

# Supporting Students' Self-Directed Learning in EFL Speaking Classroom by Using Cake Application

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**Abstract:** Students are currently on the verge of a technological revolution known as Industry 4.0. As a result, it is critical for today's educators to be able to integrate a teaching-learning method with educational technology as appropriate media in order to achieve the goal of effectively teaching and learning EFL speaking. Smartphones or mobile devices can be loaded with a variety of language-learning apps. One of them is the Cake application, which will serve as the focal point of this current study to supplement previous relevant research. Using a case study research design, 25 third-semester English education program students as the research participants were asked to explore Cake at home for a week while recording all of their activities and discoveries. They were then given open-ended questionnaires to express their perceptions with the app. The results demonstrated that the Cake supported students' self-directed learning in EFL speaking classroom since it was easy, simple, interesting to use, and contained a lot of features for English learning independently, so they could manage themselves to decide the learning goals of using the app and control the learning process. The app could also be used to help them improve some components of speaking skills (pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar) which are the most common issues they face when speaking English. As a result, this app could be a good way for EFL students to improve their speaking skills and support their self-directed learning.

**Keyword:** *EFL Speaking Classroom, Self-Directed Learning, Technology, Cake Application.*

## INTRODUCTION

Speaking is the most important skill for communicating ideas, intentions, thoughts, and feelings to others through the use of verbal and nonverbal images in order for the message to be clearly delivered and well understood by the listeners (Baygate, 2003, and Bahadorfar & Omidvar, 2014). In terms of EFL learning, speaking English is the most important skill to master among the four language skills in order to communicate effectively in today's global world. As a result, even though the majority of EFL students believe it is a difficult task, they strive to master it. In fact, for the majority of EFL students, the speaking class is their only chance to practice English. They have no opportunity to speak or communicate in English once they leave the classroom.

Several studies discover issues with EFL students' difficulties in speaking English. *First*, students' ability to communicate in English is still limited. When they speak, they make numerous errors. They make mistakes in pronunciation, words of stress and intonation, grammatical accuracy such as tenses, prepositions, and sentence constructs, and vocabulary such as using inappropriate words (Suciati, 2020). *Second*, they have difficulties in distinguishing similar sounds, pronunciation, and words that do not exist in the Indonesian language (Subandowo, 2017). *Third*, they are unable to communicate fluently and accurately due to a lack of knowledge about the topic being discussed (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). *Fourth*, they tend to be passive in speaking classes due to anxiety and fear of failure (Savaşçı, 2014).

According to Alharbi (2015), there are three major factors that contribute to the emergence of problems in speech learning in EFL classrooms: lecturers' ability to teach, methods used, and students' lack of opportunities to practice speaking in the classroom. In terms of methods, given that students are currently on the verge of a technological revolution known as Industry 4.0, it is critical for today's educators to be able to integrate a teaching-learning method with educational technology as appropriate media in order to achieve the goal of teaching and learning effectively. The most obvious reason for incorporating technology into the EFL classroom is to increase student excitement and motivation. According to Shyamlee and Phil (2012), "This speedy rising and advancement of information technology has proposed

a greater pattern to explore the new teaching model.” Therefore, technology also plays a critical role in English education, and the most obvious reason for incorporating technology into EFL classrooms is to increase students’ excitement and motivation.

The fact that the majority of students now own smartphones, with nearly 66 percent of the world's population owning one by the end of 2015, contributes to the belief that students are on the verge of a technological revolution. These smartphones or mobile devices can be outfitted with a variety of applications for learning foreign languages (Munday, 2015). Cake application is one of them, and it will be the focus of this current study. Cake is a free application developed by Cake Corp that was released on March 22, 2018. This app has a lot of features for learning English, such as a speaking tool to practice speaking using dialogue, watching videos to improve speaking skills, and guess fill in the blank and comparing the correct answer to help memorize each expression. Speaking practice, which stimulates conversation with native speakers, is one of the features (Fitria, Dwimaulidiyanti, & Sapitri, 2021).

There are a variety of reasons to use Cake application in order to solve the problems. This application is very interesting because the availability of various categories and videos can make students or users more excited to learn, allowing them to learn English, particularly speaking, pronunciation, and listening (nawangsihjournal.blogspot.com/2019/12). Cake application does a better job of introducing learning methods that are more relevant in today's world. Users are shown short videos from various categories. There are numerous vlogs, movies, and podcasts available, all with text and subtitles in Indonesian. Users can use these methods to practice reading, listening, and pronunciation all at the same time (Aldijana, 2021). The results of a study conducted by Yanti (2021) suggest that using Cake application in EFL classrooms can create a fun learning environment and can improve students' motivation, students' confidence and students' speaking skills as well. This prompted the current researcher to look into the Cake app further to see if it could also improve students' vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar in EFL speaking classrooms since the speaking problems were also connected to the components of speaking skill that are concerned with vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, comprehension, and fluency (Harris, 1974).

The participants of this current research also face the same problems. To get accurate data of the participants' problems, the researcher looked for preliminary data to find out the most difficult component for the participants in improving their speaking skills. In this case, the components were limited only on the three components: vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. The preliminary data on the three difficult speaking components of the students are presented in Table 1.

**TABLE 1.** The preliminary data on the EFL students' difficulties

Speaking Components	Percentage (%)	Result	Of the three components
Grammar	92	the most difficult	
Vocabulary	84	quite difficult	
Pronunciation	32	less difficult	

nents of speaking in Table 1, the most difficult for students is grammar, the next position is vocabulary that is considered quite difficult, and the last one, considered less difficult, is pronunciation. Since the previous research about the Cake app conducted by Yanti (2021) has not investigated the three speaking components, this current research is intended to complement the previous research. Furthermore, since the participants in the current research were the researcher's university students, the researcher considered using an instructional strategy called self-directed learning (SDL) to explore her students' potentials based on their abilities, motivate them to learn independently, and develop them based on their talents and abilities, as well as directing students to be responsible for their own learning process. Self-directed learning (SDL) is defined as “an instructional strategy where the students, with guidance from the teacher, decide what and how they will learn. It can be done individually or with group learning, but the overall concept is that students take ownership of their learning” (Self-Directed Learning: Definition & Strategies, 2017, April 28). This means that self-directed learning is an improvement of knowledge, skills, accomplishments, or personal development that is chosen and driven by their efforts using various methods throughout their lives (Rahman, 2017).

Related to the discussions above, there are two objectives of this current study to complete the results of the previous research: 1) to find out if Cake app can support students' self-directed learning in EFL speaking classrooms, and 2) to find out if Cake app can improve the three speaking components of the students in EFL speaking classrooms (vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Teaching Speaking in EFL Classroom**

Speaking is widely regarded as the most basic skill to learn. It has been regarded as the ultimate goal of language training since the advent of the communicative era, and its proper development has become the focus of both teachers and learners' attention. It is also widely acknowledged that achieving speaking proficiency in EFL classrooms is a difficult task. Even advanced students frequently leave a language course feeling unprepared to speak outside of the classroom (Yusuf and Zuraini, 2016).

Ur (1995) mentioned some problems or difficulties in teaching speaking in EFL classrooms, such as inhibition – feeling of insecurity, looking weak, criticism, nervousness; nothing really to say – learners struggle with finding motivation to speak, formulating points of view or relevant opinions; low or uneven involvement – often caused by the tendency of some students to dominate in the group; mother-tongue use – particularly common in less disciplined or less motivated classes, where learners find it easier. In addition, Harmer (2007) stated that students are often hesitant to speak up because they are shy and do not like to express themselves in front of others, particularly when asked to provide information or personal opinions. They frequently worry about speaking poorly in front of the class which causes them to lose face in front of their peers.

The problems stem primarily from the insufficient nature and frequency of speaking opportunities in EFL classrooms in comparison to the many natural variations and genres of oral communication. In fact, selecting the most appropriate type of spoken discourse for classroom practice in a specific language course is a difficult task as well. Therefore, appropriate decisions must be made in order to benefit from regular speaking practices in the classroom (Thornbury, 2007).

### **Self-directed Learning (SDL)**

Every student essentially has different abilities that can be developed with his expertise; using a self-directed learning strategy is one way to improve his skill. Self-directed learning is a teaching strategy in which a student decides what and how they will learn while being guided by the teacher. It can be done individually or in groups, but the overall goal is for students to take charge of their own learning (Rahman, 2017). Students can be taught to think for themselves, work at their own paces, learn in their own ways, set their own goals, and design their own programs.

According to Bharathi (2014), the core elements of self-directed learning are as follows: 1) Learners are in charge of their own learning, 2) Learners manage and monitor their own progress, 3) Learners participate together with their teachers and peers, 4) Learners gain specific knowledge as well as the ability to apply that knowledge in new situations and 5) Motivation and self-control are essential in maintaining the learner's efforts. The current research investigated whether or not students' self-directed learning in EFL speaking classroom can be supported by the use of technology in order to improve their speaking skills.

### **Technology in EFL Classroom**

The rapid rise and advancement of information technology has created a greater need to investigate new teaching models. As a result, technology plays a critical role in EFL teaching, and the most obvious explanation for incorporating technology into EFL classrooms is to increase student excitement and motivation (Redjeki and Muhajir, 2021). Furthermore, Kiryakova et al., (2014) revealed that teachers face new challenges and must discuss critical issues related to tailoring the learning process to students' needs, interests, and passions. They must put into practice various teaching strategies and techniques that encourage students to be active participants who are motivated and dedicated to their learning. Current educational paradigms and phenomena provide a framework for the implementation of innovative methods and strategies to incorporate an active learning process. More specifically, Munday (2015) discovered that the majority of students nowadays own smartphones, with nearly 66 percent of the

world's population owning one by the end of 2015. These smartphones or mobile devices can be outfitted with a variety of applications that can be used for specific purposes, such as learning a foreign language.

### Cake Application

Cake is a free app created by Cake Corp that was released on March 22, 2018. This app has a lot of features for learning English, such as a speaking tool to practice speaking using dialogue, watching videos to improve speaking skills, and guessing the correct answer and comparing it to help memorize each expression. One of the features is speaking practice that can be used to encourage conversation with native speakers. Therefore, it can be said that Cake is a program designed to help people become better speakers. It gives people the confidence and skills they need to speak powerfully on stage, in front of an audience, or in everyday situations (Yanthi, 2021). According to Sinha (2019), it serves people by allowing them to listen to their recordings, which can be a lot of fun. It is the best app for learning to speak English because it uses video to show us an example of a word that will be very useful in everyday conversation (Batool, 2019).

### METHOD

Since the data in this study was analyzed in the form of description and identification, this research used a qualitative method with a case study design. According to Creswell (2012), "Qualitative methods can be used to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional methods, and case studies are a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals."

The research was conducted at a university in Bogor, West Java, with 25 third-semester English education program students from two speaking classes in the 2021/2022 academic year as the research participants. The research was also conducted to support their speaking learning activities. They were instructed to spend a week at home exploring the Cake app while improving their speaking and recording all of their activities and discoveries related to the use of the app. They were then given open-ended questionnaires to convey their perceptions to the app, and the results were taken as a basis to determine whether or not this app could support students' self-directed learning in EFL speaking classrooms, as well as whether or not this app could improve the three speaking components of the students in EFL speaking classrooms (vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar). As a result, there are four aspects of the research to be investigated: self-directed learning, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar of the students.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis results of the open-ended questionnaires on the students' perceptions to the use of Cake in EFL speaking classrooms were classified into four research aspects to clearly answer the research objectives. Percentages of the four aspects are presented in Table 2.

**TABLE 2.** Percentages of the students' perceptions to the four research aspects

Research Aspects	Percentage (%)	Result
Self-directed learning	100	Successful
Vocabulary	100	Successful
Pronunciation	100	Successful
Grammar	84	Quite successful

From the table 2, it is clearly seen that Cake app can be used to support students' self-directed learning in EFL speaking classrooms and improve students' vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar as parts of the components of speaking skill. The complete information on the four aspects is explained below.

## 1. The use of Cake app to support students' self-directed learning in EFL speaking classroom

After a week of exploring the Cake at home, all participants responded "yes" for the open questions given about the Cake related to students' self-directed learning. It means that the app could help students improve their self-directed learning in EFL speaking classrooms, and this statement is supported by some reasons from the students' perceptions summarized in table 3 below.

**TABLE 3.** Summary of students' perception to the first aspect (Self-directed Learning)

	<b>Students' Perception</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
1.	This app is free, interesting, and easy to use.	100
2.	This app can be accessed and used from anywhere and at any time.	80
3.	This app covers a wide range of speaking topics, English conversations, and English expressions.	84
4.	I am interested in the numerous videos on the app with various topics, so I can learn and practice my pronunciation, vocabulary and listening.	80
5.	I can learn and practice English simply by watching videos.	88
6.	Learning English with Cake becomes easier, simpler, and more fun.	100
7.	I can simulate conversation with native speakers using a "speak" feature, allowing me to practice my pronunciation and listening.	80
8.	There is a "quiz" feature that challenges me to get the highest score, motivating me to keep practicing and studying.	72
9.	When I use Cake, I don't even realize that I am learning.	40
10.	I myself can determine learning objectives, study time, and materials of the Cake to be studied independently.	92
11.	The app can be used to learn English independently as long as students are enthusiastic and want to use the app regularly.	88
12.	When I find the difficult questions, if I practice frequently and consistently, the questions will become easier and my speaking will improve.	32

From the table 3, it can be concluded that Cake can support students' self-directed learning in EFL speaking classrooms as long as they are enthusiastic and want to use the app frequently and regularly. This is because Cake is a smartphone application that is free, interesting, easy to use, can be accessed from anywhere and at any time, and covers a wide range of speaking topics, English conversations, and English expressions that are interesting for students to learn and practice English independently. They can learn and practice English simply by watching videos. Therefore, learning English with Cake becomes easier, simpler, and more fun.

## 2. The use of Cake app to improve students' vocabulary in EFL speaking classroom

All participants responded "yes" for the questions given about the Cake related to vocabulary. It means that the app could help them improve their vocabulary in EFL speaking classrooms, and this statement is supported by some reasons from the students' perceptions summarized in table 4 below.

**TABLE 4.** Summary of students' perception to the second aspect (vocabulary)

<b>No.</b>	<b>Students' Perception</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
1.	I can improve my vocabulary after watching videos, having a today's conversation, and doing quizzes given.	100

2.	I get a lot of new vocabulary that I don't know before.	80
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The table 4 above informs us that Cake app can improve students' vocabulary in EFL speaking classrooms by watching videos, having a today's conversation and doing quizzes provided by the app, so they can get a lot of new vocabulary that they do not know before.

### 3. The use of Cake app to improve students' pronunciation in EFL speaking classroom

After a week of exploring the Cake at home, all participants responded "yes" for the open questions given about the Cake related to the students' pronunciation. In other words, the app could help them improve their pronunciation in EFL speaking classrooms, and this statement is supported by some reasons from the students' perceptions summarized in table 5 below.

**TABLE 5.** Summary of students' perception to the third aspect (Pronunciation)

No.	Students' Perception	Percentage (%)
1.	Cake can improve my pronunciation because after watching a video, I will be directed to take a quiz by imitating the pronunciation of a native speaker in the video.	100
2.	By taking the quiz, Cake helps me find out my pronunciation mistakes because the quiz will give me score so that my mistakes in pronunciation can be identified.	100
3.	Cake can make us familiar with native speaker's pronunciation because there is a "speak" feature that can simulate a conversation with a native speaker.	84
4.	There are many learning videos to listen to, and there is also a voice record feature to record my voices, so it will be easier for me to learn and improve my pronunciation.	80
5.	If there are words or sentences that are a bit difficult to pronounce, we can stop the video clip so that the pronunciation becomes clearer and easier to practice.	80
6.	Cake can help me improve my pronunciation if I consistently use it to learn and practice.	60

Based on the table 5 above, it can be concluded that Cake can improve students' pronunciation in EFL speaking classrooms because there are a lot of video clips and features in the app they can use for learning and practicing their English consistently. When they hear words, phrases or sentences that are a bit difficult for them to pronounce, they can stop the video to repeat the difficult pronunciation. Some features in the app that can improve students' pronunciation are as follows: 1) Feature "quiz". After watching a video, they will be directed to take a quiz by imitating pronunciation of a native speaker. 2) Feature "speak". It is used to simulate a conversation with a native speaker so they can practice their pronunciation as well as possible. 3) Feature "voice record". It is used to record their voices, so it will be easier for them to recognize whether or not they have pronounced English words or phrases in a good way.

### 4. The use of Cake app to improve students' grammar in EFL speaking classroom

After a week of exploring the Cake at home, 84% of the participants responded "yes" and 16% of the participants responded "no" for the open questions given about the Cake related to grammar. Even not 100% of the participants responded "yes", it can still be assumed that the app could help students improve their grammar knowledge in EFL speaking classrooms, and this statement is supported by some reasons from the students' perceptions summarized in table 6 below.

**TABLE 6.** Summary of students' perception to the fourth aspect (Grammar)



No.	Students' Perception	Percentage (%)
1.	If Cake is used every day it is possible to improve our grammar knowledge.	84
2.	All dialogues and expressions in Cake's videos are spoken by native speakers, so of course they use good grammar to be used as learning materials.	80
3.	Cakes help improve my grammar, especially in spoken grammar and idioms through various videos.\.	84
4.	There is a "class" feature that provides learning about idioms, correct verb placement, etc., so we can understand better in making sentences.	80
5.	There is a "quiz" feature in this app which directs us to arrange words into correct sentences and provides automatic corrections for wrong answers, so that we can practice our grammar knowledge.	80
6.	I find it a bit difficult to learn grammar through an English learning application like this app, so when I don't understand grammar material, I will ask my friends who understand more about it.	4
7.	I haven't found the benefits of Cake for grammar yet, maybe it was because only on the 7th day (the last day) I discovered the "class" feature that teaches grammar.	8
8.	After exploring cake for 1 week, I feel that this application does not provide much grammar material, so we have to pay or go to premium when we need it more complete.	4

From the table 6 above, even though the result is not 100%, it can be said that Cake app, if it is used every day, can help them improve their grammar knowledge, especially spoken grammar and idioms. The strongest point of this app is the variations of videos in which all dialogues and expressions are spoken by English native speakers who definitely use correct, standard grammar appropriately. There are two features that support students to improve their grammar: 1) Feature "class": it provides learning about idioms, correct verb placement, etc., so we can understand better how to make correct sentences, and 2) Feature "quiz": it directs them to arrange words into correct sentences and provides automatic corrections for wrong answers, so they can practice and improve their grammar knowledge. Next, the students who do not feel that the app can improve their grammar (16%) give some reasons: 1) difficulty learning grammar by using English learning application such as Cake, 2) the opportunity given to use the Cake app in this research was very limited so that it was only on the last day (the seventh day) to find a feature "class" that teaches grammar, and 3) Cake does not provide much grammar material, so they have to pay or go to premium when they need it more complete.

## Conclusion

The result of the research shows that the strength of the Cake application as an English learning medium is the number of interesting videos that covers a wide range of speaking topics, English conversations, and English expressions that are interesting for students to learn and practice English independently. They can learn and practice English simply by watching videos. Therefore, learning English with Cake becomes easier, simpler, and more fun. Besides, there are some features such as quiz, class, voice record, speak, etc. that are useful and interesting to support students' self-directed learning in improving their speaking skills. Thus, it can be concluded that the Cake application could be a useful, interesting learning medium to support students' self-directed learning and improve the three components of speaking skill (vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar) as well if students use it consistently and regularly.

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