

## The Role and Advantages of Ice-Breaking Activities in Primary School English Classrooms

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### Abstract

This study investigates the implementation and impact of ice-breaking activities on student engagement and classroom atmosphere in primary school English language learning. Employing a classroom action research (CAR) approach, the study followed the spiral model of Kemmis and McTaggart, which includes four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The research was conducted with fourth-grade students at a private elementary school in South Tangerang. Data were collected over three action cycles using multiple methods, including classroom observation, open-ended interviews, instructional documentation, and a teacher's reflective journal. The findings reveal that the systematic application of ice-breaking activities at the beginning of lessons significantly enhances student participation, improves classroom interaction dynamics, and increases learning motivation. Furthermore, the study provided teachers with new insights into selecting appropriate ice-breaking formats tailored to students' characteristics and the subject matter. Based on these results, the study recommends integrating ice-breaking activities as a key component of active learning strategies within the lesson plans (RPP) for elementary-level education.

### Keywords:

Ice breaking;  
English as a Foreign  
Language (EFL);  
Primary school;  
Student engagement

## 1. Introduction

English language learning at the primary school level is an essential foundation for developing students' language competence, as it equips them with skills needed for future academic and professional development (Al Ghifarah & Pusparini, 2023). However, teaching English to young learners is not without challenges. Elementary school students tend to have limited concentration spans and may easily lose interest when learning activities are monotonous or teacher-centered (Fitria, 2023). A positive and enjoyable classroom atmosphere is therefore a crucial factor in sustaining engagement and motivation among young learners (Sumindar & Setiawan, 2024).

In practice, many English classrooms struggle to maintain such a conducive learning environment. Prolonged lectures, lack of interactive methods, and insufficient variation in teaching activities often lead to boredom and disengagement among students (Wedyawati et al., 2022, as cited in Sumindar & Setiawan, 2024). Research has shown that students experiencing boredom may display disruptive behaviors, lose focus, and show lower motivation to participate in classroom activities, all of which negatively affect the overall learning atmosphere (Damayanti, 2022; Rahma et al., 2022, as cited in Sumindar & Setiawan, 2024). These issues highlight the importance of applying innovative strategies to stimulate interest, encourage participation, and improve classroom interaction.

One approach that has received increasing attention is the use of ice-breaking activities. Ice-breaking is defined as a set of short, engaging activities designed to reduce tension, foster cooperation, and create a pleasant classroom atmosphere (Noviyanti et al., 2022; Shaleha, 2023). Previous studies

found that ice-breaking can enhance students' learning motivation, emotional involvement, and participation by transforming a rigid and passive atmosphere into an active and enjoyable one (Amelia et al., 2023; Khodijah, 2023). It also helps teachers build stronger relationships with students and maintain positive classroom dynamics (Felani, 2022). Although several studies have investigated the general benefits of ice-breaking, most focused on secondary or higher education, while systematic investigations in the context of primary school English classrooms remain limited (Rahmayanti et al., 2019; Al Ghifarah & Pusparini, 2023).

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the role and advantages of ice-breaking activities in primary school English classrooms. Specifically, it aims to analyze how the systematic integration of ice-breaking affects student engagement, classroom interaction, and learning motivation. Employing a classroom action research (CAR) approach, this study also explores how ice-breaking can be effectively incorporated into lesson plans (RPP) to support active learning. The findings are expected to provide practical guidance for teachers, enrich pedagogical practices, and contribute to the broader discourse on innovative strategies in English language teaching at the elementary level.

## 2. Method

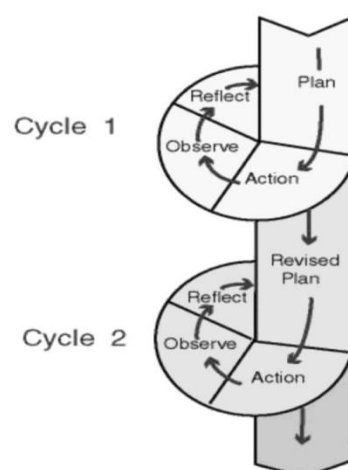
This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) method following the spiral model of Kemmis and McTaggart, which consists of four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The research was conducted over three cycles to implement and evaluate the effectiveness of ice-breaking activities in enhancing student engagement and classroom atmosphere in primary school English lessons (Syahadah, 2025; Sari, 2024).

The participants were fourth-grade students at a private elementary school in South Tangerang. There were 25 students and one teacher participated in this action research. Ice-breaking activities were applied at the beginning of each lesson with the aim of creating an interactive and enjoyable classroom environment (Mahendra, 2025).

The study's intervention framework relied on three primary activities designed to prime the learning environment. First, Language Games served as a social bridge, allowing students to experiment with English expressions through low-pressure play. Second, Motivational Claps acted as a pedagogical 'reset,' using kinetic energy and auditory cues to boost student morale. Finally, Short Quizzes were utilized not as testing tools, but as confidence-builders, allowing students to engage with previous content in a psychologically secure and non-punitive way.

Figure 1

*Action Research Cycle*



Kemmis and McTaggart (1990) Cycle of Action Research

Data collection employed qualitative methods including classroom observations to monitor student participation and interaction, open-ended interviews with students to explore their perceptions and motivation, instructional documentation such as lesson plans and activity records, and a teacher's

reflective journal to document observations, challenges, and reflections during the implementation process (Sari, 2024; Syahadah, 2025). Data were qualitatively analyzed by identifying primary themes related to student engagement, classroom interaction, and learning motivation during each cycle. Reflections after each cycle were used to refine planning and implementation in subsequent cycles, ensuring that the ice-breaking activities were tailored appropriately to students' characteristics and lesson content (Mahendra, 2025).

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Results

**Table 1**

*Summary of Average Scores TP1–TP5*

Learning Objective	Average Score	Humanistic Note
TP1	78	The starting point, students were still adapting
TP2	81	The atmosphere began to ease, enthusiasm grew
TP3	83	Interaction increased; scores became more stable
TP4	85	Consistency in learning became more visible
TP5	87	Peak achievement, students grew more confident

The action research intervention involved integrating focused Ice Breaking activities (language games, motivational claps, short quizzes) at the start of English lessons for Grade IV students. Data was analyzed across five time points (TP1 to TP5), revealing significant changes in both the affective domain and academic performance.

#### **Affective Domain: Classroom Atmosphere and Confidence**

The initial observations at **TP1** aligned with the research problem, noting that students “still appeared hesitant” with “varied” engagement. Following the introduction of Ice Breaking activities, a marked shift in the classroom atmosphere was noted:

#### **Increased Engagement**

Qualitative data documented a rapid change, with more enthusiasm, laughter and excitement,” leading to “livelier classroom interactions.” This signifies a successful creation of a positive, less intimidating learning environment.

Figure 2.

*Students and teacher's engagement*



#### **Enhanced Confidence**

The narrative confirms that Ice Breaking fostered a “courageous to speak” attitude. By **TP5**, students’ “confidence in using English also became more apparent,” highlighting the long-term impact on their willingness to take linguistic risks.

#### **Academic Domain: Summative Score Improvement**

The positive shift in the affective domain translated directly into improved academic results, as evidenced by the class average scores across the time points:

Initial Variation (TP1): Scores varied greatly, suggesting that initial anxiety or lack of engagement hindered some students’ ability to absorb the material effectively. Immediate Improvement (TP2): The “class average score increased,” indicating that the creation of a “cheerful atmosphere positively influenced their ability to understand the material” almost immediately after the intervention began. Sustained Progress (TP3, TP4, TP5): Nearly all students demonstrated noticeable progress.” The observed changes underscore the premise that Ice Breaking activities are not just mood lighteners, but powerful pedagogical tools that effectively enhance learning quality by acting as a bridge connecting hearts, minds, and knowledge.

#### **Lowering the Affective Filter**

The most profound finding is the direct link between “laughter and excitement” and improved scores. This confirms the impact of Ice Breaking on Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis. The simple, non-threatening nature of the activities “relaxed” the students, successfully lowering the psychological barrier that was initially blocking the input (TP1 variation). Once students felt safe and joyful, they became “ready to absorb the material,” as evidenced by the subsequent rise in average scores starting at TP2.

#### **Promoting Low-Pressure Communication and Community**

The observed increase in “courageous to speak” behavior and “livelier interactions” points to the advantage of Ice Breaking in fostering classroom community. By using “simple activities such as language games, motivational claps, or short quizzes,” the teacher provided consistent, low-stakes opportunities for communication. This practice environment shifts the focus from linguistic accuracy to functional fluency and social bonding, which naturally encourages shy primary students to participate and builds their confidence in using English as a tool, not just a subject (Effedi & Wijirahayu, 2024).

#### **Reflection**

This action research cycle proves the effectiveness of affective strategies in primary language education. The summative results provide clear evidence that the Ice Breaking strategy effectively enhanced the quality of learning. The continuity of positive results across TP2, TP3, TP4, and TP5 suggests that this intervention should become a permanent fixture in the lesson structure. The next action research cycle could focus on measuring the qualitative impact of specific types of ice breakers (e.g., language games vs. motivational claps) on the complexity of students’ spontaneous English output to further refine the instructional strategy.

Figure 3

*Students’ increased motivation*



### **Humanistic Analysis of the Intervention Stages**

The progression observed from TP1 to TP5 demonstrates the profound impact of the Ice Breaking intervention on the affective and social needs of the Grade IV students, confirming that learning is deeply intertwined with self-concept, emotion, and community.

#### ***TP1 to TP2: Establishing Individual Affective Safety***

Observation: Students “began to find an enjoyable rhythm in learning.”

Humanistic Link: This stage addresses the fundamental psychological needs of affective safety and freedom from threat. Ice Breaking activities, by being inherently fun and non-judgmental, successfully lowered the Affective Filter (Krashen). Students shifted their focus from the anxiety of being judged for making errors to the enjoyment of the activity. This initial finding of “rhythm” is the foundation for intrinsic motivation.

#### ***TP2 to TP3: Developing Courage and Self-Actualization***

Observation: Students “became more open to trying to speak in English.” Humanistic Link: This phase reflects an increase in courage and self-efficacy. As students felt less threatened (TP2), they moved up Maslow's hierarchy, becoming more willing to take the risk of linguistic production. The humanistic goal of education is to facilitate self-actualization—in this context, finding the confidence to use one's voice. The open attempt to speak is the first tangible sign of this courageous self-expression.

Figure 4

*Students' Self-Actualization*



#### ***TP3 to TP4: Fostering Belonging and Optimal Learning***

Observation: The classroom atmosphere became more conducive, and learning outcomes became more evenly distributed. Humanistic Link: This stage demonstrates the crucial role of Belongingness and Love Needs (Maslow). The Ice Breaking activities shifted from supporting individual enjoyment to building collective community. A “conductive” atmosphere implies trust and mutual support, which is the necessary prerequisite for achieving equity in learning outcomes. When the affective filter is lowered for *all* students, their capacity to receive and process input becomes more uniform, leading to the observed even distribution of scores.

### **TP5: Achieving Confidence and Cohesion**

Observation:

“Not only had the scores improved, but students’ confidence and sense of togetherness also grew stronger.” Humanistic Link: This represents the achievement of the intervention’s full humanistic potential. The improved scores confirm that the higher-order needs (like confidence and self-esteem) directly facilitated academic success. The “sense of togetherness” is the ultimate social outcome, indicating the class now operates as a cohesive learning unit where peer support reinforces language acquisition. The confidence growth is a lasting personal gain, fostering not just language skills, but a stronger positive self-concept in the learner.

### **3.2 Discussion**

The findings of this study resonate strongly with earlier research, confirming that Ice Breaking is far more than a playful pause—it is a powerful tool for shaping the classroom atmosphere (Syhadah, 2025; Sari, 2024). By inaugurating each lesson with short, enjoyable, and interactive activities, students were able to alleviate initial tension and engage with the material with greater ease (Wijirahayu et al., 2024). This simple shift successfully prepared them to listen, participate, and focus.

#### **The Evolution of the Intervention: Action Research Cycles**

Following Kemmis and McTaggart’s spiral model of Critical Action Research (CAR), the teacher moved through iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection, ensuring continuous improvement. To address the research objectives, the study implemented three distinct forms of ice-breaking activities at the onset of each lesson. They are Language Games, Motivational Claps and Short Quizzes.

**Initial Cycle Reflection:** In the first cycle, the data revealed that some students remained hesitant. This reflection became the catalyst for change: the Ice Breaking activities were immediately adjusted for the subsequent cycle. **Language Games:** These consisted of interactive games centered on foundational English vocabulary and expressions. The primary objective was to encourage peer-to-peer interaction and promote the confident use of the target language in a low-pressure environment. Ice breaking is conducted at the beginning of the lesson. If the duration is not controlled, it can take up core learning time. It may turn into mere entertainment activities dependence on teacher creativity.

**Second Cycle Adaptation:** The activities were modified to include more group-based and language-centered games tailored to the students’ specific interests. The difference was immediate and qualitative: hands were raised more often, smiles were widespread, and the classroom atmosphere buzzed with dynamic energy. **Motivational Claps:** This strategy utilized rhythmic clapping sequences coupled with positive, motivating phrases. These activities served as a kinetic and auditory tool to elevate student enthusiasm and sharpen their focus before transitioning into the core curriculum.

**Third Cycle Transformation:** By the third cycle, Ice Breaking had evolved from a mere teacher’s tool into a student-driven expectation. The children eagerly awaited the activities, and significantly, the quieter voices began to emerge. **Short Quizzes:** Designed as “low-stakes” assessments, these quick question-and-answer sessions covered previous material or general knowledge. By maintaining an informal tone, these quizzes ensured students felt psychologically safe to participate and attempt answers without the fear of academic penalty. The success of ice breaking greatly depends on the teacher’s ability to choose activities suitable for students’ characteristics. The teacher’s creativity in modifying activities in each cycle. If the teacher is less reflective or innovative, the effectiveness of ice breaking may decrease.

#### **Impact on Achievement and Affect Emotion**

While the rising summative scores from TP1 to TP5 narrated the academic progress, the fuller picture was found in the students themselves. The core outcomes included demonstrably greater confidence, a stronger willingness to speak English, and friendships strengthened through shared laughter (Widyasari & Wijirahayu, 2025). These results underscore a fundamental truth: learning thrives when affective needs are met alongside cognitive goals. Ice Breaking created a safe and joyful space where mistakes were no longer feared but embraced as a natural component of learning. This balance of laughter and academic pursuit not only boosted measurable academic progress but also nurtured essential traits such as motivation, collaboration, and resilience (Mahendra, 2025)

Figure 4

*Achieving confidence*



### **Future Implications**

The results highlight the critical importance of thoughtfully weaving affective strategies like Ice Breaking into primary English lessons. When systematically adapted to the students' context and evolving needs, such activities maximize both the heart and mind of the young learner, helping children not only achieve better scores but also grow into confident, joyful, and communal learners (Wijirahayu, 2024).

### **4. Conclusion**

This Action Research study sought to evaluate the impact of consistent ice-breaking activities on Grade IV Primary English students, specifically addressing initial challenges of low confidence and inconsistent academic performance. The findings confirm a profound correlation between the students' affective state and their cognitive learning capacity. The success of the intervention is evidenced through three key developmental pillars namely, Reduction of the Affective Filter, Correlation with **Academic Excellence, and Holistic Humanistic Growth**

**Reduction of the Affective Filter:** The transition from student hesitation to laughter and excitement signifies a successful lowering of the Affective Filter. By establishing the classroom as a psychologically safe environment, students moved from a state of apprehension to being "ready to absorb the material," optimizing their receptivity to linguistic input. **Correlation with Academic Excellence:** The emotional shift within the classroom translated into measurable academic gains. The sustained upward trajectory of class average scores from TP2 through TP5 provides empirical evidence that a supportive, high-energy atmosphere directly enhances material comprehension and retention. **Holistic Humanistic Growth:** Beyond quantitative data, the intervention facilitated significant personal development. Students progressed from establishing an "enjoyable rhythm" to demonstrating "courageous speaking," ultimately culminating in a robust sense of communal togetherness and individual self-assurance by the conclusion of the study.

In summary, the integration of ice-breaking activities is not merely a peripheral engagement strategy but a fundamental pedagogical tool. By prioritizing the emotional well-being of the learner, educators can unlock higher levels of academic achievement and foster a resilient, participatory classroom culture.

### **Implications for Practice**

The results advocate for a paradigm shift in primary English language teaching, confirming that emotional readiness is a prerequisite for acquisition, not a byproduct. Ice Breaking activities should not be viewed as merely optional time-fillers but rather as foundational pedagogical tools that establish the essential classroom community and trust required for effective communicative language learning.

## Future Research

Building upon the current cycle, future action research should investigate the long-term transferability of the observed confidence, specifically focusing on whether the high engagement from the Ice Breaking activities is sustained during subsequent, more complex academic tasks. This would further refine the optimal implementation strategies for maximizing learning quality.

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