

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ICE-BREAKING ACTIVITIES USED BY ENGLISH TEACHERS IN TEACHING PROCESS AT SMAN 10 PEKANBARU

Wilastri Ayunda¹, Mahdum², Muhammad Syarfi³

¹Universitas Riau,

²Universitas Riau,

³Universitas Riau,

¹wilastri.ayunda5235@student.unri.ac.id,

²mahdum.adanan@lecturer.unri.ac.id,

³m.syarfi@lecturer.unri.ac.id,

ABSTRACT

This study explores students' perceptions of ice-breaking activities implemented by English teachers in the teaching process at SMAN 10 Pekanbaru. A quantitative descriptive design was employed, and data were collected through a questionnaire. The results indicate that students generally held positive perceptions of ice-breaking activities, particularly regarding their role in creating a supportive and engaging classroom atmosphere. These activities were also perceived as effective in reducing anxiety, fostering comfort, and encouraging active participation and interaction among students. However, their influence on focus, concentration, and comprehension of lesson material was considered moderate, suggesting that ice-breaking activities serve primarily as motivational and social supports rather than direct tools for enhancing academic understanding. Overall, ice-breaking activities are regarded as beneficial supplementary strategies that can promote a positive classroom atmosphere, enhance students' emotional readiness, and support increased engagement in English learning.

Keywords: students' perceptions, ice-breaking, teaching process

A. Introduction

Education plays an essential role in developing students' potential so that they can grow into knowledgeable and skilled individuals who are able to contribute to society. In the 21st century, rapid technological and social changes have posed complex challenges for education, one of which is maintaining students' motivation

and active participation in learning. English, as an international language, has become an important subject in schools; however, it is often considered difficult, which makes many students struggle to stay engaged. According to Damayanti (2017), challenges in English learning include large class sizes, low student motivation, exam-oriented teaching,

and limited instructional time, all of which can hinder students' learning outcomes.

Teachers play a crucial role in addressing these challenges, as their methods and classroom management directly influence students' motivation and participation. Motivation is a key factor in determining the effectiveness of teaching and learning (Cahya & Dewi, 2022), and a positive classroom atmosphere can encourage active participation, while an unsupportive one may lead to boredom and lack of focus. Sardiman (2012) also emphasized that student motivation is influenced by the variation of teaching methods and the teacher's ability to create a positive learning environment.

One activity that can be used to address these issues is ice-breaking. Ice-breaking activities are designed to reduce tension, refresh students' minds, and encourage interaction among students and teachers. These activities can be implemented at the beginning, middle, or end of a lesson depending on the intended purpose. Previous studies have shown that ice-breaking has a positive impact on students' participation and motivation.

For instance, Sasan et al. (2023) found that ice-breaking increased student participation and interaction, while Al Ghifarah & Pusparini (2023) revealed that it enhanced students' motivation and involvement in English learning.

Although several studies have explored ice-breaking activities in classrooms, most have different research focuses or employ qualitative approaches (e.g., Mepieza, 2024). In contrast, this study specifically investigates students' perceptions of ice-breaking activities in English learning, employing a quantitative approach using questionnaires. Understanding students' perspectives can provide valuable insights into the pedagogical effectiveness of ice-breaking activities and inform teachers on how to implement them to promote classroom engagement.

Therefore, this study aims to examine students' perceptions of ice-breaking activities used by English teachers in the teaching process at SMAN 10 Pekanbaru. The findings are expected to guide teachers in selecting and implementing ice-breaking activities that align with students' needs, enhance motivation,

and foster active participation in English learning.

B. Methods

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to investigate students' perceptions of ice-breaking activities used by English teachers at SMAN 10 Pekanbaru. Data were collected using a survey questionnaire developed based on Walgito's (2010) perception framework, which included indicators of absorption, understanding, and evaluation operationalized into five dimensions: classroom atmosphere, social interaction and communication, focus and concentration, understanding of material, and self-confidence and participation. The questionnaire consisted of 25 items measured on a five-point Likert scale (Sugiyono, 2013) and was distributed to eleventh-grade students selected through Cluster Random Sampling, with four classes (XI IPA 1, XI IPA 2, XI IPA 4, XI IPS 4) as samples ($n = 162$). Validity and reliability were tested using SPSS 27, with all items exceeding the minimum correlation value ($r > 0.304$) and Cronbach's Alpha yielding 0.877, indicating very high reliability. The collected data was

analyzed using Microsoft Excel to calculate the average score for each item and the overall perception, which was interpreted based on the interpretation scale. This approach ensured a systematic, reliable, and concise assessment of students' perceptions of ice-breaker activities in the classroom.

C. Results and Discussion

This study examined students' perceptions of ice-breaking activities conducted by English teachers at SMAN 10 Pekanbaru. Data were collected using a questionnaire containing 25 items adapted from Walgito's (2010) perception framework and operationalized into five dimensions relevant to the classroom context, namely: classroom atmosphere, social interaction and communication, focus and concentration, understanding of material, and confidence and participation. The average scores for each dimension are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary Students' Perceptions of Ice-Breaking Activities

No	Dimen- sion	Aver- age	Criteria
1	Class- room At- mos- phere	3.00	Neutral
2	Social Interac- tion and Communi- cation	3.18	Neutral
3	Focus and Concen- tration	2.87	Neutral
4	Under- standing of Mate- rial	2.78	Neutral
5	Self- Confi- dence and Par- ticipation	2.81	Neutral
Total			
Average		2.93	Neutral

The overall findings revealed that students' perceptions of ice-breaking activities were generally neutral ($M = 2.93$). This indicates that students recognized the role of ice-breaking as a supportive classroom activity but did not perceive it as a dominant factor directly influencing their academic outcomes.

First, the classroom atmosphere dimension obtained an average score of 3.00 (neutral), with students acknowledging that ice-breaking

helped create a lively, fun, and friendly learning environment. This result aligns with Astuti et al. (2020) and Pranata et al. (2021), who found that ice-breakers improved classroom enjoyment and student comfort. However, some students perceived ice-breaking as chaotic or lacking creativity, which may explain the neutral average. These mixed responses suggest that while ice-breaking fosters a positive atmosphere, its effectiveness depends on how creatively and appropriately the teacher delivers the activity.

Second, the highest average was recorded in social interaction and communication ($M = 3.18$, neutral with a tendency toward positive). Students reported that ice-breaking helped them interact better with peers, encouraged shy students to participate, and supported collaboration in group work. This resonates with Taupik et al. (2023) and Anjariyah et al. (2023), who concluded that ice-breakers positively influence students' willingness to communicate. However, the neutral range indicates that the improvement was not very strong, suggesting that deeper communication may require

more sustained pedagogical strategies beyond ice-breaking.

Third, the focus and concentration dimension had an average score of 2.87 (neutral). Many students agreed that ice-breaking refreshed their minds and helped them stay more attentive, yet some expressed that these activities occasionally made them feel lazy to engage in serious learning. These findings are consistent with Zulfadly et al. (2024), who noted that effectiveness varies depending on student engagement levels and the type of activity used. Thus, while ice-breaking may provide short-term cognitive stimulation, its long-term impact on focus requires thoughtful integration with lesson content.

Fourth, in terms of understanding of material, the average score was 2.78 (neutral), the lowest among the five dimensions. Students felt that ice-breaking helped them prepare for lessons and recall materials, but its direct impact on comprehension was limited. This supports Mapieza (2024), who emphasized that ice-breakers primarily enhance the affective and social aspects of learning rather than deep cognitive outcomes. Therefore,

ice-breaking should be seen as a preparatory tool rather than a method for direct mastery of English content.

The final dimension, self-confidence and participation, obtained an overall mean score of 2.81, categorized as neutral. Students reported feeling slightly less anxious about making mistakes and more confident in their ability to succeed after participating in ice-breaking activities. However, the absence of ice-breaking was not perceived as a significant barrier to motivation. This finding aligns with Sasan et al. (2023), who observed that while ice-breaking boosts enthusiasm, intrinsic motivation and instructional quality remain crucial for sustained engagement.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that students' perceptions of ice breaking activities are generally neutral across all five dimensions. However, variations were observed, with the highest average found in the Social Interaction and Communication dimension (3.18), suggesting that students recognize the role of icebreaker activities in facilitating interaction and engagement with peers. On the other hand, the lowest average was found in the Material

Comprehension dimension (2.78), indicating that students view icebreaker activities as less directly supportive of material mastery. This difference highlights that while icebreaker activities are valuable in promoting social and emotional readiness, their contribution to the cognitive aspects of learning remains limited.

D. Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that students at SMAN 10 Pekanbaru generally have positive perceptions of ice-breaking activities, especially in creating a pleasant, friendly, and engaging classroom atmosphere. These activities also provide social and emotional benefits, such as improving interaction, reducing anxiety, and fostering comfort, although their influence on focus, concentration, and understanding of material is moderate. Thus, ice-breaking is perceived more as an activity that prepares students mentally rather than a direct contributor to academic achievement. In line with these findings, it is recommended that teachers implement ice-breaking activities strategically, particularly at the beginning of lessons, with varied and age-appropriate designs that are, if

possible, connected to the lesson content to avoid monotony and increase learning effectiveness. Furthermore, the implementation of ice-breaking should consider students' preferences and feedback to ensure a more interactive and enjoyable classroom atmosphere that encourages active participation and reduces anxiety. Finally, this study may serve as a reference for future research to further explore the role of ice-breaking in different educational contexts and across various levels of learners.

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