

SIMON SAYS: A FUN AND ENGAGING ICEBREAKER FOR BOOSTING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT


This study aimed to investigate student perceptions of Simon Says as an icebreaker activity in an English language classroom. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the study involved ten students from Grade 11. A purposive sampling method was used to select participants. Data collection instruments included questionnaires administered before and after the implementation of Simon Says icebreaker activities, along with experimental instruction. Questionnaire results indicated that these icebreakers significantly enhanced student enthusiasm and interest in English language learning. Students reported completing the questionnaire accurately and comprehensively. These findings suggest that English language teachers incorporate Simon Says and similar interactive games into their classroom routines. These games can serve as effective icebreakers, fostering a relaxed and engaging learning environment and reducing student anxiety. This encourages greater student participation. This study has implications for both teachers and curriculum developers. Teachers can diversify their teaching methods, while curriculum developers can incorporate such games into teaching materials to enhance student engagement and motivation.

KEYWORDS: *English Language Learning, Icebreakers, Simon Says.*

INTRODUCTION

Although there are many other languages spoken throughout the world, English is an international language, thus mastering it is crucial (Fitriyasni, 2020; Nisa et al., 2020; Tathahira & Nahrinya, 2020). Enthusiasm and motivation are essential for the successful application of learning in the teaching and learning process (Dewaele & Li, 2021). The experiences and results of students' learning are greatly influenced by motivational orientations. The kind and intensity of motivation have a major impact on how students interact with their studies, persevere through difficulties, and succeed academically, according to a wealth of research. Designing tactics that promote successful learning and long-lasting passion in educational environments is made easier with an understanding of these orientations (Mahler et al., 2018).

Any curriculum's cornerstone highlights the teacher's function as a facilitator in



developing interesting and productive learning opportunities. Teachers need to carefully consider how to create methods and approaches that encourage inquiry and creativity while making learning fun (Lamrani & Abdelwahed, 2020; Thompson, 2017). In order to ensure that courses are both age-appropriate and meaningful, teaching strategies should also take into account the social, emotional, and cognitive traits of students. Teachers can foster students' innate passion while laying a strong basis for lifetime learning through games, storytelling, practical exercises, and teamwork opportunities. Ultimately, the goal is to create a positive and stimulating atmosphere that supports growth, discovery, and a love for learning (Lamrani & Abdelwahed, 2020; Thompson, 2017).

In this study, the use of icebreakers makes the classroom dynamic and interesting. Icebreakers are planned exercises meant to promote conversation and help students unwind, which enhances the learning experience. According to Sasan et al. (2023), in order to increase student participation and engagement in the classroom, icebreakers are essential. Such activities foster a more inclusive environment and help students feel more connected to their peers and the classroom by removing obstacles. They help students develop a feeling of belonging by promoting cooperation and candid dialogue. Students' confidence and willingness to participate in class activities, have debates, and exchange ideas are increased when they feel linked. Teachers may create a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere where students feel appreciated and inspired to participate by using icebreakers, which will enhance the educational process as a whole (Sasan et al., 2023).

There are a variety of icebreakers, one of which is "Simon Says" as the focus of this study. Simon Says is a useful game in language instruction since it has been shown to significantly improve students' capacity to remember and apply new words over time (Humairoh et al., 2023). Thus, this present study aims to investigate the potential of Simon Says to enhance learning English in the classroom. This study addresses two primary research questions: 1) Does the Simon Says game improve the classroom environment and increase student motivation in English lessons? 2) What are students' perceptions of the Simon Says icebreaker activity?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Icebreakers foster a sense of community and belonging by promoting communication and teamwork among students early on, which can boost their motivation to engage fully in class. As students work together and share experiences, they not only build social connections but also deepen their understanding of the content being taught.


Ultimately, icebreakers contribute to a more engaging and participatory learning environment (Sasan et al., 2023).

The goal of icebreaking is to create a dynamic, energetic, and lively learning atmosphere while also encouraging students' motivation or interest. The objective is to create a welcoming environment that promotes involvement and active learning in the classroom (Gunawan et al., 2023). Teachers can make students feel more at ease and receptive to learning by beginning with an icebreaker, which sets the tone for a more laid-back and participatory session. This method instills a feeling of enthusiasm and vitality that makes education pleasurable. Zuhariyah et al. (2022) highlight that icebreakers are a powerful tool for lowering stress, fostering rapport, and inspiring pupils to actively engage in lessons that follow. In the end, they help create an engaging and joyful learning environment, which makes the classroom a more welcoming space for all kids.

Icebreakers are exercises created especially to "warm up" a class and make the students more open and interested (Mustafa Kurdi & Sabah Meena, 2023). It is crucial that students feel at ease and willing to participate before learning can occur effectively. By encouraging connection and removing early barriers between participants, icebreakers are essential to doing this. Students can unwind, socialize with classmates, and open up to the learning process with the aid of these activities (Mustafa Kurdi & Sabah Meena, 2023). Icebreakers facilitate more seamless transitions into more formal instructional activities by fostering an upbeat and energetic environment. They also promote teamwork and foster a feeling of community in the classroom, which boosts students' willingness to participate (Sasan et al., 2023).

Research has highlighted the positive effects of icebreakers to increase student participation and interest in the classroom (Gunawan et al., 2023; Sasan et al., 2023). For example, icebreakers greatly increased engagement, especially among students' discussion. Students were more engaged in class discussions throughout the semester when icebreakers were used at the beginning of the course (Mepieza, 2024).

Such exercises are essential for creating a welcoming and cooperative learning environment (Mepieza, 2024). Students' attitude, sense of community, engagement, and participation are just a few of the important characteristics of the classroom that are positively impacted by icebreakers. Icebreakers help to foster a more engaging and encouraging learning atmosphere in addition to energizing students (Mustafa Kurdi & Sabah Meena, 2023). Icebreakers make students feel more at ease and inclined to participate in class activities by creating a sense of connection and belonging. Teachers can improve the classroom experience and foster a stimulating environment that is



conducive to learning by incorporating icebreakers into their lesson plans (Sasan et al., 2020).

PREVIOUS STUDIES

There are several previous studies about Simon Says icebreaker. A study by Humairoh et al. (2023) has demonstrated that using the Simon Says game greatly increases students' vocabulary. Here, this interactive teaching increases student involvement and improves vocabulary acquisition in an efficient manner. In addition to enhancing language proficiency, the game piques students' curiosity and actively engages them in the educational process, making classes entertaining and effective. Simon Says fosters a dynamic learning environment where students are inspired to participate by fusing enjoyment with instructional value, which helps them succeed in language acquisition overall.

Research by Murni and Zuhriyah (2023) found that the Simon Says game is a flexible educational tool that may be modified to improve a variety of skills, including speaking and writing. Teachers can adapt the game to fit various learning goals by introducing versions like "Teacher Says" or other inventive changes. It is strongly advised that educational institutions support English teachers in using the Simon Says game as a substitute teaching tool for listening comprehension. Schools could also help teachers by contributing to the development of instructional materials in order to optimize its impact. Since teachers frequently need more time and resources to create engaging learning materials, this partnership is essential.

It is clear from the research done by Humairoh et al. (2023) and Murni and Zuhriyah (2023) that the Simon Says game is a very useful and successful teaching tool. It creates a dynamic and interactive learning environment by greatly improving vocabulary acquisition, student engagement, and general participation. The game can be modified to enhance speaking and writing abilities in addition to vocabulary, making it a versatile teaching tool. It is advised that schools assist teachers in integrating Simon Says into their lesson plans in order to optimize its efficacy, particularly when it comes to listening comprehension. Furthermore, giving educators the time and resources, they need to produce interesting teaching materials will maximize the game's impact and guarantee that students have a more interesting and fruitful learning experience.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study took place in SMA Negeri 1 Leupung, Aceh Besar over the course of two days, from June 8 to June 9, 2020. The sample of the study was selected purposively from one class in Grade 11, consisting of ten students. This study employed a

quantitative method. Quantifiable data on student responses was collected through questionnaires administered before and after the implementation of Simon Says icebreaker activities, with the analysis focusing on identifying shifts in student participation and engagement levels. Furthermore, individual student perspectives, gathered through close-ended (i.e., Yes and No) questions on the questionnaires, were analyzed to gain deeper insights into their experiences. Data were analyzed by calculating the percentage of the students' responses on the item questions.

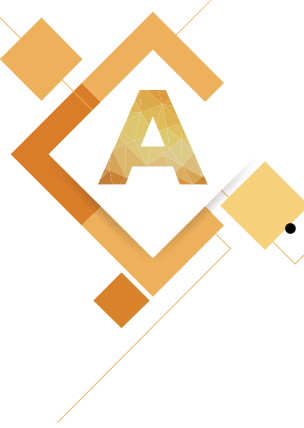
The study implemented the Simon Says icebreaker in two sessions. In the first session, the game's rules were explained to the ten participating students. They gathered in a circle, and the teacher provided instructions using the phrase "Simon Says." Students were required to follow instructions promptly and accurately. Those who made mistakes or failed to comply were eliminated from the game. In the second session, one student assumed the role of "Simon." The final remaining student was declared the winner and received a small reward.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the questionnaires are described in the following:

a. The students' responses before the Simon Says icebreaker was applied


- *You like English:* While a minority of students, constituting 30% (3 out of 10), expressed enjoyment in English language instruction, a significant majority, representing 70% (7 out of 10), indicated a less favorable experience. This suggests that a considerable portion of the student population may not find the current English language instruction to be engaging, motivating, or enjoyable.
- *English is enjoyable:* A relatively small proportion of students, comprising 30% (3 out of 10), perceived learning English as a highly pleasurable experience, suggesting that they found the subject matter intrinsically motivating and enjoyable. However, a substantial majority, representing 70% (7 out of 10), did not share this view, indicating that they may find learning English to be challenging, tedious, or lacking in inherent interest.
- *Learning English is important:* A strong majority of students, representing 80% (8 out of 10), recognized the crucial importance of studying English, acknowledging its significance in various aspects of life, such as academic pursuits, career opportunities, and global communication. In contrast, a smaller minority, comprising 20% (2 out of 10), did not perceive English classes as significant, suggesting that they may not fully understand or appreciate the value and relevance of English language proficiency in today's world.

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- *English is difficult to learn:* A significant majority of students, representing 80% of the class (8 out of 10), perceived English lessons as challenging, indicating that they found the subject matter to be demanding and requiring considerable effort to master. In contrast, a smaller proportion of students, constituting 20% (2 out of 10), did not share this view, believing that learning English was not particularly difficult.
 - *You feel bored while learning English:* A substantial portion of the student body, comprising 80% (8 out of 10), reported experiencing boredom during English lessons, suggesting that the instruction may not have been engaging or stimulating enough to maintain their interest and attention. Conversely, 20% of students (2 out of 10) did not find English lessons to be boring, indicating that they were either intrinsically motivated to learn or found the teaching methods to be effective and engaging.
 - *Your teacher is always motivated before starting the English lesson:* A considerable number of students, representing 70% of the class (7 out of 10), observed that their teacher consistently demonstrated enthusiasm and motivation before the commencement of English lessons. This proactive approach, characterized by energetic and encouraging demeanor, was perceived positively by a majority of the students. However, 30% of students (3 out of 10) did not observe this consistent level of motivation from their teacher, suggesting that the teacher's approach may vary depending on the day or the specific lesson.
 - *You have heard of icebreakers:* None of the ten students surveyed had prior knowledge of icebreaker activities, which are commonly used in group settings to foster social interaction and build rapport among participants. This lack of familiarity with icebreakers suggests that they may not be commonly employed in other academic or social contexts within the students' experiences.
 - *Your teacher has previously applied icebreakers before starting or ending the learning session:* The data revealed that none of the ten students had ever encountered the use of icebreakers, either at the beginning or the conclusion of an English lesson, by their teacher. This suggests that the teacher may not utilize icebreakers as a pedagogical tool to enhance student engagement or create a more conducive learning environment.
 - *You have heard of the Simon Says icebreakers before:* Only a small fraction of the student population, specifically 10% (1 out of 10), had prior familiarity with the "Simon Says" icebreaker game, which involves following instructions only when preceded by the phrase "Simon Says." The remaining 90% of students (9 out of 10) had no prior exposure to this particular icebreaker activity.
 - *Your teacher has applied the Simon Says icebreakers:* The data indicated that none of the ten students had experienced the use of the "Simon Says"

icebreaker game by their English teacher. This suggests that the teacher may not utilize this specific icebreaker activity to enhance student participation, engagement, and learning in the English classroom

b. The students' responses after the Simon Says icebreaker was applied

- *English is enjoyable:* A significant majority of students, representing 80% (8 out of 10), found learning English to be enjoyable, indicating that they found the subject matter engaging, stimulating, and intrinsically motivating. However, a minority of students, comprising 20% (2 out of 10), did not share this positive sentiment, suggesting that they may find English lessons to be challenging, tedious, or lacking in inherent interest.
- *You feel bored while learning English:* Only a small minority of students, representing 20% (2 out of 10), reported feeling bored during English lessons, suggesting that they may find the instruction to be monotonous, unengaging, or lacking in variety. Conversely, a substantial majority of students, comprising 80% (8 out of 10), did not experience boredom during English lessons, indicating that they found the instruction to be engaging, stimulating, and conducive to learning
- *Simon Says icebreaker is new for you:* Given that the "Simon Says" icebreaker was a novel experience for all students, 100% of the participants indicated that it was new to them. This suggests that the "Simon Says" icebreaker was either a newly introduced activity in the classroom or a concept that was unfamiliar to the students prior to its implementation.
- *You like Simon Says icebreakers:* A significant majority of students, representing 90% (9 out of 10), expressed enjoyment in the "Simon Says" icebreaker activity, indicating that they found it to be engaging, fun, and a positive addition to the learning experience. Conversely, a single student, representing 10% of the class, did not enjoy the "Simon Says" icebreaker, suggesting that they may have found it to be disruptive, time-consuming, or not aligned with their learning preferences.
- *Simon Says icebreaker is easy to understand:* A significant majority of students, representing 90% (9 out of 10), found the "Simon Says" icebreaker to be easy to understand, indicating that the instructions and rules of the game were clear, concise, and readily grasped by the majority of participants. However, a single student, representing 10% of the class, found the "Simon Says" icebreaker to be difficult to comprehend, suggesting that they may have experienced confusion regarding the rules or instructions of the game.
- *Simon Says icebreaker is interesting:* A significant majority of students, representing 90% (9 out of 10), found the "Simon Says" icebreaker to be



interesting and engaging, suggesting that they were intrigued by the game's dynamics, enjoyed the playful interaction, and found it to be a novel and stimulating experience. Conversely, a single student, representing 10% of the class, did not find the "Simon Says" icebreaker to be engaging, possibly due to personal preferences, lack of interest in the game's format, or a preference for other types of activities.

- *Simon Says icebreaker adds to your enthusiasm for learning:* A substantial majority of students, representing 90% (9 out of 10), reported that the "Simon Says" icebreaker enhanced their enthusiasm for learning, suggesting that the game's interactive and engaging nature created a more positive and motivating learning environment. This positive impact may have been attributed to factors such as increased student participation, improved classroom dynamics, and a more enjoyable overall learning experience. Conversely, a single student, representing 10% of the class, did not perceive an increase in their learning enthusiasm as a result of the "Simon Says" icebreaker, indicating that the game's impact on their motivation may have been minimal or insignificant.
- *Because of the Simon Says icebreaker, you want to speak English well:* A considerable number of students, representing 70% (7 out of 10), reported that the "Simon Says" icebreaker motivated them to improve their English speaking skills. Conversely, 30% of students (3 out of 10) did not perceive a significant increase in their motivation to speak English fluently as a result of the "Simon Says" icebreaker, suggesting that the game's impact on their speaking motivation may have been limited or varied among individuals.

This study addressed two primary research questions. The first aimed to investigate whether the Simon Says game could positively impact the classroom environment and motivate students to learn English. Research findings revealed that the Simon Says game indeed enhanced student enthusiasm and improved the classroom atmosphere. Questionnaire results indicated that many students experienced boredom and disinterest in English classes prior to the introduction of the icebreaker. However, a notable shift occurred following the implementation of Simon Says. The majority of students reported increased excitement and engagement in the course, suggesting that the game effectively rekindled their enthusiasm for learning English. This finding is similar to those in Humairoh et al. (2023) which found that students felt more excited and engaged in learning English with Simon Says.

The second research question focused on exploring student perceptions of the Simon Says icebreaker. Findings demonstrated a significant improvement in student attitudes towards English learning. While only a small percentage of students initially found


English lessons enjoyable, nearly all reported an increase in enjoyment after participating in the icebreaker activity. Moreover, a significant majority of students reported a decrease in boredom during English classes, highlighting the effectiveness of Simon Says in enhancing the overall learning experience. These results underscore the potential of interactive activities like Simon Says to motivate students and cultivate a more dynamic and engaging learning environment in the classroom. These findings are in line with those in Humairoh et al. (2023) and Murni and Zuhriyah (2023). Moreover, Wright et al. (2006) assert that using games like Simon Says to teach languages can make the learning process more interesting and fun for students. Games have the power to boost motivation, lessen classroom boredom, and promote active student engagement in language learning (Safura & Helmanda, 2022; Wright et al. (2006). Therefore, using icebreakers, such as Simon Says, can help English teachers attract student attention to study in the classroom.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that the implementation of Simon Says has significantly impacted both the classroom environment and student enthusiasm for learning English. The game is particularly effective at the beginning of class or when the learning atmosphere has become stagnant and unengaging. By energizing students and revitalizing the classroom environment, Simon Says sets a positive tone for the remainder of the lesson. Prior to the introduction of Simon Says, many students expressed disinterest and boredom in English classes. However, a noticeable shift in their attitudes became evident following the icebreaker activity. Students became more engaged and enthusiastic, with several expressing a newfound preference for English classes. The game effectively piqued student interest, not only enhancing the learning process but also fostering a more dynamic and inspiring learning environment. These findings demonstrate the effectiveness of icebreakers in increasing student participation and transforming the overall educational experience.

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