

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This chapter provides the methodology utilized to conduct the study. This chapter outlines seven parts of the research procedure, namely research method, research focus, setting and participant, data collection technique, data analysis technique, research steps, place and time of research. More details are described below.

A. Research Design

The research design in this study used a descriptive case study with a qualitative approach. According to Yin (2018), a descriptive case study aims to thoroughly describe a phenomenon within its actual environment. Moreover, a case study examines a current phenomenon (the "case") in detail and in the context of the real world. In this study, the phenomenon refers to the use of Character.AI in EFL students' language learning.

This qualitative case study was selected because it is considered appropriate for exploring the roles of Character.AI in EFL students' language learning based on their perceptions. Since the use of Character.AI occurred naturally in students' English learning activities, this design enables the researcher to gather rich, detailed data from the participants' perceptions and experiences. Furthermore, the results of this study were presented in a descriptive narrative form, detailing the themes that emerge from the students' experiences.

B. Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at a university in Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia. This setting was chosen because it represents a typical Indonesian higher education context where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL). The phenomenon investigated in this study was the use of Character.AI for language learning, which had emerged organically among students at this university. Preliminary observations had indicated that students frequently engaged with

Character.AI for English practice, particularly through role-playing and conversational activities.

Participants for this research were selected using a purposive sampling technique. They consisted of three university students who had experience using Character.AI in their English language learning. In qualitative research, participant selection is not primarily determined by the number of participants, but by the relevance and richness of the case being investigated (Bekele & Ago, 2022).

The recruitment process began through preliminary observations and informal conversations with students at the university. During these interactions, the researcher identified students who had been using Character.AI independently for English practice. From this initial pool, three students were selected based on two criteria: first, they had been using Character.AI regularly for English language learning for over six months; and second, they were willing to share detailed insights about their experiences. Participants were then approached individually, informed about the research purpose, and invited to participate voluntarily.

In terms of their experience with Character.AI, all three participants had been using the platform for approximately two years at the time of the study. P1 reported using the platform around five days a week, engaging with various features of Character.AI to practice their English skills. P2 described a more flexible usage pattern, engaging with the platform whenever they had free time to support their English learning. P3 reported using Character.AI in an impulsive manner, typically for two to three hours per session, using the platform as part of their independent English learning practice. All three participants reported using Character.AI on their own initiative, outside of any formal classroom instruction.

Participants were given a comprehensive explanation of the research purpose, procedures, and ethical considerations. It was made clear to them that signing the consent form represented a formal agreement to participate in the study. Throughout the research process, participants were guaranteed anonymity, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

C. Data Collection

The data collection method used in this research was a semi-structured interview. According to Bryman (2012), a semi-structured interview involves the use of a prepared list of questions while still allowing flexibility in how questions are asked and enabling follow-up on noteworthy responses. This method was appropriate as it balanced structure with the flexibility needed to explore participants' experiences in depth. In this study, interviews were used to elicit participants' opinions, insights, and perceptions, in alignment with the research aim of exploring the roles of Character.AI in EFL students' language learning.

The interview guideline was developed using the Technology Acceptance Model 3 (TAM3) from Venkatesh & Bala (2008) as its theoretical framework. The interview questions were specifically designed to elicit responses related to the core constructs of TAM3, namely Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease-of-Use (PEOU). For PU, the questions were designed to elicit students' perceptions of how using Character.AI affected their English language learning. This involved exploring determinants from TAM3, such as subjective norms, image, job relevance, output quality, and result demonstrability. For PEOU, questions focused on the degree to which students believed using Character.AI was free from effort. This construct was explored through determinants anchored in computer self-efficacy, perceptions of external control, computer anxiety, and computer playfulness, as well as adjustments including perceived enjoyment and objective usability.

The interviews were conducted in the participants' first language, Indonesian, to allow them to express their thoughts freely without language barriers and to prevent confusion and miscommunication. All interviews were conducted online via Zoom and audio-recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accurate data collection and analysis. Interview schedules were arranged in advance according to participants' availability. Additional interview sessions and follow-up questions were conducted when further clarification and deeper information were

needed. The interviews continued until the data reached saturation, meaning that no significant new information or themes emerged from the participants' responses.

Since the interviews were conducted in the participants' first language, Indonesian, all interview transcripts were originally recorded and transcribed in Indonesian, as presented in Enclosure 3. For the purpose of data presentation and discussion in Chapter 4, the relevant transcript excerpts were translated into English by the researcher. To maintain the accuracy and validity of meaning during this translation process, the translated excerpts were reviewed under the supervision of the thesis supervisors before being incorporated into the discussion. This translation process is indicated throughout the findings by the notation "Author's Translation" following each cited excerpt.

D. Data Analysis

To analyze the data, this research uses thematic analysis method as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a flexible and interactive approach that enables researchers to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning (themes) across a qualitative dataset, allowing for a rich and detailed understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions. The thematic analysis includes six phases that assist the researcher in examining the data as follows:

1. Familiarizing with the data

During this phase, the researcher became acquainted with the data by carefully reviewing the interview transcripts multiple times.

2. Generating Initial Codes

During this phase, the researcher initiated the organization of the data by assigning symbols or markers that aligned with the objectives of the study. The researcher utilized a coloring technique to distinguish various aspects identified by the participants, which resulted in the creation of initial codes.

Table 2. Generating Initial Codes

Extracts	Initial codes
Oh, and speaking as well. I often have direct conversations using the call feature in Character.AI. It also helps with listening, because in Character.AI we can listen to the AI characters with different accents, we can choose them. So, it feels like talking to a native speaker.	Interactive Language Learning
So, it's kind of like a simulation of having a conversation with a real person. And if you keep using it, it might actually get you used to having conversations like that in real life too.	Writing Conversation Practice
Oh yeah, it also helps with grammar. I personally tend to stick to one tense. When I write prompts or chat on Character.AI, I usually use the present tense, so it makes it easier for me to be aware of how to form sentences using the present tense.	Grammar Awareness
In Character.AI, I usually do roleplay, so there's a storyline. The characters also don't always use common words, so that's where I learn new vocabulary.	Vocabulary Expansion
Usually, I apply it either in Character.AI or in another context. For example, in Character.AI, when we role-play with a character in an angst storyline, I might say something like, "I broke down crying, reminiscing about our time together."	Vocabulary Application
Like this one, usually I only used dialogue tags like 'she said' or 'he said'. Now it's more developed, like the dialogue tag is given some action, so it becomes	Descriptive and Figurative Language Use

'he drops his head down, throwing his hope as his words end in a painful whisper'.	
This flexibility helps make it more convenient, so we can be the ones who decide when we want to study, adjust it to our free time, and we can do it as often and for as long as we want, because this AI is different from humans, it doesn't get tiring.	Time-Based Autonomy
What makes me feel at home (using it) is because literally all the characters that exist on social media, in anime, or even self-made characters are there, so I can switch between them.	Adaptable Content Needs
...because the AI is an inanimate object and only I know about my learning process, I can be free and not afraid of being judged.	Anxiety-Free Learning

The researcher identified 9 initial codes, each representing different aspects highlighted in the participants' interview transcriptions. These codes encapsulated various themes and patterns observed in the data, providing a comprehensive framework for further analysis and interpretation of the participants' experiences and insights.

Table 3. Calculating initial codes

No.	Initial Codes	Total
1.	Interactive Language Learning	7
2.	Writing Conversation Practice	6
3.	Grammar Awareness	4
4.	Vocabulary Expansion	8
5.	Vocabulary Application	2
6.	Descriptive and Figurative Language Use	5

7.	Time-Based Autonomy	7
8.	Adaptable Content Needs	13
9.	Anxiety-Free Learning	14

3. Searching for themes

The third phase involves analyzing interconnected codes to form main themes. During this phase, the researcher consolidates relevant codes into cohesive themes that align with the research questions. The process entails selecting data transcripts and identifying something notable or intriguing in the data related to the research questions.

Table 4. Searching for themes

Initial Codes	Potential Themes
Interactive Language Learning	Character.AI as a Language Practice Partner
Writing Conversation Practice	
Grammar Awareness	Character.AI as a Language Development Tool
Vocabulary Expansion	
Vocabulary Application	
Descriptive and Figurative Language Use	
Time-Based Autonomy	Character.AI as a Personalized Learning Platform
Adaptable Content Needs	
Anxiety-Free Learning	

4. Reviewing Themes

The fourth step involves reviewing the themes by assessing how well they correspond to the coded extracts and the overall dataset. During this phase, the researcher revisits the previously identified themes from the previous phase. The researcher carefully evaluates the themes to determine their appropriateness for this study. If any themes are deemed unsuitable,

the researcher either rejects them or modifies them until the most suitable and acceptable themes are established.

5. Defining and Naming Themes

The fifth step involves creating appropriate names and definitions for each theme and delving into the data within each theme to identify their underlying core. The researcher analyses and interprets each identified theme as an answer to the research question that was initially posed.

Table 5. *Defining and Naming Themes*

Themes	Definition
Character.AI as a Language Practice Partner	Character.AI is a partner that provides EFL students with opportunities for authentic language exposure and simulated communication, both in written and spoken forms. Through role-play, text-based conversations, and voice interactions, the platform enables students to practice English in a conversational context that resembles real-life communication.
Character.AI as a Language Development Tool	Character.AI is a tool that facilitates students' language development by supporting grammar awareness, vocabulary expansion, vocabulary application, and descriptive and figurative language use.
Character.AI as a Personalized Learning Platform	Character.AI functions as a personalized learning platform that allows learners to tailor their learning experience based on

their individual preferences, needs, and conditions.

6. Producing the Report

The final step is to create a written report on the research findings regarding the roles of Character.AI in EFL students' language learning. The report typically includes an overview of the research question, a description of the methodology employed, a presentation of the central themes and their supporting evidence, and an interpretation of the findings. The report aims to provide a clear and coherent account of the research outcomes based on the identified themes.

E. Research Schedules

This research was conducted from September 2025 to June 2026 at a university in Tasikmalaya, with three EFL students as participants.

Table 6. Research Schedules[illegible]

Results
Seminar

Thesis
Examination

