

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ICE BREAKING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT: This study originates from the researchers' observation that students frequently experience boredom during English lectures owing to the unengaging and repetitive nature of the learning process. The researcher seeks to ascertain the causes and develop solutions for this issue. The researcher intends to investigate students' perspectives regarding the use of ice-breaking activities in English learning to enhance the process's efficiency and effectiveness. The employed study method is mixed, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches, with data gathered via questionnaires and interviews with students in class IX at State Junior High School (SMPN) 2 Nisam Antara, North Aceh, Indonesia. This study's findings indicate that implementing ice-breaking strategies enhances students' engagement in learning, hence mitigating feelings of boredom during the English learning experience. Consequently, it may be inferred that the use of ice-breaking activities in English education can mitigate student ennui, enhancing the efficacy of the learning process.

Keywords: English learning, Icebreaking, Innovative learning, Students' perception

INTRODUCTION

English is one of the most important subjects to learn, as it plays a crucial role as a global communication language, (Richards, 2005). In the era of globalization, mastering the English language is crucial due to the rapid growth in transportation and information sectors, enabling seamless interaction across time, distance, and place (Muslem et al., 2019). Students from an early age to adulthood should be encouraged to learn this language, (Pinter, 2017). In this context, students are expected to master English well and fluently for their future lives. This makes the need for interactive processes in English learning activities highly important. Thus, in teaching English, English teachers should pay more attention to how they deliver knowledge in a way that is well-received by their students (Freeman & Johnson, 1998).

In reality, the researcher still finds many students who feel bored and

disengaged with how they learn English, whether due to the students themselves or how their teachers deliver the material (Apridayani & Waluyo, 2024). Although learning fatigue is a common issue faced by everyone daily, if not addressed properly, it can render the teaching and learning process ineffective. The material intended to be conveyed to students may not be received as well as the teachers had hoped. To address this issue, the researcher investigates a strategy for alleviating students' boredom using icebreakers during the learning process. Ice breaking appears to be easy and enjoyable, making it suitable for overcoming student boredom during lessons.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Learning and Icebreaking

Language learning is intricate, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and social aspects. Students frequently encounter obstacles such as

nervousness, diminished self-assurance, and apprehension regarding errors, which might impede their advancement. Icebreaking activities, organized exercises to alleviate stress and promote connection, have been progressively employed to tackle these difficulties. Icebreaking exercises are acknowledged as useful instruments for cultivating a happy learning atmosphere, especially in language learning settings. These activities alleviate anxiety, foster rapport among learners, and establish a collaborative environment favorable to language learning.

The implementation of icebreaking activities in language learning can be analyzed through several theoretical frameworks. Krashen (1982) asserts that emotional elements, including anxiety, drive, and self-confidence, profoundly affect language learning. Icebreakers can diminish fear and cultivate a friendly atmosphere, so decreasing the affective filter and enhancing language acquisition. Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) underscores the significance of social interaction in cognitive development. Icebreakers facilitate engagement and collaboration, fostering chances for learners to engage in substantive discussion and support one another's learning.

Icebreaking is an attempt to break or melt the cold or rigid atmosphere like ice so that the learning process can take place more pleasantly and comfortably. Ice breaking is a method employed to foster a welcoming classroom environment, alleviate initial tensions, and engage students in the learning process (Zulfadli et al., 2024). Ice breaking can refresh the mind, and if these games or activities are applied in the teaching and learning process in the

classroom, students will be motivated to learn. This conducive atmosphere will be more effective in helping students achieve their learning goals than when they are in a tense or stressful situation. Ice breaking can be said to be an activity carried out to clear up a passive and boring learning process into active and fun learning. This can increase students' motivation to learn with better enthusiasm. In other words, ice breaking serves to increase students' interest. When they are interested in doing something, it means that they are motivated to do it.

Teachers can include learning materials that will or have been delivered in ice breaking. The teacher can convey the material needed in the delivery of ice breaking. In addition, ice breaking can also dilute the condition of students who are initially bored or tense to be fun. Students can play while learning without putting aside the core material, either from literature books or others.

There are various types of icebreakers including games, singing, gestures, audio-visual, and storytelling. Like icebreaking, video and audio media used appropriately can increase student motivation and participation in the classroom (Hajar et al., 2024). The ice-breaking activities often commenced with an introduction of the activity names, followed by explanations of the procedures, a simulation, and ultimately the execution of the activities, lasting approximately five to twenty minutes (Farwati et al., 2018).

In implementing icebreakers, teachers need to choose and adjust to the class conditions and context they face. Icebreakers should be lively and straightforward to meet students' desire to create an acceptable social interaction with classmates and

teachers, and preview the classroom event's style and context (Sasan et al., 2023). The class conditions include the number of students and the condition of the students, whether they are still excited or getting tired. If the students are still eager to continue learning, then the teacher can directly convey the material that must be taught, and then at the end of the lesson, a break can be done. However, if the students are tired, the teacher can do an icebreaker first.

Icebreaking activities can be executed in several formats to assist learners in practicing their target language. These encompass personal introductions, group conversations, role-playing, games and riddles, and cultural icebreakers. Personal introductions facilitate the sharing of personal information among learners, whereas group discussions promote dialogue and enable the articulation of ideas. Role-playing enables learners to adopt various identities and participate in authentic scenarios, alleviating anxiety and facilitating practical language application. Language games such as word searches, crosswords, and charades render learning enjoyable and participatory, whereas cultural icebreakers incorporate cultural components, igniting learners' attention and offering context for language application.

The Role of Icebreaking

Icebreaking activities transcend mere introduction exercises; they serve as potent instruments that can substantially enrich the language learning experience. Icebreakers foster a friendly and helpful learning environment by alleviating anxiety, establishing rapport, and enhancing communication. Ice-breaking activities are thought to foster a

conducive learning environment and enhance student engagement (Zulfadli et al., 2024). Teachers may integrate diverse icebreaking activities into their language instruction to enhance learner engagement and promote language acquisition.

Icebreaking is significantly advantageous for fostering a more dynamic learning atmosphere that promotes, inspires, and increases engagement. It aids in alleviating stress, augmenting motivation, and improving collaboration. Benefits of ice breaking encompass the establishment of a stimulating and engaging learning atmosphere, enhancement of focus and motivation, promotion of concentration and receptiveness to learning. The integration of ice-breaking activities into educational sessions has revitalized an otherwise monotonous atmosphere, rendering it dynamic and enjoyable, thereby augmenting student motivation (Zulfadli et al., 2024).

Icebreaking can restore concentration and increase student motivation in participating in the learning process. Ice-breaking activities were beneficial in enhancing students' motivation for studying English (Pranata et al., 2021). Maintaining students' enthusiasm and stamina is the most important thing for teachers to do. The principle of motivation becomes the basis for choosing the right type or form of ice breaking. If students experience a decrease in stamina and enthusiasm for learning, it can affect the absorption of information. Learners who have high learning motivation can focus their attention during learning. Conversely, if the motivation of students is low, it can result in the low achievement of optimal learning objectives.

Icebreaking practices in language learning have numerous advantages. They alleviate anxiety, cultivate a serene atmosphere, and establish rapport among learners, promoting a helpful educational environment. Ice-breaking activities efficiently foster a more dynamic and participatory classroom environment, enhance student engagement, and alleviate anxiety (Leba & Ardhy, 2024).

English language teachers use icebreakers in classrooms, creating a relaxed and engaging learning environment, reducing student anxiety, and increasing student participation (Nisa et al., 2024). Stimulating and pleasurable icebreakers enhance motivation by rendering the learning experience more enjoyable. They enhance communication skills by necessitating that learners utilize the target language in a significant setting, so cultivating speaking, listening, and negotiation abilities. Moreover, numerous icebreakers integrate cultural components, offering learners perspectives on the target culture. Cultural awareness is essential for language acquisition, as it improves comprehension of the context in which the language operates.

Ice breaking is also useful in encouragement of collaboration and communication, optimization of learning efficiency and enjoyment, mitigation of boredom and distraction, cultivation of creativity and critical thinking, augmentation of directness in learning, intensification of focused learning, and alleviation of non-academic issues. Ice breaking facilitates the establishment of a more engaging and interesting learning environment, mitigating boredom, ambiguity, and insufficient engagement. It also aids in surmounting

non-academic obstacles, absence of purpose, and insufficient interaction.

METHOD

The method used in this study is mixed, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data was collected through questionnaires and answers to interview questions, which were then analyzed to address the research problem. This method was chosen to express students' perceptions as subjects experiencing boredom in learning English and to determine whether the ice breaking strategy can address this issue.

The researcher collected data by distributing a questionnaire containing 10 statements to 30 randomly selected students from classes IX A and IX B at SMPN 2 Nisam Antara, North Aceh, Indonesia. The classes were chosen because they had experienced English lessons with ice breaking strategies applied six times. In addition to the questionnaire, the researcher also conducted interviews with 5 selected students as supporting data.

This study was conducted over 3 months. Pre-observation activities were carried out during the first week when the researcher observed the model teacher teaching in several classes. During the learning process, students began to lose concentration and interest, appearing bored. Afterward, the researcher sought to understand why the students behaved this way. They explained that they were no longer interested in the learning process because it felt monotonous every day. Some students also mentioned that they needed something different to refresh their minds and spark their interest. Consequently, the teacher planned lessons for the following week by introducing something new and fresh to

the students, encouraging them to learn English without feeling bored or forced. The teaching process was conducted seven times, with ice breaking applied six times and once without ice breaking due to a daily test. The ice breaking activities were adapted from Firdaus and Nuryanti (2022).

In the first meeting, the teacher provided an ice-breaking activity similar to the "break the rule". Involving "cat and mouse." When the teacher said "cat," students had to respond with "yes" and shake their heads. Conversely, when the teacher said "mouse," students had to respond with "no" and nod their heads. Students who made mistakes were asked to come forward and given a simple, entertaining punishment. During this first meeting, students' enthusiasm began to emerge, and they started to accept the teacher. The classroom atmosphere, which was usually quiet and boring, became lively and responsive.

In the second meeting, the teacher introduced a different ice breaking activity called "handclapping," where students had to clap once when the teacher said "red" and twice when the teacher said "white." However, if the teacher mentioned a color other than these two (e.g., "black" or "blue"), students were not supposed to clap. Students who clapped incorrectly received a light punishment in front of the class. This second meeting showed that students became more willing to express themselves rather than remaining silent and letting the teacher lecture. Additionally, the classroom atmosphere became more relaxed and fluid. Interaction between students and the teacher during the lesson improved, and the class became more active.

By the third meeting, the teacher noticed a significant change in students' responses, as they appeared ready to engage in English learning. No students were late to class, as the English lesson was scheduled after the first break. Some students even greeted the teacher and requested new games for the day. However, in the third meeting, the teacher introduced a different ice breaking activity by playing a music video clip of Justin Bieber's song "Hard to Face Reality," which tells the story of a girl mistreated by her boyfriend. The video was played twice, and students were asked to share their opinions on who they thought was at fault in the story. This activity was linked to the day's lesson on "asking and giving opinions," encouraging students to express their views on the video. The diverse responses from students elicited laughter and created a relaxed atmosphere during the English lesson.

In the fourth meeting, the teacher introduced the "ship vs. boat" game, a modified version of the "break the rule". This ice-breaking activity aimed to train students' concentration and challenge their everyday habits by reversing common facts. The procedure was as follows: when the teacher said "ship," students had to respond with "big" while snapping their fingers to indicate "small." Conversely, when the teacher said "boat," students had to respond with "small" while gesturing with their hands to indicate "big." This reversal of gestures made the activity engaging. During this meeting, students enjoyed the lesson and easily grasped the day's material, which focused on perfect tenses, a topic they initially found challenging. However, with the ice breaking activity, most students

understood the concept and performed well on the exercises.

In the fifth meeting, the teacher conducted a psychological test on students' interests and personalities using a video downloaded from YouTube. Many students were enthusiastic about discovering their personalities and talents based on the metaphorical questions in the video. Some students were surprised to find that their personalities matched the test results. After the activity, the lesson proceeded as usual, with students remaining active and engaged.

In the sixth meeting, the teacher introduced an icebreaker, involving "follow what I say" and "guess what I say," as these two activities were similar and could be conducted simultaneously. Although the activity took longer, all students enjoyed it and did not feel bored during the subsequent lesson. The class atmosphere remained calm and relaxed, with no students appearing tired or sleepy until the bell rang for the next subject.

RESULT

The researchers conducted the study by distributing questionnaires and interviewing several students to understand their perceptions of the use of ice-breaking strategies in English learning. The researcher prepared a questionnaire with 10 statements, which was distributed to 30 randomly selected students. The questionnaire results are presented in Table 1.

In the first statement, 23 out of 30 students agreed that they enjoy English lessons. This indicates that 76.67% of the students enjoy learning English, although their enthusiasm does not always reflect this. It can be concluded

that the majority of students have a high interest in English.

Table 1: The result of Students' Perception of Using Ice Breaking

No	Statements	Frequency	Percentage
1	I like English.	23	76.67 %
2	It's easier to understand English by implementing an icebreaker.	19	63.33 %
3	I feel enthusiastic in learning English with the icebreaker	26	86.66 %
4	I am interested in the English learning model applied by the teacher.	26	86.66 %
5	It is easier to develop and conclude the English material.	21	70 %
6	I like the use of icebreakers given in English learning	28	93.33 %
7	I think giving an icebreaker before learning begins is interesting.	25	83.33 %
8	I agree that my interest in learning English has increased since ice breaking was given during learning.	26	86.66 %
9	I feel that learning with icebreakers given feels more creative and fun.	27	90 %
10	I agree that ice-breaking activities should always be given for English learning.	38	93.33 %

The second statement shows that 19 out of 30 students found it easier to understand English lessons when ice

breaking was applied. This indicates that 63.33% of students did not face difficulties in understanding the material when ice breaking was introduced at the beginning of the lesson. This is supported by an interview with a student, who stated: "With ice breaking, we feel more prepared to receive the lesson material. We feel more relaxed, and our minds are fresher when receiving the material."

It can be concluded that students are more prepared to engage in English lessons when ice breaking is introduced at the beginning of the class. The third and fourth statements discuss students' perceptions of the learning environment during English lessons, especially after ice breaking was introduced. According to the questionnaire results, 26 out of 30 students felt more enthusiastic and interested in the learning atmosphere. This condition is supported by an interview with a student who noted: "I often feel bored and sleepy during the lesson. Especially since English is scheduled for the last period on Wednesday. I often feel tired, lose concentration, and sometimes don't understand what is being taught." Another student also reported: "I actually enjoy English, but sometimes I get confused with certain materials. I wonder what the purpose of this material is. But with the recent lessons, I feel more interested. Even tenses, which were difficult to learn, are now easier to understand."

From this interview, it is clear that students find regular English lessons monotonous and boring, especially when scheduled at the end of the day. This reduces their interest and ability to concentrate fully on the lesson.

The fifth statement discusses how students find it easier to develop

and summarize English materials after learning. According to the questionnaire, 21 out of 30 students found it easier to summarize and develop the material. This indicates that 70% of students found it easier to summarize their learning after ice breaking was introduced.

The following statements discuss the implementation of ice breaking in English lessons. According to the questionnaire, all students enjoyed the ice-breaking activities during English lessons. Additionally, 93.33% of students found it interesting when ice breaking was provided before the lesson. These statements are supported by an interview with a student who reported: "I enjoy the ice breaking activities, and the lessons become more interesting." Another student also noted: "Many of my classmates who used to lose focus or feel bored during lessons, especially since English is usually taught in the afternoon when we're sleepy, now feel refreshed after the ice breaking. All the games are fun and unique, making the lessons more relaxed and less tense."

From this response, it can be concluded that students enjoy ice breaking, as reflected in the questionnaire results. According to the students, ice breaking makes the lessons more engaging and easier to follow, as the atmosphere is more relaxed and less tense. They look forward to the lessons, anticipating what new activities will be introduced. Ice breaking at the beginning of the lesson also improves their mood and sparks their interest in learning English.

The next statements discuss the impact of ice breaking on students' interest in learning English. First, 26 out of 30 (86.66 %) students stated that their

interest in learning increased after ice breaking was introduced at the beginning of the lesson. Additionally, 90% of students felt that lessons with ice breaking were more creative, colorful, and enjoyable. Finally, 93.33% of students agreed that ice breaking should continue to be used in future lessons. These statements are supported by an interview with a student who reported: "Ice breaking makes the class livelier, more fun, and enjoyable. If lessons continue like this, I will be more motivated to learn."

DISCUSSION

Results of this study indicate that students at SMPN 2 Nisam Antara, North Aceh, Indonesia have a generally positive perception of the implementation of ice-breaking activities in English language learning in the classroom. This finding aligns with interview results revealing that students feel more enthusiastic and motivated to learn when ice-breaking activities are applied. Additionally, students acknowledged that they find it easier to understand English learning materials after the implementation of such activities. This suggests that ice-breaking not only serves as a mood refresher but also as an effective strategy to enhance student engagement and comprehension in the learning process. This finding is similar to Astuti et al. (2020) who state that ice breaking helps students prepare mentally, as their minds are fresher before the lesson begins.

The favorable perception of students regarding ice-breaking can be elucidated by various elements. First, ice-breaking activities foster a more relaxed and enjoyable educational environment, as they are engaging and

provide a competitive element that enhances motivation. Such activities may alleviate the anxiety or monotony frequently associated with English language acquisition. Second, ice-breaking activities can foster active student engagement, hence improving interaction and collaboration among students and between students and teachers. This aligns with learning theories that underscore the significance of a positive and participatory learning environment for enhancing material understanding (Dörnyei, 2001).

Third, ice-breaking activities can create a comfortable learning environment. The ice-breaking activity aimed to transform the ambiance from astonishingly dull and lethargic to one that was enjoyable, stimulating, and relaxing, so fostering a more conducive learning environment with a substantial impact. To enhance engagement in the learning process and thereby elevate students' motivation to learn.

Interview results also revealed that students feel more motivated and eager to participate in English lessons after including ice-breaking activities. This motivation is a key factor in foreign language learning, as high motivation tends to increase students' effort and persistence in mastering the material (Gardner, 1985). Thus, ice-breaking activities can be considered an effective approach to maintaining and enhancing student learning motivation.

Furthermore, these findings support previous research stating that the use of refreshing activities such as ice-breaking can improve students' concentration and information retention (Jensen, 2005). In the context of English language learning, this is particularly important because foreign languages require deep understanding and

consistent repetition. With ice-breaking activities, students can focus more easily and absorb the material being taught.

However, it is important to note that the effectiveness of ice-breaking heavily depends on how teachers design and implement the activities. Ice-breaking activities that are too long or irrelevant to the learning material can divert students' attention from the main learning objectives. Therefore, teachers need to ensure that the ice-breaking activities used are brief, engaging, and relevant to the material being taught.

Overall, these findings illustrate that the implementation of ice-breaking activities in English language learning in the classroom has a positive impact on students' perceptions, motivation, and comprehension. The implication of this research is the importance for teachers to consider the use of ice-breaking as an innovative and effective learning strategy, particularly in the context of foreign language learning. Further research can be conducted to explore the types of ice-breaking activities that are most effective and their long-term impact on student learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted at SMPN 2 Nisam Antara, North Aceh, Indonesia. The researcher identified a problem where many students felt bored with the usual English lessons. This led the researcher to explore students' perceptions of the implementation of ice breaking in teaching and learning. The conclusions drawn from the study conducted based on questionnaire and interview data.

Students perceive that the boredom in English lessons stems from the difficulty of the subject and their lack

of understanding of the purpose of certain materials. Additionally, many students feel bored and sleepy during English lessons, making the learning process ineffective and inefficient.

The use of icebreakers is beneficial in motivating and energizing students during English lessons, reducing boredom in the classroom. Furthermore, students find English lessons more interesting, creative, and something to look forward to. Their interest in learning also increases with the implementation of icebreakers in English lessons.

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