



## Original Article

### Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Ice Breaking and Its Contribution to Learning Motivation

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#### Abstract:

Ice breaking is one of the pedagogical strategies used to create a conducive learning atmosphere and maintain student motivation. This study aims to analyze teachers' and students' perceptions of the use of ice breaking in learning and its contribution to learning motivation. The study used a qualitative descriptive approach conducted at SMA Negeri 2 Kota Tanjungbalai, involving 48 teachers and 36 students. Data were collected through classroom observation, open and semi-open questionnaires, interviews, and supporting documentation, then analyzed using thematic descriptive analysis techniques. The results showed that students had a positive perception of ice breaking because it created a more relaxed learning atmosphere, increased focus, and generated enthusiasm for learning. Teachers viewed ice breaking as a classroom management strategy that helped maintain student readiness and engagement, although its implementation still varied. This study concluded that ice breaking contributed positively to learning motivation when planned proportionally and adapted to classroom conditions.

**Keywords:** Ice Breaking, Teacher Perceptions, Student Perceptions, Learning Motivation

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#### Introduction

A conducive classroom atmosphere is an important factor in supporting the success of the teaching and learning process. A positive and comfortable learning environment can help students focus their attention, participate actively, and understand the learning material more optimally (Widiastuti, Susilo and Nurfinaputri, 2020; Cayubit, 2022; Peng, Deng and Jin, 2022; Doyle, 2023; Abidin and Muhammad, 2024; Dalimunthe *et al.*, 2024). In the context of learning, learning motivation plays a central role because it is directly related to students' interest, involvement, and readiness to receive the material (Nadya, Pustika and Indonesia, 2021; Tohir, Learning and Tohir, 2022; Çebi, 2023; Jalinus and Syaifullah, 2025). However, in practice, teachers often

face challenges in the form of decreased student concentration due to boredom, fatigue, or academic pressure. These conditions can hinder the effectiveness of learning if not addressed with the right pedagogical strategies. Therefore, systematic efforts are needed to create a dynamic classroom atmosphere that can maintain students' focus and enthusiasm throughout the learning process (Wahab, 2020; Ramzan *et al.*, 2023; Putri, R and Qushwa, 2024; Qi, 2024).

One pedagogical strategy that is widely used to overcome boredom and declining student concentration is ice breaking. In the context of learning, ice breaking can be defined as a short activity designed to break the ice in the classroom, rebuild focus, and increase students' readiness to learn (Sari *et al.*, 2021; Adi F. Mahmud, 2023; Fitria, 2023; Jaya, 2023; Kasih *et al.*, 2023; Andesti, Nisa and Suriani, 2024; Reffalleo, 2024). Ice breaking is not intended as a mere time-filler, but as part of a learning strategy that has clear pedagogical objectives. Through the appropriate use of ice breaking, teachers can create a smoother transition between one learning activity and another, while also fostering more positive interactions within the classroom (Dressel, 2020; Gunawan *et al.*, 2023; Jaya, 2023; Shavoun, Adeli and Tehran, 2024). Thus, ice breaking serves as a means of supporting student motivation and engagement in learning.

In learning practice, ice breaking can be applied in various forms and adapted to classroom conditions and student characteristics. Ice breaking activities can include singing, simple body movements, short games, riddles, or lighthearted humorous questions (Padangsidimpuan, no date; Ramadhan, 2020; Akmal, 2022; Zhang, 2024). With the development of learning technology, ice breaking can also be done digitally through the use of applications such as Wordwall, Educaplay, Wayground, and Interactive Flat Panel (IFP)-based media (Adi F. Mahmud, 2023; Fitria, 2023; Jaya, 2023; Kasih *et al.*, 2023; Kurdi, Soran Mustafa, 2023). Ice breaking is generally carried out in a short duration, around three to five minutes, either at the beginning of the lesson, in the middle of the lesson when the classroom atmosphere begins to decline, or towards the end of the lesson (Padangsidimpuan, no date; Sari *et al.*, 2021; Kurdi, Soran Mustafa, 2023; Abidin and Muhammad, 2024; Zhang, 2024). This short but targeted application is expected to be able to revive students' focus and motivation to continue the learning process more effectively.

In teaching practice, ice breaking is not always applied uniformly by teachers. Ice breaking can be done at the beginning of a lesson to build students' readiness to learn, in the middle of a lesson when concentration begins to wane, or at the end of a lesson before class is dismissed (Nazelli, 2021; Willingham, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2022; Fletcher, J., Najarro, A., & Yelland, 2023). However, not all teachers use ice breaking consistently in every meeting. This difference is influenced by teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of ice breaking and their established teaching habits. Some teachers view ice breaking as an important strategy for maintaining a conducive classroom atmosphere, while others consider it an additional activity that is not always necessary (Adi F. Mahmud, 2023; Kurdi, Soran Mustafa, 2023; Mawardi, Ibnu Hajar, Helmiyadi, 2024; Shavoun, Adeli and Tehran, 2024). This variation in practice shows that the application of ice breaking is highly dependent on each teacher's pedagogical understanding and beliefs.

A number of previous studies have shown that the use of ice breakers in learning can contribute positively to learning motivation, student engagement, and a more interactive classroom atmosphere. Ice breaking has been reported to help students reduce boredom and improve their mental readiness to participate in learning (Sari *et*

*al.*, 2021; Fitria, 2023; Gunawan *et al.*, 2023; Kasih *et al.*, 2023; Ayu, Puspa and Dewi, 2024). In addition, the role of the teacher is considered to be very decisive in the success of ice breaking, both in the selection of activity types and in adjusting to classroom conditions (Sari *et al.*, 2021; Adi F. Mahmud, 2023; Fitria, 2023; Jaya, 2023; Kasih *et al.*, 2023; Andesti, Nisa and Suriani, 2024). However, most studies still tend to highlight the impact of ice breaking from a single perspective, mainly from the perspective of students or teachers separately. Research that examines the perceptions of teachers and students simultaneously is still relatively limited, so a more comprehensive study is needed to understand the effectiveness of ice breaking as a whole.

This research was conducted at SMA Negeri 2 Kota Tanjungbalai as a local context relevant to daily learning practices. This school has 48 teachers involved in learning activities and 36 students who were respondents to explore their learning perceptions. In practice, teachers at this school have implemented ice breaking in various forms, both conventional and digital-based. Conventional ice breaking includes singing, simple movements, and light games, while digital ice breaking utilizes learning applications and Interactive Flat Panel-based media. This variety of practices provides a rich context for examining how ice breaking is perceived and utilized in learning.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze teachers' and students' perceptions of the use of ice breaking in learning and its relationship to learning motivation. Specifically, this study focuses on four main aspects, namely students' perceptions of the use of icebreakers in the classroom, teachers' perceptions of the function and role of icebreakers, the contribution of icebreakers in stimulating students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning, and the factors that influence the effectiveness of icebreakers in learning. Through this study, it is hoped that a comprehensive picture of the role of icebreakers as a pedagogical strategy in creating a conducive learning atmosphere will be obtained.

## Methods

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach that aims to describe in depth the perceptions and experiences of teachers and students regarding the use of ice breaking in the learning process. This approach was chosen because the study focuses on the meanings, views, and experiences of the research subjects in the context of real learning in the classroom, without involving hypothesis testing or statistical analysis. The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 2 Kota Tanjungbalai, involving 48 teachers as the main respondents and 36 students as supporting respondents. Teachers were involved to explore their perceptions of the function, purpose, and effectiveness of ice breaking in learning, while students acted as representatives of learning experiences who directly felt the impact of ice breaking in the classroom (Jannah, 2021; Adi F. Mahmud, 2023; Fitria, 2023; Jaya, 2023; Kurdi, Soran Mustafa, 2023; Mawardi, Ibnu Hajar, Helmiyadi, 2024). The selection of respondents was based on their direct involvement in the learning process so that the data obtained reflected authentic learning conditions.

Data collection in this study was carried out using several research instruments, namely interview guidelines, open and semi-open questionnaires, observation sheets, and supporting documentation. The interview guidelines were used to explore teachers' views and experiences in greater depth regarding the use of icebreakers, including the objectives of their implementation, types of activities, and obstacles encountered (Fitria, 2023; Kurdi, Soran Mustafa, 2023; Khoirunnisaa, 2024; Liang, 2024; Reffalleo, 2024; Robinson, 2025). Open and semi-open questionnaires were given to teachers and

students to obtain written and structured data on their perceptions. Observation sheets were used to record the learning situation, the form of ice breaking implementation, and student responses during the activity. Supporting documentation in the form of learning notes, teaching materials, and recordings of classroom activities were used to complement and strengthen the data from observations and interviews. The combination of these instruments enabled the researcher to obtain comprehensive and complementary data.

The research procedure began with direct observation of the learning process in the classroom to identify the use of ice breaking, the timing of its implementation, the types of activities used, and student responses during the activity. Observations were conducted systematically over several learning sessions to obtain a consistent and representative picture. Next, the researcher distributed open-ended and semi-open-ended questionnaires to 48 teachers and 36 students to explore their perceptions of the purpose, benefits, and effectiveness of ice breaking in learning. After the questionnaires were collected, in-depth interviews were conducted with a number of selected teachers based on variations in the application of ice breaking, both conventional and digital-based. The interviews aimed to confirm the findings of the observations and questionnaires and to explore the pedagogical reasons behind the selection and implementation of ice breakers. In addition, the researcher collected supporting documentation in the form of learning notes, activity plans, and evidence of ice breaker activities to strengthen and validate the data obtained.

The data obtained from observations, questionnaires, interviews, and documentation were analyzed using thematic descriptive analysis techniques. The initial stage of analysis was carried out by grouping the data based on the focus of the study, namely teacher perceptions, student perceptions, the contribution of ice breaking to learning motivation, and factors that influence the effectiveness of ice breaking. The data from the questionnaires and interviews were then coded to identify the main themes, similarities, and differences in views among respondents. The observation results were used to support and verify the perception data obtained in writing and orally. Furthermore, each theme was analyzed descriptively to explain the patterns of practice and meanings that emerged in the application of ice breaking in the classroom. Data interpretation was carried out contextually by relating the findings to the research objectives and research questions, thereby obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the role of ice breaking in learning.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **1. Students' Perceptions of the Use of Ice Breaking in Learning**

The results showed that most students had positive perceptions of the use of ice breaking in the learning process. Based on questionnaire data and classroom observations, students considered ice breaking to be an activity that helped create a more relaxed and less stressful learning atmosphere. Ice breaking is considered to be able to reduce boredom, especially when learning takes place over a long period of time or the material presented requires high concentration (Sari *et al.*, 2021; Fitria, 2023; Gunawan *et al.*, 2023; Parlina *et al.*, 2023; Ayu, Puspa and Dewi, 2024). Students also show a more active response after ice breaking is carried out, such as being more courageous in asking questions, answering teachers' questions, and engaging in class discussions. These findings indicate that ice breaking acts as an initial trigger to build students' mental readiness before continuing with core learning activities.

In addition to creating a more comfortable classroom atmosphere, ice breaking is also perceived by students as a strategy that helps increase focus and enthusiasm for learning (Fitria, 2023; Gunawan *et al.*, 2023; Parlina *et al.*, 2023). Observations show that when ice breaking is done in the middle of learning, students who previously appeared passive or inattentive regain interest in the lesson. One student said, “Kalau sudah mulai ngantuk atau bosan, terus guru kasih ice breaking, kelas jadi lebih hidup lagi dan kami jadi lebih focus.” Another student added, “Ice breaking bikin kami lebih semangat, jadi tidak tegang dan lebih siap menerima materi.” These statements show that ice breaking not only has an impact on students' emotional state but also helps restore their concentration, which may have declined (Sari *et al.*, 2021; Giani *et al.*, 2022; Gunawan *et al.*, 2023).

The students' positive perceptions were also evident in the types of icebreakers used by teachers. Students said they were more interested in interactive icebreakers, whether in the form of short games, simple movements, or digital-based activities (Taufiqurrochman, Ahmed and Rana, 2021; Sari and Herawati, 2024). Icebreakers involving the use of applications or digital media were considered more interesting because they provided a variation from conventional learning. One student said, “Kalau ice breaking pakai gim atau kuis, kami jadi lebih senang dan tidak terasa seperti belajar.” However, some students also emphasized that the duration of ice breakers should be kept short so as not to interfere with learning time. These findings show that, in general, students view ice breakers as beneficial activities as long as they are applied proportionally and are relevant to the classroom conditions (Gunawan *et al.*, 2023; Kurdi, Soran Mustafa, 2023; Sasan, 2023).

## **2. Teachers' Perceptions of the Function of Ice Breaking in Learning**

The interview results show that teachers view ice breaking as a pedagogical strategy that serves to create a more conducive learning atmosphere and support the learning process (Sari *et al.*, 2021; Kurdi, Soran Mustafa, 2023; Shavoun, Adeli and Tehran, 2024). The majority of teachers stated that ice breaking is used to reduce student boredom, rebuild focus, and prepare students psychologically so that they are more ready to receive learning material. One teacher said, “Ice breaking itu penting supaya siswa tidak tegang dan lebih siap belajar. Kalau suasana sudah cair, materi lebih mudah masuk.” This view shows that teachers do not interpret ice breaking as merely an entertainment activity, but as part of classroom management aimed at maintaining the effectiveness of learning (Adi F. Mahmud, 2023; Fitria, 2023; Khoirunnisaa, 2024).

Regarding the timing, teachers revealed that ice breaking can be done flexibly according to the classroom conditions. Ice breaking is generally done at the beginning of the lesson to build a positive atmosphere, in the middle of the lesson when students' concentration begins to decline, or at the end of the lesson before class ends (Adi F. Mahmud, 2023; Fitria, 2023). The forms of ice breaking used also vary, ranging from simple activities such as body movements, clapping, and light questions, to games and short quizzes. One teacher explained, “Biasanya saya pakai ice breaking di tengah pelajaran kalau lihat siswa sudah mulai tidak fokus. Cukup sebentar saja, tapi efeknya lumayan.” This shows that teachers adjust the use of ice breaking to the needs and dynamics of the class (Khoirunnisaa, 2024; Shavoun, Adeli and Tehran, 2024).

However, this study found differences in teachers' practices and perceptions of the effectiveness of icebreakers. Some teachers admitted to regularly using icebreakers because they felt they had a positive impact on the atmosphere and student participation

(Fitria, 2023; Shavoun, Adeli and Tehran, 2024; Ynot and Senior, 2024). However, there were also teachers who rarely used them due to time constraints or concerns that icebreakers would reduce the time available for delivering material. One teacher stated, “Kadang saya tidak pakai ice breaking karena takut waktunya habis dan materi tidak selesai.” These differences in opinion show that the use of ice breakers is greatly influenced by each teacher's teaching style, experience, and pedagogical priorities. These findings indicate the need for a more uniform understanding of the function of ice breakers as part of a learning strategy, rather than as an additional activity separate from the learning objectives (Fitria, 2023; Kreijkes and Greatorex, 2024).

### **3. The Contribution of Ice Breaking to Learning Motivation**

The results of the study show that ice breaking contributes significantly to increasing students' enthusiasm for learning. Classroom observations and student responses indicate that ice breaking helps shift the atmosphere from a passive or bored state to a more relaxed and enjoyable one (Adi F. Mahmud, 2023; Fitria, 2023; Mawardi, Ibnu Hajar, Helmiyadi, 2024; Rahma and Abduh, 2024). When students' emotional state is more positive, their readiness to learn increases and they are more open to the material being presented. Ice breaking serves as an initial trigger that arouses energy and attention, so that students show greater enthusiasm in following further learning (Gunawan *et al.*, 2023; Kurdi, Soran Mustafa, 2023).

In addition to increasing enthusiasm, ice breaking also strengthens student engagement in the learning process (Rahma and Abduh, 2024; Shavoun, Adeli and Tehran, 2024). Activities that involve movement, interaction, or games encourage active participation without feeling pressured. Students become more courageous in expressing their opinions, answering questions, and engaging in discussions. This condition is in line with the principle of learning motivation, which emphasizes the importance of a sense of security, comfort, and active involvement as prerequisites for intrinsic motivation (Zajda, 2021; Behavior, Fishbach and Woolley, 2022; Clanton Harpine, 2024). Thus, ice breaking not only has an impact on the emotional aspect but also strengthens students' cognitive and social involvement.

### **4. Factors Affecting the Effectiveness and Limitations of Ice Breaking**

The effectiveness of ice breaking is influenced by the teacher's readiness in designing and implementing it (Behavior, Fishbach and Woolley, 2022; Adi F. Mahmud, 2023). Teachers who understand the pedagogical objectives of ice breaking tend to choose activities that are relevant to the classroom conditions and learning objectives. Conversely, limited readiness and confidence can cause teachers to use ice breaking only to a limited extent. The type of ice breaking also has an effect; activities that are simple, contextual, and directly involve students are more easily accepted and have a positive impact compared to activities that are too complex or less suited to the characteristics of the students (Becker, 2021; Dzemydienė, Turskienė and Šileikienė, 2023).

Factors such as duration, classroom conditions, and supporting media also determine the success of icebreakers. Icebreakers that are too long have the potential to disrupt the allocation of learning time, while those that are too short and unfocused can lose their pedagogical impact (Nyboer, Winters and Faragallah, 2024; Shavoun, Adeli and Tehran, 2024; Tehran, Parizad and Taheri, 2025). Findings show that the ideal duration is between three and five minutes, adjusted to the dynamics of the class. In addition, heterogeneous classroom conditions and the availability of media, both conventional and digital influence the choice and effectiveness of activities (Matzavela

and Alepis, 2021; Purba, 2021; Yan and Li, 2023). Other constraints include limited variety of ideas and concerns about time management. This confirms that ice breaking will be effective if it is consciously planned as part of a learning strategy, rather than just a spontaneous activity.

### Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the use of ice breaking in learning is perceived positively by teachers and students. Ice breaking is seen as capable of creating a more conducive classroom atmosphere, increasing focus, and encouraging active student involvement during the learning process. Teachers interpret ice breaking as part of a classroom management strategy that helps maintain student readiness to learn, while students feel its benefits in increasing their enthusiasm and comfort in learning. These findings indicate that icebreakers contribute to supporting learning motivation when applied proportionally and in accordance with classroom conditions.

### Suggestion

Based on the research findings, the use of icebreakers in learning needs to be understood as an integral part of the learning process, not just a side activity. The variety of icebreaker forms, adjustments to duration, and teacher readiness in implementing them are important factors that influence their effectiveness. The use of ice breaking that is consciously and contextually designed has the potential to strengthen a positive learning atmosphere and support the sustainability of student learning motivation in daily learning activities.

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