CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the study. It comprises the background, formulation of the problem, operational definitions, aim of the study, and significance.

A. Background of the Study

Technology integration into English language learning has significantly changed the educational landscape. It enables a more personalized and engaging learning experience by allowing students to practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in authentic contexts, often with instant feedback. Solano et al. (2017) emphasize that the use of technology in education is increasingly promoted, both in formal school settings and for personal use outside the classroom. This demonstrates its effectiveness when combined with various teaching methods. Such integration aligns with the concept of self-directed learning, which allows individuals to learn at their own pace and according to their specific needs. According to Smith (1982), independent learning refers to an individual's ability to manage learning plans and related factors. In addition, technology-based learning usually requires mobile devices such as smartphones, tablets, or laptops to support the learning process (Fatimah et al., 2021). Therefore, utilizing technology in the current educational context offers valuable opportunities for students and teachers to enhance their English learning.

Learning English at the junior high school level is critical for students' language and cognitive development. At this phase, students often encounter challenges such as fear of failure, lack of motivation, and anxiety, which can hinder effective communication and long-term language proficiency. This issue aligns with the findings of Savaşçı (2014), who states that students in public speaking classes tend to be passive due to nervousness and fear of failure, with one contributing factor being the learning methods employed. Moreover, the integration of technology in classrooms remains underdeveloped (Redjeki & Muhajir, 2022), despite its growing relevance in modern education. This situation was also evident in a language-focused class at one of the junior high schools in Tasikmalaya, where

students were required to take initiative in learning English beyond regular school hours. Many students faced difficulties with fluency and lacked everyday vocabulary, which limited their ability to communicate in English. Since the program emphasized English-only communication, students were expected to actively enhance their vocabulary and pronunciation independently. Student-teachers (PLP participants) were placed in this class to support this objective of sustaining the English-speaking environment. The Cake application was introduced as a digital resource to support students' self-directed learning during the teaching practicum. Initially recommended for all students, the study ultimately focused on three who had already begun using the app independently due to time and resource constraints. Consequently, a case study approach was used to explore their learning experiences more deeply.

The exploration of the use of technology in language learning has emerged as an effective strategy to address common challenges in the EFL classroom and encourage independent learning among students. According to Knowles (1975, as cited in Lai et al., 2022), self-directed learning is a process in which students take initiative and responsibility for their learning. This includes identifying their learning needs, setting goals, seeking resources, selecting and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating their progress, with or without the help of others. One of the freely accessible applications that support independent learning of English is Cake. As Redjeki and Muhajir (2022) mentioned, the Cake app offers various features, such as speaking aids to practice dialogues, movie clips to improve speaking and listening skills, fill-in-the-blank exercises to memorize expressions, and immediate feedback to aid learning. These features are designed to motivate and engage EFL students by providing a dynamic and interactive language learning experience. This topic merits further research, as the Cake app is a technological tool supporting self-learning activities aligned with students' individual needs. Exploring students' perspectives on using the Cake app for self-learning is important.

Several previous studies have explored the use of the Cake application in English language learning, particularly its effectiveness and implementation.

Octavianita et al. (2022) found that the application significantly increased students' motivation to learn English by providing an enjoyable and non-intimidating learning environment that encouraged confidence in speaking. Suryani et al. (2021) emphasized the application's role in improving students' pronunciation skills through its word-by-word correction feature, which helps learners identify and practice accurate pronunciation. Similarly, Abang et al. (2022) investigated the impact of the Cake application on students' reading comprehension at SMA Negeri 9 North Halmahera. The study revealed a notable improvement in students' reading abilities after a six-session app intervention, demonstrating its relevance and effectiveness in supporting English learning through technology.

While previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of the Cake application in enhancing students' motivation, pronunciation, and reading comprehension (Octavianita et al., 2022; Suryani et al., 2021; Abang et al., 2022), these studies have predominantly concentrated on measurable skill-based outcomes and general classroom implementation. Most of this research has assessed how the app contributes to language performance, with limited attention to the underlying learning processes it supports. Specifically, there is a noticeable gap in understanding learners' perceptions of how the Cake application facilitates self-directed learning behaviors, such as goal setting, self-monitoring, and autonomous practice. Despite the growing emphasis on learner autonomy in digital education, empirical evidence addressing this perspective remains rare. Therefore, this study seeks to fill the gap by exploring students' perspectives on how the Cake application supports their self-directed learning strategies in English language acquisition.

B. Formulation of the Problem

The present study addresses the research question, "What are the students' perceptions toward using the Cake Application for self-directed English language learning through the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) Framework?"

C. Operational Definitions

1. English Language Learning

English language learning is the process of learning English in one of the classrooms in junior high school, which highlights vocabulary and pronunciation skills.

2. Cake Application

The Cake application is a learning medium that some Junior High School students use to learn English through listening, vocabulary development, and pronunciation.

3. Self-directed Learning

Self-directed learning refers to the students' willingness to learn English by practicing through the Cake application features.

4. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) Framework

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) refers to a theoretical framework used to explain students' acceptance and use of the Cake application in learning English. The model focuses on two main constructs, Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU).

D. Aim of the Research

This research examines the students' perceptions of using the Cake Application for self-directed English language learning.

E. Significance of the Study

1. Theoretical Significance

This research contributes to using TAM on students' perceptions of using the Cake application for self-directed English language learning.

2. Practical Significance

This research contributes to language education practice and pedagogy. These findings can inform educators and language practitioners about effective teaching strategies for learning English using the Cake application. For students, after examining their perceptions, it is hoped that the Cake application can also be a strategy to maximize their learning of English.

3. Empirical Significance

      This research offers insight into integrating technology into students' self-directed learning, explicitly using the Cake application in their English learning process.