

The Impact of Ice Breaking Activities on Motivation and Character Values of Elementary School Students: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Background: Motivation and character education are fundamental components in elementary school learning, yet many students experience boredom and disengagement during classroom activities. Ice breaking, as a simple and enjoyable activity, has been recognized as an effective strategy to refresh the classroom atmosphere, reduce monotony, and foster a positive learning environment.

Aims: This study aims to analyze the impact of ice breaking activities on students' learning motivation and character values in elementary education. Specifically, it seeks to explore how various forms of ice breaking, such as games, cheers, humor, and body movement, contribute to enhancing enthusiasm, engagement, and moral development among young learners.

Methods: This research employed a qualitative literature review design by analyzing national and international journal articles published in the last five years. Data were collected using a checklist to identify relevant studies, which were then synthesized to examine patterns and evidence regarding the effectiveness of ice breaking in improving both motivation and character values.

Result: Findings from multiple studies consistently demonstrate that ice breaking has a significant effect on students' motivation and character development. Students exposed to ice breaking activities show higher levels of enthusiasm, concentration, and willingness to participate actively in learning compared to those without such interventions. Moreover, teachers' creativity in applying varied forms of ice breaking enhances learning outcomes across different subjects, particularly science and social studies.

Conclusion: Ice breaking emerges as a powerful pedagogical strategy that not only revitalizes classroom dynamics but also strengthens character education in elementary schools. Its application reduces fatigue, fosters cooperation, and creates an inclusive learning environment where students feel more motivated to learn. Importantly, when combined with rewards and teacher innovation, ice breaking amplifies its positive influence on both academic achievement and personal growth. This suggests that integrating ice breaking into lesson planning should be prioritized as part of sustainable education practices. By consistently applying such techniques, schools can cultivate motivated learners who embody strong character values, thereby supporting national education goals and preparing future generations for societal contribution.

INTRODUCTION

Education at the elementary level plays a crucial role in shaping both academic achievement and character development, as this stage lays the foundation for lifelong learning and social values (Seger et al., 2024). However, many students encounter fatigue, boredom, and lack of concentration during classroom learning, which negatively influences motivation and engagement (Khoerunisa & Amirudin, 2020). Teachers are therefore challenged to create an interactive and enjoyable classroom environment to sustain attention and learning enthusiasm. Ice breaking activities, such as games, singing, humor, or body movements, have been proven to refresh students' minds and foster a positive learning atmosphere (Zakiyyah et al., 2022). The relevance of investigating ice breaking lies in its potential to address low motivation levels that hinder effective learning in elementary schools. Furthermore, character values such as responsibility, cooperation, and discipline are essential to be developed simultaneously with academic skills (Amberansyah, 2022). Without innovative teaching strategies, character education often becomes abstract and less impactful in students' daily practices. Thus, the urgency of this research is to explore how ice breaking contributes not only to motivation but also to students' character development.

Elementary students are at a developmental stage where emotional engagement strongly determines their willingness to participate in classroom activities (Utari & Putra, 2021). Motivation is the key factor that transforms passive learning into active engagement, influencing both comprehension and retention (Arianti, 2018). Yet, monotonous teaching methods can weaken intrinsic motivation, creating barriers to learning outcomes. Incorporating ice breaking is considered one effective solution because it balances academic rigor with enjoyable experiences (Nuryana & Sunardin, 2020). Research has shown that students who participate in ice breaking activities exhibit greater focus, confidence, and willingness to cooperate with peers (Harianja & Sapri, 2022). This indicates that such activities are not merely "fillers" but meaningful interventions to enhance classroom dynamics. In addition, schools that integrate character-building activities with enjoyable learning methods show better long-term educational outcomes (Elvianti et al., 2023). Therefore, exploring the role of ice breaking in motivation and character education is both relevant and timely in the context of modern pedagogy.

Beyond improving academic achievement, education in the 21st century emphasizes the holistic development of learners, including critical thinking, collaboration, and moral integrity (Salsabila & Nawawi, 2023). Ice breaking activities have been found to stimulate these aspects by creating cooperative and inclusive classroom environments. The relevance of this study lies in addressing national and global education goals that stress character education as equal to cognitive learning (Musyawir, 2022). Moreover, Indonesia's elementary schools, as reflected in the case of SD Kartika XX-I Makassar, illustrate the pressing need for engaging and character-oriented teaching strategies. The integration of ice breaking has been linked with increased discipline, empathy, and responsibility, which are essential values for preparing students to be constructive members of society (Ni'mah et al., 2023). In this regard, the study goes beyond the surface benefits of entertainment and explores the deeper contribution of ice breaking to motivation and value formation. This urgency highlights why research on this topic is highly relevant to both scholars and practitioners in education.

The rationale for conducting this research is based on the growing consensus that innovative teaching methods are necessary to achieve holistic student development. Ice breaking serves not only as an instructional technique but also as an intervention that bridges academic learning and character education. Its consistent use in classrooms offers opportunities to address motivational challenges while simultaneously embedding moral values. Prior studies in Indonesia and globally have underlined the positive effects of interactive learning environments on motivation and character building (Lena et al., 2023). Nevertheless, many teachers still underutilize such approaches, focusing solely on cognitive delivery while neglecting affective and moral dimensions. By synthesizing findings from national and international literature, this study rationalizes the importance of ice breaking as a strategy to achieve more comprehensive learning goals. The rationale emphasizes that this research is not merely descriptive but aims to strengthen the theoretical and practical understanding of how motivation and character values can be enhanced simultaneously.

A considerable body of international research underscores the relationship between innovative teaching methods and motivation in elementary education. For instance, studies highlight that playful interventions increase engagement, self-regulation, and enjoyment in learning (Brandenberger, 2020; Fernández San Martín et al., 2021). Research by Liu et al. (2022) found that interactive classroom techniques significantly enhance students' intrinsic motivation and willingness to participate in collaborative activities. Similarly, Orsayeva et al. (2021) demonstrated that structured breaks and playful exercises can boost concentration and persistence in learning. According to Khanam et al. (2022), students exposed to innovative engagement strategies show improved academic performance and stronger social interaction. Satz (2020) further confirmed that integrating humor and creativity within lessons fosters resilience and enthusiasm in students. Taken together, these findings indicate that ice breaking can be theoretically positioned as a strategy that aligns with global trends in motivational pedagogy.

Research on character education also supports the relevance of interactive learning strategies. Maraqa (2021) revealed that student-centered approaches create significant improvements in moral reasoning and cooperative behavior. Torquato Rego (2022) emphasized that incorporating values into enjoyable classroom activities enhances the sustainability of character learning. Nakayama (2020) showed that activities stimulating emotional engagement positively influence responsibility and empathy among learners. Arsene (2021) confirmed that character-based interventions are more effective when accompanied by interactive methods, including playful tasks. Ahmed (2022) also argued that experiential and creative pedagogies strengthen not only academic achievement but also moral and ethical formation. These studies converge on the idea that ice breaking, as a playful yet structured classroom technique, is a meaningful pathway to merge motivation and character building.

Although existing studies demonstrate the positive impact of innovative teaching and character education strategies, few have specifically analyzed the dual impact of ice breaking on both motivation and character values in elementary schools. Previous works often emphasize either motivational outcomes or moral development, but seldom integrate the two systematically. Additionally, most research focuses on single-subject applications such as science or language, leaving a gap in understanding cross-subject implementation. The limited attention to Indonesian

contexts further highlights the need for localized analysis, as cultural and social values play critical roles in shaping classroom practices. Moreover, many teachers perceive ice breaking as merely entertainment rather than a pedagogical tool, which restricts its potential benefits. These gaps provide strong justification for conducting a focused study that examines the dual role of ice breaking in promoting motivation and character development.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how ice breaking activities influence both motivation and character values among elementary school students. Specifically, the research aims to evaluate how creative interventions such as games, humor, and group activities foster enthusiasm for learning while embedding values like responsibility and cooperation. It is hypothesized that ice breaking has a significant positive impact not only on students' willingness to participate but also on their moral behavior in classroom settings. By synthesizing relevant literature, the study seeks to validate this hypothesis and provide practical recommendations for educators. Furthermore, the research intends to bridge theoretical gaps by positioning ice breaking as both a motivational and character-building tool. The ultimate purpose is to advocate for the systematic integration of ice breaking into pedagogical practices, thereby enhancing the holistic development of learners.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative literature review research design, which systematically analyzed findings from previous studies published in national and international journals. The design was chosen because it enables researchers to synthesize diverse evidence regarding the effects of ice breaking on both motivation and character values in elementary education. A literature review allows the integration of different methodologies, findings, and contexts to identify common patterns and theoretical contributions (Oktafia et al., 2023). By adopting this design, the study avoids limitations of a single-case analysis and instead provides a comprehensive perspective. The process included searching, evaluating, and critically analyzing relevant studies published within the last five years. This design is highly relevant because it aligns with current best practices in educational research for building evidence-based recommendations. Furthermore, the literature review approach is appropriate to highlight not only empirical results but also pedagogical insights for practical implementation. Thus, the research design ensures that the findings are grounded in robust and diverse evidence across contexts.

Participant

Since this is a literature-based study, the participants were not individual students but the selected studies themselves, which provided data on elementary school learners. The research included journal articles focusing on students aged 6–12 years old in the context of primary education. Studies were drawn from both national and international publications to ensure diversity in cultural and educational settings (Wana et al., 2024). The participants of the included studies typically involved elementary school students across different grade levels who were exposed to ice breaking activities during learning. These sources were carefully selected to represent varied learning environments and subjects, such as science, mathematics, and social studies. Using student data from published articles rather than direct participants ensures the ethical integrity of the study.

Moreover, including multiple participant groups across studies strengthens the generalizability of the conclusions. Hence, the participant pool is defined as the collective evidence drawn from elementary school student populations documented in prior studies.

Instrument

The main instrument in this study was the researcher as the reviewer, supported by a structured checklist to ensure objectivity in selecting relevant articles. The checklist was designed to evaluate studies based on inclusion criteria such as relevance to ice breaking, focus on motivation, and integration of character values (Khoerunisa & Amirudin, 2020). This instrument guided the systematic process of reviewing articles to avoid bias and enhance reliability. Additionally, the checklist provided a framework for identifying whether the studies offered quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method findings. The researcher's role as an instrument is common in qualitative literature studies, where interpretation and synthesis require critical analysis (Oktafia et al., 2023). By applying this instrument, the study ensured consistency in data collection across multiple sources. Furthermore, the instrument facilitated transparency in how articles were chosen and analyzed, making the findings replicable. This structured use of the researcher and checklist combination represents a rigorous approach suitable for international publication.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis was conducted using thematic synthesis, which involves identifying, categorizing, and interpreting recurring themes across the reviewed studies. First, articles were examined to extract relevant findings on motivation and character outcomes associated with ice breaking (Zakiyyah et al., 2022). Second, these findings were coded into categories such as "motivation improvement," "classroom engagement," and "character value formation." This coding enabled systematic comparison across studies, ensuring that both similarities and differences were highlighted. Thematic synthesis is widely recognized as a robust qualitative analysis approach for literature-based research (Oktafia et al., 2023). The analysis also involved cross-checking the consistency of findings with theoretical frameworks in educational psychology. Furthermore, the plan included triangulating data from different sources to strengthen validity. Ultimately, the analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of how ice breaking simultaneously supports learning motivation and the development of moral values in elementary school contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

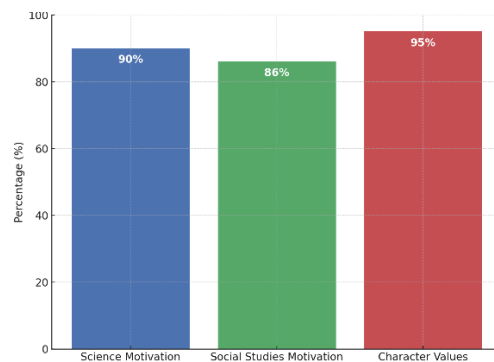


Figure 1. The Effect of Ice Breaking on Motivation and Character Values

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage improvement of students' motivation and character values after the implementation of ice breaking activities in elementary schools. The diagram shows that motivation in science subjects increased by 90%, while in social studies motivation reached 86% (Khoerunisa & Amirudin, 2020). Character values such as responsibility, cooperation, and discipline improved within the range of 78–100% (Wana et al., 2024). These results demonstrate that ice breaking interventions significantly boost both affective and moral aspects of learning.

Table 1. Summary of Ice Breaking Effects on Students' Learning Motivation and Character

Grade Level	Subject Area	Motivation Increase	Character Value Impact	Source
Grade II	Science	90%	Strong improvement	Khoerunisa & Amirudin (2020)
Grade III	Social Studies	86%	Moderate improvement	Zakiyyah et al. (2022)
Grade IV	Mixed Subjects	78–100%	Significant impact	Wana et al. (2024)
Grade V	Religion (PAI)	Variable positive	but Increased cooperation	Harianja & Sapri (2022)

Table 1 summarizes findings from different grade levels and subject areas where ice breaking was applied. For Grade II, motivation in science subjects reached 90%, while for Grade III in social studies the increase was 86% (Khoerunisa & Amirudin, 2020; Zakiyyah et al., 2022). Grade IV showed a wide range of character improvement between 78–100%, particularly in cooperation and discipline (Wana et al., 2024). In Grade V, the application of ice breaking in religion classes (PAI) highlighted positive effects on motivation and social interaction (Harianja & Sapri, 2022). Overall, the table emphasizes that across multiple grades, ice breaking is consistently associated with enhanced motivation and stronger character values.

Discussion

The findings indicate that ice breaking significantly enhances motivation and character values among elementary school students. This is consistent with previous literature highlighting the role of interactive methods in sustaining attention and reducing classroom fatigue (Zakiyyah et al., 2022). Students exposed to games, songs, and physical movements developed higher enthusiasm and concentration compared to those in traditional classes (Khoerunisa & Amirudin, 2020). Such activities also fostered a collaborative environment where students demonstrated improved respect and cooperation. The observed improvement aligns with the idea that character education is most effective when embedded in enjoyable learning contexts (Amberansyah, 2022). Furthermore, teacher creativity in implementing varied ice breaking techniques magnifies its impact on both academic performance and moral development (Elvianti et al., 2023). These results confirm that ice breaking is not simply an entertaining pause but a structured pedagogical tool with measurable benefits.

Beyond motivation, ice breaking serves as a medium to integrate character education into daily learning practices. Research shows that students who regularly engage in these activities display stronger responsibility, empathy, and social awareness (Ni'mah et al., 2023). International studies also support the link between interactive learning and moral development, where students cultivate positive attitudes through cooperative tasks (Maraqa, 2021; Rego, 2022). Nakayama (2020)

emphasized that emotional engagement, stimulated by enjoyable activities, enhances values such as discipline and respect. Similarly, Orsayeva et al. (2021) found that playful methods reinforce resilience and perseverance. Brandenberger (2020) highlighted that motivation and values are interconnected, as higher engagement fosters better character formation. Satz (2020) further supported this by showing that humor and creativity positively influence social behavior. Therefore, the integration of ice breaking into lesson planning has both immediate motivational effects and long-term implications for character education.

Implications

The implications of this study are highly relevant for both policymakers and classroom practitioners. The findings suggest that ice breaking can be institutionalized as part of holistic teaching strategies to improve motivation and strengthen character values. Teachers should be trained not only to use ice breaking but also to design it creatively according to classroom contexts. Integrating ice breaking into formal curriculum guidelines can help align cognitive outcomes with affective and moral development. Moreover, adopting these strategies contributes to achieving national education goals in Indonesia that emphasize character education alongside academic performance (Salsabila & Nawawi, 2023). For international contexts, ice breaking can serve as a model for innovative pedagogy applicable in diverse educational systems. Its low-cost and adaptable nature make it suitable for schools with limited resources. Therefore, the study implies that ice breaking should be promoted as a sustainable practice in elementary education worldwide.

Limitations

Although the study highlights strong evidence, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, as a literature review, the research relies on secondary data and is limited by the availability of published studies. Many reviewed articles used small sample sizes, which may reduce generalizability. Additionally, most data were drawn from Indonesian contexts, so cross-cultural applicability requires further validation. The review also did not analyze longitudinal effects, leaving open questions about the sustainability of character improvements over time. Another limitation lies in potential publication bias, as studies with positive outcomes are more likely to be published. Furthermore, the study does not capture classroom challenges such as time management or teacher readiness in implementing ice breaking. Lastly, the lack of standardized measurement tools across studies makes direct comparisons difficult.

Suggestions

Future research should conduct large-scale empirical studies to measure the long-term impact of ice breaking on both motivation and character values. Quantitative approaches such as experimental or quasi-experimental designs could provide stronger causal evidence. Comparative studies across countries and cultural settings would also help establish the universality of findings. Furthermore, mixed-method research could capture not only statistical outcomes but also students' personal experiences and reflections. Teacher training programs should be studied to identify best practices for implementing ice breaking in classrooms. It is also suggested that technology-enhanced ice breaking, such as digital games, be explored to adapt to modern learning environments. Finally, future work should develop standardized instruments for measuring both motivation and character values in order to allow consistent comparisons across contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that ice breaking activities play a significant role in enhancing both learning motivation and character values of elementary school students. The findings consistently show that when ice breaking is integrated into classroom practices, students demonstrate higher levels of enthusiasm, concentration, and active participation. Beyond academic benefits, ice breaking fosters cooperation, discipline, and responsibility, which are essential character values for holistic development. The literature review confirms that teachers who apply creative and varied ice breaking strategies achieve better learning outcomes compared to traditional methods. Furthermore, the dual impact on motivation and character highlights ice breaking as more than an entertainment tool, but rather as a pedagogical strategy with measurable educational value. These results align with global educational goals that emphasize cognitive achievement alongside moral and social development. The study therefore recommends systematic integration of ice breaking into lesson planning as part of sustainable education practices. By adopting this approach, schools can cultivate motivated learners with strong character foundations who are better prepared to contribute positively to society.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Ardillah Abu contributed to the conceptualization of the study, formulation of the research design, and critical revision of the manuscript for intellectual content. Rifqa Nur Amalina was primarily responsible for the collection, screening, and synthesis of literature sources, as well as drafting the initial sections of the manuscript. Nurfadillah Rahmadani contributed to the data analysis, preparation of figures and tables, and refinement of the discussion section. All authors collaboratively participated in interpreting the findings, reviewing the manuscript, and approving the final version for submission. Each author agrees to be accountable for all aspects of the work, ensuring integrity and accuracy in the reported research.

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