



An Exploration of Students' Experiences Using Cake at SMPN 1 Telaga Biru to Enrich Vocabulary (*Eksplorasi Pengalaman Siswa Menggunakan Aplikasi Cake di SMPN 1 Telaga Biru untuk Memperkaya Kosakata*)

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Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: 22 May 2026 Revised: 11 August 2026 Accepted: 12 August 2026 Keywords: Cake Application Vocabulary Learning Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) Students' Experiences EFL Learners Kata Kunci: Aplikasi Cake Pembelajaran Kosakata Pembelajaran Bahasa Berbantuan Perangkat Seluler Pengalaman Siswa Pembelajar Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing	This study explores the experiences of eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Telaga Biru in using the Cake application to enrich their English vocabulary. Qualitative research design was employed, involving 10 Grade 8 students selected purposively based on their vocabulary levels, experience using the Cake application, and willingness to participate in in-depth interviews. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that 8 of the 10 participants perceived the audiovisual features, including videos, subtitles, pronunciation practice, and interactive exercises, as making vocabulary learning more enjoyable. Seven participants considered the application easy to use, while four explicitly reported perceived gradual improvement in their vocabulary. Students also highlighted contextualized conversations and repeated exposure as helpful for understanding and remembering vocabulary. However, three participants reported unstable internet connections, while other challenges included difficulty understanding fast speech, inconsistent learning habits, and distracting learning environments. Overall, the findings suggest that Cake can serve as a useful supplementary medium for contextual and flexible vocabulary learning. However, its effectiveness depends on supporting conditions such as teacher guidance, internet access, and students' self-regulation. Abstrak Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman siswa kelas delapan di SMPN 1 Telaga Biru dalam menggunakan aplikasi Cake untuk memperkaya kosakata bahasa Inggris mereka. Desain penelitian kualitatif diterapkan dengan melibatkan 10 siswa kelas 8 yang dipilih secara purposif berdasarkan tingkat penguasaan kosakata, pengalaman menggunakan aplikasi Cake, dan kesediaan untuk berpartisipasi dalam wawancara mendalam. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa 8 dari 10 partisipan menganggap fitur audiovisual termasuk video, takarir (subtitle), latihan pelafalan, dan latihan interaktif membuat pembelajaran kosakata menjadi lebih menyenangkan. Tujuh partisipan menilai aplikasi tersebut mudah digunakan, sementara empat partisipan

secara eksplisit melaporkan adanya peningkatan kosakata secara bertahap. Siswa juga menyoroti percakapan kontekstual dan paparan berulang sebagai faktor yang membantu mereka memahami dan mengingat kosakata. Namun, tiga partisipan melaporkan masalah koneksi internet yang tidak stabil, sedangkan tantangan lainnya meliputi kesulitan memahami tuturan yang cepat, kebiasaan belajar yang tidak konsisten, dan lingkungan belajar yang kurang kondusif. Secara keseluruhan, temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa Cake dapat menjadi media pendukung yang bermanfaat untuk pembelajaran kosakata yang kontekstual dan fleksibel. Akan tetapi, efektivitasnya bergantung pada kondisi pendukung seperti bimbingan guru, akses internet, dan kemampuan pengaturan diri siswa.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, characterized by rapid technological advancements, proficiency in English has become a fundamental necessity, not only in the academic world but also in the international arenas of technology, business, and communication. This phenomenon is supported by a paradigm shift in education toward digital-based learning, which has become increasingly prominent in recent years. In this context, smartphones are no longer merely communication tools but have transformed into powerful learning media, including for language learning through the concept of *Mobile-Assisted Language Learning* (MALL). MALL offers accessibility, flexibility, and personalization that conventional classroom methods cannot always provide (Alisoy & Sadiqzade, 2024). Consequently, the integration of mobile applications into English language learning has become increasingly relevant, particularly for junior high school students who are closely connected to digital technology in their daily lives.

Vocabulary enrichment is considered one of the most essential aspects of English language learning because vocabulary serves as the foundation for listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Nation (2021) explains that vocabulary knowledge enables learners to understand meaning, express ideas, and participate effectively in communication. Without sufficient vocabulary, students often experience difficulties in comprehending texts, expressing opinions, and engaging in classroom interactions. In the Indonesian educational context, vocabulary learning remains a major challenge for many junior high school students. Bintang (2026) states that students' limited vocabulary knowledge is influenced by several factors, such as minimal exposure to English in daily life, low learning motivation, monotonous teaching methods, and limited use of contextual learning media. Furthermore, traditional textbook-oriented learning often encourages memorization rather than contextual understanding of vocabulary usage.

To address these issues, the emergence of MALL applications has provided alternative approaches to vocabulary enrichment. Various language learning applications such as Duolingo, Memrise, Busuu, Elsa Speak, FluentU, and HelloTalk have been widely used to support English learning. Previous studies indicate that digital applications can increase students' motivation and improve vocabulary retention through interactive and flexible learning experiences (Klimova & Zamborova, 2020). However, many of these applications mainly emphasize memorization, drills, or isolated language exercises without sufficiently providing contextualized communication experiences. As a result, students may recognize vocabulary items but still struggle to apply them appropriately in real-life communication.

Among various MALL applications, the Cake Application has gained attention due to its learner-centered and contextual learning features. Cake provides authentic video-based learning content, pronunciation practice supported by *Artificial Intelligence* (AI), interactive quizzes, and repeated exposure to vocabulary through audio-visual materials. The application also allows students to learn independently by accessing short conversation videos derived from movies, television programs, and everyday communication contexts. Nurhaliza and Fakhurriana (2023) found that the Cake application significantly improved students' understanding of vocabulary in daily conversational contexts. Similarly, Patmawati (2024) reported that

students' vocabulary scores increased considerably after using the Cake application in English learning activities. These findings indicate that contextual audio-visual learning can support vocabulary enrichment more effectively than conventional memorization-based learning approaches.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore Grade 8 students' experiences in using the Cake Application for English vocabulary enrichment. The qualitative approach was selected because this study focused on understanding students' experiences, perceptions, and responses toward the use of digital learning applications in the English learning process. According to Creswell (2026), qualitative research is used to understand social phenomena based on participants' experiences and perspectives in depth. Therefore, this approach was considered appropriate for exploring students' experiences in using the Cake Application as a medium for English vocabulary enrichment.

This study was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Telaga Biru, located on Jln. Ahmad Wahab, West Pentadio Village, Telaga Biru District, Gorontalo Regency, Gorontalo Province. The subjects of this study were Grade 8 students who had experience using the Cake Application in English learning activities. Based on the initial assessment data in 2024, the average students' vocabulary score was 65, which was still below the Minimum Passing Criteria (KKM) of 75. This condition indicated that students still experienced difficulties in English vocabulary enrichment, indicating the need for more engaging and contextual learning media.

The participants of this study consisted of 10 students selected from a total of 28 students. The participants were selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives, namely students who consistently used the Cake Application for at least one semester, students with different levels of vocabulary ability, and students who were willing to provide in-depth information regarding their learning experiences. The participants consisted of six female students and four male students aged between 13 and 14 years old. To obtain variation in learning experiences, the participants were categorized into three groups: *high achievers*, *moderate achievers*, and *low achievers*.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews using a *semi-structured interview* technique. The researcher prepared open-ended questions to explore students' experiences in using the Cake Application, the perceived benefits, the process of vocabulary enrichment, and the challenges encountered during the learning process. The semi-structured interview technique allowed participants to provide more flexible and in-depth responses based on their experiences. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in a comfortable environment to encourage participants to provide open information. Each interview lasted approximately 10 to 40 minutes and was recorded to maintain the accuracy of the research data.

The interview data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2024). The analysis process involved several stages, namely *familiarization with the data*, *open coding*, *axial coding*, *theme refinement*, *defining and naming themes*, and data interpretation. The researcher first transcribed the interview results and repeatedly reviewed the data to obtain a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences. Subsequently, important statements related to the use of the Cake Application, vocabulary enrichment, learning motivation, and learning challenges were coded and grouped into several themes. The final stage involved interpreting the findings based on the research objectives and relevant theories related to vocabulary learning and *Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL)*.

In this study, the researcher acted as the primary instrument directly involved in the processes of data collection and data analysis. To maintain the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher rechecked the interview transcripts and coding process to ensure that the interpretations remained consistent with the participants' actual experiences.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study obtained through semi-structured interviews with Grade 8 students at SMPN 1 Telaga Biru. The findings focus on students' experiences in using the Cake application to enrich their English vocabulary. The analysis was conducted using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework, which involved data familiarization, coding, theme generation, reviewing themes, and interpretation of themes.

The findings are categorized into three major themes: (1) students' experiences using the Cake application, (2) vocabulary enrichment through the Cake application, and (3) challenges encountered during the learning process. The findings are interpreted using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) perspectives.

3.1 Theme 1: Students' Experiences Using the Cake Application

The interview findings revealed that most participants experienced positive impressions while using the Cake application for vocabulary learning. Students perceived the application as more interesting, flexible, and interactive compared to conventional classroom learning.

Eight out of ten participants explained that the use of videos, subtitles, pronunciation practice, and interactive exercises made learning English feel more enjoyable. Students stated that the visual and audio elements helped them focus better and reduced boredom during learning activities.

One participant stated: “I like learning with Cake because it feels like watching videos, so it is not boring. I can choose what I want to learn.” (S3)

Another participant explained: “When I learn through videos, I understand faster because I can directly see and hear it.” (S1)

These findings indicate that the integration of audiovisual materials created a more engaging learning atmosphere. Students did not perceive learning as a stressful academic activity, but rather as an enjoyable experience. This finding supports the concept of affective engagement in language learning, where enjoyable learning environments can improve learner participation and motivation.

In addition, seven participants reported that the Cake application was easy to operate. Students explained that the application interface was simple and understandable even for first-time users.

One participant stated: “This application is easy to use. I only need to open the video, and I can directly start learning.” (S6)

This finding demonstrates that the simplicity of the application contributed to students’ willingness to use it repeatedly. Ease of access reduced technical barriers and allowed students to focus more on vocabulary learning activities. Furthermore, flexibility emerged as another important finding. Several students stated that they preferred practicing vocabulary independently using the application rather than learning only through classroom activities.

One participant mentioned: “If I use Cake, I can practice by myself and repeat it until I can do it.” (S5)

This finding indicates that the Cake application supported learner autonomy. Students were able to control their learning pace, repeat materials, and select learning content according to their preferences. Interestingly, the findings also showed differences in learning tendencies between male and female students. Female students tended to emphasize emotional comfort, confidence, and enjoyment in using the application, while male students focused more on practicality, flexibility, and direct vocabulary gains. However, both groups similarly agreed that the Cake application was more attractive than conventional vocabulary learning methods. Overall, the findings suggest that the Cake application successfully created positive learning experiences through enjoyable learning environments, flexible learning opportunities, and accessible technology.

3.2 Theme 2: Vocabulary Enrichment Through the Cake Application

The second theme focuses on students’ perceptions regarding vocabulary enrichment after using the Cake application. Four participants explicitly stated that their vocabulary increased gradually after using the application consistently.

One participant stated: “My vocabulary is increasing, although not too much, but I can feel the improvement.” (S2)

This statement indicates that vocabulary improvement was perceived as a gradual process rather than an instant achievement. Students believed that repeated exposure to vocabulary through videos and exercises contributed to vocabulary retention.

Another participant explained: “Through videos, I can understand the meaning because there are examples in conversations.” (S7)

This finding demonstrates that contextual learning played an important role in vocabulary acquisition. Students did not merely memorize isolated words but also learned how vocabulary was used in authentic communication situations.

The findings also showed that repetition significantly supported vocabulary retention. One participant stated: “Because the words are repeated many times in the videos, eventually I memorize them by myself.” (S8)

This statement reflects the role of repeated exposure in strengthening vocabulary memory. Students unconsciously memorize words after repeatedly hearing and seeing them in different learning contexts. Moreover, students reported that vocabulary learned through the Cake application could be applied in classroom learning situations.

One participant stated: “When the teacher asked questions in class, I immediately remembered the words I heard in Cake.” (S4)

This finding indicates that vocabulary learned through the application could be transferred into formal classroom activities. Students were able to connect vocabulary learned digitally with school-based

English learning. However, despite improvements in vocabulary comprehension, several students admitted that they still lacked confidence in using English orally. Some participants explained that they were still shy when speaking English in front of others.

This finding suggests that vocabulary mastery alone does not automatically improve speaking confidence. Affective factors such as self-confidence, anxiety, and classroom support remain important in language learning. Overall, the findings demonstrate that the Cake application contributed to vocabulary enrichment through contextualized learning, repeated exposure, audiovisual support, and independent learning opportunities.

3.3 Theme 3: Challenges in Using the Cake Application

Although students generally reported positive experiences, several challenges were also identified during the learning process. Three participants mentioned that unstable internet connections became a major obstacle in using the application. One participant explained: “Sometimes the internet connection at my house is unstable, so the Cake application often loads slowly.” (S4)

This finding indicates that technological infrastructure significantly influenced the effectiveness of mobile-assisted language learning. Students living in areas with limited internet access experienced interruptions during learning activities.

Another challenge was related to vocabulary comprehension. Some students explained that certain expressions and conversations in the videos were difficult to understand because native speakers spoke too quickly. One participant stated: “Sometimes there are words that are difficult to understand because they speak too fast.” (S9)

This finding suggests that authentic materials, while beneficial for contextual learning, can also create comprehension difficulties for beginner learners. In addition, some students admitted that they did not always use the application consistently. Learning motivation fluctuated depending on mood, school assignments, and environmental conditions. One participant stated: “When I feel lazy or have many school assignments, I rarely open the application.” (S10)

This finding demonstrates that independent digital learning still requires self-regulation and learning discipline. Furthermore, some participants stated that home environments were not always conducive to learning. Noise, family activities, and distractions from social media reduced concentration during learning sessions. Overall, the findings indicate that the effectiveness of the Cake application was influenced not only by the application itself but also by external factors such as internet access, learning environments, and students’ self-regulation.

3.4 Students’ Acceptance of the Cake Application Based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The findings of this study indicate that students generally had positive experiences when using the Cake application for vocabulary learning. Most participants explained that the application was interesting, easy to use, flexible, and helped them understand vocabulary better through videos and conversations. These findings answer the research question, which focuses on students’ learning experiences while using the Cake application.

From the perspective of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) proposed by Vian (2026), students’ acceptance of the Cake application can be seen through two main aspects, namely perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use.

3.5 Perceived Usefulness (PU)

Based on the interview results, students perceived the Cake application as useful for vocabulary learning. Students stated that vocabulary became easier to understand because the words were presented through videos, conversations, subtitles, and pronunciation practices. The application also helped students remember vocabulary through repeated exposure. One student stated: “If it is through videos, I can understand the meaning because there are examples in conversations.”

This finding shows that students experienced vocabulary learning contextually. Students not only memorize vocabulary, but also understand how vocabulary is used in communication situations. This finding supports Nation and Webb (2021), who explain that vocabulary learning should involve understanding meaning and contextual usage. Furthermore, students also explained that they could remember vocabulary more easily because the words often appeared repeatedly in videos and exercises.

This finding is relevant to Challop (2025), who explain that repeated exposure in digital learning supports vocabulary retention and helps learners gradually develop vocabulary mastery. The findings also support previous studies conducted by Pinargote et al. (2024), which found that the Cake application improved students’ understanding of vocabulary in everyday communication contexts. Similarly, Patmawati (2024) found that students’ vocabulary achievement increased after using the Cake application. Thus, the findings indicate that students accepted the Cake application because they perceived that the application contributed positively to vocabulary enrichment.

3.6 Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)

The findings also indicate that students perceived the Cake application as easy to use. Students explained that the application was simple to operate, easy to access, and understandable even for beginner users. One participant explained: “This application is easy to use. I only need to open the video, and I can directly start learning.”

This finding supports the concept of perceived ease of use in TAM, where users are more likely to use technology consistently when it does not require complicated effort. Students did not experience serious technical difficulties while operating the application, which increased their willingness to continue learning.

This finding is also in line with Dammas et al. (2025), who explain that applications with simple interfaces improve students’ engagement in digital learning. Similarly, Alhrahsheh et al. (2024) found that ease of use contributes significantly to students’ motivation in educational technology.

In this study, ease of use also influenced students’ confidence in independent learning. Students felt more comfortable learning vocabulary individually because they could repeat the material freely without fear of making mistakes. Therefore, the findings confirm that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use played important roles in students’ acceptance of the Cake application.

3.7 The Cake Application as Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

The findings of this study also show that the Cake application functioned as a form of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL). Through smartphones, students were able to learn vocabulary flexibly anytime and anywhere. Students explained that the Cake application provided opportunities for independent learning outside the classroom. They could repeat videos, listen to conversations repeatedly, and practice vocabulary according to their own learning pace. One student stated: “If I use Cake, I can practice by myself and repeat it until I can do it.”

This finding supports Alisoy and Sadiqzade (2024), who state that MALL creates flexible and student-centered language learning. Through mobile learning, students become more independent and active in managing their own learning process. In addition, the use of audiovisual learning in the Cake application also supported vocabulary comprehension. Students stated that videos helped them understand the meaning of vocabulary because they could directly see examples of conversations and pronunciation. This finding is consistent with Hardiana and Lubis (2024), who explain that multimodal learning through text, audio, and visuals supports better vocabulary understanding. Similarly, Saragih et al. (2024) state that contextual vocabulary presentation helps learners understand vocabulary usage in real communication.

The findings also indicate that students experienced enjoyable learning while using the application. Students described the learning process as interesting and not monotonous because the learning materials resembled entertainment content. One student stated: “I like learning with Cake because it feels like watching videos, so it is not boring.”

This finding supports Hellin et al. (2023), who explain that interactive and engaging digital learning environments increase students’ motivation and participation. However, the findings also show that the implementation of MALL still faced several challenges. Some students experienced unstable internet connections, which affected access to videos and learning materials. One participant explained: “Sometimes the internet connection at my house is unstable, so the Cake application often loads slowly.”

This finding indicates that technological infrastructure remains an important factor in mobile learning implementation. In addition, some students also experienced difficulties understanding vocabulary because native speakers in the videos spoke too quickly. This finding indicates that authentic learning materials may become challenging for beginner learners. Although authentic materials support contextual learning, students still need guidance and repetition to fully understand vocabulary usage.

Therefore, the findings suggest that the success of MALL implementation depends not only on the application itself but also on supporting factors such as internet access, learning environments, and teacher guidance.

3.8 Vocabulary Enrichment Through Contextual Learning

The findings demonstrate that vocabulary enrichment occurred gradually through repeated exposure, contextual learning, and audiovisual support. Students explained that vocabulary became easier to remember because they repeatedly heard and saw words in videos and exercises. This repeated exposure helped students memorize vocabulary unconsciously. This finding is relevant to Yolanda, Titien, and Citra (2022), who explain that vocabulary acquisition through digital media develops gradually through repeated and continuous exposure. Furthermore, students stated that they understood vocabulary better when words were presented in conversations.

This finding confirms that contextual vocabulary learning is more meaningful than isolated memorization. Students not only learned vocabulary meaning but also learned how vocabulary was used in communication. This finding supports Nation (2022), who explains that effective vocabulary learning involves meaning, pronunciation, and contextual usage. The findings also show that some students were able

to apply vocabulary learned from the Cake application in classroom situations. One participant stated: “When the teacher asked questions in class, I immediately remembered the words I heard in Cake.”

This finding indicates that vocabulary learned through the application could transfer into formal classroom learning. Thus, the Cake application not only supports passive vocabulary recognition but also supports students’ ability to recall vocabulary during learning activities.

However, the findings also reveal that vocabulary mastery did not automatically increase students’ speaking confidence. Some students still felt shy when speaking English directly. This indicates that vocabulary learning is influenced not only by cognitive aspects but also by affective factors such as confidence and anxiety. Therefore, the researcher argues that digital applications such as Cake are effective as supplementary media for vocabulary learning, but teacher support remains important in encouraging students to actively use vocabulary in communication.

3.9 Differences in Students’ Learning Experiences

The findings also reveal differences in learning tendencies between male and female students. Female students tended to emphasize emotional comfort, enjoyment, and confidence while using the Cake application. They felt more comfortable learning independently because they were not afraid of making mistakes. Meanwhile, male students focused more on practical aspects such as flexibility, repeated exposure, and direct vocabulary gains. Although the tendencies were different, both groups similarly agreed that the Cake application was more attractive and flexible than conventional learning methods. This finding indicates that digital learning applications can accommodate different learning characteristics among students.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

This study aimed to explore students’ experiences in using the Cake application to enrich their English vocabulary at SMPN 1 Telaga Biru. Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that students generally had positive experiences using the Cake application as a mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) tool.

Students perceived the Cake application as easy to use, flexible, and engaging for vocabulary learning. Features such as short videos, interactive exercises, and contextual conversations helped students understand and remember vocabulary more effectively. The findings also show that repeated exposure to vocabulary through audio-visual materials supported students’ vocabulary retention and encouraged independent learning.

The findings further confirm the concepts of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Students accepted the application positively because it was simple to operate and beneficial for vocabulary learning.

However, several challenges were also identified, including unstable internet connections, difficulty understanding unfamiliar vocabulary contexts, inconsistent learning motivation, and distractions in the home learning environment. These findings indicate that the effectiveness of the Cake application is influenced not only by the quality of the application itself but also by technological access, learning support, and students’ self-regulation. Overall, the Cake application can be considered an effective supplementary medium for vocabulary learning, particularly in supporting flexible and contextual English learning experiences.

This study has several limitations. First, this study involved only ten participants from one school, namely SMPN 1 Telaga Biru. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized broadly. Second, this study focused on students’ experiences and perceptions without measuring vocabulary improvement quantitatively. Third, this study focused only on the Cake application and did not compare it with other English learning applications. Despite these limitations, this study still provides important insights into students’ experiences using digital applications for vocabulary learning.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that students experienced the Cake application positively as a vocabulary learning medium. The application supported vocabulary enrichment through contextualized audiovisual learning, repeated exposure, flexibility, and interactive learning experiences.

The findings confirm the relevance of the Technology Acceptance Model and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning theories in explaining students’ digital learning experiences. At the same time, the study highlights that effective vocabulary learning through digital applications depends not only on technological features but also on emotional engagement, self-regulation, teacher support, and learning environments.

4.2 Suggestions/Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed. First, English teachers are encouraged to integrate the Cake application into vocabulary learning activities and provide guidance to help students use the application consistently and effectively. Second, schools are expected to support technology-based learning by providing adequate internet access and encouraging students to develop digital literacy and independent learning skills. Finally, future researchers are recommended to conduct studies

using quantitative or mixed-method approaches to measure vocabulary improvement more comprehensively. Future studies may also involve larger participants and compare the effectiveness of the Cake application with other vocabulary learning media or applications.

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