

**TEACHER STRATEGIES IN IMPROVING STUDENT LEARNING
MOTIVATION THROUGH ICE BREAKING AT SDN 081
PANYABUNGAN**

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Abstract

This study aims to describe teacher strategies for increasing student learning motivation through the implementation of icebreakers in learning at SDN 081 Panyabungan. This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive research style. The research subjects included classroom teachers and elementary school students. Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis involved data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was tested through triangulation of techniques and sources. The results showed that teachers implemented icebreakers in a planned manner at the beginning, middle, and end of lessons, with short durations and a variety of activities tailored to student characteristics. The types of icebreakers used included enthusiastic applause, short movement-based games, educational songs, and light quizzes. Teacher strategies in implementing icebreakers were proven to create a pleasant learning atmosphere, increase focus, and encourage active student participation. The impact of icebreaker implementation was seen in increased student motivation and active participation in the learning process. Thus, icebreakers can be recommended as an effective learning strategy for increasing student motivation in elementary schools.

Keywords: Ice Breaking, Learning Motivation, Teacher Strategies, Elementary School Learning

INTRODUCTION

Learning at the elementary school level requires teaching strategies that not only deliver content but also maintain and enhance student motivation. Learning motivation is a determining factor in learning success because it influences student interest, attention, and active participation in the learning process (Wana et al., 2024). Low motivation in the classroom is often seen in decreased concentration, active participation, and suboptimal learning outcomes (Muharrir, 2022). In the elementary school context, students need a fun and safe learning environment to encourage participation, especially after the pandemic, which has caused many students to experience a decline in learning enthusiasm (Isnaini, 2018).

One strategy widely researched and applied by educators to break the ice in the classroom is the use of icebreakers. Icebreakers are essentially short activities designed to lighten the mood, increase focus, and foster a positive mood before or during main learning activities (Fadillah & Muthi, 2024). Research at various levels shows that the implementation of icebreakers can improve student motivation, concentration, and readiness to learn, both at the elementary, middle, and high school levels (Syahrudin, 2022). Appropriately designed icebreaker activities (age-appropriate, brief, and relevant) tend to increase student activity and engagement in subsequent lessons (Fadillah & Muthi, 2024).

In elementary schools, teachers play a crucial role as managers of the learning environment, not just as transmitters of material. PAIKEM (Active, Innovative, Creative, Effective, and Enjoyable Learning) strategies, including the use of icebreakers, have been shown to help teachers create a supportive learning environment that stimulates students' intrinsic motivation (Dahlan et al., 2023). Consistent and systematic use of icebreakers can reduce student boredom, increase social engagement among students, and foster confidence in participation (Fajri & Rahmi, 2024).

However, the effectiveness of icebreakers is not automatically the same in every context. Variables such as the type of game/activity, duration, relevance to the material, teacher readiness, and school culture influence the results. A systematic literature review found variations in the effect of ice breaking on learning motivation depending on the intervention design and sample characteristics (Wana et al., 2024). Therefore, contextual research at the specific school level is needed to determine how teachers implement ice breaking and which strategies are most effective in increasing student motivation in that school.

Based on the above background, research on teacher strategies for increasing student learning motivation through ice breaking at SDN 081 Panyabungan is crucial. This study is expected to provide a practical overview of strategic steps, effective types of ice breaking, and obstacles and solutions to their implementation in the elementary school context in Mandailing Natal Regency. The research findings can also serve as recommendations for teachers and school policymakers to design more enjoyable and motivational learning, while also adding empirical evidence from the local context.

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative approach, aiming to deeply understand teachers' strategies for increasing student learning motivation through the implementation of icebreakers in the learning process. A qualitative approach is deemed appropriate because it explores educational phenomena in a naturalistic manner, reflecting real-world conditions, and emphasizes the meaning, process, and understanding of the behavior of the research subjects (Moleong, 2019).

The study was conducted at SDN 081 Panyabungan, Panyabungan District, Mandailing Natal Regency. The research location was selected based on the consideration that the school had implemented icebreakers as part of its classroom learning strategy. The research subjects included the classroom teachers who conducted the lessons and the students directly involved in the icebreaker activities. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique,

selecting informants based on specific criteria such as direct involvement in learning and understanding of icebreaker strategies (Sugiyono, 2020).

Data collection techniques in this study included observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to directly observe the implementation of icebreakers, the classroom atmosphere, and students' responses to the activities. In-depth interviews were conducted with classroom teachers to obtain information regarding the objectives, forms, and strategies for implementing icebreakers, as well as their impact on student learning motivation. Documentation, including lesson plans (RPP), lesson notes, activity photos, and school archives relevant to the research, served as supporting data (Arikunto, 2019).

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive model encompassing data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation were selected and focused on aspects related to teacher strategies and student learning motivation. The data were then presented in descriptive narrative form to facilitate interpretation, and then systematically summarized in accordance with the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2020).

To ensure data validity, this study employed triangulation techniques, both technical and source triangulation. Technical triangulation was conducted by comparing data from observations, interviews, and documentation, while source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from several informants. This step was taken to ensure the data obtained was more valid, credible, and scientifically accountable (Moleong, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Implementing Ice Breakers in Learning

Based on observations and interviews conducted at SDN 081 Panyabungan, it was discovered that teachers routinely implement ice breakers in learning activities. Ice breakers are generally implemented in three stages: at the beginning of the lesson before the material is delivered, in the middle of the lesson when students begin to feel bored, and towards the end of the lesson to reinforce a positive classroom atmosphere. The duration of ice breakers is relatively short, ranging from 3–5 minutes, so as not to disrupt the main lesson time allocation.

Teachers explained that the main purpose of ice breakers is to refocus students' attention, create a pleasant learning atmosphere, and increase students' mental readiness before receiving the material. The ice breakers used included enthusiastic applause, short movement-based games, educational songs, and light-hearted questions involving all students. Observations showed that after ice breakers were implemented, students appeared more focused, participated more willingly, and showed greater enthusiasm in the lesson.

The findings of this study indicate that planned and brief ice breakers can create a conducive and enjoyable learning atmosphere. This aligns with the opinion of (Fadillah & Muthi, 2024), who stated that icebreakers serve as an initial stimulus to stimulate students' attention and readiness to learn, especially at the elementary school level. Icebreakers placed at the beginning of a lesson help students adapt to the classroom atmosphere and reduce

boredom caused by previous learning activities.

The results of this study also support the findings of (Syahrudin, 2022), who explained that icebreakers play a crucial role in preparing students' psychological state so they are more ready to receive learning material. Icebreakers implemented during the lesson have proven effective in restoring students' concentration when focus slumps occur, as confirmed by research (Muharrir, 2022), which found that learning breaks in the form of light activities can boost students' motivation to learn.

Furthermore, icebreakers tailored to the characteristics of elementary school students have shown greater effectiveness. Research (Wana et al., 2024) revealed that active icebreakers involving physical movement are more appropriate for elementary school students because they can channel their energy while increasing their engagement in learning. This aligns with field findings showing that students are more enthusiastic about participating in learning after the implementation of movement- and song-based icebreakers.

Thus, the implementation of icebreakers in learning at SDN 081 Panyabungan not only serves as a time filler, but also as part of the teachers' pedagogical strategy to increase student learning motivation. Appropriate implementation in terms of timing, duration, and format of the activities has been proven to support the creation of a more active, enjoyable learning environment that is oriented towards comprehensive student engagement.

B. Types of Ice Breakers Used by Teachers and Their Relevance to Learning

Observations and interviews show that teachers at SDN 081 Panyabungan use several types of ice breakers, varying according to classroom conditions and student characteristics. The most frequently used types of ice breakers include encouraging applause, short movement-based games, educational songs, and light questions or simple quizzes. Teachers choose ice breakers that are easy for students to understand, do not require special equipment, and can be implemented quickly. This variety of ice breakers aims to prevent students from getting bored and maintain their enthusiasm for learning.

Teachers also adapt the type of ice breaker to the classroom situation. At the beginning of a lesson, teachers tend to use ice breakers such as encouraging applause or songs to maintain student attention. Meanwhile, midway through a lesson, when students begin to appear tired or lose focus, teachers often use short games involving body movement. Observations show that students are more active, smile, and respond positively when movement-based ice breakers and songs are used.

These findings suggest that a variety of ice breakers plays a crucial role in maintaining student motivation and engagement during learning. Research by Fadillah and Muthi (2024) confirms that interactive icebreakers, such as games and songs, are more effective in increasing elementary school students' learning motivation because they align with their developmental characteristics, which favor physical activity and a fun atmosphere. This aligns with the findings of this study, where students showed greater enthusiasm when icebreakers involved movement and singing.

These results also support the findings of Muharrir (2022), who stated that using a variety of icebreakers can reduce learning boredom and increase students' readiness to follow the learning material. Monotonous icebreakers tend to be less effective, so teachers need to

combine several types of activities to keep learning engaging. Research (Syahrudin, 2022) also shows that icebreakers in the form of enthusiastic applause and simple games can increase student focus and engagement, especially at the elementary school level.

Furthermore, the relevance of icebreakers to the characteristics of elementary school students is a crucial factor in their success. Wana (2024) in his literature review stated that age-appropriate icebreakers that involve play have a positive impact on learning motivation because they create a positive emotional atmosphere. This finding aligns with research at SDN 081 Panyabungan, where students appeared more prepared and enthusiastic about learning after icebreakers were implemented.

Thus, the types of icebreakers used by teachers not only serve as a break from learning but also play a strategic role in creating a conducive classroom atmosphere and supporting increased student motivation. The variety and appropriateness of icebreakers to the students' needs are key to the effectiveness of this strategy in elementary school learning.

C. Teacher Strategies in Implementing Ice Breakers

Based on interviews and observations, teachers at SDN 081 Panyabungan implement ice breaking with several specific strategies to increase student readiness and motivation to learn. These strategies include: planning tailored to student characteristics, adapting activity types to the subject matter, setting effective durations to avoid disrupting the core learning experience, and overall student active engagement.

Teachers explained that prior to the lesson, ice breaking activities are simply designed through daily teaching plans (RPP). The ice breaking activities chosen are tailored to the classroom atmosphere and students' concentration levels. For example, during morning lessons when students have just arrived, teachers choose ice breaking activities in the form of light, movement-based games. Conversely, when students appear tired midway through the lesson, teachers use songs or enthusiastic applause to restore focus. Another strategy identified is the arrangement of small groups during ice breaking to ensure shy students feel comfortable participating.

These findings indicate that teachers' strategies in implementing ice breaking are not merely formalities, but rather pedagogical actions planned and tailored to students' needs. This aligns with research by Syahrudin (2022), which shows that icebreakers designed to suit student characteristics are more effective in capturing attention and increasing learning engagement. Icebreakers are not simply conducted randomly, but strategically select the type and timing of the icebreakers to ensure they are relevant to the classroom situation and learning stage.

Research by Fadillah and Muthi (2024) also supports this finding. They state that one effective strategy is selecting icebreakers that align with the characteristics of the student group and the learning objectives. Icebreakers that are too long and complex can actually disrupt learning focus, while short and effective ones can create a pleasant atmosphere and stimulate learning motivation (Fadillah & Muthi, 2024).

Another relevant strategy is managing the duration of the activity. Ultima and Normawati (2023) in their research showed that icebreakers that last no longer than 5 minutes can maintain student concentration without reducing the core learning time. This is consistent

with findings at SDN 081 Panyabungan, where teachers consistently adjust the duration so that the main lesson continues effectively without being interrupted too much by icebreaker activities.

Furthermore, research (Sawitri & Susanti, 2024) in their literature review explains that active student involvement during icebreaking is an important strategy for improving self-confidence and social skills. Icebreaking, which involves all students taking turns, better prepares students for core learning. This finding aligns with field observations, where students appeared more open to interaction after participatory icebreaking activities.

Overall, the teachers' strategies for implementing icebreaking at SDN 081 Panyabungan reflect reflective teaching practices that are responsive to students' needs. Teachers do not simply implement icebreaking as a routine, but adapt it to the learning context to maximize student motivation and engagement in class.

D. Impact of Ice Breaking on Student Motivation and Engagement

Based on observations and interviews, the implementation of ice breaking in learning at SDN 081 Panyabungan had a positive impact on student motivation and engagement. After the ice breaking session, students appeared more focused on the teacher's explanations, more confident in asking and answering questions, and showed greater enthusiasm in participating in learning activities. Classroom conditions that were previously passive or tended to be noisy became more conducive and controlled.

Teachers also reported that previously less active students began to show courage in engaging in class discussions after the ice breaking session. Furthermore, students appeared to respond more quickly to teacher instructions and were able to participate in learning with a more positive mood. Observations showed increased student learning motivation, as indicated by readiness to learn, active participation, and better interaction between students and teachers during the learning process.

The findings of this study indicate that ice breaking plays a significant role in increasing the motivation and engagement of elementary school students. This aligns with research (Marlina et al., 2024), which states that icebreakers can stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning and increase their engagement in learning by creating a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere. A positive emotional atmosphere is an important factor in fostering student learning motivation.

The results of this study also support the findings (Fajri & Rahmi, 2024), which explain that icebreakers can improve students' mental readiness, making them more active and focused in learning. Icebreakers help students shift boredom and fatigue into positive energy, which results in increased learning participation. Thus, icebreakers serve as an initial stimulus and reinforcer for student learning motivation in the classroom.

Research by Muharrir (2022) further supports these findings by stating that consistent use of icebreakers can increase student activeness in asking, answering, and interacting during learning. Icebreakers not only impact cognitive aspects but also affective aspects, such as self-confidence and courage to speak in front of the class. These findings align with the situation at SDN 081 Panyabungan, where students appeared more confident after the implementation of icebreakers.

Furthermore, a literature review conducted by Wana (2024) concluded that icebreakers have a positive influence on learning motivation because they create a relaxed and enjoyable classroom atmosphere. Increased motivation will impact student active engagement in learning. Thus, icebreakers can be viewed as an effective strategy that not only increases learning motivation but also encourages overall student engagement in the learning process in elementary schools.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results and discussion, it can be concluded that the implementation of icebreakers is an effective strategy for increasing student motivation and learning engagement at SDN 081 Panyabungan. Planned icebreakers, implemented at the beginning, middle, and end of lessons, create a more enjoyable, conducive learning atmosphere, and encourage active student engagement.

The types of icebreakers used by teachers, such as enthusiastic applause, short movement-based games, educational songs, and light quizzes, have proven relevant to the characteristics of elementary school students. The variety and appropriateness of icebreakers to classroom conditions contribute to increased student focus, enthusiasm, and mental readiness for learning.

Teachers' strategies for implementing icebreakers, which include activity planning, time management, and adaptation to the material and student circumstances, demonstrate that icebreakers are not simply a casual activity but part of a pedagogical approach aimed at increasing learning motivation. Teachers play a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of icebreakers through creativity and sensitivity to classroom dynamics.

Overall, icebreakers have a positive impact on student motivation and engagement, indicated by increased participation, increased voice, and positive interactions between students and teachers. Therefore, ice breaking can be recommended as an effective learning strategy to be implemented continuously in elementary school learning to support the achievement of optimal learning objectives.

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