is fairer and can be compared between participants and between tests. In addition to the Structure and Written Expression section, TELP also consists of two other sections, namely Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension. These three sections are then added together to get a total score, with a maximum score of 677.

The following is a table of estimated score conversions, from the number of correct answers to the scale score in the structure and written expression section:

**Table 3.1** TOEFL ITP Level 1 Structure and Written Expression Score Conversion Estimates

| Approx. Correct Answer | Scaled Score |
|------------------------|--------------|
| 40                     | 68           |
| 38-39                  | 65-67        |
| 35-37                  | 61-64        |
| 30-34                  | 56-60        |
| 25-29                  | 51-55        |
| 20-24                  | 46-50        |
| 15-19                  | 41-45        |
| 15                     | <41          |

*Note.* This table is an estimate based on various TOEFL preparation sources. ETS does not officially publish these conversions.

In this research, all participants obtained high scores in Structure and Written Expression section: 1) P1 obtained a score of 60 with a total TELP score of 573, 2) P2 obtained a score of 57 with a total TELP score of 580, and 3) P3 obtained a score of 56 with a total TELP score of 600. Based on the table above, the participants probably answered around 30 to 34 questions out of a total of 40 correctly. This score indicates that they have a good command of grammar. In addition, their total scores that are in the high range (573–600 out of a maximum of 677) also indicate that they are students with good English skills, so they are worthy of being participants in this study.

This research ensured ethical considerations by respecting participants' rights. They received detailed information about the research's purpose, procedures, and description and signed a consent form to confirm their willingness to participate. Additionally, participants' identities were kept confidential, with pseudonyms used to protect their anonymity.

### C. Data Collection

The data collection for this research were conducted through semi-structured interviews. According to Ruslin et al. (2022), semi-structured interview is an interview process that combines flexibility and structure, making it highly efficient for collecting detailed information. This interview is a mix of closed and open-ended questions, with follow-up “why” or “how” questions (Adams, 2015). As a

result, researchers were able to gather information in a more flexible and adaptable way about students' test-taking strategies in the structure and written expression section of TELP.

In this research, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews through 10 interview questions. These interview questions were adapted from Cohen's (2013) types of strategies employed in test-taking strategies and Nguyen's (2003) dimensions of test-taking strategies, namely language learner strategies, test management strategies, and test-wiseness strategies.

**Table 3.2** Cohen's (2013) Types of Strategies Employed in Test-taking Strategies and Nguyen's (2003) Dimensions of Test-taking Strategies

|                                       |  |   |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>1. Language Learner Strategies</b> | <b>1.1 Grammatical Cues</b>                          | The use of grammatical knowledge to understand and answer questions in the test. It includes the identification of grammatical patterns, sentence structures, and the use of tenses in choosing the correct answer. |
|                                       | <b>1.2 Trouble-Shooting and Using Aids in Recall</b> | Strategies used to recall the concepts or examples of similar problems that have been encountered before. This could be recalling rules or patterns that appear frequently in the test.                             |
| <b>2. Test Management Strategies</b>  | <b>2.1 Time Tracking</b>                             | Strategies for efficiently allocating time for each question to ensure all questions can be done within the time limit.   |
|                                       | <b>2.2 Staying in Control</b>                        | Techniques used to manage stress and stay focused during test, especially when facing time pressure or uncertainty in answering questions.  |
|                                       | <b>2.3 Locating Parts of Sentence to Focus On</b>    | The ability to identify the keyword or phrase in the sentence that is the main focal point in answering the question.   |
|                                       | <b>2.4 Reviewing and Changing Answers</b>            | Strategies for reviewing answers before ending the test, as well as how to determine whether to change answers based on re-evaluation.  |
|                                       | <b>2.5 Reading the Directions Carefully</b>          | Understanding the instructions carefully to avoid unnecessary mistakes.   |

|                                    |                                       |   |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| <b>3. Test-wiseness Strategies</b> | <b>3.1 Stem-option Matching</b>       | The technique of matching keywords in the question with words in the answer options to find the most appropriate answer.                    |
|                                    | <b>3.2 Eliminating Similar Option</b> | A strategy of eliminating answers that look similar or confusing by looking for small clues that distinguish correct and incorrect choices. |
|                                    | <b>3.3 Guessing</b>                   | Strategies based on the “chance” nature of choosing a correct option.   |

Several factors were taken into consideration during the interview process. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom Meeting. To prevent language barriers and create effective interaction, the researcher and participants conducted the interviews in Indonesian. In addition, the researcher conducted the semi-structured interviews following Adams’ (2015) guidelines, as follows.

1. Selected respondents and arranged interviews

During this stage, the researcher chose three participants to interview and then agreed on a time and location for the interview. Participants were also provided with a consent form that contained an explanation of their agreement to participate in this study.

2. Drafted questions and the interview guidelines

At this step, the researcher created an interview guideline in the form of a list of questions relating to the research topic, organized in an appropriate language and understandable to participants. The interview questions were adapted from Cohen’s (2013) types of strategies employed in test-taking strategies and Nguyen’s (2003) dimensions of test-taking strategies. In addition, the researcher sent interview guidelines to participants online in anticipation.

3. Started the interview

In this stage, the researcher interviewed participants online via Zoom Meetings. The interview was conducted online and recorded using the Zoom Meeting Recording feature.

#### 4. Polished interview techniques

During the interview, the researcher should have maximum understanding of the questions to be asked. Furthermore, the researcher adjusted the speaking tone and attitude toward the participants, created a pleasant impression and setting in which they responded comfortably.

#### 5. Analyzed and reported a semi-structured interview

After conducting the interview, the researcher examined the results and then transcribed and translated the data to be analyzed employing Braun and Clarke's (2022) thematic analysis.

### D. Data Analysis

The data collected from the results of the interviews that have been conducted were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a technique used to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns or themes of meaning in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Braun and Clarke (2022) divided the process into six phases, as follows.

#### 1. Familiarization

This phase requires reading and re-reading the data (and listening to recordings, if applicable) to get an overall sense of the content.

#### 2. Coding

This phase is where segments of data that appear interesting or meaningful are identified and labeled.

**Table 3.3** Generating Initial Codes of the Data

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <i>Before I started the test, I took a deep breath and had a drink, tried to stay calm, and kept praying and asking for prayers from my mother.</i>  | Managing emotions                                |
| <i>To answer questions on the structure and written expression section, just like usual, I fill them in sequentially, but if there is a difficult question and I am not sure about the answer, I will skip it first and then revisit it when I still have more time.</i> | Skipping questions that are considered difficult |
| <i>As far as I can remember, there is no time limit for each question, for example, how many seconds it should take for</i>  | Deciding the time limit for                      |

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|--|---|
| one question, but at least I think it should not take more than 30 seconds for one question.   | answering a question  |
| ... but the most important thing is to read the questions as efficiently as possible and answer them as efficiently as possible, so that if, for example, you have chosen the answer and you think you are sure, you can immediately move on to the next question.   | Understanding the questions as efficiently as possible                  |
| As for the format and also the instructions of the questions themselves, I think it is very important to understand them. Because later you can get an idea of how to answer the questions and what strategies can be used.  | Get to know the instructions and question format before taking the test |
| Coincidentally, at that time I had participated in TELP preparation and was told what the question pattern for the TELP test was like, which also helped me to be more efficient in using my own time to understand the question format and instructions.  | Participating in a preparation class for the test                       |
| For example, for compound sentences, simple sentences or compound complex sentences, to answer each question, first of all, read the question in its entirety, then scan the type of sentence approximately using what tenses, after being identified or already knowing what type of tenses it is, and what type of sentence it is, then look for the irregularities and something that is missing, adjusted again to the structure that I have previously learned. | Identifying the sentence  |
| If I am not mistaken, the answers all look the same but in different forms: some are past tense, some are simple present tense. Most importantly, first look at the sentence in the question, whether it uses the past tense or other tenses. If, for example, I use the past tense, it means that I also chose the same answer as the tenses used in the question sentence.   | Determining the type of tense   |
| I usually focus on the verb, the verb or whether there is an auxiliary verb or not. Then also for adverbs of time, if for example for adverbs of time it varies. Some are for present, for simple present it is usually habit, so there is every day, every week, like that.   | Focusing on the verb in the sentence                                    |
| But it is important to look at the subject, for example, whether changes are needed for the verb, for example, for the simple present, there is a change, there is an additional "-es", or not, and then other things like that.   | Focusing on the subject in the sentence                                 |
| It depends on the type of question, but I have also experienced being stuck to choose an answer, not knowing which answer is the right one, in the end I tried to eliminate the wrong answers, until in the end I found only two possible answers and from those two answers because the   | Eliminating the options   |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <i>probability of being correct is 50%, so I just chose one of them.</i>  |   |
| <i>There was something that I remember at that time, there was one question that was similar and the answer was also similar to the material that had been taught during TELP preparation, if I am not mistaken about idioms. That is what I remember from the TELP preparation material.</i>   | Recalling from the material                 |
| <i>Well, if I am hesitant to answer the question, I will not spend too much time on that one question, I will immediately move on to the next question but I marked the previous question I was hesitant about.</i>   | Marking on the doubtful questions           |
| <i>Well, I personally usually focus on the questions that I doubt first. For example, out of 40 questions, there are 10 that I doubt. Well, I usually read and double-check these 10 questions first, until I am sure. When I am sure, then I read and double-check from 1 to 40, and if there is still time, I repeat again from 1 to 40, to make sure. I am afraid there is something wrong, or I answer carelessly, or lack focus.</i> | Double-checking all answers                 |
| <i>If I know what the grammar is like, I usually use grammar knowledge, but if I am stuck and have forgotten this material, I use feelings, but as much as possible, in the most correct logic.</i>   | Guessing                                    |
| <i>If I am stuck, I usually read the sentence first and match it, for example, for choice A, whether it sounds natural or not, when I try to say the sentence.</i>  | Choosing the sentence that fits when spoken |
| <i>Apart from TELP preparation, I have heard it from random videos that I have watched, and I remember there were some vocabs that appeared in the test.</i>  | Recalling from a video or movie             |

A total of 17 initial codes represented different aspects shown by participants' interview transcriptions. Here is a list of the initial codes and their frequencies.

**Table 3.4** List of Initial Codes and Their Frequencies

| No | Initial Codes  | Total |
|----|--|-------|
| 1  | Managing emotions                                      | 5     |
| 2  | Skipping questions that are considered difficult       | 5     |
| 3  | Deciding the time limit for answering a question       | 2     |
| 4  | Understanding the questions as efficiently as possible | 2     |



|    |   |    |
|----|---|----|
| 5  | Get to know the instructions and question format before taking the test | 7  |
| 6  | Participating preparation class for the test                            | 5  |
| 7  | Identifying the sentence  | 6  |
| 8  | Determining the type of tense   | 7  |
| 9  | Focusing on the verb in the sentence                                    | 3  |
| 10 | Focusing on the subject in the sentence                                 | 2  |
| 11 | Eliminating the options   | 6  |
| 12 | Recalling from the material   | 3  |
| 13 | Marking on the doubtful questions                                       | 5  |
| 14 | Double-checking all answers   | 4  |
| 15 | Choosing the sentence that fits when spoken                             | 7  |
| 16 | Guessing  | 10 |
| 17 | Recalling from a video or movie   | 5  |

### 3. Generating or constructing initial themes

At this stage, codes grouped into broader themes provide meaningful answers to the research questions. These themes represent shared patterns across the dataset, leading from specific meanings (codes) to broader conceptualizations (themes).

**Table 3.5** Developing Themes

| No | Initial Codes   | Potential Themes           |
|----|---|----------------------------|
| 1  | Managing emotions   | Strategies before the Test |
| 2  | Get to know the instructions and question format before taking the test |                            |
| 3  | Participating in a preparation class for the test                       |                            |
| 4  | Identifying the sentence  |                            |
| 5  | Determining the type of tense   |                            |
| 6  | Focusing on the verb in the sentence                                    |                            |
| 7  | Focusing on the subject in the sentence                                 |                            |
| 8  | Recalling from the material   | Strategies during the Test |
| 9  | Recalling from a video or movie   |                            |
| 10 | Skipping questions that are considered difficult                        |                            |
| 11 | Eliminating the options   |                            |
| 12 | Double-checking all answers   |                            |
| 13 | Marking the doubtful questions  |                            |
| 14 | Deciding the time limit for answering a question                        |                            |

|    |  |
|----|--|
| 15 | Understanding the questions as efficiently as possible |
| 16 | Guessing   |
| 17 | Choosing the sentence that fits when spoken            |

#### 4. Theme development and review

This stage involves reviewed the data and initial themes to ensure coherence and alignment with the data set.

**Table 3.6** Reviewing Themes

| No | Themes                     | Sub-themes  |
|----|----------------------------|---|
| 1. | Strategies before the Test | Strategies of Managing Emotions<br>Strategies of Preparation for Doing the Test   |
| 2. | Strategies during the Test | Strategies of Analyzing Grammatical/Structural Patterns<br>Strategies of Recalling Prior Knowledge<br>Strategies of Justifying the Answer<br>Strategies of Managing Time<br>Strategies of Guessing the Answer |

#### 5. Refining, defining, and naming themes

At this stage, themes are refined to provide clarity and uniqueness. Each theme is given a precise definition and outlined with its scope, core concepts, and boundaries.

**Table 3.7** Defining Themes

| Themes                            | Definitions   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <b>Strategies before the Test</b> | The efforts made by students to prepare themselves physically and mentally before taking the test, including emotional management and pre-test activities that support readiness to face the test.  |
| <b>Strategies during the Test</b> | Students actively implement strategies during the test. These strategies include linguistic, cognitive, technical, and intuitive approaches used to understand questions, choose the right answers, |

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and manage time and pressure during the test.

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**Table 3.8** Defining Sub-themes

| <b>Sub-themes</b>  | <b>Definitions</b>   |
|--|--|
| <b>Strategies of Managing Emotions</b>                         | Strategies used by students to calm themselves, reduce anxiety, and maintain emotional stability before the test. This includes taking deep breaths, praying, and maintaining physical condition to stay focused.  |
| <b>Strategies of Preparation for Doing the Test</b>            | Activities carried out by students before the test as a form of technical preparation, such as understanding the question format, reading the instructions carefully, and participating in a preparation class to familiarize themselves with the types of questions they will face. |
| <b>Strategies of Analyzing Grammatical/Structural Patterns</b> | Students' strategies in analyzing grammatical and structural elements such as tense, subject-verb agreement, and sentence patterns, to find incorrect or missing parts in a sentence.  |
| <b>Strategies of Recalling Prior Knowledge</b>                 | Reusing information and strategies obtained from various sources, whether from a preparation class, materials, or other media such as videos and films, to help answer questions.  |
| <b>Strategies of Justifying the Answer</b>                     | Techniques used by students to help answer questions, such as skipping difficult questions, marking doubtful questions, and reviewing answers before time runs out.  |
| <b>Strategies of Managing Time</b>                             | The students' effort in managing time during the test so that they can complete all questions efficiently. This includes limiting the time per question and reading and understanding the questions quickly but accurately.  |
| <b>Strategies of Guessing the Answer</b>                       | Decision-making based on guessing what feels most reasonable or sounds natural when spoken is often used when students are stuck or unsure about choosing an answer.   |

## 6. Writing or stopping

The final phase is about weaved the themes into a coherent narrative that answers the research question.

Thematic analysis used to facilitate the researcher in finding and reporting themes contained in interview transcripts generated from the interview adapted from Cohen's (2013) types of strategies employed in test-taking strategies and Nguyen's (2003) dimensions of test-taking strategies, namely language learner strategies, test management strategies, and test-wiseness strategies.

## E. Schedule of the Study

This research conducted from October 2024 to July 2025, as shown in table 3.9. It started from research proposal writing to the thesis examination. Then, the research conducted at a state university in Tasikmalaya.

**Table 3.9** Schedule of the Study

| Description                         | Oct-Nov<br>2024 | December<br>/2024 | April<br>/2025 | May<br>/2025 | June/<br>2025 | July/<br>2025 |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| Research<br>Proposal<br>writing     |                 |                   |                |              |               |               |
| Research<br>Proposal<br>examination |                 |                   |                |              |               |               |
| Data<br>Collection                  |                 |                   |                |              |               |               |
| Data Analysis                       |                 |                   |                |              |               |               |
| Report                              |                 |                   |                |              |               |               |
| Thesis Result<br>Seminar            |                 |                   |                |              |               |               |
| Thesis<br>Examination               |                 |                   |                |              |               |               |

In October-November 2024, researchers focused on writing and designing proposal, specifically from October 1 to November 28. The research proposal examination was held on December 13, 2024. Data collection took place from April 22 to April 28, 2025. Data analysis and reporting began on May 1, 2025, and continued through to July 30, 2025, which included the thesis result seminar and thesis examination.