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THE USE OF ICE-BREAKING TO OVERCOME STUDENTS' SPEAKING ANXIETY

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Abstract: Students usually have speaking anxiety during speaking English so that several ways are recommended to reduce it. Teachers who deal with student speaking anxiety may implement ice-breaking during teaching and learning process which can be done at pre-, whilst, or post-activity. This study was conducted to find out how teachers use ice breaking and students' perceptions about ice breaking in overcoming speaking anxiety. This research explores whether or not ice-breaking activities can alleviate speaking anxiety among students. A qualitative method with a case study design was employed. The study involved one English teacher and 29 students from a vocational high school in Ciamis. Data was collected through interviews and closed-ended questionnaires. The results indicate that ice-breaking activities can reduce speaking anxiety among students during the learning process, but they do not significantly enhance students' public speaking skills or confidence. It can be concluded that while ice-breaking has a positive impact on classroom dynamics, it may not fully address broader challenges related to public speaking and self-assurance.

Keywords: ice breaking; speaking anxiety; vocational school

INTRODUCTION

Speaking anxiety is a prevalent issue among students, particularly in vocational high schools. This type of anxiety often emerges in English language classrooms and significantly affects students' ability to communicate effectively. Romadhon et al. (2023) emphasize that factors such as regional dialects, limited exposure to English, and fear of negative evaluation from peers and teachers contribute to students' language anxiety, especially in coastal areas of northern Java. These psychological barriers are compounded by students' fear of making mistakes and discomfort when speaking in front of others, which makes it difficult for them to apply grammatical rules and develop speaking fluency.

The complexity of speaking as a skill further contributes to students' anxiety. Goh & Burns

(2012) argue that speaking involves multiple cognitive and emotional processes, making it one of the most challenging aspects of English language learning. Anxiety, characterized by nervousness, tenseness, and fear, is often triggered by the possibility of making pronunciation errors or being humiliated in front of peers Bashori et al. (2021, as cited in Romadhon et al., 2023). This is especially concerning in vocational schools, where oral communication skills are essential for future employment.

To address this problem, educators have explored various pedagogical strategies, including the use of ice-breaking activities. Ice-breaking is an instructional technique aimed at reducing tension and creating a supportive classroom environment. Mahmud et al. (2023) argue that ice-breaking activities can enhance motivation and make the learning experience more enjoyable, while Rahmayanti et al. (2019) highlight their benefits in boosting student engagement and lowering anxiety. These activities help students feel more comfortable and relaxed; consequently it reduces psychological barriers to learning, especially when it comes to speaking tasks.

The concept of ice-breaking is rooted in the idea of "breaking the ice" — eliminating the rigid and tense atmosphere that often pervades classrooms. Astuti et al. 2020, as cited in Kasimova (2022) explain that the term "ice breaker" symbolizes overcoming cold and uncomfortable classroom dynamics. According to Al Ghifarah & Pusparini (2023), these activities significantly boost enthusiasm and promote interaction. They may include games, songs, team-building exercises, or even humorous storytelling, with the primary purpose of encouraging communication and rapport among students. Fitria (2023) identifies nine types of ice-breaking activities: yells, applause, songs, body motions, humor, games, stories/fairy tales, magic, and audio-visuals. In vocational high schools, these activities can be particularly effective in addressing students' fear of speaking English. They not only reduce anxiety but also foster a sense of community and mutual support among learners.

Speaking anxiety in the context of language learning is not a new phenomenon. Noviyanti (2022) find that students experience anxiety due to limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, fear of mistakes, and shyness. Tran (2022) notes that both internal factors (such as self-doubt) and external ones (such as teacher attitudes and classroom settings) contribute to speaking anxiety. Furthermore, Hz (2022) reports on personality traits, especially instinctive types that are linked with higher public speaking anxiety.

In the context of vocational education, the pressure is even more intense. These institutions are designed to equip students with practical and job-related skills (Sherly et al., 2022) and effective communication in English as it is a critical part of employability. However, students often face additional challenges such as lack of tailored learning materials, insufficient teacher preparation, and classroom environments that may not be conducive to speaking practice (Haryudin et al., 2020). Asysyfa et al. (2019) found that vocational students commonly experience anxiety due to fear of making mistakes, peer ridicule, and difficulties in word choice and pronunciation.

Despite numerous studies that investigate students' perceptions of ice-breaking activities in increasing engagement and motivation (Hartini et al., 2025; Reffalleo et al., 2024; Khoirunnisaa et al., 2024; Leba & Ardhy, 2024; Soviana et al., 2024), there is a notable gap in research addressing students' perceptions of ice-breaking activities, specifically as a strategy to overcome speaking anxiety. Most studies have focused on the benefits of ice-breaking for classroom engagement and enjoyment, not on its psychological impact on speaking-related anxiety. Therefore, the current study aims to investigate how teachers use ice-breaking activities in English classes and how students perceive these activities in terms of helping them overcome speaking anxiety. By understanding students' perceptions, this research hopes to contribute to the development of effective classroom strategies that support learners emotionally and academically in vocational high school settings.

METHODS

This study utilizes a qualitative research methodology, employing a case study design to gather in-depth insights into the topic. The goal of qualitative research is to develop a comprehensive understanding of human behaviour, experiences, and perceptions (Creswell, 2018). To collect and analyse data, the researcher also used a case study research design. A case study is an intensive and data-driven examination of a specific, well-defined system—such as an event, process, or group of individuals—which provides a rich and nuanced understanding of the subject matter (Creswell, 2018). The case study approach enables a detailed exploration of the issue within its real-life context, offering a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study. The research participants consisted of a sample of one vocational high school class, comprising 29 students and one English teacher. The researcher employed a purposeful sampling strategy to select the participants for the case study. Purposive sampling, also known as judgment sampling, is a non-random method where participants are chosen based on specific qualities relevant to the research, without adhering to a predefined theory or set number of participants. Purposeful sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to intentionally select individuals and sites for study to gain a deeper understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon (Creswell, 2018). The researchers utilized this strategy to deliberately choose both male and female students based on their relevance to the research. This approach allowed the researchers to identify and recruit individuals who possessed the necessary characteristics, experiences, or knowledge to provide valuable insights into the phenomenon being studied.

The researcher also employed a combination of two data analysis techniques to examine the data collected from the research instruments. These methods included content analysis and percentage calculation. Content analysis was a tool to analyze the results of the semi structured interview. Content analysis is a method that allows researchers to investigate human behavior indirectly by examining the communication patterns and messages exchanged between individuals (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). The researcher meticulously transcribed the interview recordings into written form, followed by a thorough analysis of each question and its corresponding response. This meticulous process enabled the researcher to extract valuable insights and answer the research question by examining the participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

After that, the closed-ended questionnaire in the form of Guttman Scalling (Guttman, 2017) was analyzed using percentage calculations. The researcher organized the data by presenting each question and its corresponding answer in a table format. The data was further analyzed using the formula suggested by (Hatch &Lazaraton, 1991), which enabled the researcher to effectively quantify and interpret the findings as given in the following formula:

$$\text{Participants} = \frac{Number\ of\ frequency}{Total} \text{x } 100\%$$

The computation's outcome was described and given the codes "Yes" and "No". To respond to the research topic, the researcher could finally categorize, translate, interpret, and draw conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher gained the data for the first research question by the process of a semi-structured interview with an English teacher at Vocational High School in Kawali, Ciamis. The researcher analyzed the data from a semi-structured interview that consisted 10 questions in total which focused on how teachers use ice breaking to overcome students' speaking anxiety. A closed-ended questionnaire was administered by researchers via Google Form in order to gather data for the second research question. Ten statements on the questionnaire use the options "Yes" and "No", using Guttman scale questionnaire. This format facilitates in figuring out a respondent's beliefs as well as their degree of conviction. To categorize the data from the analytical questionnaire, the researchers included each question in a table. The frequency and proportion of each question were

determined by the researcher after gathering student responses and organizing them into tables. The researcher analyzed a questionnaire of students' perception towards ice breaking in overcoming speaking anxiety which will be discussed in the following sections:

How do teachers use ice-breaking to overcome students' speaking anxiety?

The researcher conducted interviews to gather insights that would help answer the first research question, which focused on how teachers use ice-breaking to overcome students' speaking anxiety. The interview portion of the study took place on May 16, 2024. The researcher analyzed the data from a semi-structured interview that consist 10 questions in total which focused on how teacher use ice breaking to overcoming students' speaking anxiety.

Table 1. How teacher use ice breaking to overcoming students' speaking anxiety

Interviewer	Do you use ice-breaking activities to help reduce students' speaking anxiety?
Interviewee	Yes, I do.
Interviewer	If yes, please describe some of the ice-breaking activities you use.
Interviewee	Simple ice breaking. But, it is interesting.
Interviewer	In what situations do you implement ice breaking strategies in class? How often is it applied?
Interviewee	Usually in the afternoon of the last class. Twice in a month.
Interviewer	How do you decide to choose ice-breaking activities in your classroom?
Interviewee	I chose the interesting ice breaking.
Interviewer	In your experience, how effective have these ice-breaking activities been in reducing students' speaking anxiety?
Interviewee	I think it's very effective for me and my students.
Interviewer	Have you noticed any specific ice-breaking activities that tend to work better for reducing speaking anxiety in your students? If so, what are they?
Interviewee	Yes, I have. Simple ice breaking like hi hello. Passive students to be active students.
Interviewer	Are there any challenges or limitations you face when implementing ice-breaking activities to overcome students' speaking anxiety?
Interviewee	Yes, they are. My students were calmer after giving ice breaking.
Interviewer	What additional strategies or resources do you think could help address students' speaking anxiety in your classroom?
Interviewee	Creating a comfortable situation and then maybe a friendly situation.
Interviewer	Do you have any additional comments or suggestions regarding students' speaking anxiety and the use of ice-breaking techniques in the classroom?
Interviewee	Yes, I do. I think, it is important to make an interesting ice breaking to overcome students speaking anxiety.
Interviewer	The most used ice-breaking is Hello hi? How do you do it in the classroom?
Interviewee	Simple ice breaking like hello and hi. The teacher said hello and the students answered hi. Usually I give a clapping (*tepukan, misalnya tepuk 1).* That's the Simple ice-breaking.

Based on the interview data from Table 1, it was seen that the teacher consistently used simple yet interesting ice-breaking activities, such as greetings "hello" and "hi" and clapping, to help reduce students' anxiety in speaking. This activity was implemented twice a month, especially in the afternoon class sessions which tended to make students more passive. The teacher chose ice-breaking that was considered interesting and created a comfortable and friendly atmosphere, which she thought was very effective in making previously passive students become more active in speaking. Although the form of challenges faced was not explained in detail, the teacher

mentioned that after being given ice-breaking, students became calmer. The selection of simple, interesting, and repetitive activities has consistently proven effective in reducing students' speaking anxiety.

Students' perceptions about ice breaking in overcoming speaking anxiety

The researcher provided a questionnaire to answer the second research question. Ten statements on the questionnaire use the options "Yes" and "No", uses Guttman scale questionnaire (Guttman, 2017). This format is facilitated in figuring out a respondent's beliefs as well as their degree of conviction. To categorize the data from the analytical questionnaire, the researchers included each question in Table 2. The frequency and proportion of each question were determined by the researcher after gathering student responses and organizing them into tables. The researcher explained a questionnaire to analyze students' perception about ice breaking in overcoming speaking anxiety.

Table 2. Students' perceptions about ice breaking in overcoming speaking anxiety

No.	Statements	Yes	No	Total
1.	I found ice breaking a new and innovative in teaching and learning to overcoming speaking anxiety.	89,7% 26	10,3% 3	100% 29
2.	I enjoy ice breaking and I found it interesting.	96,6% 28	3,4% 1	100% 29
3.	I will participate in ice breaking again if it was available.	93,1% 27	6,9% 2	100% 29
4.	Ice breaking increases learning motivation and interest on learning activity.	86,2% 25	13,8% 4	100% 29
5.	Ice breaking improves my public speaking.	31% 9	69% 20	100% 29
6.	Ice breaking stimulates my self-confidence to speak in English.	37,9 % 11	62,1% 18	100% 29
7.	I feel easy expressing myself in speaking class after ice breaking.	25% 7	75% 21	100% 29
8.	I did not feel anxious because the teacher is watching my speaking after ice breaking.	57,1% 16	42,9% 12	100% 29
9.	Ice breaking reduces anxiety in learning to speak.	89,7% 26	10,3% 3	100% 29
10.	My oral communication improves after the ice breaking.	44,8% 13	55,2% 16	100% 29

Based on the questionnaire data from Table 2, the majority of students perceived positively the use of ice-breaking in overcoming speaking anxiety. As many as 89.7% of students considered ice-breaking as a new and innovative method in learning, and 96.6% of students enjoyed and felt interested in the activity. In addition, 93.1% were willing to participate in ice-breaking again if available, indicating that this method was well received by students. Most students also stated that ice-breaking increased learning motivation (86.2%) and reduced anxiety in learning to speak (89.7%). However, although students felt more comfortable in general, only a small number felt that ice-breaking directly improved their public speaking skills (31%) or their confidence in speaking English (37.9%). This shows that although ice-breaking is effective in creating a positive atmosphere and reducing anxiety, its impact on improving speaking skills is still felt to be limited by some students. Therefore, students' perceptions of ice-breaking are very positive in the context of reducing anxiety, but it needs to be combined with other learning strategies to support more significant improvements in speaking skills.

Discussion

The previous section has elaborated the answer of the two research question from the present study. The first discussion is about how teachers use ice-breaking to overcome students' speaking anxiety. The findings indicate that teachers actively employ ice-breaking activities to overcome students' speaking anxiety. The investigation revealed a range of approaches used by teachers, including simple and engaging activities, targeted use in specific situations, and prioritization of interesting activities. The effectiveness of these strategies was perceived positively by teachers, who reported a significant reduction in students' speaking anxiety. This is the same as what Al Ghifarah & Pusparini (2023) said about icebreaking that provides boosting in the teaching and learning process. The teacher also said that ice breaking makes students more active. It also implied that teachers found that certain approaches, such as using simple greetings and shifting passive students to active roles, were particularly effective in overcoming speaking anxiety.

The teacher also used the type of ice breaking as said by Fitria (2023) namely the type of yells with a simple type using the words “hi” and hello", and the type of applause using shaking hands or clapping. However, the teacher also faced challenges, including managing noisy classrooms, but noted that ice-breaking activities could help calm students. As stated by Fitria (2023), the study suggests that establishing a comfortable classroom atmosphere and fostering positive relationships among students could be additional strategies to address speaking anxiety. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of engaging and enjoyable activities in helping students feel more at ease and confident in speaking, which can be a crucial factor in addressing speaking anxiety effectively. Based on the results of the interview, it can be concluded that the teacher did an ice-breaking to reduce students' speaking anxiety. The ice-breaking activity has a positive impact on these students. Even, simple ice-breaking can have a positive impact on teaching and learning activities carried out in the classroom.

The second discussion is about students’ perception of ice breaking in overcoming speaking anxiety. This finding shows that the use of ice-breaking by teachers strategically is able to create a positive atmosphere that supports students' courage to speak because these activities significantly boost enthusiasm, promote interaction, motivation, and enjoyment. It can be concluded that ice-breaking activities have a significant impact on students' learning experiences and attitudes towards speaking English. This is the same as research conducted by Al Ghifarah & Pusparini (2023) and Mahmud et al. (2023) about students having very positive perceptions of ice-breaking activities. In terms of reducing anxiety in learning to speak, the results indicate that ice-breaking has a positive impact, as the majority of students agreed that it reduces anxiety in learning to speak. The majority of students found ice-breaking to be a new and innovative approach in teaching and learning to overcome speaking anxiety, and they enjoyed it and found it interesting.

Additionally, students expressed a strong commitment to participate in ice-breaking activities again and believed that it increased their learning motivation and interest. This is in line with what were said in the study conducted by Rahmayanti et al. (2019). However, the results also indicate that ice breaking does not have a significant impact on students' public speaking skills, as the majority of students disagreed that it improves their public speaking abilities. Furthermore, the results indicate that ice-breaking activities do not significantly enhance students’ self-confidence in speaking English, as the majority of students disagreed that it boosts their self-assurance. Additionally, ice-breaking activities do not significantly improve students’ oral communication skills, as most students disagreed that it enhances their verbal abilities. This aligns with the findings reported by Hz (2022) regarding the negative impact of speaking anxiety on oral performance and self-confidence. Overall, the results from the questionnaires suggest that while ice-breaking activities positively affect students’ learning experiences and attitudes towards speaking English—primarily by reducing anxiety and increasing motivation—they do not substantially improve oral communication skills or self-confidence. However, the results also indicate that ice breaking does not have a significant impact on students' public speaking skills or self- confidence in speaking English.

CONCLUSION

This research explores how teacher use ice breaking to overcome students' speaking anxiety and students' perceptions of its effectiveness. The findings indicate that teacher employ a range of strategies, including engaging activities, targeted use in specific situations, and prioritization of interesting activities, which are perceived as effective in reducing students' speaking anxiety. Additionally, the teacher's ability to adjust their teaching methods to fulfill the various needs of their students was crucial in addressing the unique challenges that each student faces in overcoming their speaking anxiety.

Students, on the other hand, found ice-breaking activities to be a new and innovative approach to teaching and learning to overcome speaking anxiety, and they enjoyed and found it interesting. The results indicate that ice-breaking has a positive influence on students' learning experiences and attitudes toward speaking English, particularly in terms of reducing anxiety and increasing learning motivation. However, the results also suggest that ice-breaking does not have a significant impact on students' public speaking skills or self-confidence in speaking English. Overall, the research highlights the importance of engaging and enjoyable activities in helping students feel more at ease and confident in speaking, which can be a crucial factor in addressing speaking anxiety effectively. The findings provide valuable insights for educators seeking to create a supportive environment that fosters effective communication among students.

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