TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES ON THE USE OF ICE BREAKING IN ENGLISH LEARNING PROCESS AT MTSN GOWA

Luthfia Zahra[1]
Multazam Abubakar[2]
Nur Aliyah Nur[3]

[123]Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar
E-mail: luthfia.azzahra10@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate teachers' experiences in using ice-breaking strategies in English language classrooms at MTsN Gowa, focusing on how teachers interpreted and implemented ice-breaking activities as part of their daily teaching practice and how these experiences contributed to student engagement. A qualitative narrative approach was employed, using non-participant classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with two selected English teachers. The observation checklist was designed to identify the presence and use of ice-breaking activities in English learning, while interviews provided deeper insights into teachers' experiences. Data were analyzed thematically through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification to ensure conceptual coherence. The findings indicate that teachers perceive ice-breaking as an important tool to reduce tension, increase motivation, and create a supportive classroom atmosphere. Vocabulary games and humor encouraged students to be more active, confident, and engaged, while also supporting vocabulary learning and classroom interaction. These experiences reflected teachers' cognition, as their beliefs, knowledge, and reflections shaped how ice-breaking was applied in classroom practice. The study concludes that understanding teachers' experiences in using ice-breaking can offer practical insights for developing student engagement strategies, benefiting teachers by highlighting the value of experience-based practices in improving classroom interaction, enhancing teaching effectiveness, and supporting ongoing professional growth.

Keywords: Teachers' experiences, Ice-breaking activities, English language Teaching, Student engagement, Teacher cognition.

1) INTRODUCTION

English is a key global language that plays an important role in communication, education, and career development. As English skills become more valuable, teachers need effective methods to improve students' learning experiences. Srinivas (2019) states that English proficiency helps students join global conversations, use educational

materials, and increase job opportunities. However, learning English as a foreign language can be difficult, especially in non-English-speaking areas where students often face low motivation, anxiety, and limited participation. To overcome these issues, teachers use different strategies to build a positive and engaging classroom setting. One effective strategy is using ice-breaking activities, which are now widely used because they help students interact more easily, reduce anxiety, and create a more positive classroom environment.

Ice-breaking activities are interactive tools that help students begin lessons with more ease and confidence. These activities include games, storytelling, and structured tasks that encourage teamwork and communication. According to Khoirunnisaa et al. (2024), ice-breaking activities help create a positive learning environment, which makes students more open to learning English. Similarly, Rezki et al. (2022) point out that these activities help students build stronger relationships with their peers, leading to better participation and involvement in class. Other studies also show that ice-breaking techniques can spark creativity, support vocabulary learning, and increase students' learning motivation. Although ice-breaking activities offer many benefits, teachers have different views on how they should be used in English classrooms. Some see them as important tools for increasing student engagement, while others think that these activities take time away from the main purpose of learning. Mardiani (2024) highlights several challenges teachers face when using ice-breaking methods, such as large class sizes, limited materials, and keeping students interested. Khoirunnisaa et al. (2024) also explain that these activities need to be well planned and adapted to the characteristics of each class so that they can be implemented effectively.

This research focuses on teachers' experiences in the use of ice-breaking in the English learning process, specifically involving two English teachers who teach at grade VIII and IX. Using a qualitative approach, the study aims to understand how teachers apply ice-breaking activities and how these contribute to increasing students' motivation and classroom interaction. Based on this focus, the research question addressed is: How do teachers experience the use of ice-breaking in English learning process at MTsN Gowa?

Several previous studies have examined teachers' views and practices in using ice-breaking strategies. Yani (2024) found that ice-breaking improved vocabulary and student engagement, though some students remained passive. Sari et al. (2024) showed that game-based ice-breaking enhanced teamwork and classroom interaction, but focused more on outcomes than teacher reflections. Khoirunnisaa et al. (2024) highlighted challenges and strategies in international EFL classrooms, emphasizing creativity and flexibility. Agusriana (2021) revealed that teachers' perceptions shaped their choice of ice-breaking methods, often preferring games to increase enthusiasm. Dhuhria (2021) demonstrated that songs, jokes, and short games improved classroom atmosphere and student focus, though the study did not explore teachers' reflections.

Although these studies provide useful insights, many concentrate on classroom outcomes or general perceptions. The current study fills this gap by exploring teachers' experiences more deeply, focusing on how they describe, evaluate, and reflect on their use of ice-breaking strategies in English learning.

In this study, the researcher adopted the Teacher Cognition framework proposed by Borg (2003), which explores how teachers' beliefs, prior experiences, and knowledge inform their classroom practices and professional decision-making. This perspective is relevant for understanding how and why teachers choose to incorporate ice-breaking techniques, what meanings they attach to those choices, and how these decisions reflect their pedagogical values. The objective of this research was to investigate teachers' experiences in the use of ice-breaking in the English learning process at MTsN Gowa. The study is significant in providing practical insights for teachers to improve classroom interaction, enhance teaching effectiveness, and support professional growth through experience-based practices. Within this context, the Teacher Cognition framework was applied to analyze teachers' experiences of ice-breaking, which were categorized into five aspects as outlined in the conceptual framework.

2) METHODS

Type and Location of Research

A narrative qualitative research approach was used to explore teachers' experiences and reflections on using ice-breaking strategies in English instruction. Narrative inquiry was applied as a method for understanding human experiences by gathering personal stories, interactions, and the meanings constructed from them (Creswell, 2013). This approach focused on collecting detailed narratives from teachers to understand how they experienced ice-breaking in their classrooms. The research was conducted at MTsN Gowa, a state Islamic secondary school located on Malino Street No. 7, Balang-Balang, Bontomarannu Sub-district, Gowa District, South Sulawesi.

Research Design

A narrative qualitative research design was employed to explore teachers' experiences and reflections on using ice-breaking strategies in English instruction. Narrative inquiry was chosen because it allowed the collection of personal stories and interactions, providing deeper insights into teachers' thinking and instructional practices (Creswell, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This design emphasized individual accounts rather than broad patterns, enabling the study to capture teachers' identities, beliefs, and perspectives through their own narratives.

Participants

The participants consisted of two English teachers at MTsN Gowa, a state Islamic secondary school located in Gowa District, South Sulawesi. One teacher was responsible for Grade VIII and the other for Grade IX. These teachers were purposively selected because they were directly involved in teaching English and had firsthand experience in implementing ice-breaking activities.

Their perspectives were considered representative of real classroom practices and challenges in engaging students.

Instruments

a. Observation

A structured observation checklist was developed to identify the presence and use of ice- breaking activities in English classrooms. The checklist was adapted from Creswell's (2012) protocol and included indicators such as type and timing of activity, student engagement, classroom atmosphere, and teacher facilitation style. Observations were conducted during English lessons, and reflective field notes were added to capture contextual nuances.

b. Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the two teachers to explore their knowledge, experiences, advantages, and challenges in using ice-breaking strategies. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed for analysis. The questions were adapted from Creswell's (2012) semi-structured interview model and organized into five thematic areas: teachers understanding, procedures, advantages, challenges, and reflections.

c. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Observations were conducted during English lessons to capture how ice-breaking strategies were applied in real classroom settings, while interviews were carried out to explore teachers' reflections, advantages, and challenges in using these strategies. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed for analysis.

The data were analyzed using the framework of Miles et al. (2014). In the first stage, interview transcripts and observation notes were condensed by selecting, simplifying, and coding the most relevant information. In the second stage, the refined data were displayed in thematic matrices and coding charts to highlight recurring patterns and relationships. In the final stage, conclusions were drawn and verified by identifying themes between observation and interview data, and conducting member checking with participants to ensure accuracy and

credibility. This process ensured that the findings were valid, trustworthy, and deeply rooted in the participants lived experiences.

3) RESULTS

Teacher Understanding of Ice-Breaking

This section presents how Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 understood the concept and purpose of ice-breaking in the classroom.

Teacher 1 stated,

> "Ice breaking really helps to lighten the mood of learning… it's really fun."

Teacher 2 also stated,

> "Ice breaking has functions such as increasing vocabulary… so that before learning begins, children are not too bored."

This understanding was confirmed in classroom observations. Teacher 1 used storytelling in the middle of the lesson, which reduced tension and motivated students. Teacher 2 applied a vocabulary game at the beginning of the lesson, creating an energetic atmosphere and helping students refocus after the break.

Procedures of Ice-Breaking Implementation

This section presents how Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 implemented ice-breaking activities in the classroom, including the timing, preparation, and media used.

Teacher 1 explained,

> "I decide everything depending on the situation... whether it's necessary at the beginning of the lesson or not, or whether it's necessary at the end. If the kids start to get bored, we provide an icebreaker."

Teacher 2 also added,

> "For example, if it's in YouTube format, we first show examples of icebreakers... then practice them directly."

This flexible and responsive approach was visible in classroom observations. Teacher 1 placed storytelling in the middle of the lesson when students seemed distracted, using humour

and gestures to regain their focus, and aligning the activity with the recount text by sharing a short personal story about past experience. Teacher 2 placed in the beginning with a vocabulary game after the break session to energize the class.

Advantages of Implementing Ice-Breaking

This section presents the perceived benefits of using ice-breaking activities in English language teaching, as described by Teacher 1 and Teacher 2.

Teacher 1 stated,

> "There are so many benefits. Because the kids really enjoy it. Sometimes we don't even give them one, but they already ask for an icebreaker... But we hope that in the learning process, icebreakers aren't required to be given repeatedly, just once or twice. No more, because that would be time-consuming and take away from our time for the material."

Teacher 2 stated,

> "The benefits are, firstly, perhaps as a refresher before the learning process and also to increase students' enthusiasm for learning. For teachers, the benefits of icebreakers are to reduce fatigue in teaching, increase motivation, and encourage continued learning."

These advantages were also visible in classroom observations, where students showed increased confidence, engagement, and readiness to participate in the learning process.

Challenges in Implementing Ice breaking

This section presents the challenges faced by Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 in implementing ice- breaking activities during English language teaching.

Teacher 1 explained,

> "It depends on the instructions we give. Because, if the instructions are clear, then what they do will also be clear. If the instructions aren't good from the start, the kids will be confused... So, when the icebreaker or the games start, they already understand and there's no mistake."

Teacher 2 stated,

> "As for the classroom atmosphere, it really depends on the situation and conditions of the class... For icebreakers, I usually need 15 to 20 minutes. However, the rules... only 10 to 15 minutes, no more... so in the middle of the lesson, there are some materials that I have to trim... That's the downside of icebreakers, perhaps in terms of time management."

These challenges were also observed in practice. Teacher 1's storytelling activity required clear instructions to ensure students could follow smoothly, while Teacher 2's vocabulary game sometimes extended beyond the allocated time, forcing adjustments to lesson content.

Teachers' Reflections on Ice-Breaking

This section presents how Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 reflected on ice-breaking activities in their teaching practice.

Teacher 1 stated,

> "It's already included in the lesson plan... Because five years ago, the first person who taught us was from Australia... They taught interactive teaching methods, one of which required icebreakers."

Teacher 2 shared,

> "In the Ministry of Religious Affairs... we have been using ice breakers since 2019... But if we use ice breakers, it must be included in the teaching module... The point is how the reflection will be seen from the results of the ice breakers, whether or not they were successful in improving the learning process."

These reflections were also observed in practice. Teacher 1's storytelling activity was integrated into the lesson plan as part of interactive teaching, while Teacher 2's vocabulary-based ice-breaking was aligned with the teaching module and used to evaluate student motivation and focus during lessons.

4) DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings based on five main themes. Each theme is explained using the Teacher Cognition theory by Borg (2003), and compared with previous studies to see what is similar or different. The discussion also shows what these findings mean for teaching English in the classroom.

Teacher Understanding of Ice-Breaking

The findings show that teachers perceived ice-breaking as a useful and flexible strategy to help students feel comfortable and ready to learn. They did not treat it as optional, but as part of their regular teaching plan. Ice-breaking was used to reduce tension, make the classroom more enjoyable, and prepare students for the lesson. Teachers also used it to introduce new vocabulary and sustain student interest, especially when learners seemed tired or distracted. This indicates that teachers perceived ice-breaking not only as a relational tool to foster comfort, but also as an instructional strategy that directly supported learning objectives.

This understanding is consistent with Kurdi and Meena (2023), who found that experienced teachers used ice-breaking to build relationships and help students focus. It also connects with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1985), which explains that students learn better when they feel relaxed and confident. By using ice-breaking, teachers lowered emotional barriers so students could participate more actively and absorb material more effectively.

These findings support Borg's (2003) Teacher Cognition framework, which explains that teachers' beliefs, past experiences, and knowledge influence how they teach and make decisions. In this study, teachers chose to use ice-breaking because they believed it helped students learn better and enjoy the process. Their choices show that teaching is not just about following a plan, but about thinking carefully and adjusting based on student needs.

Procedures of Ice-Breaking Implementation

The findings show that teachers implemented ice-breaking activities in a flexible and responsive way, adjusting timing, preparation, and media based on classroom conditions. Ice-

breaking was placed at the beginning or middle of lessons depending on student energy and focus. Teachers observed student behavior and mood to decide when the activity was most needed, aiming to re-engage learners and create a more relaxed environment. In preparing activities, they selected content that was enjoyable and relevant, often using digital platforms such as YouTube or AI tools to find engaging materials. Clear instructions were emphasized to ensure students understood the activity and could participate effectively.

These practices are consistent with Mawardi et al. (2024), who found that experienced teachers developed systematic procedures for ice-breaking, including selecting activities based on student needs, timing them strategically, and modifying them in response to classroom dynamics. Similarly, Arifin (2022) highlighted how teachers in flexible teaching environments used ice-breaking to manage transitions and sustain student attention.

This aligns with Borg's (2003) Teacher Cognition framework, which explains that teachers' classroom practices are shaped by their beliefs, prior experiences, and professional knowledge. In this case, the way teachers planned and adjusted ice-breaking activities showed how their understanding of student engagement and classroom flow informed their instructional decisions.

Advantages of Implementing Ice-Breaking

The findings show that teachers perceived ice-breaking as a valuable strategy to improve both student engagement and classroom atmosphere. Students often requested ice-breaking activities, indicating their enjoyment and emotional connection to the practice. Ice-breaking helped reduce boredom, especially during long English lessons, and re-energized students through interactive movement and language-based games. Teachers observed visible changes in student behavior such as increased participation and enthusiasm after ice-breaking was applied. Teachers themselves benefited from renewed motivation and smoother lesson delivery.

These findings are supported by Rahmawati et al. (2023) and Fitria (2023), who found that ice-breaking enhanced student focus, improved learning outcomes, and created a more

interactive classroom environment. Activities such as clapping, singing, or vocabulary games helped students stay mentally alert and emotionally ready to learn.

This understanding reflects Borg's (2003) Teacher Cognition framework, which explains that teachers' beliefs and experiences shape classroom decisions. In this study, teachers used ice- breaking not only to refresh the mood but also to support learning and motivation. Their decisions were based on observing student reactions and adjusting their approach accordingly.

Challenges in Implementing Ice breaking

The findings reveal two main challenges: giving clear instructions and managing time. Teachers emphasized that if instructions were not delivered clearly, students became confused during the activity. To prevent this, they explained steps carefully, often using English to help students become familiar with the language. Another challenge was time management. Ice-breaking sometimes took longer than expected, forcing teachers to reduce or skip parts of the lesson.

These challenges are in line with Kurniawati et al. (2021), who stated that limited instructional time and curriculum demand often restricted the use of ice-breaking activities. Teachers also needed to consider classroom diversity and student readiness when selecting appropriate activities.

These findings align with Borg's (2003) Teacher Cognition framework, which highlights how teachers' beliefs and knowledge shape instructional decisions. In this study, teachers' awareness of classroom dynamics and their efforts to manage both clear instruction and time reflected thoughtful decision-making.

Teachers' Reflections on Ice-Breaking

The findings show that teachers reflected actively on how ice-breaking was integrated and how it affected their teaching. Teachers viewed ice-breaking as more than just a motivational tool; it was also seen as a way to manage classroom behavior, support vocabulary development, and create a more student-centered environment. However, they also recognized its limitations, particularly in terms of time management and possible overuse.

This study aligns with Schön's (1983) concept of "reflection-in-action," were teachers evaluate and adjust strategies during teaching. It also connects with Clandinin and Connelly (2000), who explained that teachers build professional understanding through reflection. In this study, teachers reflected not only on the outcomes of ice-breaking but also on how it fit into broader lesson plans.

These reflective practices align with Borg's (2003) Teacher Cognition framework, which explains that teachers' beliefs and experiences influence classroom decisions. Teachers reflected on how well ice-breaking worked and adjusted its use based on the situation. Their reflections were based on real classroom experiences, showing that professional growth happens through ongoing observation, evaluation, and adjustment.

5) CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, ice-breaking activities had a meaningful impact on teaching and learning in English classrooms at MTsN Gowa. Teachers perceived ice-breaking as a strategy to reduce tension, boost student motivation, and create a more positive classroom environment. They implemented it flexibly, often at the beginning or middle of lessons, and selected activities according to classroom conditions. Ice-breaking helped students become more active, confident, and focused, while also supporting vocabulary learning and improving classroom interaction. Despite these benefits, teachers faced challenges such as limited time and the need to provide clear instructions. Nevertheless, they continued to reflect on their practice and made adjustments to improve the effectiveness of ice-breaking. Overall, this study shows that teachers viewed ice-breaking not merely as a warm-up, but as a planned and reflective strategy that supported both emotional readiness and instructional goals in English language teaching.

Besides of these findings, several implications and recommendations can be drawn. Teachers are encouraged to use ice-breaking activities more intentionally, with clear goals and proper timing to support learning. Schools and institutions should provide support through training and resources, enabling teachers to develop creative and effective ice-breaking strategies. Future studies could explore ice-breaking in different contexts, such as other

subjects or school levels, and examine how teacher reflection influences teaching development. Ice-breaking activities should also gain recognition as part of structured lesson planning, not only as entertainment, but as tools to improve student engagement and learning outcomes.

REFERENCES

Agusriana, C. F. (2021). Teachers' perception on the use of ice breaking strategy in teaching and learning process (Skripsi thesis). UIN Ar-Raniry.

Arifin, B. S. (2022). Types of perception in education: Positive and negative perspectives. Journal of Educational Psychology, 14(2), 112-126.

Borg, S. (2003). Teacher cognition in language teaching: A review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe, and do. Language Teaching, 36(2), 81–109.

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research. Jossey-Bass.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Dhuhria, A. R. (2021). Exploring ice breaker usage in English language classroom (Skripsi thesis). UIN Ar-Raniry.

Fitria, T. N. (2023). Breaking the ice in the classroom: Using ice-breaking in the teaching and learning process. Borneo Journal of English Language Education, 5(1).

Khoirunnisaa, R., et al. (2024). Ice-breaking techniques in English language learning: Pedagogical implications. International Journal of English Pedagogy, 8(3), 221-235.

Krashen, S. D. (1985). Principles and practice in second language acquisition. Pergamon Press. Kurdi, S., & Meena, R. (2023). The students' perception towards the use of icebreakers, warmers, and energizers in EFL classrooms: A tertiary study. Arab World English Journal (AWEJ), 14(4), 233-251.

Kurniawati, D., Ramadhani, R., & Suhendi, E. (2021). Investigating teacher experience in adapting instructional strategies: Evidence from Indonesian schools. Educational Horizon, 39(2), 67–78

Mardiani, S. (2024). Challenges in implementing ice-breaking strategies in large classroom settings. Educational Strategies Review, 10(1), 89-105.

Mawardi, M., Hajar, I., Helmiyadi, H., & Muntazar, T. (2024). Students' perceptions on the implementation of ice breaking in English language learning. Jurnal Pendidikan Bumi Persada, 3(2), 115–124.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Rahmawati, M., Rakhman, P. A., & Rokmanah, S. (2023). Implementasi dan manfaat ice breaking dalam meningkatkan minat dan hasil belajar peserta didik SDN Blok I Cilegon. Trihayu: Jurnal Pendidikan Ke-SD-an, 10(1), 66–74.

Rezki, F., et al. (2022). Ice-breaking activities and their impact on student motivation in ESL classrooms. Asian Journal of Language Teaching, 15(4), 312-328.

Sari, K. C., Rusfandi, R., & Herawati, S. (2024). Exploring the use of game-based ice-breaking activities by English teachers during the teaching and learning process. Journal of English Language and Education, 9(6). https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v9i6.584

Schön, D. A. (1983). The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action. Basic Books. Srinivas, P. (2019). The importance of English Language proficiency in global education. Global Linguistics Review, 6(1), 55-70.

Yani, D. S. (2024). Teachers' experiences in implementing ice breaking in EFL class (Undergraduate thesis). UIN K. H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan.