



The Relationship Between the Use of Ice-Breaking Activities in Learning and the Reduction of Academic Stress Among Elementary School Students

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Abstract: This study aimed to examine the relationship between the use of icebreakers in learning and the level of academic stress among elementary school students. Academic stress often arises due to monotonous learning methods and high academic demands, so a strategy that creates a pleasant learning atmosphere is needed. This research employed a quantitative, descriptive-correlational approach. The participants were 25 fifth-grade students from SD Negeri 01 Tugu Harum, comprising 12 boys and 13 girls. The instrument used was a 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire on the use of icebreakers and academic stress, which had undergone validity and reliability testing. Data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation, t-test, and the coefficient of determination. The results revealed a strong and significant relationship ($r = 0.649$; $p < 0.05$), with ice breaking contributing 42.1% to reducing academic stress. Although the sample size was limited, these findings emphasize that consistent application of icebreakers can be an effective strategy to support students' mental health and improve learning quality.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji hubungan antara penggunaan ice breaking dalam pembelajaran dengan tingkat stres akademik siswa sekolah dasar. Stres akademik kerap muncul akibat metode belajar yang monoton dan tuntutan akademik tinggi, sehingga diperlukan strategi pembelajaran yang mampu menciptakan suasana belajar menyenangkan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan metode deskriptif korelasional. Subjek penelitian berjumlah 25 siswa kelas V SD Negeri 01 Tugu Harum, terdiri atas 12 siswa laki-laki dan 13 siswa perempuan. Instrumen penelitian berupa angket skala Likert 5 poin mengenai penggunaan ice breaking dan stres akademik, yang telah melalui uji validitas serta reliabilitas. Analisis data menggunakan uji korelasi Pearson, uji t, dan koefisien determinasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan hubungan yang kuat dan signifikan ($r = 0,649$; $p < 0,05$), dengan kontribusi ice breaking sebesar 42,1% terhadap penurunan stres akademik. Meski jumlah sampel terbatas, temuan ini menegaskan bahwa penerapan ice breaking secara konsisten dapat menjadi strategi efektif dalam mendukung kesehatan mental siswa serta meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran.

A. Introduction

Primary education represents a vital early phase in the comprehensive development of a child's character, personality, and competencies. It plays a key role in preparing students with essential life values, foundational academic skills, and social competencies that will support them throughout their personal and academic journeys. As highlighted by Dewi et al (2021) and Windayani (2021), primary education serves as a cornerstone for nurturing moral values, basic knowledge, and critical thinking skills, all of which contribute to shaping a child's intelligence and future character. Education also significantly contributes to students' personal development by fostering religious values, practical skills, emotional regulation, and intellectual growth (Budiyani et al., 2021). This perspective aligns with Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which states that the goal of primary education is to establish a strong foundation for intellectual, moral, and personal growth, as well as to develop learners' independence.

Despite its critical role, in reality, elementary students often experience considerable academic pressure due to the demands of the learning environment. A crowded curriculum, the emphasis on achieving high academic performance, and ineffective teaching strategies can result in students feeling mentally and emotionally strained (Hariadi & Gondohanindijo, 2021). These conditions can trigger academic stress even among young learners. Barseli & Ifdil (2017) define academic stress as a psychological state in which students feel overwhelmed by academic requirements they perceive as surpassing their capabilities. This form of stress may manifest in various ways, including physical symptoms such as headaches, fatigue, and difficulty sleeping; emotional symptoms like irritability and anxiety; and behavioral signs such as social withdrawal or avoidance of school-related tasks (Safira & Hartati, 2021)

A study by Nindyati (2020) found that elementary students experiencing academic stress tend to exhibit decreased concentration, difficulties in time management, and heightened anxiety regarding school tasks. Observations in elementary schools have also indicated that some fifth-grade students exhibit similar symptoms, including difficulty focusing, fatigue during lessons, and reluctance to participate actively in class. This suggests that academic stress is not exclusive to secondary or higher education levels but also affects primary school students, who are still in a crucial stage of emotional development. This issue warrants serious attention, as primary education represents a critical phase in child development. If academic pressures are not adequately addressed, they may adversely affect not only students' academic achievement but also their psychological and social well-being. Therefore, it is essential to implement learning strategies that focus not only on academic outcomes but also on fostering a joyful, relaxed, and mentally supportive learning environment (Hutasoit & Tambunan, 2018).

One such strategy believed to promote a positive learning atmosphere is the use of ice-breaking activities (Aniuranti et al., 2021). Ice breaking refers to fun, interactive activities conducted at the beginning or during learning sessions to relieve tension, promote social interaction, and increase student enthusiasm (Nisa, 2023). Harianja & Sapri (2022) suggest

that ice breaking can help teachers build emotional connections with students and create a more positive, engaging, and less rigid classroom atmosphere. Such conditions are necessary for students to maintain concentration during learning activities (Zakiyyah et al., 2022). Lestari & Pratama (2022) further emphasise that the appropriate implementation of icebreakers can enhance students' comfort and readiness to absorb academic content.

Furthermore, Yuliana & Rachman (2021) explain that a comfortable emotional classroom environment significantly influences learning effectiveness. Students who feel emotionally secure are more likely to concentrate and are less susceptible to psychological stress. In this context, ice breaking functions as a stimulus that can activate students' positive emotions, reduce anxiety, and enhance attention during learning sessions. This is particularly crucial in primary education, where students are in a sensitive stage of social and emotional growth.

Previous studies have demonstrated that the use of ice-breaking activities in educational settings yields positive outcomes in enhancing the learning process. A study conducted by Putri (2021) found that students exhibited increased learning motivation and were more active in class following the implementation of ice breaking. This suggests that ice-breaking activities have a positive psychological impact on students' readiness to learn. Similarly, research by Muhammad Zuhaery et al (2024) reported that the use of ice-breaking activities significantly improved students' classroom concentration. These findings support the view that ice-breaking is an effective strategy for increasing student engagement and participation in learning.

While numerous studies have examined the advantages of ice-breaking in educational settings, existing research has predominantly emphasized its effects on student motivation, engagement, and classroom participation. However, empirical evidence that specifically investigates the relationship between the use of ice-breaking activities and the reduction of academic stress remains limited, particularly within elementary school contexts. This gap is critical, as elementary school students are at a sensitive stage of emotional development and are increasingly exposed to academic demands that may negatively affect their psychological well-being. Therefore, further investigation is needed to determine whether ice-breaking activities can serve not only as instructional enhancers but also as effective strategies for alleviating academic stress among young learners.

Building on this premise, the present study offers a novel contribution by extending existing research on ice-breaking activities beyond their commonly examined effects on student motivation, concentration, and classroom participation. Rather than focusing solely on cognitive and behavioral outcomes, this study emphasises the affective dimension of learning by examining academic stress as a key psychological variable among elementary school students. This focus is particularly important because students at the elementary level are in a formative stage of emotional and character development, yet empirical studies that specifically link ice-breaking activities to academic stress reduction in this context remain limited. By addressing this underexplored area, the study contributes new empirical

evidence to the literature and supports the development of psychologically responsive, student-centred teaching practices in primary education.

In line with this focus, the study is guided by a central research question that seeks to determine whether a significant relationship exists between the implementation of ice-breaking activities during classroom instruction and the level of academic stress experienced by elementary school students. This question is formulated to clarify whether ice-breaking activities can function not only as instructional strategies that enhance classroom engagement but also as pedagogical tools that help alleviate academic pressure among young learners.

Accordingly, the objective of this study is to examine the relationship between the use of ice-breaking activities in learning and the academic stress levels of elementary school students. Specifically, the study aims to identify the extent to which the implementation of ice-breaking strategies is associated with reductions in academic stress, thereby contributing to the creation of a more positive, supportive, and psychologically safe learning environment. Through this objective, the research seeks to strengthen the integration of affective considerations into instructional practices in elementary education.

B. Method

This study employed a quantitative, descriptive-correlational approach. Descriptive quantitative research is a type of research that describes, examines, and explains phenomena based on numerical data as it exists, without attempting to test a specific hypothesis (Sulistyawati et al., 2022). The descriptive correlational method is utilized to determine the degree of relationship between two variables without providing any specific treatment or manipulation to those variables (Arikunto, 2017). In this study, the two variables examined were the use of ice-breaking activities in learning (independent variable) and students' academic stress levels (dependent variable).

The population of this research consisted of all fifth-grade students at SD Negeri 01 Tugu Harum, OKU Timur Regency, totaling 25 students. Given the relatively small number of participants, a saturated sampling (total sampling) approach was used, in which all members of the population were included as research subjects (Sugiyono, 2018). Although this sampling approach is suitable for small populations, it also poses limitations. The small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings, so the results should be interpreted with caution and viewed as preliminary evidence that needs further verification in broader contexts.

The research instrument used in this study was a 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire, developed based on indicators for each variable. The Likert scale was chosen because it is widely used to measure attitudes, perceptions, or respondents' tendencies toward specific phenomena (Sugiyono, 2019). For the ice-breaking variable, the indicators included enjoyment, concentration, and motivation in learning. Sample items included: "ice breaking activities make me more motivated to learn" and "I can concentrate better in class after participating in ice breaking activities." For the academic stress variable, the indicators

included emotional, physical, and behavioral symptoms. Sample items include: "I feel anxious when receiving a lot of assignments" and "I often feel tense or pressured when studying."

Before being distributed, the questionnaire underwent validity and reliability testing. Educational practitioners examined content validity to determine whether each item corresponded to the indicators established for each variable. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. According to Azwar (2017), an instrument is considered reliable if its Cronbach's Alpha value exceeds 0.70. The results showed that the ice-breaking questionnaire had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.82, while the academic stress questionnaire had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.79. Both values exceeded the threshold, indicating that the instruments were reliable and consistent for data collection.

The data were analyzed using statistical techniques. Pearson's product-moment correlation test was used to determine the direction and strength of the relationship between the two variables: the use of ice-breaking activities and students' academic stress levels. Furthermore, a t-test was conducted to assess the statistical significance of the identified relationship, ensuring that the findings were not due to chance. In addition, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was calculated to estimate the proportion of variance in academic stress explained by the use of ice-breaking in learning.

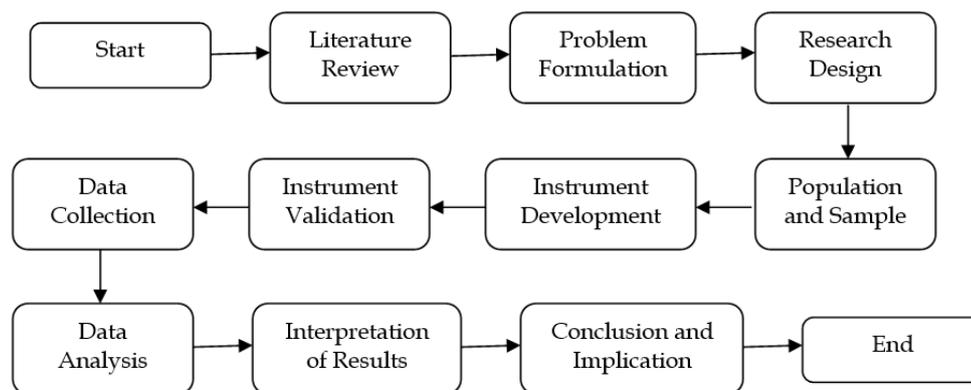


Figure 1. Research Flow

C. Result

This study aimed to examine the relationship between the use of ice-breaking activities in learning and the academic stress levels of elementary school students. The collected data were analysed using the Pearson correlation test and the t-test to assess the extent to which the use of ice-breaking activities influences academic stress. These statistical analyses were employed to identify both the strength and significance of the relationship between the variables, thereby providing empirical evidence regarding the role of ice-breaking activities in creating a more supportive and psychologically conducive learning environment for young learners.

Table 1. Pearson Correlation Between Ice Breaking and Academic Stress

		Correlations	
		Ice Breaking	Stres Akademik
Ice Breaking	Pearson Correlation	1	.649**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	25	25
Stres Akademik	Pearson Correlation	.649**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	25	25

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Based on the data analysis, the Pearson correlation coefficient was 0.649, with a p-value of 0.000. This correlation coefficient falls within the category of a positive, moderately strong relationship, indicating that the more effective or frequent the use of ice-breaking activities in learning, the lower the level of academic stress experienced by students. In practical classroom terms, this means that when teachers consistently implement ice-breaking activities, students tend to feel more relaxed, focused, and engaged, which helps reduce their academic stress. For example, a short energizer game or motivational activity before lessons can make students feel less pressured and more ready to learn.

The significance value of 0.000, which is below the standard threshold of 0.05, indicates that the relationship between the use of ice-breaking activities and academic stress is statistically significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that the observed correlation was not due to chance but reflects a genuine relationship between the two variables in the learning environment of elementary school students.

Table 2. Coefficient of Determination

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.649 ^a	.421	.396	3.787

a. Predictors: (Constant), Ice Breaking

Furthermore, the analysis of the coefficient of determination revealed an R-squared value of 0.421, indicating that 42.1% of the variability in students' academic stress can be explained by the use of ice-breaking activities in learning. This means that nearly half of the reduction in academic stress levels can be attributed to how teachers plan and apply breaking strategies in their classrooms. Put simply, consistent use of icebreakers can directly help reduce stress for a significant portion of students. Meanwhile, the remaining 57.9% is influenced by other factors not examined in this study, such as family environment, peer relationships, academic workload, teacher expectations, or internal psychological aspects like motivation, emotional regulation, and self-confidence. This highlights that while ice-

breaking is important, comprehensive efforts are needed to address other factors contributing to students' academic stress.

Table 3: T-test Result

Model	Coefficients ^a		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error				
1	(Constant)	14.550	4.959		2.934	.007
	Ice Breaking	.566	.138	.649	4.091	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Stres Akademik

In addition, the t-test for the ice-breaking variable yielded a t-value of 4.091 and a p-value of 0.000. This result further confirms that ice breaking's Influence on academic stress is statistically significant. Since the significance value is less than 0.05, it can be concluded that ice-breaking activities have a meaningful effect in reducing students' academic stress. Moreover, as the calculated t-value (4.091) exceeds the critical t-value (2.069), the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted.

In other words, the well-planned and properly implemented use of ice-breaking activities within teaching and learning processes significantly contributes to reducing academic stress among elementary school students. This finding underscores the importance of establishing an interactive, enjoyable, and emotionally supportive classroom atmosphere to ensure that students not only develop cognitively but also feel psychologically safe and comfortable throughout the learning process.

D. Discussion

This study revealed a strong, significant relationship between the use of ice-breaking activities in learning and the academic stress levels of elementary school students. This was demonstrated by the Pearson correlation test, which produced a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.649$ with a significance value of 0.000. These results indicate that the relationship between the two variables is positive, moderately strong, and statistically significant. In other words, the more frequently and effectively ice-breaking is applied in the learning process, the lower the academic stress students experience.

These findings are consistent with those of [Handayani et al \(2020\)](#), who argued that ice-breaking activities can create a more enjoyable learning atmosphere while reducing students' psychological tension. In a relaxed environment, students tend to be better prepared emotionally to receive academic materials and manage the pressures of academic demands. Within such conditions, students not only absorb content more effectively but also experience reduced anxiety, which is often a primary source of academic stress.

[Yuliana & Rachman \(2021\)](#) similarly emphasized that a favorable emotional climate within the classroom plays an essential role in minimizing students' psychological stress. In this context, ice-breaking activities serve not only as recreational interludes but also as a

medium for fostering social bonds among students, teachers, and peers. This is especially important because one of the primary causes of stress among elementary school students is the sense of rejection or absence of warm interpersonal relationships in the classroom.

Furthermore, the t-test result, with a calculated t-value of 4.091 exceeding the critical t-value of 2.069 and a significance level of $0.000 < 0.05$, confirms that the use of ice-breaking activities has a statistically significant effect on students' academic stress. This evidence demonstrates that learning strategies designed to be enjoyable and to alleviate classroom rigidity have been empirically proven to reduce the academic pressure students face. These findings support the notion that humanistic and participatory approaches in education not only improve student engagement but also enhance students' psychological well-being.

The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.421$) indicates that ice-breaking activities account for 42.1% of the variance in students' academic stress levels. The remaining 57.9% is influenced by factors not examined in this study, including family support, socioeconomic conditions, peer relationships, teacher-imposed pressure, homework load, and internal psychological factors such as anxiety, self-confidence, and time management. This finding aligns with [Barseli & Ifdil \(2017\)](#), who explained that academic stress is a multifactorial condition influenced by both internal and external factors.

Additionally, this study supports the findings of [Putri \(2021\)](#), who found that ice-breaking activities improved students' motivation and increased classroom engagement. High motivation acts as a protective factor against stress, as motivated students are typically more resilient in coping with academic challenges. Similarly, research by [Muhammad Zuhaery et al \(2024\)](#) confirmed that consistent application of ice-breaking activities can significantly enhance students' concentration, which is crucial for reducing anxiety and academic pressure.

[Harianja & Sapri \(2022\)](#) also suggested that ice breaking represents a humanistic learning strategy that fosters emotional connections among students. When students feel emotionally and socially connected in the learning process, they are better able to understand academic material and experience less stress from academic tasks. In this regard, ice-breaking serves not only as a recreational activity but also as a therapeutic tool, helping students manage stress and pressure in the school environment.

According to [Lestari & Pratama \(2022\)](#), the systematic implementation of ice-breaking activities can improve students' concentration and attentiveness during the learning process. This is particularly essential for elementary school students, who are still developing their emotional and cognitive capacities. When the classroom environment is perceived as positive and enjoyable, students tend to be more focused, which directly contributes to reducing academic stress.

From a pedagogical perspective, teachers play a strategic role in designing learning activities that balance cognitive and affective aspects. Through activities such as icebreakers, teachers not only deliver academic material but also help students manage stress arising from academic demands.

In conclusion, enjoyable and psychologically supportive learning experiences from an early age are essential investments in nurturing a generation that is intellectually capable and emotionally resilient. The consistent, context-based implementation of icebreakers has been proven to be an effective strategy for fostering a healthy, engaging, and low-stress learning environment.

E. Implication

The findings of this study hold important theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the results support the idea that a positive, engaging, and emotionally supportive learning environment facilitated through activities such as ice breaking – can reduce students' academic stress. This is consistent with humanistic learning theories that emphasize the importance of emotional and psychological well-being within the educational process.

From a practical perspective, this study offers valuable recommendations for elementary school teachers to incorporate ice-breaking activities into their teaching strategies regularly. Implementing ice-breaking activities has been shown to help create a more interactive and comfortable classroom atmosphere, enhancing students' readiness to learn and reducing academic pressure.

In terms of policy, educational institutions are encouraged to include ice-breaking activities in recommended teaching strategies and professional development programs that prioritize student-centered learning and student well-being.

This study also carries social implications, underscoring the need for early interventions to address students' mental health and support successful learning outcomes. By understanding the impact of academic stress, teachers and parents can collaborate to create a more supportive, adaptive, and inclusive learning environment.

F. Limitation and Suggestion for Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research was conducted at a single elementary school with a relatively small sample of 25 students, limiting the generalizability of the results to a broader population. Second, data collection relied solely on questionnaires and documentation, without using triangulation methods such as in-depth interviews or classroom observations.

Moreover, this study did not thoroughly account for external factors that could influence students' academic stress, including family conditions, social expectations, additional academic workloads, and students' emotional and psychological states. These factors may significantly impact stress levels, but were not measured within the current research framework.

Therefore, future research is recommended to involve larger, more diverse samples, including individuals from different social backgrounds, school types, and geographic locations, to enhance representativeness and external validity. Additionally, adopting a

mixed-methods approach would provide more comprehensive and meaningful data. Qualitative data from interviews with students, teachers, and parents, as well as classroom observations, could enrich the interpretation of quantitative findings and offer deeper insights into the role of ice breaking in reducing academic stress.

Future studies are also expected not only to provide statistical information but also to holistically explain students' experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies for managing academic stress through enjoyable learning approaches such as ice-breaking.

G. Conclusion

This study aimed to determine the relationship between the use of ice-breaking activities in learning and academic stress levels among elementary school students. Based on the analysis and discussion, a significant relationship exists between the two variables. The more consistently teachers implement better ice-breaking activities, the lower students' academic stress.

Appropriate implementation of ice-breaking activities not only creates an enjoyable, interactive classroom environment but also helps students become emotionally and psychologically prepared to receive academic material. A positive classroom atmosphere plays a crucial role in reducing the academic pressure students commonly experience.

Therefore, the hypothesis in this study is accepted: the use of ice-breaking activities in learning significantly reduces students' academic stress levels. These findings emphasise the importance of teachers addressing the affective dimensions of learning and creating a classroom environment that promotes students' mental health and holistic development.

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