

THE APPLICATION OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION AT POLITEKNIK PELAYARAN SURABAYA

Wahyuni Oktavia¹, Natriya Faisal Rachman², St. Hariati B³, Anak Agung Ngurah
Ade Dwi Putra Yuda⁴

^{1,4} Nautic department, Politeknik Pelayaran Surabaya

² Technical Department, Politeknik Pelayaran Surabaya

³ Electrical Engineering Department

*Corresponding email: Wahyuni.oktavia@poltekpel-sby.ac.id

Abstract: This study examines the application of experiential learning-based ice breaking activities to increase class participation and soft skills development in cadets at Politeknik Pelayaran Surabaya. The objectives of this study is to see how innovative learning strategies can create a positive learning atmosphere while supporting the improvement of integrity, work ethic, initiative, communication, cooperation, and adaptability. This study used qualitative descriptive design. The data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation of cadets' participation in various interactive activities. Data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification. The results showed that the integration of ice-breaking sessions at the beginning of learning significantly increased cadets' engagement, motivation, and willingness to use English in real contexts. Teacher participation in facilitating the activities also strengthened cadets' confidence and encouraged collaborative learning. Furthermore, experiential learning-based ice breaking provides opportunities for cadets to practice decision making, problem solving, and interpersonal communication in a supportive environment. This study concludes that the interactive approach is not only effective in improving language learning outcomes, but also important in developing soft skills that are crucial for cadets' professional readiness in the maritime industry. However, this study has limitations in sample size and generalizability, so further research with a larger and more diverse population of cadets is recommended

Keywords: Experiential learning, Ice breaking, Class participation, Soft skills, cadets

To cite this paper (in APA style):

Oktavia, W., et al. (2026). The application of experiential learning in English language instruction at Politeknik Pelayaran Surabaya. *Journal of English Language and Educational Studies (JELES)*, 1(1), 16–38.

INTRODUCTION

English has a strategic role in the maritime world as a lingua franca used in various aspects of shipboard communication. Its functions are not limited to routine work instructions, but include cross-border shipping coordination, incident reporting to international authorities, administrative documentation, and interpersonal interactions between crew members from diverse national, cultural and linguistic backgrounds (James et al., 2018; Smelikova, 2020). In the context of maritime globalization, English is not only a technical communication tool, but also a medium of unifying international maritime professional identity. This is in accordance with the standards set by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) through the Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) document, which is designed to minimize the risk of misunderstanding in operational communication (Nagy, 2015)

The importance of mastering maritime English is further emphasized by empirical data. Reports that more than 80% of marine accidents are caused by human error, and one of the dominant causes is inter crew miscommunication (Ziarati et al., 2011). Failure to understand instructions, misinterpretation of navigation orders, or unclear technical condition reports often lead to serious incidents that threaten life safety and material losses. A clear example is the case of a container ship collision in the Singapore (Yildiz et al., 2022), where investigations showed that one of the contributing factors was a communication failure between the skipper and the duty officer who were from different countries. This fact underscores the urgency of English as a crucial competency in ensuring global shipping safety.

At the national level, Indonesia faces both a challenge and a great opportunity. As a maritime country with the second-longest coastline in the world, the need for seafarers who are not only technically competent, but also proficient in communicating in English, is increasing. The Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS, 2022) reported that the number of Indonesian maritime sector workers absorbed in the international job market has exceeded 1 million people, and around 65% of them are required to have adequate maritime English skills. Reinforced by the International Chamber of Shipping (Handl, 2023), he emphasizes that international shipping companies are increasingly strict in selecting seafarers, especially in the aspect of English communication which is an indicator of professionalism and readiness to face emergency situations.

Recognizing this need, the Indonesian government through the Transportation Human Resources Development Agency (BPSDMP) has included English language competency as an integral part of the education curriculum in shipping schools, including at Politeknik Pelayaran Surabaya. The curriculum not only emphasizes basic linguistic aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, but also communicative aspects such as Maritime English for Navigation, Engineering, and Communication. Thus, graduates are expected to not only be

able to understand technical texts, but also apply English in daily operational contexts, ranging from giving work instructions, writing logbook reports, to conducting radio communications with international ports.

Although the curriculum policy has been appropriately directed, in practice various obstacles are still encountered in the classroom (Gao, 2019). Many cadets show low active participation in English learning. They tend to be passive, wait for instructions from lecturers, and rarely take the initiative to communicate. Low confidence in speaking is also a serious obstacle. The fear of making mistakes, both in terms of grammar and pronunciation, often makes cadets reluctant to speak even though they actually understand the material. This condition is further exacerbated by the class atmosphere which tends to be formal and monotonous, thus not encouraging natural communicative interaction.

This phenomenon is in line with the constructivistic learning theory developed by (Devi, 2019). Piaget emphasized that knowledge is built through an active process, where individuals construct meaning based on experience and interaction with their environment. Meanwhile, Vygotsky introduced the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which states that optimal learning occurs when students receive support (scaffolding) in facing challenges that are slightly beyond their actual abilities (Vygotsky, 2011; Devi, 2019). In the context of maritime English learning, this means that cadets need a learning environment that allows them to directly experience the use of English in realistic situations, as well as obtain instructional support from lecturers and peers.

The limitations of the traditional lecture-based approach are increasingly apparent in this context. The lecture method, which places the lecturer as the center of knowledge, tends to emphasize cognitive aspects, namely understanding of grammar rules or memorization of vocabulary, but ignores the social and affective dimensions of language learning. In fact, maritime communication competence demands pragmatic skills and the courage to interact in real situations. In other words, lecture-based learning only creates "knowledge about language", but does not necessarily produce "ability to use language" (Simanjuntak, 2024).

To address these challenges, there is an urgent need for more student-centered and experiential learning strategies. According to (Kolb, 2013; Kolb, 2013) (Bartle, 2015), The experiential learning approach offers a relevant conceptual framework. effective learning occurs through a four-stage cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. When applied in the context of maritime education, experiential learning allows cadets to not only learn English theory, but also use it in shipboard communication

simulations, navigation instruction role-play, or real case-based problem solving discussion exercises.

Furthermore, the application of experiential learning is also in line with the need to develop soft skills in maritime vocational education. Soft skills such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, and leadership are increasingly seen as determinants of seafarer career success (Iakovaki et al., 2023; Wibowo et al., 2025). Mastery of English within an experiential learning framework not only improves linguistic competence, but also strengthens cadets' integrity, work ethic and interpersonal skills. Thus, experiential English learning has a double value: supporting the technical aspects of shipping safety while preparing cadets to face global work challenges. This can be linked to theories of communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based language teaching (TBLT), which emphasize the importance of real-world tasks-based learning.

According to Wibowo, Ulfaika, et al., (2025), TBLT place authentic communication at the core of language learning, which is in line with maritime education objectives that emphasize practical communication skills. By integrating ice-breaking, simulation and role-playing into experiential learning, the classroom atmosphere can be made more dynamic, encourage active participation and reduce speaking anxiety which has been a major obstacle (Wibowo et al., 2024).

Based on the previous background, there is a real need to improve the quality of English language learning in Indonesia's maritime vocational education, especially at Politeknik Pelayaran Surabaya. The foundations of constructivism, Vygotsky's ZPD theory, and Kolb's experiential learning model provide strong arguments that effective learning must be based on direct experience, interactive, and contextual (Devi, 2019). The gap between the ideal curriculum policy and conventional learning practices is an important space for research innovation and implementation of new strategies.

The experiential learning theory introduced by Kolb et al., (2014) is still one of the main references in the development of pedagogical innovation in higher education. In his four-stage cycle-Concrete Experience (CE), Reflective Observation (RO), Abstract Conceptualization (AC), and Active Experimentation (AE)-Kolb emphasizes that learning occurs through the process of transforming experience into knowledge. A number of recent studies have shown that the experiential learning model can be effectively adapted in language learning, including English, to create a more meaningful learning experience.

For example, research conducted by Beard & Wilson, (2018) found that experiential learning in language teaching was able to improve students' vocabulary retention as well as speaking skills as they engaged in real experiences such as role plays based on workplace situations. Furthermore,

Uyen et al., (2022) in their study in Vietnam asserted that experiential learning provides opportunities for students to connect linguistic theories with communication practices in the field, thus promoting the development of critical and reflective skills.

In the vocational context, Abeysiriwardhane et al., (2021) proved that experiential learning encourages polytechnic students to be more confident in using technical English. Through project-based simulations, students learn to link language theory with technical procedures according to their field of expertise. This is relevant to maritime education, where the use of English is not only limited to general conversation, but also to technical communication based on international standards (SMCP).

Lin & Zhang, (2025) examined the application of experiential learning in seafarer education at China Maritime University. The results showed significant improvement in maritime communication skills, particularly in the aspects of clear communication and situation awareness. This study strengthens the argument that experiential learning is a strategic approach in maritime vocational education, because it is in line with the needs of the world of work which demands practical, reflective and adaptive readiness.

Ice breaking has been widely researched in the context of English language learning as a pedagogical strategy to create a positive classroom atmosphere. (Day et al., 2013) noted that this activity was able to reduce the level of anxiety (language anxiety) while increasing student engagement. In another study, (Abu Omar, 2019) found that ice breaking activities at the beginning of an English class encouraged students to adapt more quickly to the collaborative learning atmosphere.

Recent research reinforces these findings. White & Smith, (2020) showed that students who participated in ice breaking activities participated more easily in group discussions and role plays, with significant improvements in speaking fluency. (Kwartama, 2025) who researched in a maritime environment found that ice breaking helped students overcome psychological barriers, such as shyness of public speaking, and directly improved interpersonal communication skills that are crucial on board. In addition, (Brown & Lee, (2025) relates ice breaking to affective theory in language learning, namely the role of positive emotions in learning effectiveness. Fun activities at the beginning of class serve as "emotional priming", which lowers students' psychological barriers so that they are better prepared to receive the next material. In the maritime context, where students are often trained with a semi-military approach that tends to be rigid, ice breaking offers a strategy to balance the disciplinary aspects with a humanistic and supportive atmosphere.

Research in Indonesia also provides similar evidence. Triyono et al., (2023) emphasized that the use of ice breaking in high school encouraged increased motivation from the beginning of

English learning. (Musdalifa, 2022) added that ice breaking supported the transition to experiential learning methods as students were more open to active activities such as role play or simulation after the class atmosphere had thawed. However, until now, research in maritime institutions has been very limited, so the relevance of ice breaking in a semi-military context is an important gap to be researched.

Soft skills have become an important focus in recent studies as the industry increasingly emphasizes non-technical competencies to support job success. The International Chamber of Shipping (Dewan, 2024) report emphasizes that in addition to technical skills, modern seafarers must have communication competencies, teamwork, integrity, and adaptability. Research by (Melnyk et al., 2025) shows that accidents at sea are often triggered not by weak technical skills, but by poor coordination and communication between crews. European shipping sector found that soft skills such as problem solving, cross-cultural communication, and leadership are the main indicators of a ship officer's success (Ragab, 2024). In Indonesia, Wibowo, Gupron, & Dewi, (2025) examined cadets of the Sailing Polytechnic and found that despite good technical skills, many cadets had difficulties in effective communication and teamwork. This resulted in low performance during sailing practice. The study recommended the integration of soft skills into the English curriculum.

Based on the above review, many previous studies have proven the effectiveness of experiential learning and ice breaking in increasing motivation and English language skills. However, there are still significant research gaps. Firstly, research that integrates ice breaking with experiential learning approaches in the context of maritime education in Indonesia is still very limited. Secondly, most of the studies only focus on linguistic achievement, not deeply exploring its contribution to the development of essential soft skills for seafaring cadets. In fact, according to BPSDMP (2020), soft skills such as integrity, communication, cooperation, and adaptation are core competencies that seafarers must have to face multicultural work dynamics on international ships.

Previous research has not explored the direct relationship between simple activities such as ice breaking and the strengthening of cadets' soft skills. Thus, there is a need to fill this gap through empirical research that connects experiential learning-based English learning practices with the development of six key soft skills for cadets at the Surabaya Sailing Polytechnic.

Therefore, this study addresses the gap in maritime vocational education by examining how the integration of ice breaking within experiential learning can enhance cadets' participation, confidence, and English mastery at Politeknik Pelayaran Surabaya, while simultaneously fostering six key soft skills: integrity, work ethic, initiative, communication, cooperation, and adaptation.

The study aims to describe the application of ice breaking in English learning and analyze its role in developing soft skills, offering a novel approach that systematically combines experiential learning and ice breaking in the Indonesian maritime context. Its contributions are both theoretical—advancing English learning models in vocational education—and practical, equipping shipping institutions with strategies to prepare cadets who are technically proficient and socially competent for the global industry.

Previous research has shown that games and gamification can positively influence learning motivation and engagement. Hamari, Koivisto, and Sarsa (2014), in their review of empirical studies, found that gamification generally produced positive effects, although outcomes depended on the learning context and implementation design. Similarly, Sailer and Homner's (2020) meta-analysis reported significant effects of gamification on cognitive, motivational, and behavioral learning outcomes. These findings suggest that game-based approaches may support English learning when teachers use them intentionally rather than as unrelated classroom entertainment.

In English language classrooms, GBL is particularly useful because it creates opportunities for repeated language exposure and low-pressure practice. Reinders and Wattana (2015) found that digital game-based language learning could support willingness to communicate in English by creating a less threatening environment for interaction. For young learners, this is important because fear of making mistakes can prevent them from speaking or participating actively. Games may reduce anxiety by shifting attention from formal correctness to meaningful participation.

However, the implementation of Game-Based Learning depends strongly on teachers. Teachers decide which games are appropriate, how games are connected to learning objectives, how rules are explained, how students are grouped, and how learning outcomes are evaluated. Huizenga et al. (2017) found that teachers who used digital games perceived them as valuable for learning and motivation, but their perceptions were shaped by classroom realities and practical constraints. Watson and Yang (2016) also reported that teachers perceived barriers to game-based learning, including lack of time, limited resources, and difficulty integrating games into formal curricula.

In the Indonesian EFL context, research on Game-Based Learning (GBL) and Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL) has received increasing attention over the last decade. This growing interest is largely driven by the need to create more engaging and learner-centered English classrooms, particularly for young learners who often require interactive and motivating learning environments. Several studies have investigated how games can support language acquisition, enhance classroom participation, and foster positive attitudes toward English learning. For example, Purba (2021) examined English teachers' perceptions of using game-based learning to

improve vocabulary instruction and found that teachers generally viewed games as effective tools for increasing students' motivation, participation, and vocabulary retention. The participants in the study believed that game-based activities helped students learn English in a more enjoyable manner while reducing boredom commonly associated with traditional teaching approaches.

Similarly, Umamah (2022) explored the perspectives of both teachers and students regarding Digital Game-Based Learning in EFL settings. The findings revealed that participants perceived digital games positively because they encouraged active engagement, facilitated collaboration, and created meaningful learning experiences. However, the study also identified several challenges, including technological limitations, unequal access to digital devices, and difficulties in selecting appropriate educational games. These findings suggest that while digital games offer significant pedagogical potential, their successful implementation depends on contextual factors and instructional planning. In addition, other Indonesian studies have reported that game-based activities contribute to increased learner motivation, improved classroom interaction, and more positive attitudes toward English learning. Teachers frequently describe games as effective tools for capturing students' attention and maintaining engagement throughout the learning process.

Beyond Indonesia, international research has consistently highlighted the educational value of Game-Based Learning. Studies conducted in various educational contexts have shown that games can promote motivation, facilitate language practice, and encourage collaborative learning. Reinders and Wattana (2015), for instance, found that digital game-based environments increased learners' willingness to communicate in English by creating less threatening learning situations. Likewise, Plass et al. (2015) argued that effective game-based learning integrates cognitive, motivational, affective, and social dimensions, enabling learners to engage deeply with educational content. Meta-analytic studies by Hamari et al. (2014) and Sailer and Homner (2020) further demonstrated that game-based approaches generally produce positive effects on learner engagement, motivation, and academic performance when implemented appropriately. Collectively, these studies provide substantial evidence supporting the educational potential of Game-Based Learning across different learning environments.

Despite the growing body of literature, existing research has primarily focused on measuring learning outcomes, academic achievement, vocabulary gains, or student engagement resulting from game-based interventions. Many studies have employed quantitative approaches to determine whether games improve learning performance, while relatively fewer investigations have explored the perceptions and experiences of teachers who are responsible for implementing these instructional approaches. Since teachers play a central role in selecting games, designing learning activities, managing classroom interactions, and evaluating learning outcomes, their perceptions

can significantly influence the effectiveness and sustainability of Game-Based Learning practices. Understanding teachers' perspectives is therefore essential for gaining a more comprehensive understanding of how game-based instruction operates in authentic educational settings.

Furthermore, much of the existing literature has concentrated on secondary schools, higher education institutions, or digital game-based learning environments. Comparatively little attention has been given to elementary school contexts, particularly private elementary schools where educational conditions may differ substantially from those of public institutions. Private schools often operate within unique educational environments characterized by different curriculum expectations, classroom cultures, parental involvement, technological resources, and institutional policies. These contextual differences may influence how teachers perceive, adopt, and implement Game-Based Learning in English classrooms. Consequently, findings from previous studies conducted in other educational settings cannot necessarily be generalized to private elementary school contexts.

Another important limitation in the existing literature concerns the lack of in-depth qualitative investigations into teachers' lived experiences with Game-Based Learning. While previous studies have established that games can positively affect student learning, less is known about how teachers interpret the relevance of games, what pedagogical benefits they perceive, what challenges they encounter during implementation, and how they balance educational objectives with the playful nature of game-based activities. Exploring these issues is particularly important because successful implementation depends not only on the availability of games but also on teachers' beliefs, pedagogical knowledge, and instructional decision-making processes.

Considering these gaps, further research is needed to explore teachers' perspectives on Game-Based Learning within specific educational contexts. Such exploration can provide valuable insights into how teachers understand the role of games in English language teaching, how they integrate game-based activities into classroom practice, and what support they require to implement these approaches effectively. A deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions may also contribute to the development of more contextually relevant professional development programs and instructional guidelines for English language educators.

Based on the gaps identified in previous studies, this study aims to explore teachers' perceptions of Game-Based Learning in English classrooms at a private elementary school. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how teachers perceive the relevance of Game-Based Learning in supporting English language instruction, identify the benefits they associate with game-based activities, examine the challenges they encounter during implementation, and investigate how teacher readiness and pedagogical considerations influence the effective integration of games

in young learners' English classrooms. By focusing on teachers' experiences and perspectives, the study is expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on Game-Based Learning and provide practical implications for English language teaching in elementary education.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a descriptive qualitative design to describe the application of ice breaking activities in experiential learning-based English learning (Cresswell, 2014). This approach was chosen because it is relevant to explore the dynamics of classroom interactions, the perceptions of cadets as learners, and the teaching strategies of lecturers in creating a humanist, collaborative and inclusive learning atmosphere. With this design, the research does not focus on quantitative hypothesis testing, but rather on a comprehensive understanding of learning phenomena that occur in the field.

Participants of the Study

The participants were cadets of sea transportation studying in maritime academy who have got their basic training as cadets and experience some micro internship at port. They consisted of English lecturers and cadets who had experience using ice breaking in English lessons. The participants were selected through purposive sampling because they were directly involved in planning or implementing English classroom activities.

Research Setting

The study was conducted at a marine academy like a polytechnic located in Surabaya. Formally, this institution was a base for seafarers training center under ministry of transportation then now become the Polytechnique of merchant marine. This setting was relevant because lecturers had practical experience using game and ice breaking during the teaching and learning.

Research Instruments

The research instrument was developed according to Kolb's (1984) experiential learning indicators which include four stages, namely Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. In addition, the instrument is also directed to identify the development of six categories of soft skills according to the International Chamber of Shipping (2020), namely teamwork, communication, problem solving, adaptability, leadership, and situational awareness. Thus, the research instrument is able to produce holistic data

regarding the relationship between the ice breaking method and the development of cadets' soft skills.

Data Collection

Data was collected using three main techniques, namely observation, interviews, and document analysis. Observations were made to record the learning process, particularly ice breaking activities and cadets' responses to these activities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with cadets and lecturers to explore their experiences, perceptions, and views on the contribution of ice breaking to the learning atmosphere and soft skills development. Document analysis was used to review lesson plans, teaching materials, and academic records related to the integration of experiential learning.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive analysis model of (Miles & Huberman, 1994) which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data reduction was done by selecting and organizing important information relevant to the focus of the research, for example, interview quotes that explain the effectiveness of ice breaking. The reduced data were then presented in the form of descriptive narratives and direct quotes to facilitate the identification of patterns and relationships between findings.

Conclusions were drawn from the early stages of data collection with a tentative nature, then verified through triangulation. Source triangulation was done by comparing information from cadets, lecturers, and learning documents; technique triangulation was done by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and document analysis. Data validity was also strengthened by peer discussion and member checking with respondents to ensure accuracy of interpretation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the results of observations made during one semester in the English class of level I cadets of Politeknik Pelayaran Surabaya, the implementation of experiential learning-based ice breaking is carried out consistently at the beginning of the lesson. Every meeting, the lecturer provides about 5-10 minutes to implement various forms of ice breaking, both language games (word chain, guess the word), physical activities (Simon Says, stand up if...), and quick discussions (quick talk).

The application of ice breaking not only serves as a "warm-up" before entering the core material, but also as a means to foster a more lively, dynamic, and interactive classroom atmosphere. This is very important considering that at the beginning of the semester the class atmosphere tends to be passive, many cadets are reluctant to speak in English, and only a few dare to take the initiative to answer questions.



Figure 1. Ice-breaking in the Beginning of the Class to Show the Positive Learning Atmosphere

Figure 1 shows the initial learning atmosphere when the lecturer applies ice-breaking as a class opening strategy. This activity serves to create a positive, friendly and interactive learning atmosphere so that cadets feel more relaxed and ready to follow the learning process. Ice-breaking in the early stages proved effective in reducing tension, increasing focus, and building a sense of community among cadets.

In addition, based on the principle of experiential learning, this activity is an initial means for cadets to learn through direct experience (learning by doing). By participating in fun activities, cadets are encouraged to communicate more actively, dare to express themselves, and foster self-confidence. This is in line with previous research findings which emphasize that a positive classroom atmosphere can increase intrinsic motivation and learning engagement (Kolb et al., 2014) (Iryanti et al., 2024)



Figure 2. Teachers' Participation in the Classroom during Teaching and Learning

Figure 2 shows the active involvement of lecturers in the English learning process in the classroom. Lecturers' participation is not only limited as material providers, but also as facilitators who assist cadets in communication activities, discussions, and ice-breaking practices. The direct presence and interaction of lecturers can create a more inclusive learning climate, so that cadets feel valued, supported and motivated to participate.

Lecturers' active participation in the class reflects the student-centered learning approach, where lecturers act as mediators to stimulate the cadets' learning experience. Through open interaction, lecturers can identify cadets' difficulties, provide constructive feedback, and encourage a two-way dialog. This is in accordance with the concept of socio-constructivism (Vygotsky, 2011) which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in building new knowledge and skills.

Furthermore, lecturers' participation also serves as a tangible example for cadets of communication and leadership soft skills. By showing empathy, giving clear directions, and supporting cadets' involvement, lecturers play an important role in fostering self-confidence and intrinsic motivation. In line with research conducted by (Ahmad et al., 2018) consistent involvement of teachers or lecturers is proven to be able to increase student engagement and academic performance in the context of vocational education.

From the observation notes, it can be seen that ice breaking has gradually succeeded in breaking the ice of interaction. Simple activities such as guess the word generate enthusiasm because it is competitive, while quick talk encourages cadets to express ideas spontaneously. The variety of ice breakers also prevents boredom, so each meeting has a different dynamic that encourages cadets' emotional, cognitive, and social engagement.

A cadet stated in an interview:

"If there is ice breaking, I feel immediately excited. So it's not stiff, and more courageous to speak English even though it's still wrong."

(Interview, Cadet A, May 12, 2025)

This statement shows that ice breaking not only makes the classroom atmosphere more fun, but also reduces psychological barriers such as fear of being wrong and lack of confidence.

A. Improvement of Classroom Participation

One of the most significant results of implementing ice breaking is the increased active participation of cadets in class discussions. At the beginning of the semester, observation data showed that only about 40% of cadets actively responded to lecturers' questions or participated in

group discussions. Many cadets tended to stay silent, only taking notes on the material, or waiting for further instructions.

However, after a semester of ice breaking, participation increased consistently. Towards the end of the semester, more than 70% of cadets were actively involved, either by asking questions, giving opinions, or answering questions. This increase did not happen instantly, but through an accumulative process where ice breaking familiarized cadets to open up from the beginning of class.



Figure 3. cadets' classroom participation

The first picture shows cadets sitting in a group discussing. This activity reflects the practice of collaborative learning, where learners work together to solve problems, exchange opinions, and develop answers collectively. Through this kind of activity, cadets not only practice language skills, but also develop critical thinking and interpersonal soft skills such as communication, cooperation, and leadership. According to Vygotsky (1978), social interaction is an important factor in cognitive development, where learning occurs through a process of collaboration and scaffolding from peers and instructors.

The second picture shows the ice breaking activity conducted at the beginning of the lesson. Experiential learning-based ice breaking serves to create a positive, fluid, and energized classroom atmosphere. This activity makes cadets feel more confident and ready to engage in further learning. Kolb, (2014) emphasizes that direct experience (concrete experience) is an important entrance in the learning cycle, which is then followed by reflection, conceptualization, and application. Thus, ice breaking acts as an initial tool that facilitates the emotional as well as psychological readiness of cadets to learn.

Furthermore, the third picture (bottom left corner) shows cadets standing and participating in classroom activities with full engagement. This form of participation reflects the concept of active engagement, where learners are not just passive listeners, but take part in learning activities physically and mentally. This active engagement can increase intrinsic motivation and ownership of the learning process (Evans, 2025). In addition, when cadets are directly involved, the retention rate of the knowledge and language skills they learn is also higher.

There is interpersonal interaction through shaking hands or doing pair exercises. This activity shows the importance of peer participation in supporting communication skills. Cadets are trained to use language in real contexts, build social relationships, and practice adaptability in dealing with new situations. In addition, this kind of interaction also plays a role in fostering a sense of community and solidarity among cadets. This is very relevant to the needs of the maritime world, where teamwork and effective communication are key competencies.

Thus, it can be said that it provide how class participation in English learning can be designed holistically. Learning is not only directed at achieving cognitive aspects in the form of language mastery, but also at developing character, attitudes, and social skills that support the professionalism of cadets as prospective maritime officers. This approach is in line with the student-centered learning paradigm (H. D. Brown & Lee, 2025), which emphasizes the importance of giving students space to actively participate, so that the learning process becomes more meaningful and relevant to real life.

Thus, it can be concluded that classroom participation shown through group discussions, ice breaking, active involvement, and interpersonal interaction has contributed greatly to creating a positive learning atmosphere. This proves that varied learning strategies can build a more enjoyable and effective learning experience, and prepare cadets to face the increasingly complex demands of the maritime workforce.

The cadet said:

"Usually I am shy to speak, afraid of being wrong. But when I played the game at the beginning, I got used to talking and was more confident."

(Interview, Cadet C, May 14, 2025)

This statement shows the transfer effect from ice breaking to core learning activities. The sense of comfort that arises during ice breaking is carried over to the next activity, so that cadets feel safer to try to communicate even though there are still mistakes.

This finding is in line with the Zone of Proximal Development theory (Vygotsky, 2011) which emphasizes that learning can take place optimally when students receive support or scaffolding. Ice breaking here serves as an initial scaffolding that lowers affective barriers, making it easier for cadets to enter a higher learning zone.

B. Impact on Confidence and Motivation

In addition to class participation, another result that emerged was the cadets' increased confidence and motivation to learn. This confidence can be seen from their courage to use English, although there are still grammatical or pronunciation errors. At the beginning of the semester, many cadets were reluctant to speak for fear of being laughed at or judged wrong by lecturers and friends.

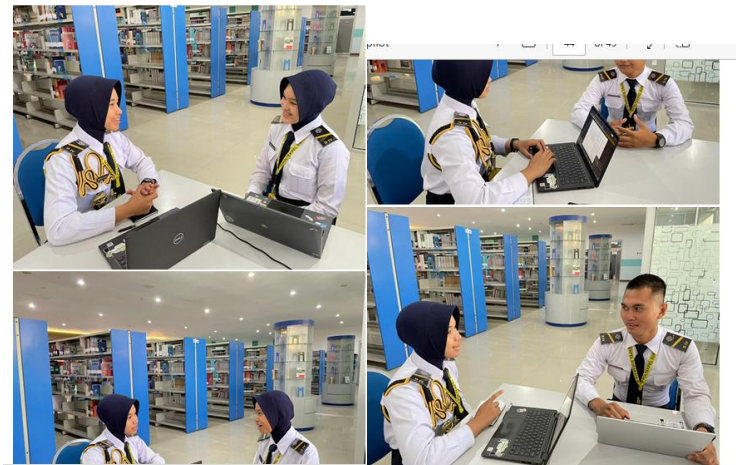


Figure 3. cadets shows confidence and motivation in the classroom

However, after getting used to it through ice breaking, they showed a change in attitude. Competitive or collaborative games helped them understand that mistakes are part of the learning process, not something to be feared.

One cadet said:

"If the game is different, we have to quickly understand and adjust. It makes us learn to adapt quickly."

(Interview, Cadet E, May 15, 2025)

Learning motivation increases because the classroom atmosphere is not monotonous. Ice breaking brings variety, surprises, and fun elements that break up the routine. Thus, cadets not only come to receive the material, but also look forward to the new experience that the lecturer will provide at the beginning of class.

C. Development of Soft Skills

Based on the analysis of observations and interviews, the application of experiential learning-based ice breaking also contributes to the development of six main soft skills of cadets:

Based on the analysis of observations and interviews, the application of experiential learning-based ice breaking not only creates a positive learning atmosphere, but also significantly contributes to the development of six key soft skills in cadets of Surabaya Shipping Polytechnic. The images shown support the empirical evidence that game activities, simulations and group work can train various non-technical skills that are very important in the maritime world.



Figure 4. cadets' soft skill development outside of the classroom

Figure 4 shows cadets standing in a circle, listening to instructions from the facilitator. The circular position emphasizes the value of equality and integrity, where each cadet is given the same opportunity to speak or take a role. This activity fosters honesty and a sense of responsibility, for example when cadets are asked to answer questions even if they are not fully confident.

This activity also encourages the formation of work ethic, because cadets are required to remain enthusiastic in participating in physical activities and games. They learn to try, compete healthily, and complete challenges according to the rules. This condition illustrates the application of the principle of experiential learning (Kolb et al., 2014) where direct experience forms a mindset of discipline and hard work that is very relevant to the lives of cadets as future shipping officers.

The cadets working together on a hand skills-based activity, such as assembling or putting together simple materials. This activity reinforces initiative, as many cadets voluntarily offer to lead or take an active role. The ability to take initiative is one of the important soft skills that is highly valued in the world of work (Wheeler, 2016) especially when facing unexpected situations at sea.

Furthermore, these activities also train communication skills. Cadets must coordinate, discuss, and convey ideas clearly to their group mates. The use of English in this activity adds to their courage and fluency in speaking, thus supporting the achievement of language learning objectives. As emphasized by (C. L. Brown & Broemmel, 2011) Brown (2007), effective language learning should provide a space for active participation for learners to communicate in a real way.

Another important aspect that emerges is cooperation and interpersonal relationships. Pair and group activities strengthen social bonds, build solidarity, and train cadets to work in teams. These competencies are very relevant to the maritime world, where the success of shipping operations depends heavily on the cohesiveness of the crew (Canton, 2021).

Finally, ice breaking activities also hone adaptability. Each meeting presents new game rules, which require cadets to quickly adjust. The ability to adapt to change is an important provision in facing the dynamics of the global world of work which is full of uncertainty. Therefore, using experiential learning, ice breaking not only serves as an atmosphere warmer, but also as a strategic vehicle to instill sustainable soft skills. In other words, this simple activity has a major impact on the character development, interpersonal skills, and professionalism of cadets at Politeknik Pelayaran Surabaya.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the use of experiential learning through ice breaking activities in English classes at the Surabaya Maritime Polytechnic, revealing that well-designed activities foster an engaging, enjoyable, and humanistic learning environment that builds cadets' confidence, participation, and willingness to speak English while also enhancing six core soft skills: integrity, work ethic, initiative, communication, teamwork, and adaptability. Despite these positive outcomes, the study's limited scope and participants restrict broader generalization, as differences in backgrounds, teaching styles, and facilities may affect results. Recommendations include integrating ice breaking into language instruction through varied, maritime-relevant activities, encouraging cadets to maximize these sessions for skill development, training lecturers and developing aligned modules at the institutional level, and conducting further research on long-term impacts, integration with innovative methods, and validation across broader maritime or cultural contexts.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to express Politeknik Pelayaran Surabaya for providing facilities, guidance, and support throughout this study. Special thanks are extended to the English lecturers and cadets for their active participation and valuable insights, as well as to the Research and Community Service Unit (LPPM) for research permission and academic assistance. The author also appreciates colleagues and reviewers for their constructive feedback, and the National Seminar on Maritime Education and Training 2024 for the opportunity to present and refine this research through academic discussion.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to this study.

AI Disclosure Statement

This manuscript was partially supported by the use of ChatGPT (OpenAI) for language editing, grammar checking, and text refinement. All AI-generated outputs were carefully reviewed, revised, and validated by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the content presented in this article.

Funding

This research received no external funding and was not supported by any public, commercial, or non-profit funding agency.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: Wahyuni Oktavia, Natriya Faisal Rachman, and Anak Agung Ngurah Ade Dwi Putra Yuda; methodology: Wahyuni Oktavia and Natriya Faisal Rachman; investigation: Wahyuni Oktavia, St. Hariati B, and Anak Agung Ngurah Ade Dwi Putra Yuda; data collection: Wahyuni Oktavia and Natriya Faisal Rachman; formal analysis: Wahyuni Oktavia and St. Hariati B; writing—original draft preparation: Wahyuni Oktavia; writing—review and editing: Natriya Faisal Rachman, St. Hariati B, and Anak Agung Ngurah Ade Dwi Putra Yuda; visualization and data presentation: Wahyuni Oktavia and Natriya Faisal Rachman; supervision: Anak Agung Ngurah Ade Dwi Putra Yuda. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to ethical considerations and participant confidentiality. However, the data may be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and with appropriate permission.

REFERENCES

- Abeyasiriwardhane, A., Lützhöft, M., & Ghosh, S. (2021). Learning and learning-to-learn by doing: An experiential learning approach for integrating human factors into maritime design education. *Maritime Technology and Research*, 3(1), 31–48.
- Abu Omar, A. (2019). *The Effectiveness of Ice-breaker Strategy in Enhancing Motivation and Producing Conducive Classroom Atmosphere for the Tenth Graders in English Classes in Nablus City Schools from the Perspectives of Teachers and Students*. Aseel Majde Kamel Abu Omar.
- Ahmad, N., Muhammad, A. M., & Jamil, A. (2018). The Potential Use of Collaborative ESP Testing Implementation Framework (CETIF) in Addressing Underlying Issues in ESP Curriculum and Testing Faced by English Lecturers Teaching Engineering Students. *International Journal of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics (IJMAL)*, 2(4), 10–19.
- Bartle, E. (2015). Experiential learning: an overview. *Institute for Teaching and Learning Innovation. Australia: The University of Queensland*.
- Beard, C., & Wilson, J. P. (2018). *Experiential learning: A practical guide for training, coaching and education*. Kogan Page Publishers.
- BPS 2022. (n.d.). *The Indonesian National Occupational Safety and Health Profile in 2022*.
- Brown, C. L., & Broemmel, A. D. (2011). Deep scaffolding: Enhancing the reading experiences of English language learners. *New England Reading Association Journal*, 46(2), 34–39.
- Brown, H. D., & Lee, H. (2025). *Principles of language learning and teaching: A course in second language acquisition*. Taylor & Francis.
- Canton, H. (2021). International Maritime Organization—IMO. In *The Europa Directory of International Organizations 2021* (pp. 338–342). Routledge.
- Cresswell, J. . (2014). Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches. In *Sage Publication* (Vol. 16, Issue 4).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839915580941>
- Day, V., McGrath, P. J., & Wojtowicz, M. (2013). Internet-based guided self-help for university students with anxiety, depression and stress: a randomized controlled clinical trial. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 51(7), 344–351.

- Devi, K. S. (2019). Constructivist approach to learning based on the concepts of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky An analytical Overview. *Journal of Indian Education*, 44(4), 5–19.
- Dewan, M. H. (2024). *Exploring Engagement, Knowledge, and Effective Training of Seafarers in Energy-Efficient Ship Operations*. Universidade NOVA de Lisboa (Portugal).
- Evans, R. S. (2025). *Agency, Responsibility, and Civic Engagement: Experiences of Former Air Cadets of Diverse Identities*.
- Gao, Y. (2019). *Study on Navigation College English Teaching Based on SPOC and TBLT*. 294(Ieesasm 2018), 356–359. <https://doi.org/10.2991/ieesasm-18.2019.65>
- Handl, G. (2023). Decarbonising the shipping industry: A status report. *The International Journal of Marine and Coastal Law*, 38(4), 730–791.
- Iakovaki, E., Konstantakis, M., Teneketzis, A., & Konstantakis, G. (2023). Analyzing cultural routes and their role in advancing cultural heritage management within tourism: A systematic review with a focus on the integration of digital technologies. *Encyclopedia*, 3(4), 1509–1522.
- Iryanti, H. D., Hidayati, D. N., Tyas, E. N., & Amurao, J. M. (2024). Exploring Quizizz-based learning media for teaching maritime English vocabulary: A needs analysis for marine engineering students. *Journal of English Language and Pedagogy*, 7(2), 61–78.
- James, A. J., Schriever, U. G., Jahangiri, S., & Girgin, S. C. (2018). Improving maritime English competence as the cornerstone of safety at sea: a focus on teaching practices to improve maritime communication. *WMU Journal of Maritime Affairs*, 17(2), 293–310. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13437-018-0145-4>
- Kolb, D. A. (2013). The process of experiential learning. In *Culture and processes of adult learning* (pp. 138–156). Routledge.
- Kolb, D. A. (2014). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. FT press.
- Kolb, D. A., Boyatzis, R. E., & Mainemelis, C. (2014). Experiential learning theory: Previous research and new directions. In *Perspectives on thinking, learning, and cognitive styles* (pp. 227–247). Routledge.
- Kwartama, A. (2025). Improving Teaching Quality through Industry Experience and Communication in Maritime Vocational Education. *Journal of Teaching and Education for Scholars*, 2(1), 41–48.
- Lin, Y., & Zhang, W. (2025). Exploring an experiential learning project: A case study through Kolb's Learning Theory. *2025 ASEE Annual Conference & Exposition*.
- Melnyk, O., Drozdov, O., & Kuznichenko, S. (2025). Cybersecurity in Maritime Transport: An International Perspective on Regulatory Frameworks and Countermeasures. *Lex Portus*, 11,

7.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. sage.

MUSDALIFA, M. (2022). *THE EFFECT OF ICE BREAKER IN INCREASING STUDENTS' MOTIVATION TO LEARN ENGLISH AT THE 7th GRADE OF SMPN 01 NOLING*. Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Palopo.

Nagy, I. K. (2015). *An Introduction to the Study of Pragmatics*. Scientia.

Ragab, A. (2024). *Intercultural competence and communication on board of merchant vessels*. University of Antwerp.

Simanjuntak, M. B. (2024). Enhancing maritime ESG leadership through english communication skills. *E3S Web of Conferences*, 577. <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202457702014>

SMELIKOVA, V. (2020). Applying CLIL method to teaching maritime english. *New Pedagogical Thought*, 102(2), 98–102. <https://doi.org/10.37026/2520-6427-2020-102-2-98-102>

Triyono, T., Kasih, F., Adison, J., & Febriani, R. D. (2023). ICE BREKING TO BOOST LEARNING MOTIVATION IN STUDENTS. *Human: Journal of Community and Public Service*, 2(2).

Uyen, B. P., Tong, D. H., & Lien, N. B. (2022). The effectiveness of experiential learning in teaching arithmetic and geometry in sixth grade. *Frontiers in Education*, 7, 858631.

Vygotsky, L. (2011). *Interaction between learning and development*. Linköpings universitet.

Wheeler, R. E. (2016). Soft skills-the importance of cultivating emotional intelligence. *AALL Spectrum*, January/February, 6–16.

White, C., & Smith, L. (2020). *Dramatic Engagers: Games, Creative Activities, & Brain Breaks for Social & Emotional Learning & Academic Achievement*. AuthorHouse.

Wibowo, A. H., Gupron, A. K., & Dewi, R. F. (2025). Integrating Teaching Factory Method in ESP Maritime English: Cadets' Perceptions and Implications For Maritime Training. *Script Journal: Journal of Linguistics and English Teaching*, 10(1), 46–67.

Wibowo, A. H., Gupron, A. K., Widjatmoko, E. N., Amrullah, R. A., Mirianto, A. D., Rahmawati, E., Onivehu, A. O., & Rohi, S. (2025). Exploring Cadets' Perceptions of Challenges and Benefits in Gamified ESP Reading: A Case Study at a Maritime Academy. *Journal of Computers for Science and Mathematics Learning*, 2(2), 107–118.

Wibowo, A. H., Munir, A., & Suhartono, S. (2024). The effectiveness of task-based language teaching to improve cadets' critical thinking skills in comprehending ESP English text. *Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology*, 8(6), 5169–5178.

Wibowo, A. H., Ulfaika, R., & Faridy, A. (2025). Exploring Veterinary Students' Practice and Challenges in Using Quizizz for Critical Reading in a Private University. *Journal of English*

Teaching, Literature, and Applied Linguistics, 9(1), 108–115.

Yildiz, S., Tonoğlu, F., Uğurlu, Ö., Loughney, S., & Wang, J. (2022). Spatial and statistical analysis of operational conditions contributing to marine accidents in the Singapore Strait. *Journal of Marine Science and Engineering*, 10(12), 2001.

Ziarati¹, M., Ziarati, R., Bigland, O., & Acar, U. (2011). Communication and practical training applied in nautical studies. *International Maritime Lecturers' Association (IMLA), The International Maritime English Conference Proceedings Of Imec*, 23, 41.