UTILIZING ICE-BREAKING QUESTIONS TO IMPROVE EFL STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN SPEAKING ACTIVITIES: A CASE STUDY OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract

This study analyzed the use of ice-breaking questions as a technique to enhance students' participation in English speaking activities. Many students in English as a Foreign Language classrooms tend to remain passive during speaking sessions due to anxiety, low self-confidence, and lack of motivation. The research aimed to describe how the teacher implemented the technique and to examine students' perceptions of its impact on their participation in speaking activities. A qualitative case study design was conducted with five students from grade X Dance 4 at SMK Negeri 1 Kasihan. Data were collected through classroom observations, field notes, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicated that the teacher consistently employed various types of ice-breaking questions, such as WH-questions by material and funny questions, prior to the main lesson. Students reported feeling more relaxed, confident, and motivated to speak. In conclusion, the technique fostered a positive classroom environment that encouraged active student participation in speaking.

Keywords: Classroom interaction, EFL students' participation, English speaking activities, ice-breaking questions, student perceptions

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking skills are one of the key skills in English language learning. This skill helps one to convey their ideas, thoughts and emotions orally clearly and effectively. Speaking is an important part of learning and teaching a second language, as well as the art of communication, which is included in the four major skills to be mastered in foreign language learning. Good speaking skills mean producing words that the listener easily understands (Bahadorfar & Omidvar, 2014). However, many students in Indonesia continue to face significant challenges in developing English speaking skills. These challenges include linguistic barriers such as limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, and interference from the mother tongue. Non-linguistic factors such as anxiety, low confidence, and fear of making mistakes also contribute to the problem (Haryanti

& Yuliana, 2024). Moreover, a lack of speaking practice, monotonous learning media, and an unsupportive classroom environment further exacerbate the situation (Daulay et al., 2021). These obstacles hinder students from achieving communicative competence, which is essential not only for academic success but also for meaningful interaction in a globalized world.

To overcome these challenges, teachers are encouraged to create an engaging and supportive classroom environment that promotes student confidence and motivation. One technique that can help achieve this is the ice-breaking question technique, which involves asking informal, creative questions at the beginning of the lesson to build rapport and reduce tension. Ice-breaking question is a technique used to create a more relaxed and interactive learning atmosphere by asking simple questions before beginning the core lesson. These questions can be serious or funny (Khusnia, 2016). For example, consider funny questions like, "If you could have any superpower, what would it be?" or "If you could travel anywhere, where would you go?" These types of questions help students feel more relaxed and willing to speak, especially at the start of class. This technique can help reduce students' speaking anxiety by shifting their focus from correctness to expression and by creating a more relaxed classroom atmosphere (Kirby, 2022).

Ice-breaking questions serve not only as a tool to break the ice but also, when combined with material-specific questions, as a means to directly relate the learning topic to the students. These questions are typically in the form of information questions, particularly WH-questions. For example, a question such as, "What is the hottest news you have read recently?" Teachers often use WH-questions because they can stimulate more in-depth answers, increase vocabulary, and students' verbal thinking ability (Darong et al., 2020). The guided WH-question technique helps students frame their thoughts and ideas in English, and teaches how to ask and express opinions with correct grammar (Perbina et al., 2021). In addition, WH questions are essential for responding to and developing student's answers, helping to improve understanding, as well as keeping them actively engaged in the learning process. This technique is also useful for assessing student's learning progress (Namasivayam et al., 2017). By combining funny and fun ice-breaking questions with triggering questions that are relevant to the material, teachers can build a more active, participatory, and contextualised classroom atmosphere.

The implementation of this technique is supported by Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through social interaction, dialogue, and collaborative meaning-making. In the context of this study, ice-breaking questions serve as a form of scaffolding that provides structured opportunities for students to interact, share ideas, and respond to prompts in a low-pressure environment. Such activities help students operate within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where teacher guidance and peer responses offer the necessary support for them to progress from hesitant participation to more confident and independent speaking. This process fosters active participation in speaking activities and encourages greater engagement in learning (Velykozhon, 2020). This approach also aligns with the goals of Kurikulum Merdeka, which promotes active, contextual, and student-centered learning practices (Halimah, 2023). Higher levels of speaking anxiety are negatively correlated with students' speaking performance in class, underscoring the importance of techniques that can reduce nervousness (Andita, 2019).

In this study, student participation in English speaking activities is operationally defined as active verbal engagement in the classroom. The indicators of participation include asking or answering questions, giving opinions, and responding to commands or statements. These indicators reflect students' readiness to use English as a means of communication during the learning process (Delwita, 2018). Teachers who apply the ice-breaking question technique consistently are more likely to observe improvements in student participation, especially among those who were initially reluctant to speak. The use of interactive speaking activities has been shown to enhance students' fluency and confidence when speaking English (Wiyanah & Endahati, 2025). Learning approaches that incorporate social interaction and light humor can help students overcome barriers to participation and become more verbally active in class .

Previous studies have explored various speaking strategies and ice-breaking activities. For the first, Hanz (2013) found that student questions as ice-breaking activities during workshops could enhance participation. Santoso et al., (2024) implemented ice-breaking activities such as songs and Q&A games to build speaking confidence, while Dressel (2020) highlighted how general icebreakers in physical education supported emotional safety and classroom interaction. However, these studies did not specifically examine the use of ice-breaking question techniques such as funny questions or WH-questions related to the material to improve student participation in speaking activities, particularly in vocational high school settings.

Therefore, this study aims to examine how the ice-breaking question technique is implemented and to explore students' perceptions of its impact on their participation in English speaking activities. The findings are expected to contribute to practical insights for EFL teachers, especially in vocational schools, in designing speaking lessons that are interactive, contextual, and engaging.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach, as it aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of students' perceptions and the implementation of the ice-breaking question technique in English speaking activities. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research is appropriate when the variables under investigation are not yet clearly defined and require exploration to fully understand the phenomenon. This approach was chosen because the research focus could not be sufficiently explained through numerical data, but rather required rich narrative descriptions to capture students' perspectives and experiences.

The research design used was a case study, which Creswell (2012) defines as an in-depth exploration of a bounded system through detailed data collection from multiple sources of information. The study was conducted at SMK Negeri 1 Kasihan, Bantul, Yogyakarta, involving Grade X Dance 4. From this class, five students were selected through purposive sampling to represent varying levels of participation in speaking activities, consisting of one highly active student, two moderately active students, and two passive students. This number was deemed sufficient for a qualitative case study, as it allowed the researcher to obtain a deep understanding of each participant's experiences while capturing variation without losing the depth of the data.

Data were collected through classroom observations, field notes, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were used to identify how the teacher implemented ice-breaking questions and how students responded verbally during speaking activities. Field notes recorded students' reactions, expressions, and behaviors related to speaking participation indicators, such as asking or answering questions,

responding to prompts, and expressing opinions. Interviews were conducted to further explore students' perceptions of the technique. Documentation included teaching modules, learning materials, and photographs to support data collection. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources, methods, and documents (Denzin, 1978).

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method for identifying, organizing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method was considered suitable because it allows for a thorough exploration of patterns in students' views and experiences, helping the researcher to interpret the meaning behind their responses. The analysis followed six stages: familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher conducted three classroom observations and interviewed five students as participants. The observations were conducted to examine how the teacher utilised ice-breaking questions during the teaching and learning process. At the same time, the interviews were conducted to understand how the students responded to and interpreted the technique during speaking activities in class. The two categories based on the results of observations and interviews are as follows:

1. The Implementation of the Ice-Breaking Question Technique by the Teacher

The observation results showed that the teacher consistently implemented the ice-breaking question technique as an opening activity in English lessons, particularly in speaking skills. Supported by the interview findings, most students stated that this activity had become a routine that helped them feel more prepared and comfortable to begin the learning process. The implementation of this technique can be examined from the following three aspects:

a. Teacher's Planning and Preparation in Implementing Ice-Breaking Questions

Based on the observation results, the teacher regularly began English speaking lessons with ice-breaking questions that had been prepared before class. These questions were displayed using a projector and answered orally by students one by one, following the attendance list. The questions used consisted of two types: funny questions to create a relaxed atmosphere and material-based questions such as WH-questions aligned with the lesson topic, like report texts. Before answering, students were given five minutes to think about their responses and were allowed to use online dictionaries as a tool to help them construct sentences in English. The teacher was also actively involved in monitoring students, offering encouragement, and maintaining a calm and supportive classroom environment to help students begin speaking activities with ease. Students gave the following statements during the interviews:
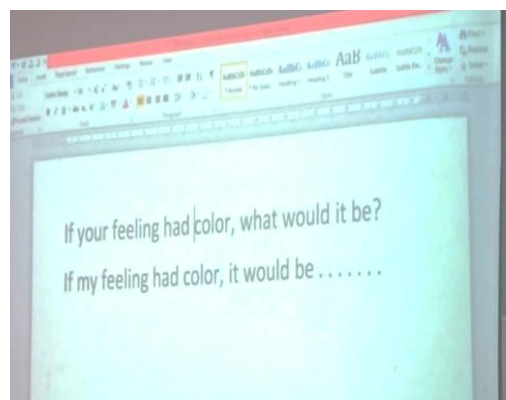
"It has become a habit in every English class that before the lesson starts, we always get an ice-breaking question." (SZ)

"With ice-breaking questions at the start of every English lesson, it becomes more fun." (SAM)

"It's fun, enjoyable, and makes the classroom less tense because of the Ice Breaking Question routine." (CEP)
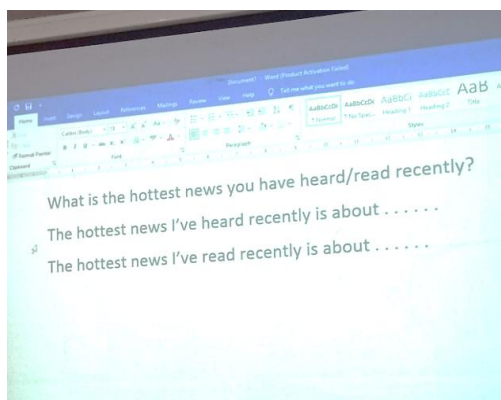
Ice-breaking question
(WH-Question by Material)

Ice-breaking question
(Funny Question

Figure 1. Types of Ice-Breaking Questions

The teacher's strategy in designing the ice-breaking question technique aligns with the findings of Huynh (2022), who investigated teachers' perceptions of questioning strategies during the pre-speaking stage in EFL classrooms. In addition to helping create a more enjoyable and relaxed atmosphere, the use of ice-breaking questions also contributed to increasing students' motivation. Zulfadli (2024), states that ice-breaking activities play an important role in encouraging student enthusiasm in English learning. These activities are considered effective in creating a positive learning environment, reducing anxiety, and boosting students' confidence to participate, especially in speaking activities. However, students also realized that the effectiveness of the questions depended on their level of difficulty. As students noted:

"If the question is difficult, I'm not confident." (SAM)

"If it's an easy question, I am not nervous and just relax. So it depends on the question." (CEP)

In planning ice-breaking questions, the teacher needs to consider the question's level of difficulty to ensure it matches students' abilities and does not hinder their participation. These student responses align with findings from the study conducted by Sumilia & Puspita (2019), which revealed that students tend to feel more comfortable answering specific and straightforward questions. In contrast, open-ended questions such as WH-questions were often confused,

especially when students had limited vocabulary or were afraid of making mistakes. Students sometimes chose to remain silent or respond nonverbally when they felt linguistically incapable of answering. Therefore, although ice-breaking questions may be well-designed, their effectiveness still depends on students' ability levels and confidence in responding.

The teacher's planning and preparation in using the ice-breaking questions technique served as a systematic initial learning strategy focused on student readiness. Through this approach, the teacher not only fostered a positive learning environment but also supported students' mental preparedness, motivation, and linguistic skills for participating in English speaking activities.

b. The Process of implementing Ice-Breaking Question in the Classroom

Based on the observation results, the teacher consistently implemented the ice-breaking questions at the beginning of English speaking lessons as part of the classroom routine. The teacher began by greeting the students warmly, then displayed the ice-breaking question using a projector. The questions fell into two categories: fun questions aimed at creating a relaxed atmosphere and material-based questions, such as WH-questions related to the lesson topic, for example report texts. After the question was presented, students were given five minutes to think about their answers and were allowed to use digital dictionaries to help construct their sentences. Then, students were called one by one, according to the attendance list, to give their responses orally. These observations were also supported by students' interview responses, as shown below:

"It's more enjoyable, more interesting, and definitely makes it fun. With the Ice-Breaking Question at the beginning of every English lesson, it becomes more exciting." (SAM)

"It's definitely fun, more exciting, and not stressful. There's humor and seriousness, so it's not boring and still enjoyable." (NM)

"Because the Ice-Breaking Questions are fun. The classroom atmosphere becomes pleasant, fun, and interesting." (AME)

The teacher explains the question

The student used online dictionary

Figure 2. Implementing of Ice-Breaking Question

This implementation aligns with the findings of Gita et al., 2023), who state that warming-up activities at the beginning of lessons function to build students' early engagement, activate prior knowledge, and help students prepare for more structured speaking tasks. This comfortable and relaxed atmosphere is in line with the findings of Pratiwi & Ayu (2020), Research indicates that an emotionally supportive learning environment can reduce students' speaking anxiety and increase their confidence to engage in oral activities actively. However, students' comfort was also influenced by how well they understood the questions. This was illustrated in a student's statement:

"If I understand the question, I feel more relaxed. But if I don't understand or feel confused, I usually get nervous." (NM)

The teacher's selection of questions needs to take into account students' linguistic abilities. This finding is supported by Sumilia & Puspita (2019), who explain that overly open-ended questions tend to confuse, especially among students with limited vocabulary. When students feel they cannot understand the question, they tend to refrain from speaking. Taqwa (2022), points out that internal factors such as low self-confidence and fear of making mistakes may lead students to remain silent, even when allowed to speak through initial activities.

The implementation of ice-breaking questions has contributed to creating a positive learning environment and stimulating student engagement from the beginning of the lesson. However, the effectiveness of this activity depends on the teacher's sensitivity in adjusting the level of question difficulty, understanding students' emotional readiness, and providing appropriate support so that all students can participate actively and confidently in speaking activities.

c. Teacher's Response to Students' Answer

Based on the observation results, the teacher provided two forms of feedback to students' answers during the ice-breaking question sessions: verbal feedback, such as praise or follow-up questions and physical feedback, such as smiling, nodding, and maintaining eye contact while students were speaking. Both forms of feedback played a role in creating a supportive learning environment and encouraging students to speak with greater confidence. This was supported by student statements in the interviews, as follows:

"If I understand the material, I usually feel more confident to say what is asked." (NM)

"If I feel my answer is correct, I'm confident." (CEP)

"Yes, I feel more confident. Sometimes I'm afraid of mispronouncing, but I just try to stay confident." (SZ)

Students prepare answer   *Student answer question*

Figure 3. Student Responses and Teacher Feedback

This aligns with Ma (2008), who states that positive teacher feedback is more beneficial than negative feedback, as it can improve students' learning behavior and motivate them to participate more actively. This supports, Sundari's (2017), view that the teacher's body language and facial expressions are essential parts of instructional interaction, making students feel safe and supported throughout the learning process. However, the findings also showed that not all students responded positively to the teacher's feedback. According to Celebi (2009), some students feel anxious when receiving feedback directly from the teacher in class because they are afraid of being judged negatively by the teacher or their peers. This concern leads students to remain passive, even in a supportive classroom environment.

The teacher's feedback on students' answers played an essential role in creating a supportive learning atmosphere and building students' confidence to

speak. However, the effectiveness of such feedback was still influenced by each student's psychological condition. Therefore, teachers need to understand students' characteristics and needs more deeply so that the feedback provided can truly support increased student participation in English speaking activities.

Based on the thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke's (2006) framework, the findings related to the first research question focusing on the implementation of the ice-breaking question technique by the teacher were organized into one overarching theme with three sub-themes. The thematic analysis table below summarizes the main theme, sub-themes, representative student quotes, and their interpretations.

Table 1. *Thematic Analysis of Theme 1 – The Implementation of Ice-Breaking Question Technique by the Teacher*

Theme	Sub-Theme	Student Quote	Interpretation / Meaning
The Implementation of the Ice-Breaking Question Technique by the Teacher	Teacher's Planning and Preparation in Implementing Ice-Breaking Questions	*"It has become a habit in every English class that before the lesson starts, we always get an ice-breaking question."* (SZ) *"With ice-breaking questions at the start of every English lesson, it becomes more fun."* (SAM) *"It's fun, enjoyable, and makes the classroom less tense because of the ice-breaking question routine."* (CEP)	Teachers consistently plan and prepare ice-breaking questions in advance to set a positive tone for learning, combining fun and lesson-related prompts to encourage engagement and reduce tension.
	The Process of implementing Ice-Breaking Question in the Classroom	*"It's more enjoyable, more interesting, and definitely makes it fun. With the ice-breaking question at the beginning of every English lesson,*	Implementation is consistent and involves structured routines: greeting students, displaying questions, giving thinking time, and

		it becomes more exciting." (SAM)	calling students one-by-one. The balance between humor and content promotes readiness and reduces anxiety.
		"It's definitely fun, more exciting, and not stressful. There's humor and seriousness, so it's not boring and still enjoyable." (NM)	
		"Because the ice-breaking questions are fun. The classroom atmosphere becomes pleasant, fun, and interesting." (AME)	
	Teacher's Response to Students' Answer	*"If I understand the material, I usually feel more confident to say what is asked." (NM)*	Teacher's verbal and non-verbal feedback fosters a supportive environment, motivating students to participate. Confidence increases when answers are understood or correct, though some still feel anxious about making mistakes.
		"If I feel my answer is correct, I'm confident." (CEP)	
		"Yes, I feel more confident. Sometimes I'm afraid of mispronouncing, but I just try to stay confident." (SZ)	

2. Students' Responses to the Implementation of Ice-Breaking Questions

Based on the results of observations and interviews, the researcher identified several main themes that represented students' perceptions of the implementation of the ice-breaking question technique in English-speaking lessons. These findings were presented in detail to address the second research question regarding students' perception, by referring to data obtained directly from classroom interactions and participants' statements. The findings were categorized into the following three aspects:

a. **Students' Response toward the Implementation of Ice-Breaking Questions**

The results of student interviews showed that the implementation of ice-breaking questions generally received positive responses from students. They stated that the activity was consistently carried out by the teacher at the beginning of every English class meeting, mainly to build a pleasant learning atmosphere and mentally prepare students for the core learning activities. The questions displayed by the teacher were often humorous, helping create a more relaxed and informal classroom environment. Most students reported feeling more at ease when answering ice-breaking questions, as the activity had become a routine that no longer created pressure. As stated by the students:

"Now I feel more relaxed, not nervous at all." (SZ)

"It's more relaxed, not nervous at all. Just for fun." (SAM)

"If I understand the question, I feel more relaxed. But if I don't understand, I usually get nervous." (NM)

"Not nervous because the question is fun. But if the question is hard, of course I get a little nervous." (AME)

"If the question is easy, I don't get nervous, just relaxed." (CEP)

This aligns with the findings of Reffalleo (2024), who states that ice breaking plays a role in building students' confidence by creating a non-threatening atmosphere and forming a positive routine that helps students feel calmer when using English. This finding is supported by Khalaf (2023), who explains that opening activities such as warm-ups or ice breaking can help build early engagement, but their effectiveness strongly depends on context, content, and students' perceptions of task difficulty. Although many students felt supported by the use of ice-breaking questions, there were also findings showing that not all students experienced the same level of increased confidence. As expressed in the following interview statements:

"No, because I'm afraid of making mistakes. It's better to just keep quiet." (AME)

"Nervous. Sometimes I can't answer. Speaking English is difficult." (CEP)

Support from the teacher through ice-breaking questions was not always enough to overcome psychological barriers such as fear of making mistakes, nervousness, or anxiety about speaking in front of the class. This is in line with the study by Jannah et al., (2022), who found that students still experience

speaking anxiety even when teachers apply strategies such as humor, light activities, or providing thinking time. Such anxiety often stems from internal factors like fear of negative evaluation, past negative experiences, or low self-confidence. Furthermore, this finding is also supported by Alfian & Azis (2023), who emphasizes that psychological barriers such as fear, shyness, or inferiority continue to be significant obstacles for students in speaking English.

The use of ice-breaking questions can create a more comfortable and enjoyable classroom atmosphere, helping most students feel more relaxed. However, not all students respond in the same way, as some still experience anxiety especially when the questions are perceived as difficult or when they have specific psychological barriers. Therefore, teachers need to consider differences in ability, experience, and emotional conditions when designing ice-breaking questions so that this strategy can encourage active participation from all students in English-speaking lessons.

b. The Impact of Ice-Breaking Questions on Students' Speaking Participation

The results of student interviews showed that the implementation of ice-breaking questions contributed positively to building students' readiness to participate in speaking activities during English lessons. Several students stated that after participating in the ice-breaking questions session, they felt more prepared and confident to speak during group discussions or when answering the teacher's questions throughout the lesson. As expressed by the students:

"Well, sometimes I give my opinion." (SZ)

"There's no change, it's the same." (SAM)

"If I understand what's being discussed, I speak more. But if not, I stay quiet." (NM)

"If the activity is fun, I speak. So it depends on the atmosphere." (AME)

"I often agree with others, but if I have an opinion, I share it." (CEP)

The ice-breaking question helped reduce initial anxiety, allowed students to speak early, and encouraged them to build the confidence needed for active participation, especially among those who had a good understanding of the discussion topic. This finding aligns with the study by Alfian & Azis (2023), which shows that ice-breaking activities are effective in increasing students' confidence, speaking courage, and classroom engagement. In addition, Akkasorn (2021), explains that pre-speaking or lead-in activities, such as ice-breaking

questions, play an important role in preparing students both psychologically and linguistically before they begin the main speaking tasks.

However, the interview results also revealed that the success of ice-breaking questions was not experienced equally by all students. This was reflected in deeper student interview responses about their readiness to speak:

"It depends on the material. If I understand it, then I speak more smoothly." (SAM)

"It's a bit fluent. But if I have to read a lot of English, it's less fluent. It depends on whether I understand the content or not. It really depends on the subject." (AME)

Students' understanding of the lesson material directly influenced their confidence in speaking. If they had a good grasp of the topic, they were more likely to speak fluently. On the other hand, a lack of understanding led to hesitation. This finding is supported by Rezki et al., (2022), who state that while ice breaking can motivate students at the beginning of a lesson, their participation in speaking still largely depends on mastery of the content, psychological readiness, and overall support from the learning environment.

Ice-breaking questions helped build a positive and less tense atmosphere at the start of the lesson. However, students' speaking participation during the main session remained influenced by various factors, including personal readiness, mastery of the material, and the learning environment in the classroom.

c. Challenges Faced by Students' in Speaking after Ice-Breaking Questions

Based on the results of student interviews, it was found that although the implementation of ice-breaking questions helped create a pleasant learning atmosphere at the beginning of the lesson, some students still faced difficulties participating actively in the main speaking sessions. Students stated that uncertainty about the material, fear of making mistakes, and group dynamics affected their willingness to speak. As expressed by the students:

"I prefer to stay quiet because I'm afraid of giving the wrong answer." (SZ)

"I choose to stay quiet and wait to see the question first." (SAM)

"If the group members are easy to talk to and open to discussion, it's easier to share opinions. But if the group tends to keep to themselves and not listen, it becomes difficult." (NM)

"Because I'm afraid of making mistakes, I prefer to stay quiet." (AME)

"For now, I'm still not confident. Speaking English is still hard for me." (CEP)

This is consistent with Mahayuni (2023), who states that speaking anxiety is often triggered by students' fear of linguistic errors and negative judgment from teachers or peers. This condition makes students more likely to remain silent rather than risk making mistakes in front of others. In addition, Garcia Ponce (2016), highlights that limited vocabulary and sentence structure mastery are among the main reasons students lack confidence when speaking. They tend to speak if they feel they do not have the necessary expressions. In line with this Abbasi & Anthony (2024), that an unsupportive group environment can worsen students' reluctance to speak. As noted by the students:

"If someone asks me, I will answer. But if we are in a group, they don't know who to ask. I prefer to stay silent because I am afraid of giving the wrong answer." (SZ)

"The group depends on the members. If they're easy to talk to, it's easier to share my opinion. But if they keep to themselves and don't listen, it's hard." (NM)

"If the group is small, it's not too difficult. But if there are too many members, it becomes hard. 4 or 3 members is better." (AME)

Besides content readiness, the group discussion atmosphere and students' psychological conditions also influenced their confidence to speak. In line with Khan Monib & ur Rahman Hadi (2025),affirms that speaking participation is not only affected by teaching strategies but also depends heavily on psychological factors such as anxiety, motivation, and social support during group discussions. When students do not feel supported by their group environment, their participation tends to decrease. Similarly, Dincer (2020) finds that limitations in language ability (grammar and vocabulary), anxiety, and fear of making mistakes are dominant factors that hinder speaking participation.

The use of ice-breaking questions can help create a comfortable classroom atmosphere and encourage many students to become more confident in speaking English. However, the outcomes still depend on each students' level of readiness, psychological condition, and the supportiveness of the discussion environment. Therefore, teachers need to adjust the types of questions and create a safe discussion space so that all students feel comfortable enough to participate actively.

Similarly, the thematic analysis for the second research question examining students' perceptions of the implementation of Ice-Breaking Questions in English speaking activities identified one overarching theme with three sub-themes. Table 2 presents a summary of these findings, including the

main theme, sub-themes, representative student quotes, and their interpretations.

Table 2. *Thematic Analysis of Theme 2 – Students' Responses to the Implementation of Ice-Breaking Questions*

Theme	Sub-Theme	Student Quote	Interpretation / Meaning
Students' Responses to the Implementation of Ice-Breaking Questions	Students' Response toward the Implementation of Ice-Breaking Questions	*"Now I feel more relaxed, not nervous at all." (SZ)* *"It's more relaxed, not nervous at all. Just for fun." (SAM)* *"If I understand the question, I feel more relaxed. But if I don't understand, I usually get nervous." (NM)* *"Not nervous because the question is fun. But if the question is hard, of course I get a little nervous." (AME)* *"If the question is easy, I don't get nervous, just relaxed." (CEP)*	Students generally respond positively, appreciating the relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere. Comfort is higher with easier questions; harder ones may still trigger anxiety.
	The Impact of Ice-Breaking Questions on Students' Speaking Participation	*"Well, sometimes I give my opinion." (SZ)* *"There's no change, it's the same." (SAM)* *"If I understand what's being discussed, I speak more. But if not, I stay quiet." (NM)* *"If the activity is fun, I speak. So it depends on the atmosphere." (AME)*	Ice-breaking questions boost initial confidence and readiness to speak, especially when students understand the topic. Participation is linked to comprehension, interest, and classroom atmosphere.

		"I often agree with others, but if I have an opinion, I share it." (CEP)	
	Challenges Faced by Students' in Speaking after Ice-Breaking Questions	*"I prefer to stay quiet because I'm afraid of giving the wrong answer."* (SZ) *"I choose to stay quiet and wait to see the question first."* (SAM) *"If the group members are easy to talk to and open to discussion, it's easier to share opinions."* (NM) *"Because I'm afraid of making mistakes, I prefer to stay quiet."* (AME) *"For now, I'm still not confident. Speaking English is still hard for me."* (CEP)	Despite the positive start, psychological barriers (fear of mistakes, lack of confidence) and group dynamics still limit speaking participation. Question difficulty level also affects willingness to engage.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the ice-breaking question technique positively influenced students' participation in speaking English. The teacher played an active and well-prepared role in implementing this technique at the beginning of the lesson, balancing fun and topic-related questions to maintain both engagement and relevance. The teacher carefully prepared the questions, gave students time to think, and provided positive responses both verbally and through body language. Most students responded positively to the use of ice-breaking questions because it helped create a relaxed and enjoyable classroom atmosphere, making them feel more confident to speak. This technique was also useful in preparing students to speak before starting the main lesson.

However, several students still faced difficulties. Some students felt hesitant to speak due to a combination of factors: fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, and the influence of group dynamics in the class. In addition, differences in the difficulty level of the ice-breaking questions also affected students' comfort in answering. Students usually spoke more easily when the questions were easy to understand, but became hesitant when the questions were more difficult. Therefore, although the use of ice-breaking questions was useful in encouraging students' speaking participation, teachers need to adjust the level of question difficulty according to students' abilities, so that all students feel ready and confident to speak.

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