

THE EFFECT OF ICEBREAKERS ON UNDERGRADUATE LIBYAN STUDENTS' MOTIVATION AND WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN ENGLISH

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Abstract. *The purpose of this study is to determine "how icebreakers affect Libyan undergraduate students' motivation and willingness to communicate in English". Pre and post-tests were administered to a single group as part of a pre-experimental study design. During the academic year 2023–2024, semester one, the study was conducted at the Faculty of Education, University of Sebha, Zuwila, Libya. Thirty students from the Department of English were chosen using a purposeful sampling technique. Interviews, observations, and questionnaires were used to gather data. According to the findings, icebreakers considerably raised students' desire and readiness to communicate in English. The study contributes to the field of teaching English by emphasizing how crucial icebreakers are to establishing a supportive learning atmosphere and encouraging communication skills. Prospective investigations have to concentrate on extended periods, cultural adaptations of conversation starters, and methods for reducing the Hawthorne Effect.*

Key words: *Ice-breakers, motivation, students' willingness to communicate, English language teaching.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and context of English Language Teaching (ELT)

Language has changed throughout human history, serving as an important indicator of development and advancement. It acts as the main channel for communication and serves as an outlet for cultural transmission across different communities. In Libya, English has become increasingly recognized as a global language, playing a crucial role in facilitating communication between nations for various purposes, including commerce, technology, and education (Gherwash, 2024). Proficiency in English empowers Libyan pupils to adapt to contemporary requirements and actively take part in a rapidly evolving world. It equips them with essential skills for securing employment while strengthening their horizons and creating sufficient opportunities for personal growth (Richards, 2001; Gherwash, 2024).

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In Libya, the history of English instruction has changed significantly, especially throughout the 20th century. English language teaching (ELT) has seen several changes throughout the years, in contrast to disciplines like mathematics and physics, which have witnessed rather constant teaching methodologies (Gherwash, 2024; Thanasoulas, 2023). The difficulties involved in teaching and learning a new language are reflected in the development of various methods and strategies (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Teachers' use of icebreakers to promote communication and ease students into learning environments is influenced by the cultural background in Libya. For instance, Libyan students frequently use storytelling and humor as effective icebreakers to build relationships with teachers and fellow students.

As ELT has shifted from broad theories about language structure to more focused concepts highlighting exposure, contemporary approaches have replaced conventional methods that prioritized translation and rote memorization. These newer approaches support students' abilities to use English in everyday contexts (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Wright, 2010). The instructional methods encountered in ELT can be divided into three periods: the traditional methods period, the current method period, and the post-method period. The first period included approaches such as the audio-lingual technique, direct method of instruction (natural method), total physical response approach (understanding approach), and community-based language instruction technique. Each of these evolved in response to earlier methods that failed to meet specific needs related to language instruction and acquisition (Celce-Murcia, 2014).

To address the demands of contemporary ELT and support Libyan students in applying their academic language beyond the classroom, modern approaches have emerged (Gherwash, 2024). When teaching English, two versions of the effective communication approach are utilized: content-driven language instruction, which uses subject matter to teach English, and task-oriented language instruction, which employs assignments to instruct English (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

The post-method period is characterized by the idea that certain techniques may be more effective than others. Building on this notion, Prabhu (1990) identifies three responses to the question of why there is no single best method: different approaches are necessary for various teaching and learning contexts; all methods possess some reliability; and there is no definitive right or wrong approach (Baresh, 2024). This flexibility is particularly relevant for Libyan students who benefit from culturally tailored strategies that incorporate local customs and communication styles into their English language learning experiences.

1.2. Importance of motivation and willingness to communicate in ELT

The importance of motivation and willingness to communicate in ELT cannot be overestimated, mostly when dealing with undergraduate students in Libya. Motivation is one of the main features of the educational process (Eragamreddy, 2015); it plays a role in both building up students' competencies and involving them in the learning process. Motivation is quite important, as it relates to how ready and willing students are to learn English. A significant role in how motivated students feel is played by factors such as the classroom environment, friendship with fellow students, and support from teachers (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Using icebreakers in this culture will increase motivation, as Libyans are very social people who show their hospitality through good treatment of guests. That will make the atmosphere more open and livelier for students to learn.

It has been discovered from research that highly motivated students are ready, alert, and aware during learning. On the other hand, unmotivated students get distracted and passive. It is, therefore, crucial for the instructor to use different approaches to improve students' motivation. Methods, such as rewarding them for effort and giving positive feedback can significantly enhance students' interaction in learning English. In EFL settings, students often have few chances to hear the target language beyond the class settings. This makes it even more important to find other ways to motivate them (Al Shlowiy, 2014). Teachers are important for motivating students; how they teach can help or demotivate students' desire to speak English (Urhahne, 2015).

The objective of this research is to investigate the potential of ice-breaking techniques in improving motivation and communication readiness among undergraduate students at the Faculty of Education of Sebha University in Zuwila. Observational data indicated that students in their first semester displayed a lack of enthusiasm for learning English, frequently appearing lethargic and disinterested during instructional sessions. In response to this challenge, ice-breaking activities were identified as an approach to revitalize classroom interactions and enhance student participation. According to Jurkiewicz (2020), icebreakers are supposed to lower anxiety levels and make the learning environment much more interactive. The concept of willingness to communicate (WTC), initially introduced by McCroskey and Richmond (1990) in the context of first language settings, was later adapted for the second language learning context by MacIntyre et al. (1998). WTC is recognized as a reliable predictor of success in language learning; thus, promoting students' WTC through effective pedagogical activities such as ice-breakers may lead to improved communication skills in English. By focusing on these elements, this research intends to bring to light the critical relationship that exists between motivation, WTC, and effective teaching practices within the Libyan educational environment.

1.3. Significance of icebreakers in promoting motivation and willingness to communicate

One way to understand ice breaking in the classroom is as a way to address students' emotional or physical coldness. Ice Breaker was employed to establish a learning environment that progressed from saturation to relaxed, from firm to motion (familiar), and from inactive to engaged (Loliyana, 2022). A successful ice-breaking strategy in the classroom, according to Diril (2015), keeps students happy during the learning process. When teaching English, ice-breaking can be done at the beginning of the lesson, during the material delivery, and at the end of the session. Ice breaking is, therefore, crucial to the smooth operation of both the method of instruction and learning as well as the learners' capacity to stay focused during the lesson. Motivation and icebreakers go hand in hand because icebreakers help teachers demonstrate their excitement for the subject matter, learning, and the students. Creating a connection with prior knowledge and connecting the material to what the student already knew were two ways to accomplish this. Theoretically, it can be said that icebreakers were a useful method for getting students interested in studying English. Under the heading "The impact of icebreakers on students' motivation and willingness to communicate in English at Faculty of Education, English Department semester one students of Sebha University, Zuwila," the investigator became keen on conducting a preliminary study.

1.4. The Research's Hypothesis

In line with the specific goals of the research that were identified, the following hypotheses have been stated and prepared accordingly:

Alternative Hypothesis

Undergraduate students in their very first semester at the Faculty of Education, specifically within the Department of English at Zuwila, which is part of Sebha University, will most likely demonstrate much higher levels of motivation and a greater willingness to engage in communication using the English language if icebreaker activities are carefully inserted into the overall classroom experience. The increase in motivation and willingness to communicate will probably emerge in a couple of observable ways: through more engagement, more active participation, and a distinctly more positive attitude toward the learning process concerning the English language.

Null Hypothesis

There is supposed to be no significant or remarkable difference in motivation levels and willingness to communicate in the English language amongst undergraduate students who are presently in their first semester in the Faculty of Education at Zuwila, Sebha University, Department of English, with or without icebreaker activities carried out in their class setting. It will also be proper to assume that the use of icebreaker activities will not bring about any quantifiable or noticeable changes in the overall participation of students and in their attitudes towards the process of learning the target language.

1.5. Research Questions

1. To conduct an in-depth study on the effects and influences of icebreaker activities on the motivational levels of students participating in English language learning. Therefore, the present research aim is to fully analyze and investigate the extent to which the introduction of icebreakers, as active and interactive games, influences the general level of motivation among students. Specifically, this will be done in terms of their willingness to actively take part, as well as their eagerness to interact with material about the English language.
2. To investigate the relationship between the use of icebreakers and students' willingness to communicate in the English language classroom. This objective specifically seeks to explore and examine the extent to which icebreaker activities can greatly improve and enhance students' preparedness and willingness to actively take part in conversations and discussions conducted in the English language. In this way, such activities will be of major importance in fostering improved communication skills for the students who will be involved. These hypotheses and objectives will guide the research process because they give a framework for examining the effects of icebreakers on student motivation and willingness to communicate in an EFL context.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Motivation and Willingness to Communicate - Theoretical Framework

The procedure to assess an individual's level of intensity, guidance, and determination in their pursuit of aims is known as motivation (Razak et al., 2018). The inclination of second language learners to initiate and continue actions has additionally been theorized (Ushioda, 2008). Motivation, which is a crucial component of the L2 WTC hierarchical pyramid model's fourth layer, is defined as an inner psychological condition that propels L2 learners to participate in learning activities and models learning behaviors into specific objectives. The propensity for action and persistence in learning has also been attributed to L2 learners (MacIntyre et al., 1998). The theory is that one important factor affecting a person's L2 WTC is their motivation. MacIntyre et al (1998) proposed that the choice to start a conversation is a motivated act driven by both temporary and permanent circumstances. In the fourth section of their pyramid structure for L2 WTC, they encapsulated motivation as an indicator of WTC, claiming that psychological and cultural components of the factor of inspiration for interaction are made up of social and between-group inspiration. A similar theory was put forth by Dörnyei (2005), who suggested that a person's WTC is the outcome of their L2 motivational autonomy framework and that L2 WTC is the product of the interaction between linguistic self-confidence as well as the ideal L2 self.

An increasing corpus of research in a variety of situations supports the main forecasting impact of motivation to learn a language in WTC. This is demonstrated by the experimental research conducted by Lee and Hsieh (2019), which found that among 261 Taiwanese undergraduate English students, motivation and confidence favorably supported second language WTC in a positive way in digital, traditional, and non-traditional classroom settings. Subsequent research by Lee and Dražati (2019) with 176 Indonesian language students revealed similar patterns, showing a strong correlation between L2 WTC and a variety of affective variables like determination, inspiration, and self-assurance. Likewise, adopting the second language self-respect, Ebn-Abbasi et al (2022), discovered that among 308 English language students from Iran, prospective self-guides are strongly correlated with WTC. This point was amply demonstrated by a dual-method investigation by Suvongse as well as Chanyoo (2022), which found that among 341 Thai undergraduate students of English, instrumental motivation was an important indicator of L2 WTC.

Khajavy et al. (2018) and Alrabai (2022) verified that WTC and motivation are positively correlated in the EFL contexts of Saudi Arabia, China, and Iran. On the other hand, a few studies from Yashima (2002); Yashima et al., (2004) and Yu (2011) have found that motivation has an indirect impact on WTC. For instance, Yu (2011) found that among 234 Chinese university learners, inspiration subsequently surmised WTC in learning the English language using other optimistic agents of mediation. In general, prior empirical research agrees that motivation contributed to WTC in language learning.

2.2. Previous studies on the use of icebreakers in ELT classrooms

In language learning instances, icebreakers are essential because they act as motivators that improve the learning process as a whole. The purpose of these activities is to establish a welcoming and friendly environment that will help language learners feel a feeling of community. Several psychological and educational vantage points can be used to analyze how icebreakers affect language learners' motivation. First of all, by fostering

social interaction and lowering fear, icebreakers help to create a healthy learning atmosphere. When learning a language, beginners could be nervous about making errors or speaking a foreign language. Since icebreakers are frequently lighthearted and entertaining, they contribute to a laid-back environment where students feel more at ease with one another and the language learning process (Dörnyei, 2005). Since relaxed learners are more likely to participate proactively in the learning process, this anxiety reduction is crucial for increasing motivation.

Additionally, icebreakers increase motivation by encouraging a sense of unity and teamwork among students. Since learning a language is frequently a social activity, students are prone to be motivated to engage in educational activities when they feel linked to their peers (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003). A favorable group dynamic is created by icebreakers that promote cooperation and support among participants, which inspires them to work collaboratively to achieve shared language learning objectives. The affective filter, a term coined by Stephen Krashen to describe emotional elements that may help or impede language learning, is another topic covered by icebreakers (Krashen, 1985). Icebreakers assist decrease the emotional filter, making learners more sensitive to input and motivated to participate in language activities by introducing fun and engaging tasks into the language process of learning.

Although there isn't much scientific evidence on how icebreakers affect language learners' motivation, certain research and educational concepts point to possible advantages. Activities called icebreakers are meant to foster a friendly and relaxed learning atmosphere. By establishing a welcoming and encouraging environment in the educational setting, icebreakers can assist students feel more connected to one another. Higher motivation could be a result of this favorable atmosphere (Deci & Ryan, 1985). When used effectively, icebreakers can help language learners feel less anxious. Anxiety reduction is linked to higher motivation and involvement in the educational process (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). To encourage students to socialize and get to know one another, icebreakers frequently involve interacting socially. Learning a language and motivation have been related to social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978).

Icebreakers frequently call for casual conversation. Motivation for acquiring a language can be positively impacted by increased self-assurance and communication abilities (Bandura, 1977). Icebreakers can be created to draw on the passions and previous knowledge of students, increasing the relevance and curiosity of acquiring language material (Keller, 1987). Enhanced motivation can be attributed to heightened interest rates (Dörnyei, 2001). Certain icebreakers require learners to take responsibility for their education and proactively engage in the procedure of learning. This feeling of individuality may have a beneficial effect on motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Icebreakers can also be designed to accommodate students' varied learning preferences and styles, which will boost their motivation. Language learning can be made more individualized and pleasurable by engaging in activities that cater to different intelligences, such as linguistic, interpersonal, or kinesthetic (Gardner, 1983). Students are more likely to be motivated to actively take part in the language learning process when they discover tasks that align with their favorite methods of learning.

2.3. Effects of icebreakers on willingness to communicate in English

Icebreakers are essential for creating a happy and interactive atmosphere, particularly when learning a language, like English as a second language (ESL). Icebreakers have a variety of effects on people's willingness to communicate (WTC) in English, including linguistic,

social, and psychological ones. Icebreakers play a major role in helping language learners feel less nervous and more confident. Studies like those by Kang (2005) and MacIntyre and Charos (1996) show how anxiety plays a significant role in preventing people from communicating effectively through language. Icebreakers offer students a low-pressure, carefree environment that reduces nervousness and fosters positivity. This anxiety reduction is essential for increasing students' readiness to speak up in English. Icebreakers play a crucial role in promoting social interaction and creating an environment of encouragement among language learners. Studies conducted by Pica et al. (1987) highlight how crucial a supportive social setting is for language acquisition. Through the development of relationships and a sense of assistance among peers, icebreakers help students feel like they belong. Since people are more likely to employ language in a supportive community, social bond in turn has a positive impact on students' willingness to communicate.

By offering chances for real-world language practice, icebreakers also aid in the improvement of language abilities. According to Warschauer and Meskill (2000), language development depends on the application of genuine language in everyday communication contexts. Interactive and communicative exercises that necessitate English expression are frequently used as icebreakers. In addition to improving language proficiency, this real-world practice gives learners more self-assurance when speaking the language, which in turn increases their willingness to communicate. Furthermore, icebreakers have the power to dissolve cultural and social obstacles, especially in contexts where a variety of languages are being learned. Research by Gudykunst and Kim (2003) highlights the importance of intercultural communication skills for language acquisition. An atmosphere that is more welcoming and inclusive is produced by icebreakers that promote cultural exchange and comprehension. As a result, students are more inclined to communicate since they believe more at ease communicating themselves in a setting with a diversity of cultural backgrounds. Notwithstanding these advantages, it's critical to recognize that icebreakers' influence on a person's willingness to communicate may differ based on a variety of individual factors, including individuality, past language learning circumstances, and cultural background (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Although icebreakers usually improve WTC, each of these specific aspects may have an impact on how effective they are.

2.4. Factors influencing motivation and willingness to communicate

In the context of interpersonal communication, motivation and willingness to communicate (WTC) are essential elements, especially when learning a language. An individual's motivation and propensity for communication are influenced by a variety of factors, which can be divided into both internal and external factors. Motivation is greatly influenced by one's personal beliefs and attitudes regarding communication and language acquisition. The significance of attitudes is emphasized by Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model, which contends that motivation is increased by favorable attitudes toward the target language and its speakers. According to Gardner and Lambert (1972), internal factors influencing language learning include instrumental and integrative motivations. Whereas instrumental motivation is motivated by pragmatic objectives, integrative motivation is linked to the desire to become integrated into the intended language's culture. The willingness to communicate can be impacted by the existence of either or both.

Language acquisition can benefit from Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, which is defined as one's confidence in one's capacity to complete a task. Motivation and WTC are positively correlated with high self-efficacy. Similarly, people who feel better about themselves might be more open to communicating (Yashima, 2002). The job of the

instructor and the general classroom atmosphere have a big impact on WTC and motivation. A classroom environment that is inclusive and positive can encourage students to communicate more readily, and a teacher who is encouraging and helpful can boost motivation (MacIntyre et al., 2003). Peer encouragement, cultural integration, and public perceptions of language acquisition are examples of social and cultural factors that affect motivation. Because they are exposed to and acknowledge linguistic diversity more, students in multicultural and multilingual environments, for example, may feel more motivated (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). The motivation for picking up a language is influenced by media exposure and technological developments. Involvement as well as motivation, can be increased by using interactive language learning applications, internet-based tools, and media materials in the target language (Stockwell, 2012).

2.5. The role of icebreakers in enhancing motivation and fostering a communicative classroom environment

In the classroom, icebreakers are essential because they act as instruments for removing barriers, fostering relationships, and fostering an environment that is open and communicative. These exercises are more than just fillers; they are calculated instruments that help raise student enthusiasm and create a more stimulating learning environment. Students feeling like they belong and have a sense of community is one of the main goals of icebreakers. Icebreakers help students establish a more personal connection with each other by encouraging conversation and creating a laid-back atmosphere. A supportive social environment is crucial for student success and retention, according to a Tinto (1993) study. By encouraging students to talk about their interests and personal experiences, icebreakers help create a welcoming environment in the classroom. Learners who feel connected to their fellow students and their educational setting are more likely to actively take part in class activities, making this sense of belonging a powerful motivator.

Icebreakers also work well to lower anxiety and foster a happy emotional atmosphere. Pupils may experience anxiety at the start of a new academic period, particularly if they are in unfamiliar environments or are surrounded by new peers. With the help of icebreakers, pupils can ease their fears and anxieties by getting to know each other and the teacher. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) states that improving favorable feelings and lowering tensions both lead to higher motivation. Icebreakers help to create a positive emotional environment that encourages learners to take an active role in the process of learning by creating a laid-back and enjoyable environment. Icebreakers are important for encouraging communication skills besides motivation. A key component of learning is effective communication, and icebreakers give learners a chance to practice and improve these abilities. Effective communication and teamwork are encouraged through group discussions, idea-sharing, and problem-solving. According to a study by Johnson and Johnson (1994), cooperative learning improves academic achievement and communication skills. Icebreakers establish a foundation for ongoing cooperation and communication throughout the course by encouraging cooperative interactions at the start of the term.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

The design of this study was pre-experimental. One class served as the experimental class in the pre-experimental design. According to Boyas et al. (2011), the study was pre-

experimental and used "pre- and post-tests on group design." Two observations were made in this design, one before and one after the treatment. Pre-tests are observations taken before the treatment, and post-tests are observations taken after the treatment.

The following conveys the present design:

Table 1 Design of the Study

Group	Pre-text	Treatment	Post-test
Experimental	O1	X	O2

(Gay, 1987).

O1: The competence of the experimental group before giving treatment.

X: Treatment (with icebreakers)

O2: The study's group's competency resulting from treatment.

3.2. The Research's location and time

This study was carried out at the Faculty of Education, University of Sebha, Zuwila, Libya. It took place in the academic year 2023/2024, semester one, from October 1st to October 31st, 2023, for one month.

3.3. Participants and sampling procedure

Purposive sampling was used to obtain the sample. Semester one at the Faculty of Education, English Language Department, University of Sebha, Zuwila was selected by the researcher as a sample. There were 30 students enrolled in the program. The sample was selected by the researcher because it can be an enjoyable and successful means of inspiring them. For this reason, the researcher used icebreakers to positively impact students' motivation and propensity to speak English.

3.4. Data Collection Method

According to Sugiyono (2010), a study tool is a device employed to assess and gather details to facilitate processing. This research tool's purpose was to gather data regarding the study's implementation. This study involved a multidimensional strategy. First, information about students' motivation to learn was obtained through questionnaire replies. Furthermore, two observation sessions were carried out with the use of observation sheets to evaluate the effect of icebreakers on student motivation and communication on a qualitative level. Using this approach, icebreaker activity behavior patterns might be examined in real-time. Moreover, five students were interviewed to include a qualitative component. To gain a deeper knowledge of individual experiences and beliefs regarding the impact of icebreakers on English communication willingness, these interviews attempted to capture nuanced opinions. By combining quantitative and qualitative instruments, the study's findings are more thorough and legitimate, providing a full understanding of the subject.

3.5. Data analysis technique

SPSS 17.0 was used by the researcher to examine the information. The T-test was employed to compare the data from this study to determine whether there were any significant differences between the pre-and post-test scores. However, the researcher categorized the standard deviation and level score motivation of the pupils.

4. FINDINGS

The outcomes of the data analysis served as the foundation for this study's conclusions. Data was gathered through data analysis. The pretest and posttest served as the impact of icebreakers on students' motivation and willingness to communicate in English. Before providing treatment, the pre-test was used to assess the role of icebreakers on students' motivation and willingness to communicate in English, and the post-test was used to evaluate how much the icebreakers impacted students' motivation and willingness to communicate in English.

4.1. The Treatment

The following table shows the findings from being observed before as well as after the procedure.

Table 2 The outcome of the observation both before as well as after the treatment

Aspect	Prior Treatment	During and after treatment
Liveliness	<p>The teacher used the learning approach without the use of an icebreaker during the first session in the pre-test. The class situation was discovered by the researcher as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student participation in the classroom does not equate to increased learning. ▪ The learning materials that the researcher has provided are not generating much interest among the students. ▪ While some students were occupied conversing with their pals, the majority of pupils just sat silently in their chairs and pretended to grasp everything. ▪ A few pupils were operating their phones during the teacher's explanation of the subject. 	<p>Every time the researcher used an icebreaker in a class, it was evident to learners that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ They started to focus on the researcher. ▪ When allowed to play while learning, pupils have become more engaged, particularly in the researcher's team-based icebreaker game. ▪ In the learning environment, learners are interacting with one another more actively.
Understanding	<p>The teacher tested the students on the material that had been explained during the pre-test. The pupils' evidence demonstrated that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Despite the teacher's repeated explanations of the material, they failed to actively respond. ▪ Students exhibited passivity when asked to repeat the vocabulary that was talked about. 	<p>Following the distribution of an icebreaker, the students' motivation began to increase.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The interest of students communicating in English was higher. Students were able to respond to questions posed by the researcher. ▪ Students were excited to complete the assignments that the researcher gave them.

The summary of the observations made both before and after the treatment is provided in the above table. To determine whether the icebreaker method used when teaching English to students was useful to them, comparisons were made. It has been explained in this aspect of

the liveliness that before treatment, students' motivation and willingness to communicate in English was lower. However, following the use of an icebreaker in treatment, students engaged in active learning. When it came to understanding, the students' initial state was one in which they hardly responded to the researcher's questions; however, following the application of the treatment, to answer questions posed by the instructor, the students began to demonstrate an interest in paying attention to the class.

4.2. The Pre-test Questionnaire Results

The following table shows the questionnaires that students provided at the pre-test before receiving treatment from the researcher.

Table 3 The Pre-test Questionnaire Results

Respondent	Statement Number															Total	Category
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15		
R1	3	4	2	3	3	1	2	4	3	2	2	2	4	1	2	38	Average
R2	3	2	1	4	4	2	3	3	3	2	3	2	1	2	2	37	Average
R3	2	2	3	4	1	3	2	3	3	3	2	3	1	2	1	35	Average
R4	3	3	2	2	4	3	3	2	2	3	3	2	2	1	1	36	Average
R5	4	1	3	3	2	3	2	1	4	2	2	2	3	4	2	38	Average
R6	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	1	2	2	3	3	1	3	2	32	Poor
R7	4	3	3	2	3	2	2	3	4	3	3	3	2	3	3	42	Good
R8	3	3	2	4	2	2	4	3	3	1	3	4	2	2	2	40	Average
R9	3	3	2	1	1	3	3	2	2	2	1	3	3	2	3	34	Average
R10	4	3	3	2	3	3	2	1	1	3	3	2	4	2	2	38	Average
R11	3	1	2	3	2	2	1	3	2	4	2	3	3	2	4	37	Average
R12	2	2	1	3	2	2	4	2	4	2	2	3	2	3	2	36	Average
R13	2	2	3	2	4	2	3	3	2	1	4	2	2	2	2	36	Average
R14	4	3	2	1	3	2	2	3	3	2	1	4	2	3	2	37	Average
R15	4	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	1	4	3	1	1	4	4	39	Average
R16	4	2	3	3	1	3	2	3	4	2	3	3	2	2	1	38	Average
R17	3	2	1	4	4	2	3	3	3	2	3	2	1	2	2	37	Average
R18	2	2	3	4	1	3	2	3	3	3	2	3	1	2	1	35	Average
R19	3	3	2	2	4	3	3	2	2	3	3	2	2	1	1	36	Average
R20	4	1	3	3	2	3	2	1	4	2	2	2	3	4	2	38	Average
R21	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	1	2	2	3	3	1	3	2	32	Poor
R22	4	3	3	2	3	2	2	3	4	3	3	3	2	3	3	42	Good
R23	3	3	2	4	2	2	4	3	3	1	3	4	2	2	2	40	Average
R24	3	3	2	1	1	3	3	2	2	2	1	3	3	2	3	34	Average
R25	4	3	3	2	3	3	2	1	1	3	3	2	4	2	2	38	Average
R26	3	1	2	3	2	2	1	3	2	4	2	3	3	2	4	37	Average
R27	2	2	1	3	2	2	4	2	4	2	2	3	2	3	2	36	Average
R28	2	2	3	2	4	2	3	3	2	1	4	2	2	2	2	36	Average
R29	4	3	2	1	3	2	2	3	3	2	1	4	2	3	2	37	Average
R30	4	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	1	4	3	1	1	4	4	39	Average
Total																1110	-
Mean Score																37	Average

The pre-test questionnaire for the students' results is shown in the above table. Thirty students' samples were used in total. Out of 30 students, 2 received a score of 32, placing them in the poor category. 28 students were placed in the average category, with 4 receiving scores of 34, 4 receiving scores of 36, 6 receiving scores of 37, 6 receiving scores of 38, 2 receiving scores of 39, and 2 receiving scores of 40. In comparison, two pupils in the good group received an average of 42. The pre-test categories have an average mean score. 1110 is the overall score of the total students and 37 is the mean score value.

4.3. The Post-test Questionnaire Results

Following their treatment by the researcher, students received the questionnaires at the post-test. This survey will demonstrate the effects of icebreakers on students' willingness and motivation to speak in English as well as whether these factors have increased following the researcher's treatment.

Table 4 The Post-test Questionnaire Results

Respondent	Statement Number															Total	Category
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15		
R1	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	4	3	2	2	2	4	2	3	44	Good
R2	3	4	3	3	3	3	4	4	1	3	4	3	2	3	4	47	Good
R3	4	3	2	4	2	2	3	3	4	4	2	4	2	2	4	45	Good
R4	4	3	2	4	4	3	3	3	4	2	3	2	4	3	2	46	Good
R5	4	1	4	3	4	3	2	3	4	3	2	3	4	4	4	48	Good
R6	4	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	2	3	2	3	3	2	4	45	Good
R7	4	3	4	3	4	3	2	3	4	3	3	3	4	4	4	51	Excellent
R8	3	4	4	3	4	3	2	3	4	3	3	4	4	4	3	51	Excellent
R9	4	2	2	4	4	3	3	3	4	2	3	2	4	3	3	46	Good
R10	4	3	2	1	3	3	3	3	4	2	3	3	2	2	3	44	Good
R11	4	4	2	4	4	3	2	3	4	3	2	4	3	4	2	48	Good
R12	4	2	3	3	1	3	3	3	4	2	3	3	2	2	3	44	Good
R13	2	2	3	2	4	2	3	3	2	2	4	3	2	3	4	41	Average
R14	4	3	3	2	3	2	2	3	4	3	3	3	2	3	3	42	Good
R15	4	3	2	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	2	47	Good
R16	4	2	3	3	1	3	2	3	4	2	3	3	2	2	1	44	Good
R17	3	2	1	4	4	2	3	3	3	2	3	2	1	2	2	47	Good
R18	2	2	3	4	1	3	2	3	3	3	2	3	1	2	1	45	Good
R19	3	3	2	2	4	3	3	2	2	3	3	2	2	1	1	46	Good
R20	4	1	3	3	2	3	2	1	4	2	2	2	3	4	2	48	Good
R21	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	1	2	2	3	3	1	3	2	45	Good
R22	4	3	3	2	3	2	2	3	4	3	3	3	2	3	3	51	Excellent
R23	3	3	2	4	2	2	4	3	3	1	3	4	2	2	2	51	Excellent
R24	3	3	2	1	1	3	3	2	2	2	1	3	3	2	3	46	Good
R25	4	3	3	2	3	3	2	1	1	3	3	2	4	2	2	44	Good
R26	3	1	2	3	2	2	1	3	2	4	2	3	3	2	4	48	Good
R27	2	2	1	3	2	2	4	2	4	2	2	3	2	3	2	44	Good
R28	2	2	3	2	4	2	3	3	2	1	4	2	2	2	2	41	Average
R29	4	3	2	1	3	2	2	3	3	2	1	4	2	3	2	42	Good
R30	4	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	1	4	3	1	1	4	4	47	Good
Total																1378	-
Mean Score																45.9	Average

The post-test questionnaire results for the students are displayed in the above table. Thirty students' samples were used in total. Out of the 30 students, two students received an average score of 41, 24 were placed in the good category, where two students received an average of 42, six received an average of 44, 4 received an average of 45, four pupils received an average of 46, 4 received an average of 47, and 4 more received a score of 48. Four students were placed in the excellent classification, receiving an average of 51. The post-test category has a good mean score. 45.9 is the mean value. The total number of pupils with overall scores is 1378.

4.4. The Students' Pre-test and Post-test Classification

There were fifteen items on the questionnaire. There were four response result categories available for each item: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

Table 5 The frequency distribution and the percentage of students' scores before and after the test

No.	Motivation &WTC Category Range Score	Range	Pre-test		Post-test	
			F	P(%)	F	P(%)
1.	Low	15-23	0	0	0	0
2.	Poor	24-32	2	6.67	0	0
3.	Average	33-41	26	86.67	2	6.67
4.	Good	42-50	2	6.66	24	80
5.	Excellent	51-60	0	0	4	13.33
Total			30	100	30	100

According to the above table, out of the thirty pupils who took the pre-test, two fell into the poor category (6.67%), twenty-six into the average category (86.67%), and two into the good category (6.67%). In contrast, of the students who took the post-test, two fell into the average category (6.67%), twenty-four into the good category (80.00%), and four into the excellent category (13.33%). This indicates that the post-test score and its corresponding percentages are higher than those of the pre-test.

4.5. Mean and Standard Deviation Score

The following table displays the mean score and standard deviation score for the pre and post-tests.

Table 6 Total Mean Score and Standard Deviation of the Students in Pre-test and Post-test

Experimental Class	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
	37	2.34	45.9	2.77

The pre- as well as post-test standard deviations and mean values are displayed in the above table. It is visible how many scores increased during the pre and post-tests. When the questionnaire was used for the pre-test, its mean score was 37; when it was used for

the post-test, it increased to 45.9. Additionally, the standard deviation value was 2.34 during the pre-test and 2.77 during the post-test. Thus, the icebreaker technique affects students' motivation and willingness to communicate in English.

4.6. Test of Significance Evaluation

To determine whether or not where N = the total sum of pupils (30), K = the complete number of variables, and the degree of freedom (df) = $N-K$, was statistically different from the mean score for both of the factors (pre- and post-test) at the point of substantial variance (0.05). The outcome of the t-test and t-table computation is displayed in the following table.

Table 7 The T-test and T-table Calculation Results

Variable	T-test	T-table
X1-X2	2.77	2.000

The table above illustrates that the t-test score was greater compared to the t-table score. It suggests that there was a noteworthy distinction within the pupil's pre- as well as post-test results.

5. DISCUSSION

This research aimed to discover the effect of icebreaker activities on first-semester undergraduate students' motivation and willingness, to enroll in the Faculty of Education, Department of English at Zuwila, Sebha University, to communicate in the English language. The findings provided strong support for the alternative hypothesis and rejected the null hypothesis. This discussion merges the research hypotheses and aims with the findings while contrasting and connecting them to previous studies and theoretical frameworks within the field. Findings from the pre-test to post-test results clearly show that icebreaker activities have a significant impact on students' motivation and willingness to take part in English communication. Pre-test observations indicated a lack of enthusiasm, low interaction, and low participation among the pupils. Students showed a lack of activeness, relied on mechanical answers, and avoided active participation in the initial sessions. This vividly aligns with studies showing that mainstream teaching methodology often neglects the social and emotional dimensions of language acquisition (Dörnyei, 2001).

Conversely, the observations carried out after the test showed serious improvements. Students were seen to be more active, participated more actively in collaborative learning, and showed heightened interest in completing assignments and answering questions. The mean score increased from 37 in the pre-test to 45.9 in the post-test, and the standard deviation also increased, which means that there was even more variation in higher levels of performance (SD pre-test = 2.34; SD post-test = 2.77). This finding supports Research Question 1, which aimed to examine the effects of icebreakers on motivation levels.

5.1. Comparative Analysis: Icebreakers and Communication

This positive effect of icebreakers is supported by previous research, which shows that such activities reduce anxiety levels, hence creating a supportive learning environment

(Ghasiyah et al., 2024; Horwitz et al., 1986). As shown in the results of the post-test, 80% of students achieved the "good" category, while 13.33% reached the "excellent" level categories absent in the pretest. This finding highlights the role of icebreakers in improving class interactions and supports the theories on communicative competence, most particularly Hymes' (1972), model where it is foregrounded, that social involvement is significant to language use. Furthermore, the result of the t-test, being statistically significant ($t\text{-test} = 2.77$, $t\text{-table} = 2.000$), reflects a large difference in the outcomes of the pre-test and post-test measurements. This idea is in strong alignment with Dörnyei's (2021) concept known as the motivational self-system, which posits that by cultivating a clear and compelling vision of successful communication, particularly through involvement in engaging and interactive activities, students are more likely to enhance their effort levels and boost their self-confidence.

5.2. Null Hypothesis Revisited

The null hypothesis that icebreaker activities would not significantly affect the level of motivation of students, nor significantly influence their willingness to participate in communication, was convincingly and strongly rejected by the results. The data collected in the study proved not only a quantifiable improvement in motivation but also brought remarkable and positive changes in the students' attitudes as well. The data collected in this study builds upon previous studies that have noted the role organized icebreakers play in promoting interaction among students, particularly in culturally diverse classrooms (Tsui, 1996). However, other researchers have suggested that the benefits of icebreakers are short-lived and serve only to initiate interest, acting more as a 'catalyst' to motivate engagement, rather than a sustained or long-term intervention (MacIntyre et al., 1998). While the present study has found immediate treatment effects immediately after the intervention, future longitudinal research might help to indicate whether these observed improvements in interaction and engagement can continue beyond the duration of the intervention itself.

5.3. Research Question 1: Motivation through icebreakers

The first research hypothesis received strong and comprehensive support from an overwhelming amount of evidence. Observational data did reflect that in the pre-icebreaker period, students were remarkably lethargic and displayed limited levels of enthusiasm in their activities. Improvements that were recorded after treatment are neatly aligned with concepts presented by Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory and have unequivocally placed adequate social interaction as a crucial ingredient to the process of cognitive development. The icebreaker concept initiated a welcoming environment where students were enabled and motivated to participate in discussions and activities without the paralyzing fear of making errors.

5.4. Research Question 2: Willingness to Communicate

The second aim of this study was to explore and extensively examine the complicated association between the activities of icebreakers and students' general willingness to communicate by using the English language. The findings from this study provided evidence of a visibly remarkable and significant gap between the pre-test results, which averaged to fall under 86.67% and the post-test results, which present a distribution of

scores where 80% fell in the good category, while 13.33% achieved an excellent status. This result is very similar to certain research that considers the social aspect to be crucial in the development and improvement of communicative competence as presented in the work of Krashen (1985). Finally, one very remarkable result of the study was a visibly changing situation in the class, which took place during icebreaker activities. Students allowed themselves more open and uninhibited interactions, which helped them develop deeper social connections and relationships with each other. Moreover, it seemed that their overall confidence levels had noticeably improved. The present study findings support the view held by Ellis (2005) that interaction is both a primary cause and a major effect of the process of language acquisition.

While the results are in line with theories supporting interactive and communicative methodological teaching, critics call for a balance between structure and spontaneity. Icebreakers focus on student-centered learning, but some proponents of the structural approaches (Swain, 1985) now argue that grammar and accuracy may be neglected. This study, however, clearly showed that interactive icebreakers did not in any way compromise the understanding of the subject at hand. This assertion is supported by the evidence of improved participation rates and an increase in the number of correct responses taken during the post-tests. It further indicates that the context in which this study was carried out also highlights the critical importance of cultural factors that play a significant role in EFL learning environments. It was also found that icebreakers sensitively fostered a feeling of belonging amongst the students who participated, which resonated very strongly with Hofstede's (2001) framework about collectivist cultures. In these cultures, emphasis on group harmony and cohesion is believed to significantly enhance individual performance within the group setting. The finding very strongly supports the notion of implementing culturally responsive teaching strategies within language teaching and learning as it resonates with the needs and backgrounds of the learners. According to Kuswara (2004), the teaching-learning process must be successful and delightful as well as for the students to remain focused on what they are learning.

6. CONCLUSION

The researcher concluded that introducing icebreakers was a useful tool for raising students' motivation and willingness to communicate in English at semester one students' level results by the discussion and the results. It was demonstrated by the student's motivation level results, which revealed that the t-test score was greater than the t-table value and that the pre and post-test results for the students varied considerably. Therefore, it could be said that treating students with icebreakers could help them become more motivated.

6.1. Contributions to the field of ELT and language teaching

Icebreakers are frequently used along with team-building exercises and are an important part of fostering a positive and stimulating learning environment in the context of English language teaching (ELT) and learning. These exercises are excellent resources for building community, lowering anxiety, and encouraging fluent language learners to communicate. The following, which draws from pedagogical practices and research, analyzes the contributions of icebreakers for ELT and language learning. In language classrooms, icebreakers play a critical role in fostering an inclusive and upbeat environment. These activities promote

conversation among students and between students and instructors in a laid-back environment. A welcoming classroom atmosphere is essential for language learning because it gives students a sense of community and encourages them to take an active role in their education (Brown, 2007). One of the most frequent challenges faced by language learners is language anxiety. Icebreakers, which encourage casual conversation and social interaction, are a useful tool for reducing anxiety. Students are more likely to get over their language anxiety and become more confident when using the target language when they can express themselves in a low-pressure environment. (Horwitz et al., 1986).

One of the main objectives of language instruction is effective communication. With the help of icebreakers, students can hone their language abilities in relevant situations. Students participate in real-world discussions in pairs or groups, which improves their speaking and listening skills. This communicative approach is in line with modern approaches to language teaching that emphasize using language in everyday situations (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Students in many language classes come from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Sharing cultural experiences and viewpoints as an icebreaker promotes awareness of and appreciation for diversity. This enhances the educational process and equips students with intercultural communication skills, which are essential in today's globalized world (Byram, 1997). Icebreakers frequently include cooperative activities that promote collaboration. These exercises teach students how to collaborate, exchange ideas, and find group solutions to problems. These cooperation abilities can be applied to language learning, where cooperation is necessary for group projects, talks, and peer evaluations, all of which support a comprehensive language-learning process (Willis & Willis, 2007). These contributions, which highlight the value of learner-centered, communicative, and culturally inclusive practices, are in line with the developing methodologies and pedagogical approaches in language education.

6.2. Limitations of the study

Within language education, research on the effects of icebreakers on students' motivation and willingness to communicate in English is very important. However, like any research, this research comes with certain limitations that need to be acknowledged. The following are some of the limitations of the present study. The time restriction placed on icebreakers poses a serious obstacle to the study of their effects on students' motivation and willingness to communicate in English. Typically, icebreakers are quick exercises intended to create a positive atmosphere for the class or workshop. This briefness might restrict the observed impact's depth. It won't have enough time to go from the first icebreaker to a consistent motivation or greater willingness to communicate in English. Furthermore, the brief duration might make it impossible to conduct a thorough investigation into the long-term impacts of icebreakers on language learning (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2005). The size of the participant pool is another limitation. With only thirty students, it might be difficult to extrapolate research findings to a larger population. Individual differences can lead to significant differences in language learning experiences, which a small sample size may not be able to fully capture. Furthermore, the transferability of research findings may be impacted by the dynamics of a smaller group being different from those of a larger class. An even more comprehensive and varied sample would yield a more robust understanding of how icebreakers affect motivation and willingness to communicate (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The research is further complicated by the students' cultural backgrounds. Although cultural neutrality is frequently taken into consideration when designing icebreakers, differences in communication styles and cultural norms may have an impact on how effective these exercises are. Different cultural backgrounds may place a higher value on individual expression than others, and this could lead to differences in how students understand icebreakers. Cultural differences can affect students' engagement with the activities and, in turn, their motivation and willingness to communicate. In this particular context, research ought to take into account the possible impact of cultural factors on the results that are observed (Kim, 2008).

Even though the goal of icebreakers is to foster a lively and positive environment, there isn't much room for the instructor to directly affect the motivation of the class during these exercises. Rather than directly delivering motivational content from the instructor, the main goal of icebreakers is to encourage student interaction. As a result, there may be a limit to how much icebreakers can influence students' motivation. To investigate the motivational elements, more treatments or a more thorough analysis that goes beyond the icebreaker's immediate context would be necessary (Ushioda, 2001). Research may be limited by the appropriateness and accessibility of icebreakers. Not every cultural setting or degree of language ability will suit every icebreaker. Furthermore, icebreakers might lose their novelty over time, particularly if students have already engaged in comparable activities in other classes. This restriction highlights how crucial it is to keep coming up with new ideas and modifications for icebreakers to meet the specific requirements and tastes of students (Dingsøy et al., 2012).

Motivation and willingness to communicate are difficult concepts to quantify. These complex psychological concepts are subject to influence from a range of internal and external sources. It takes advanced measurement tools to quantify the effect of icebreakers on motivation and willingness to communicate, and even with these tools, it might be difficult to capture the subtle changes resulting from a quick activity. Accurately measuring these constructions and meaningfully interpreting the results are intricate tasks that researchers must be aware of. The Hawthorne effect, in which pupils alter their behavior in reaction to being watched, may have an impact on the findings of studies conducted on icebreakers. When students are aware that they are being observed, they may change their motivation and willingness to communicate either consciously or unconsciously. It can be challenging to distinguish between behavioral changes that are genuinely brought about by the icebreakers and those that are a reaction to the research setting because of this awareness of being watched, which can add an artificiality to the research findings.

6.3. Suggestions for future research

As the body of knowledge regarding how icebreakers affect students' motivation and willingness to communicate in English grows, addressing contextual challenges can strengthen the validity and relevance of research findings. Considering the limitations of the current study, the following recommendations provide directions for future investigation. By performing longitudinal studies over a range of periods, future research can investigate the temporal aspects of the impact of icebreakers. It may be possible to determine whether icebreakers continue to be beneficial over time or if there are diminishing returns by looking into the long-term effects of these techniques on motivation and communication willingness (Hannan et al., 1983). This method can also assist in determining the best times to use

icebreakers in situations where language acquisition is taking place. Even though 30 participants might be a manageable sample size for some studies, more varied participant samples should be the goal of future research. Researchers can improve the external validity of their research by using comparative studies with larger and more diverse groups to help them generalize their findings across a range of demographics, such as age groups, cultural backgrounds, and language proficiency levels (Brysbart, 2019).

Future studies might concentrate on culturally modifying these exercises considering the impact of cultural background on the efficacy of icebreakers (Romani, 2013). It is possible to develop more culturally sensitive and broadly applicable strategies for increasing motivation and communication willingness by looking into how cultural differences affect students' responses to icebreakers and adapting activities accordingly. To overcome the shortage of appropriate icebreakers, more creative designs that can be applied in a variety of settings should be investigated in future studies. Creating icebreakers that are easily adjustable for various cultural contexts, language proficiency levels, and classroom dynamics could be one way to achieve this. Using icebreakers that are digitally and technologically enhanced could provide new opportunities for student engagement.

Given that teachers have less opportunity to inspire their students, further studies should examine how professional development initiatives for teachers affect how well icebreakers are used. The effectiveness of icebreakers in language classrooms can be enhanced by looking into ways to give teachers the knowledge and abilities to optimize their motivational power (Pranata et al., 2021; Purnama et al., 2019). Future research should include strategies to reduce the Hawthorne Effect, which occurs when participants change their behavior because they are aware that they are being watched (McCambridge et al., 2014). This could entail conducting studies with a naturalistic design, utilizing control groups, or utilizing more covert observation techniques to watch students in their real-world classrooms without realizing that they are being observed. Future research should use mixed methods approaches because measuring motivation and willingness to communicate can be challenging. The integration of quantitative assessments, like surveys and standardized tests, with qualitative techniques, like reflective journals and in-depth interviewing, can yield a more all-encompassing comprehension of the complex dynamics of motivation and willingness in language learning environments (Lee, 2023).

The researcher would like to recommend that icebreakers be used going forward in the English language program based on the study's findings regarding the influence of icebreakers on students' motivation and willingness to communicate in English. Furthermore, icebreakers are useful for all academic subjects, besides English classrooms. The teacher has a wide range of options for implementing icebreakers in the classroom by employing different activities. As a result, the pupils participate in more activities and have more motivation so that there will be more opportunities to be exposed to English language communication. In a learning environment, icebreakers also prevent a monotonous atmosphere.

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