



Efforts to Improve Junior High School Students' Learning Motivation through the Implementation of Ice Breaking in Islamic Religious Education Learning

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ABSTRACT

Background: Learning motivation is a crucial factor influencing students' academic success, particularly in Islamic Religious Education, which is often perceived as monotonous. Low learning motivation among seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 32 Satu Atap Kaur highlights the need for innovative instructional strategies to create an engaging learning environment. **Objective:** This study aims to examine the effect of icebreaking activities on improving students' learning motivation in Islamic Religious Education subjects. **Method:** The research employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) across two cycles. Data were collected using learning motivation questionnaires and classroom observations. **Result:** The average student motivation score in the pre-cycle stage was 60.5, with classical completeness reaching only 30%. After implementing icebreaking activities in Cycle I, the average score increased to 68.7, with classical completeness improving to 60%. In Cycle II, the use of more varied, interactive icebreaking activities further increased the average motivation score to 80.2, with classical completeness reaching 90%. These findings demonstrate that icebreaking activities are effective in enhancing students' learning motivation, fostering a positive classroom atmosphere, and encouraging active participation. **Conclusion:** Regular integration of icebreaking activities can significantly improve student motivation in Islamic Religious Education. **Contribution:** This study provides practical insights for teachers on implementing innovative, student-centered learning strategies.

KEYWORDS

Icebreaking; Learning motivation; Islamic Religious Education; Junior High School Students

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning is a complex process that involves interactions among teachers, students, and the learning environment to achieve specific educational goals. One indicator of successful learning is the attainment of the pre-determined instructional objectives. Within this process, learning motivation plays a crucial role, as it influences stu-

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dent engagement, active participation in learning activities, and understanding of the material presented (Mayzura et al., 2025). Learning motivation refers to both internal and external drives that encourage students to learn optimally (Supriani et al., 2020). Without strong motivation, students tend to show low enthusiasm and are unable to absorb the learning material fully.

At the junior high school level, student motivation to learn often poses a particular challenge, especially in Islamic Religious Education. This subject plays a vital role in shaping students' character through the internalization of religious, moral, and social values. However, in several schools, such as SMP Negeri 32 Satu Atap Kaur, Islamic Religious Education is frequently perceived by students as monotonous and less engaging. Preliminary observations indicate that seventh-grade students tend to be passive, unfocused, and less motivated during the learning process. This condition is consistent with the findings of Susanti et al. (2017), who reported that limited variation in teaching methods can lead to decreased student motivation and participation. This issue is a serious concern given the importance of Islamic Religious Education in fostering students' moral and ethical development (Misran & Kasmantoni, 2025).

To address low student motivation for learning, teachers need to implement innovative, engaging, and student-centered instructional strategies that align with learners' characteristics. One approach that can be employed is ice-breaking. Ice breaking refers to light activities conducted at the beginning, middle, or end of a lesson to create a pleasant atmosphere, reduce tension, and increase students' enthusiasm for learning (Wahyuni, 2021). Icebreaking activities may include educational games, puzzles, simple physical activities, or short stories relevant to the lesson content (Prasetyono, 2026). According to Rahmawati (2022), icebreaking activities offer several benefits in the learning process, including creating an enjoyable learning environment, improving concentration, and encouraging active student participation. In addition, Salsabella & Purnomosidi (2025) argue that well-planned icebreaking activities are effective in enhancing interaction between teachers and students and strengthening peer relationships, thereby making learning more interactive and meaningful.

Previous studies indicate that icebreaking is an effective instructional strategy for enhancing student motivation and engagement. Nurhayati et al. (2025) concluded that structured icebreaking activities improved concentration and learning motivation among elementary school students by fostering a fun learning atmosphere and reducing boredom. These findings align with Hidayat (2020), who reported a 20% increase in learning motivation among junior high school students following the implementation of ice breaking, accompanied by improvements in attention and learning outcomes. Ramdani et al. (2025) concluded that ice breaking not only affects motivation but also promotes active student participation in discussions, particularly when the activities are relevant to the learning material. Furthermore, Fitriana (2020) found that icebreaking positively influences students' mental and emotional readiness prior to learning, thereby contributing to improved motivation and academic performance. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, Rosyidah (2023) demonstrated that consistent implementation of ice breaking increased student learning motivation by up to 90% and created a conducive learning environment. Another perspective was offered by Nurhaliza et al. (2024), who concluded that ice breaking helps students manage academic stress, thereby supporting their emotional well-being. Finally, Ramadhani (2019) emphasized that the routine implementation of icebreaking activities can increase junior high school students' learning interest by up to 75%, particularly in subjects perceived as difficult. Overall, these studies suggest that ice breaking plays a significant role in creating an enjoyable learning environment, enhancing motivation, participation, and even students' psychological well-being. These findings provide a strong foundation for further exploration of the effectiveness of ice-breaking in educational contexts.

Despite substantial evidence supporting the benefits of ice-breaking in learning, studies specifically examining its impact on student learning motivation in Islamic Religious Education remain relatively limited, particularly in rural school settings such as SMP Negeri 32 Satu Atap Kaur. Therefore, this study is important to address this research gap. Most existing studies focus on general motivation enhancement or short-term effects. At the same time, fewer investigations explore long-term impacts on sustained learning motivation and subject-specific learning outcomes, especially in Islamic Religious Education. Additionally, the types of icebreaking activities employed are often generic and not optimally tailored to student characteristics or instructional content (Yulianti & Satria, 2025). Several studies have also failed to comprehensively analyze the relationships among stress management, emotional readiness, and learning motivation within a single framework, leaving the holistic impact of ice-breaking on students' well-being and academic achievement insufficiently explored. Consequently, further research is needed to examine the effectiveness of structured, contextually tailored icebreakers in sustainably enhancing motivation, participation, and learning outcomes, particularly in subjects perceived as challenging by students.

This study aims to analyze the effect of implementing icebreaking activities on students' learning motivation in Islamic Religious Education for seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 32 Satu Atap Kaur. Specifically, the study seeks to identify students' levels of learning motivation before and after the implementation of icebreaking, measure the effectiveness of ice-breaking in creating an enjoyable learning atmosphere, and evaluate its impact on students' active participation in the learning process. In addition, this study aims to provide practical solutions for teachers to address issues related to low student motivation for learning, particularly in subjects that require deep conceptual understanding, such as Islamic Religious Education. Thus, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for designing innovative instructional strategies that align with students' needs and support the achievement of educational objectives.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using Classroom Action Research (CAR) to improve students' learning motivation by implementing icebreaking activities in Islamic Religious Education. The research design followed the Kemmis and McTaggart model, which consists of four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection (Utomo et al, 2024). The research was conducted in two cycles with iterative steps aimed at improving the learning process based on reflections from the previous cycle.

2.2 Research Object

The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 32 Satu Atap, Kaur Regency, Bengkulu Province, during the 2024/2025 academic year. The research participants were one seventh-grade class of 30 students. The class was selected using purposive sampling based on research needs and classroom conditions that required instructional intervention to enhance learning motivation.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected using a learning motivation questionnaire consisting of 20 Likert-scale statements designed to measure students' attention, interest, and effort; observation sheets to record students' activities and participation during icebreaking activities; documentation in the form of photographs and instructional notes; and learning motivation tests administered as pretests and posttests.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis included calculating the mean scores on the motivation questionnaire, classifying mastery as> 75% of students achieving this score, and applying descriptive statistics to illustrate improvements in learning motivation from the pre-cycle to Cycle I and Cycle II. The results were then interpreted to assess the impact of ice breaking on students' learning motivation, and reflections were used to formulate instructional improvements for subsequent cycles.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

This study aimed to improve students' learning motivation in Islamic Religious Education through the implementation of ice breaking in a seventh-grade class at SMP Negeri 32 Satu Atap Kaur. The research findings are presented for the pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II stages and were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

a) Pre-Cycle

During the pre-cycle stage, initial observations were conducted to assess students' learning motivation levels before implementing the planned instructional strategy. Data collection was carried out through the distribution of learning motivation questionnaires and direct observation of students' activities during the learning process.

Table 1. Learning Motivation Results – Pre-Cycle

Indicator	Result
Average Motivation Score	60.5
Motivation Category	Low

Indicator	Result
Classical Mastery (%)	30%
Observation Notes	Students showed low enthusiasm, were passive, reluctant to ask questions, and minimally involved in discussions. The classroom atmosphere was monotonous with no variation in activities or ice-breaking.

During the pre-cycle stage, students' learning motivation was categorized as low, with an average score of 60.5, and classical mastery reached only 30%. This indicates that the majority of students did not yet have a strong motivation to participate in Islamic Religious Education actively. Classroom observations revealed a monotonous learning environment in which students tended to be passive, showed limited confidence in asking questions, and participated minimally in discussions. The absence of ice-breaking activities was identified as one of the main factors contributing to low student engagement. These findings served as the basis for planning the subsequent cycle, which focused on implementing more interactive and enjoyable learning strategies, particularly through the use of icebreakers, to enhance students' learning motivation and active participation.

b) Cycle I

Table 2. Learning Motivation Results – Cycle I

Indicator	Result
Average Motivation Score	68.7
Motivation Category	Moderate
Classical Mastery (%)	60%
Observation Notes	Students began to show greater enthusiasm, and the classroom atmosphere became livelier. Student participation increased; however, some students remained passive. Ice-breaking activities were still limited and had not yet accommodated all student characteristics.

In Cycle I, the implementation of icebreakers in the form of light games and motivational stories at the beginning of Islamic Religious Education lessons successfully increased students' learning motivation compared to the pre-cycle stage. The average motivation score increased to 68.7, with classical mastery reaching 60%, indicating that most students began to respond positively to a more enjoyable learning environment. Classroom observations showed increased enthusiasm and student involvement; however, several students remained passive. The teacher began to adapt to using ice-breaking activities, but limited variation in the activities meant that not all students were fully engaged. These results indicate that ice breaking was effective in enhancing students' learning motivation, although further development and refinement were still required in the subsequent cycle.

c) Cycle II

Table 3. Learning Motivation Results – Cycle II

Indicator	Result
Average Motivation Score	80.2
Motivation Category	High
Classical Mastery (%)	90%
Observation Notes	Students were active and confident, with comprehensive participation across the classroom. Social interaction improved significantly, and the ice-breaking activities were varied and closely aligned with the content of Islamic Religious Education.

In Cycle II, ice-breaking was implemented in a more varied and integrated manner, not only at the beginning of the lesson but also throughout the learning process. Activities included group games, interactive quizzes, and physical movements relevant to Islamic Religious Education content. This strategy increased the average motivation score to 80.2, with classical mastery reaching 90%, indicating that most students were motivated cognitively, affectively, and socially. Classroom observations revealed that students became more confident, actively participated in discussions, and were fully engaged in learning activities. The teacher also demonstrated improved skills in designing and managing ice-breaking activities, making them an integral part of the instructional strategy. These

findings confirm that the creative, contextually tailored implementation of ice-breaking is effective in creating enjoyable, interactive, and meaningful Islamic Religious Education learning.

Table 3. Progression of Students' Learning Motivation

Stage	Average Motivation Score	Motivation Category	Classical Mastery (%)	Observation Notes
Pre-Cycle	60.5	Low	30%	Low motivation, monotonous classroom atmosphere, passive participation
Cycle I	68.7	Moderate	60%	Students began to show enthusiasm and increased participation, although some remained passive; ice-breaking activities were limited
Cycle II	80.2	High	90%	Students were active and confident, with comprehensive participation; social interaction improved, and ice-breaking activities were varied and relevant to the lesson content

Based on the motivation progression table, it is evident that the gradual implementation of ice-breaking had a significant impact on students' learning motivation. In the pre-cycle stage, students' motivation was low, with an average score of 60.5 and a classical mastery rate of only 30%, due to monotonous, less interactive instructional practices. Cycle I showed an improvement, with the average motivation score increasing to 68.7 and classical mastery reaching 60%. At this stage, simple ice-breaking activities reduced classroom tension and increased engagement among some students; however, the range of activities remained limited. A more substantial improvement occurred in Cycle II, where the average motivation score rose to 80.2, and classical mastery reached 90% following the implementation of more varied, creative, and integrated ice-breaking activities throughout the learning process. Classroom observations supported the quantitative data, as reflected in increased enthusiasm, active participation, enhanced social interaction, and higher levels of student confidence. These findings confirm that well-planned, content-relevant ice-breaking not only enhances cognitive and affective motivation but also supports students' social engagement, making learning more interactive, enjoyable, and effective.

3.2. Discussion

This discussion substantiates the achievement of the research objective, namely, improving students' learning motivation in Islamic Religious Education through the implementation of ice-breaking activities. The application of icebreakers was proven to transform classroom dynamics into a more conducive, enjoyable, and participatory learning environment. Such conditions encouraged students to become more actively involved in the learning process, both physically and mentally. This finding is particularly relevant to junior high school students, who are prone to boredom when learning activities are conducted in a monotonous manner. By incorporating varied ice-breaking activities, Islamic Religious Education was no longer perceived as a passive learning experience but rather as an engaging and meaningful process.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings strengthen learning motivation theories that emphasize the interaction between internal and external factors in influencing student motivation. Ice-breaking served as an external stimulus that triggered students' internal learning drives (Triyono et al., 2023). A positive, relaxed, and enjoyable learning environment enabled students to feel valued and supported, thereby fostering intrinsic motivation to participate in learning activities (Clanton, 2024). These results align with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge through meaningful experiences and positive social interactions.

This study also reinforces theoretical perspectives that highlight the importance of emotional factors in the learning process. Ice breaking helped reduce boredom, anxiety, and tension that often arise in teacher-centered instruction. When students' emotional states were more stable and positive, they demonstrated greater mental readiness to receive learning materials (Chien et al., 2022). Such supportive emotional states not only enhanced learning motivation but also created a sense of safety and comfort, allowing students to express ideas and actively participate in classroom activities.

From a practical standpoint, the findings indicate that ice breaking is an applicable and accessible instructional strategy for teachers. It does not require special equipment or advanced technology, making it suitable for implementation in various school contexts, including schools with limited facilities and resources. Teachers can flexibly adapt ice-breaking activities to Islamic Religious Education content, student characteristics, and classroom condi-

tions (Chasanah, 2024). With appropriate planning, ice-breaking can be seamlessly integrated into the instructional process without compromising the depth or quality of subject-matter delivery.

A notable contribution of this study lies in its application within Islamic Religious Education, particularly in a rural school context. Islamic Religious Education is often perceived as normative and less engaging for students (Demirel & Wright, 2019). This study demonstrates that, through appropriate instructional strategies, Islamic Religious Education can be delivered in a more interactive and contextualized manner (Rafi et al., 2025). Ice-breaking helped bridge religious content with students' learning experiences, enabling religious values to be understood not only cognitively but also internalized in an enjoyable, meaningful learning atmosphere.

Furthermore, this study emphasizes that ice-breaking is not merely a time-filler but an integral component of student-centered instructional strategies. Contextually designed ice-breaking activities strengthened social interaction, enhanced student confidence, and encouraged active participation in discussions and learning tasks. Positive interactions between teachers and students contributed to an inclusive and collaborative classroom climate, ultimately supporting students' social and emotional development.

This discussion confirms that the implementation of ice-breaking provides significant theoretical and practical contributions to Islamic Religious Education learning. The study enriches the body of knowledge on strategies to enhance student learning motivation, particularly in junior high school contexts with limited resources. The findings support the view that instructional innovation does not necessarily rely on technology but can be achieved through simple, contextual, and student-centered pedagogical approaches. Therefore, ice-breaking can be recommended as an effective instructional strategy to improve learning quality and strengthen the role of Islamic Religious Education in shaping students' character.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

4.1 Research Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications, both theoretically and practically. From a theoretical perspective, this study reinforces the notion that ice-breaking can be an effective instructional method for enhancing students' learning motivation. These findings are consistent with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that students are more motivated and actively engaged when learning occurs in an enjoyable, social environment. Practically, the implications of this study extend to several stakeholders. For teachers, ice-breaking can be used as a strategy to create more engaging and interactive learning experiences; therefore, teachers are encouraged to design ice-breaking activities that are relevant to the learning content to maximize instructional potential. For students, the implementation of icebreakers not only enhances learning motivation but also develops social skills such as cooperation, self-confidence, and active classroom participation. Meanwhile, schools can adopt icebreakers as part of broader instructional innovation programs to improve educational quality, particularly by enhancing students' motivation and learning outcomes.

4.1 Research Contributions

This study makes significant contributions both academically and practically. Academically, it provides empirical evidence on the effectiveness of ice-breaking in improving students' learning motivation, particularly in Islamic Religious Education, and thus may serve as a reference for future studies on interactive and participatory learning strategies. In practice, the findings offer guidance for teachers in designing and implementing ice-breaking activities aligned with lesson content to create enjoyable learning environments, increase student engagement, and encourage active participation. In addition, this study provides schools with guidance for developing instructional innovation programs that improve student motivation and learning outcomes while simultaneously supporting students' social and emotional skill development through interactive activities. Overall, this research contributes to improving the quality of the learning process from both instructional strategy and student learning experience perspectives.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

5.1 Research Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research was conducted in only one seventh-grade class at SMP Negeri 32 Satu Atap Kaur with a limited number of participants, which restricts the generalizability of the results to other school contexts or educational levels. Second, the use of Classroom Action Research (CAR) focused on short-term instructional improvement and therefore did not

examine the long-term effects of ice breaking on sustained student learning motivation. Third, the measurement of learning motivation relied primarily on questionnaires and observations, which may be influenced by respondent and researcher subjectivity. In addition, this study did not compare the effectiveness of different types of ice-breaking activities, making it difficult to determine which forms are most effective for enhancing motivation in Islamic Religious Education.

5.1 Recommendation for Future Research Directions

Given these limitations, future research is recommended to involve larger, more diverse samples across different schools, regions, and socio-cultural backgrounds to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Further studies may also employ experimental or quasi-experimental designs to compare ice breaking with other instructional strategies and to examine its long-term impact on student motivation and learning outcomes. In addition, future research should explore the variations and characteristics of ice-breaking activities most suitable for Islamic Religious Education content and integrate them with cooperative, project-based, or values-based learning models. Researchers are also encouraged to include additional psychological variables, such as student engagement, self-regulation, and emotional well-being, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of ice-breaking on the learning process.

6. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of ice-breaking activities has a positive impact on improving students' learning motivation in Islamic Religious Education. Prior to the intervention, the learning process was teacher-centered and monotonous, resulting in low student engagement and limited participation. These conditions indicated the need to employ more innovative, student-centered instructional strategies to create a more engaging learning environment.

Through the gradual application of ice-breaking across the action cycles, the learning atmosphere became more dynamic, interactive, and enjoyable. Ice-breaking activities helped reduce students' boredom, encouraged active involvement, and supported more positive social interactions during the learning process. As the variety and integration of icebreakers improved, students demonstrated greater confidence, enthusiasm, and willingness to participate in discussions and learning activities. Teachers also showed increased ability to manage classroom dynamics by integrating ice-breaking meaningfully with lesson content.

Overall, the findings affirm that ice breaking is not merely an auxiliary activity but an effective instructional strategy that supports student motivation in Islamic Religious Education. When designed creatively and contextually, icebreakers can foster a favorable learning climate, strengthen students' cognitive, affective, and social engagement, and enhance the overall quality of the learning process. Therefore, ice-breaking can be recommended as a practical and applicable approach for teachers to promote more meaningful, interactive, and motivating learning experiences in Islamic Religious Education.

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Author Contribution Statement

All authors discussed the results, contributed to the final manuscript, and approved the final version for publication. Iftisa Oktika Sari: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - Original Draft, Performed data collection and Analysis, Interpretation of the results. Azizah Aryati: Conceptualization, Writing - Review & Editing.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no significant competing financial, professional or personal interests that might have influenced the performance or presentation of the work described in this manuscript

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