

# **The Effectiveness of Ice-Breaker Activity to Improve Students' Speaking Skill of The Third Semester Students of English Department Students of FKIP UKI Toraja**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research was aimed at investigating the effectiveness of Ice-Breaker Activity in improving students' Speaking skill and the students' perceptions towards the use of Ice-Breaker activity in improving speaking skill of the third semester students of English Department of FKIP UKI Toraja.

A quasi experimental design was employed with one class of the third semester students of English Department of FKIP UKI Toraja. Samples were selected by using cluster sampling method. The data were obtained through oral test and a questionnaire. The Speaking assessment was covering pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency and self-confidence. The findings were analyzed statistically using independent t-test procedure.

The findings showed that the value of t-test in experimental class was higher than the value of t-table (value of  $t = 3.57 > \text{value of } t \text{ table } 2.021$ ). Furthermore, the students' perception towards Ice-Breaker Activity was 95.2% students agreed that this technique could help them to increase their Speaking skill.

The statistical computation showed that Ice-Breaker Activity was not effective in improving the students' Speaking skill but the students have positive perception towards the use of Ice-Breaker Activity in improving their speaking skill. Designing the learning purpose appropriately which considers students' needs and language level may ease lecturer to use the Ice-Breaker Activity in improving students' Speaking skill. The lecturer may try to take advantage of Ice-Breaker Activity to be utilized in their classroom activities to conduct an effective and interesting learning atmosphere in the classroom.

**Key words: Ice-Breaker activity, teaching speaking, speaking skill**

## **A. Introduction**

As a skill, speaking is the most used skill by people rather than the three other skills, reading, writing and listening. The mastery of speaking skills in English is a priority for many second or foreign language learners. According to Richards (2008:19), “Learners consequently often evaluate their success in language learning as well as the effectiveness of their English course on the basis of how well they feel they have improved in their spoken proficiency.” From the statement, writer concludes that most language learners study English in order to develop proficiency in speaking. Besides, many language learners regard speaking ability as the measure of knowing a language. These learners define fluency as the ability to converse with others, much more than the ability to read, write, or comprehend oral language. They regard speaking as the most important skill they can acquire, and they assess their progress in terms of their accomplishments in spoken communication.

Thus most students are eager to converse in the new language and therefore practice is the primary importance in their learning experience. However, the students sometimes do not have sufficient commands to engage in conversation. They simply are not prepared for many kinds of speaking activities, and if pushed into it, they will make so many errors that the experience will prove to be counterproductive.

As a matter of fact, the third semester students of English Department Students of FKIP UKI Toraja, even though they have studied English from elementary up to the university level only few of them can speak English well, some of them cannot speak English well. There are many factors that make student speaking skill is low. It could be caused by some factors such as motivation, interest, intelligence, economic background, learning materials and teacher’s performance including their teaching methods or techniques

Effective instruction is an instruction that meets students' needs and characteristics and accommodates students' learning style (Border and Note in Rejeki, 2009:8). In line with Border and Note, Dryden and Vos (2000) in Holil (2009:10) states that learning will be more effective through joyful learning. An effective classroom Ice-Breaker can help teachers in creating a positive and joyful classroom atmosphere. Many teachers put too much mechanical activities and they think it is the best way to spend the time in the classroom. Few of them put the Ice-Breakers in the beginning or in the middle of the lesson to attract students' interest in learning.

The term of Ice-Breaker may not be as popular as warm-up. Ice-Breaker means "to break the ice". "The ice" may refer to many conditions. Commonly, Ice-Breaker is used in a situation where people have not met yet before, in an instruction, Ice-Breaker is used to help the clear the way for learning to occur by making the learners more comfortable by helping to bring out a conversation.

The Ice-Breakers are intended to refresh the situation, reduce tension and reload the energy and enthusiasm of the members (Yusuf, 2009:11). Considering the positive effects, some teachers apply it in their instruction. In an instruction, an Ice-Breaker is used to improve students' motivation in communicating each other, because of the problems that commonly appear in a class such as boredom, tired, low enthusiasm, and unwillingness to study.

Dixon et al (2008:15) exposes that an Ice-Breaker is an ungraded activity designed to allow the teacher to get to know the students and for them to know each other. It is clear enough that Ice-Breakers are well designed to make the students get to know with the each other, feel more relaxed and get them prepared for materials.

It is important for students to feel comfortable with each other, confident in themselves and focus on the English lesson rather than on other distractions.

Teachers are demanded to be creative, risk-taking, thoughtful, communicative and happy to work with students (Thornbury, 2006:21)

There are many names of Ice-Breakers: warm-ups, de-inhibitors, tension reducers, and feedback/disclosure loops, energizers and games (Forbes-Green, 2007:5).

Similarly, Ice-Breaker activity helps the students to interact with one another and also to exchange learning through series of games and activities and teamwork. Ice-Breaker helps to clear the way for successful exchange of ideas by making the participants more comfortable and engaging them in conversation.

Ice-Breakers are a part of creative thinking, strategic thinking, positive thinking, problem solving and learning strategies, not only in business organizations but also for students of all age groups. The reason is classroom Ice-Breaker activities help to develop various soft skills such as interpersonal skill, communication skills that include written, verbal and non-verbal and team building skills (Forbes-green, 2007:9). Ice-Breaker activities also help in creating a bond between students and teachers. Classroom Ice-Breaker activity on new class or school can help newcomers to mix with the old students and also help to make them feel comfortable and settle in.

In Ice-Breaker activity, there are two aspects contained, including definition and the way to use Ice-Breaker activity.

## **B. Review of Study**

### **1. Definition of Ice-Breaker**

Pitts (2010:11), Ice-Breakers are interactive activities that can be used in the first class to relax adult students and create an atmosphere of fun in what is usually a formal environment. Additionally, many Ice-Breakers

allow adult students to get to know each other and can enable the teacher to acquire a better understanding of the background of his-her adults students.

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to mix with the old students and also help to make them feel comfortable and settle in.

## **2. How to use Ice-Breakers**

In using Ice-Breaker, there are two aspect to focus about, including the important items to consider and the strategy of using Ice-Breaker.

### 1) Important items to consider

Laura Tillery in her article stated that there are many important items to consider when working with Ice-Breakers:

- a. Teachers need to learn what Ice-Breakers work out best according to the age group and number of people.
- b. According to the Stress and Wellness Specialists a succesful Ice-Breakers needs step-by-step instructions and then needs to be demonstrated (*Instant Ice-Breakers*). Ice-Breakers are most effective when they are thought out, practiced, and have clear instructions (“Beat the summer heat,” 1998:7).
- c. Teachers need to read their class; if something is not working the teacher can adjust or try a different approach to an Ice-Breaker.
- d. Specialists stress that a teacher should make sure the room is silent before Speaking so that they have full attention of their students. A teacher can use a noisemaker like a drum or a whistle to get the student’s attention.

### 2) Strategies of using Ice-Breakers

In using Ice-Breaker we need a strategy. Groover (2005:35) states the strategies of using Ice-Breakers as follow:

#### a) Objectives and Execution

Before teachers start any Ice-Breaker activities, they need to be aware of two things: what they are going to achieve and how they are going to achieve it.

#### b) Group Size

Teachers also need to choose activities based on the size of the group. If the teachers have a large number of people, they can have them interact with a series of leading questions, such as, “If you were a Star Wars character, which one would you be, and why?”. By giving them leading questions and having them talk to one another, the teacher forces them to talk about things other than small talk, which will let them find some common ground.

Small groups can have their Ice-Breaker with the teacher rather than having them interact independently. The teachers could just follow the questions stated previously, but with them asking rather than having them ask one another. Alternatively, the teachers can play games such as “two truths and a lie,” in which people each states two truths and one lie about them and their new coworkers try to guess which is which.

#### c) Appropriateness

Teachers should choose an Ice-Breaker strategy based on how appropriate it is for the students. The Ice-Breakers that will be used in the classroom also be consideration for the teacher to get the student’s attention.

The teacher should make sure that Ice-Breaker chosen is actually connected to the intended purposes of the Ice-Breaker. This is very important because not all kind of Ice-Breakers work for intended end.

Considering the problems and explanations above, this study focuses in researching the effectiveness of Ice-Breaker activity to improve students’ Speaking skill and to find out the students’ perceptions towards the effectiveness of Ice-Breaker activity to improve their Speaking skill.

### **C. Method**

It was a quasi-experimental research design where there were pre test, treatment and post test used in collecting and analyzing the data (Walliman, 2006:57). This study used cluster sampling method in choosing the sample.

They were divided into two groups called the experimental and control groups.

The study has conducted at the third semester students of English Department of FKIP UKI Toraja. Therefore the number of population was 32 students. The instruments were oral test and questionnaire. The oral test was organized in order to find the students' Speaking skill improvement towards the use of Ice-Breaker activity in Speaking class. It was carried out as the instrumentation to collect the data of the students' scores in pre-test and post test in both of two groups (control group and experimental group). The first oral test (pre-test) was aimed to know the students' Speaking skill before the study is conducted while the oral test in post test was aimed to find out the students' Speaking skill after the study is conducted. In addition, there were five main aspects in scoring and analyzing the students speaking skill. They were pronunciation, vocabularies, grammar, fluency and self-confidence. The use of questionnaire in order to strengthen the findings of the study and answer the second problem of the study where a set of written questions was used to get information from the students in terms of their perception on the use of Ice-Breaker activity in Speaking class (Walliman, 2006:88) It was the instrument of data collection that typed in a number of questions and the form were closed questions, simple and avoiding the personal questions which required in making a judgment about the students' perception.

Moreover, the close-ended questionnaire was used in the study in order to provide consistency of response across the students and generally easier to use and analyze related to the objectives of the study. There were 10 questions. In constructing each question in the questionnaire, it was important to determine the data that should be gathered related to the objective of the study.

#### **D. Findings and Discussion**



## **1. The Students' Improvement in Speaking**

The findings from the calculation of the study and the hypothesis testing above that the Speaking scores of the students in experimental group had a significant difference after the use of Ice-Breaker Activity in Speaking was done in compared to the control's group achievement who did not receive the Ice-Breaker Activity as on the experimental group, but received the usual treatment as the teacher uses in the class. The statement above was strengthened by the findings on the independent t-test computation.

The result means that the null hypothesis was rejected and there was significant difference between post-test means of the control and experimental groups. In other words, the students' score in experimental group was significantly different from the students' in control group after the treatment on the use of Ice-Breaker Activity which had been given. So, it could be concluded that the use of Ice-Breaker Activity in Speaking class made some improvements to the students' Speaking Skill.

However, the result showed that the students' Speaking skill was improving. Then, it can be said that Ice-Breaker was an activity that helped the students to interact with one another and also to exchange learning through series of games and activities and teamwork. Ice-Breakers are a part of creative thinking, strategic thinking, positive thinking, problem solving and learning strategies, not only in business organizations but also for students of all age groups. The reason is classroom Ice-Breaker activities help to develop various soft skills such as interpersonal skill, communication skills that include written, verbal and non-verbal and team building skills (Forbes-green, 2007:9).

The significant different mean scores between pre-test and post-test of the experimental class. Before the treatment given, the mean score of students in the experimental class was 5.7. However, after the researcher conducted

treatment to the experimental class, the mean score of the the students became 7.7. This means there was significant increasing of the students' Speaking achievement.

The significant difference also happened in the post-test result of both classes. The treatment made the mean score of both groups are significantly different. The mean score of control class was 7.2 and the mean score of experimental class was 7.7. Based on the mean score difference of both group, it could be concluded that the mean score of control class was lower than the experimental class.

The significant differences is also showed the level difference between experimental and control class. The experimental class which got the treatment showed the better score than the control group. In experimental class, 2 students got very good score and 10 students got good scores. Another side, no students got very good score, 9 students got good scores, and 3 students at the fairly level in the control group.

In conclusion, it was relatively fair to state that the use of Ice-Breaker Activity in Speaking class at the eighth grade students of vocational school can improve the students' skill in Speaking class. Further, the second purpose of this study was to identify the students' perceptions towards the use of Ice-Breaker Activity in students' Speaking achievement.

#### **A. The Students' Perception towards the use of Ice-Breaker Activity**

The questionnaire was conducted in gaining it. The questionnaire result showed that the students' performance towards the use of Ice-Breaker Activity in Speaking class was good. Almost all of them enjoy the technique. However, a few students prefer the conventional way. Finally, having followed the procedures, the result showed that the use of Ice-Breaker Activity improved students' skill in Speaking.

The finding from questionnaire showed that the students feel the improvement on their Speaking skill towards the use of Ice-Breaker Activity. The students did not feel depressed to practice a conversation on a given topic (Introducing One and Others). It seemed to be an effective way to relax the students in Speaking class atmosphere, such as in making them got creative thinking, strategic thinking, positive thinking, problem solving and learning strategies.

The students think that Ice-Breaker was helpful for Speaking and did not appear to be a test for them. It was the same as the explanation on the second chapter of the study that the Ice-Breakers was a warm-ups, de-inhibitors, tension reducers, and feedback/disclosure loops, energizers and games (Forbes-Green, 2007).

## **E. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

As has been stated on the previous chapter, this study investigated the effectiveness of Ice-Breaker Activity to improve students' skill in Speaking and identify the students' perception towards the use of Ice-Breaker Activity in teaching English.

The data gathered through pre-test and post-test was computed while data from questionnaire were analyzed based on the frequency students' answers and then were calculated and interpreted into percentages. Furthermore, this study has proven that:

1. Ice-Breaker Activity was not too effective in terms of improving students' Speaking skill. It could be seen on the means' scores on both of control and experimental groups, where the experimental group gained higher means scores (7.7) than the control group (7.2). It showed that the difference between experimental and control group only 0.5, that was the reason why the Ice-Breaker Activity was not too effective.

2. The use of Ice-Breaker Activity in Speaking obtained positive perceptions from the students. It could be seen on the result from questionnaire where the percentage of students' skill in Speaking was increasing after conducting the treatment, where 100% of the students got the improvement and 95.2% of the students wanted to hold the Ice-Breaker Activity for improving their skill in Speaking.
3. Lecturer should take advantage of Ice-Breaker Activity in teaching English specially for speaking class not only to teach but also to create and enhance students' motivation, interest and achievement. For English teacher or lecturer who teach English as a foreign language should be cognizant of the benefits of using Ice-Breaker Activity in learning English specially in Speaking class. A combination of their skills, experience and the use of Ice-Breaker Activity will definitely bring about a more effective teaching and learning.
4. Future Researchers  
For future researchers, it is suggested that this study could be a reference to conduct other research on the same field. Future researchers may use true experimental research design to know whether or not the use of Ice-Breaker Activity is effective in improving students' abilities in other skills, such as writing, reading and listening.

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