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Increasing Student Motivation in Learning English Through Digital Ice-Breaking Activities

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A B S T R A C T

In this digital era, students often lack motivation in conventional English learning. Although ice-breaking is found to be helpful, conventional methods can feel monotonous for students who are familiar with digital technology, and the impact of digital ice-breaking has not been widely explored. This study aims to determine the effectiveness of digital ice-breaking (using platforms such as Bamboozle, Kahoot! and Quizizz) on the learning motivation of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Diwek. A pre-experimental design with one pre-test/post-test group was used on 31 eighth-grade students in class C. Motivation was measured using a questionnaire before (pre-test) and after (post-test) the digital ice-breaking treatment. The results showed a statistically significant difference (p = 0.009) between the pre-test motivation scores (mean = 30.29) and post-test scores (mean = 33.36). The Paired Samples T-test (t = -2.790) and moderate effect size (Cohen's d = -0.501) confirmed the positive impact of the treatment. Digital ice-breaking proved to be effective in increasing students' motivation in learning English.

Keywords: *Digital Ice-Breaking, English Learning, Learning Motivation*

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INTRODUCTION

In the era of rapid development of digital technology, the learning process before the 21st century tended to rely on the use of classrooms and face-to-face interaction between teachers and students, but now there has been a major change along with the development of information and communication technology, especially internet-based technology (Ma'rifatulloh & Fajarina, 2022). The transformation not only affects the way teachers deliver the material but also changes students' expectations of a more dynamic and engaging learning process. The media used as a learning strategy must be motivating and fun (Lailiyah & Ma'rifatulloh, 2024). The reality in the field shows that students have limited attention to learning that is perceived by them as too monotonous and less interesting in terms of delivery in the classroom since the beginning of learning. The students were unmotivated to learn English because they were bored with the techniques the teacher was using to teach them and they didn't seem to enjoy the English lessons (Zuhriyah & Rohmah, 2022). Every teacher must have often encountered a situation where, when entering the classroom, they are faced with the faces of students who look tense, bored, and even less enthusiastic about participating in learning. Joyful learning is a type of learning process or experience that can help a student interested in teaching learning activities. Typically, traditional instruction causes students to become bored and sit quietly in class (Tasaufi et al., 2024).

The teacher must be creative and have techniques to teach and face students. The techniques have to be interesting and have more educational effects on the teacher and students to help them understand and catch the material from the teacher easily (Muammamah & Zuhriyah, 2024). Therefore, teachers are expected to be able to use relevant technology during the learning process. Integrating technology into English language learning at the junior high school levels offers many advantages but also faces challenges such as the

digital divide and the need for teacher training (Sembiring & Sitepu, 2024). The problems for teacher are mastering teacher training, teaching methods, and how to use IT in the classroom learning process (Sari & Zuhriyah, 2023).

And therefore, the importance of providing ice breaking as a solution as well as a bridge to make the atmosphere that previously looked tense become more alive and build a deeper connection between teachers and students. In the English learning process, the purpose of ice breaking is not only to break the ice or just an open game, but also as a strategy to reduce students' anxiety in learning a foreign language and create a conducive learning environment so that the delivery of material can be received properly. However, many teachers currently use conventional ice breaking which is considered monotonous or less interesting for students who are accustomed to digital stimulation in their daily lives.

Students' motivation in learning English when they have entered grade VIII of junior high school often experiences ups and downs. In this phase students begin to experience shyness, fear, and lack of confidence when they have to speak English. The phenomenon of "silent period" or the silence of students in English learning becomes a real challenge for teachers every time they teach in class, especially in English subjects. In many cases, silent learners are actively processing and absorbing language input, but their participation is misinterpreted as disengagement or lack of effort. Teachers who expect immediate oral production may inadvertently increase anxiety, prolonging the silent phase rather than reducing it (Okhunov, 2025).

Several previous studies have shown the positive impact of using ice breaking on increasing students' interest or motivation to learn. In line with research by Sasan et al. (2023) shows concrete evidence that the use of ice breaking can increase students' enthusiasm and participation in the learning process. Another study by Sari et al. (2021) indicates that icebreaking activities can enhance student concentration during learning. Experience in the field also provides concrete evidence that students who initially look less enthusiastic and not excited can turn into more active and participate with ice breaking. However, the majority of previous studies still examine ice breaking in conventional forms such as physical games, singing or simple verbal, while ice breaking combined with digital technology has not been explored in depth.

The rapid development of digital technology has been a breath of fresh air in education, especially in English language learning. Hasumi & Chiu (2024) state that technology can create a more interactive learning experience. The use of several learning applications such as Duolingo, Kahoot or Quizizz has proven that digital platforms can help the English learning process more interesting and interactive with the features presented. Students who were previously lazy to open books and learn to do exercise questions finally become enthusiastic when learning using their smartphones. Studies by Wei (2023) also show that digital technologies such as AI can help active collaboration from students in learning languages. However, the challenge is how to use technology effectively in the learning process, especially in the context of ice breaking that integrates direct interaction between teachers and students.

Previous studies have shown that ice breaking can increase students' motivation, concentration, and participation in learning. Pratama et al. (2021) found that the application of ice breaking in online learning significantly increased students' learning motivation and concentration. Another research result by Hayat (2024) proved that the use of virtual ice breakers can effectively improve students' English-speaking skills, the average score of the experimental group was higher than that of the control group. With digital transformation bringing significant changes in global education, research specifically discussing ice breaking using technology in English language learning is still limited. Because most teachers still use conventional ice breaking at the beginning of learning and then use digital technology in the core learning session. Whereas if both are used at the beginning it has enormous potential and has not been explored in depth. Therefore, there are still relatively few studies that specifically examine the effect of digital ice breaking in increasing students' motivation and English learning outcomes.

In teaching learning process, especially at the junior high school level, educators are currently facing similar problems, where students often lack motivation to participate in the learning process. SMP Negeri 1 Diwek is one of the schools that faces real challenges in learning English. Based on the initial observation, it can be seen that most of the VIII grade students show a lack of motivation when the English teacher enters the class. They tend to be silent, lazy to ask questions, and often look bored during the learning process. The students' factors were that they disliked the English class, could not understand the meaning of English words, and had little motivation to study English. Meanwhile, issues from the teacher were that the teacher did not use any media besides applied conventional technique that was, by still using the dictation method (Murni & Zuhriyah, 2023). This condition not only affected the classroom atmosphere, but also had an impact on the low average score of English compared to other subjects. Paradoxically, these students look very active when using their smartphones outside of class hours. This shows a disconnect between how they learn in class and how they interact with technology in their daily lives.

The research question was established as follows: Is there a significant difference between students' motivation before and after being taught by using digital ice breaking? In addition, the null hypothesis (H0) stated that there is no significant difference in student learning motivation before and after the implementation of digital ice-breaking; otherwise, the alternative hypothesis (H1) stated that there is a significant difference in student learning motivation before and after the implementation of digital ice-breaking.

Review of Literature

Several previous studies have examined the effectiveness of icebreaker activities in education. One study conducted by Adi et al. (2021) demonstrated that ice-breaking activities effectively enhanced motivation for learning English at class VII of junior school. Their research demonstrated that ice-breaking activities helped students feel engaged, active, energized, happy, and interactive in the classroom, while also encouraging them to remain attentive during the learning process and focus on the material. The difference between their study and this research lies in the sample population: their study focused on seventh-grade students at SMP Nurul Jadid, whereas this research targets eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Diwek. However, both studies share a similarity in their use of ice-breaking activities to enhance English learning.

Another study, conducted by Artati (2021), demonstrated that using Kahoot as an icebreaker offers numerous benefits in language teaching, particularly for improving the motivation of EFL students with low engagement. The difference between Artati's study and this research lies in the research subjects: her study involved 40 students, while this research focuses on one class of 31 students. Both studies, however, share the use of Kahoot as an ice-breaking tool to boost students' motivation.

Additionally, a study by Arifani & Safitri (2023) found a significant effect of ice-breaking activities on improving student motivation, noting a clear difference in motivation levels between students taught with ice-breaking strategies and those taught without them. The difference between their study and this research lies in the population: their study involved eleventh-grade students at SMK Cendana Padang Panjang, while this research focuses on eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Diwek. Both studies share the use of ice-breaking activities in English learning.

Similarly, Zulfadli et al. (2024) showed that ice-breaking activities are highly effective in boosting student engagement and motivation. The similarity between their study and this research is the use of ice-breaking activities to increase student motivation in English learning. However, their study adopted a descriptive qualitative approach, whereas this research employs a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental design.

Finally, a study by Pane (2024) demonstrated a strong relationship between ice-breaking strategies and the learning motivation of tenth-grade students at MA Hubbulwathan Duri. The difference between Pane's study and this research lies in the research subjects: Pane's study involved 36 tenth-grade students, while this research targets 31 second-grade students

at SMP Negeri 1 Diwek. Both studies share the use of ice-breaking activities in English learning.

METHOD

This research employed a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental design, specifically utilizing the one-group pre-test and post-test design. This design was selected because the objective was to assess the effect of a treatment on a single group without a control group. The researcher measured the dependent variables (motivation) before applying the treatment (pre-test), then gave the treatment (digital ice-breaking), and then measured the dependent variables again (post-test) to determine if there were any significant difference or effect from the treatment. This design was practical to implement within an existing classroom environment without disrupting the school's structure.

Population and Sample

The population in this study was taken from all VIII grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Diwek in 2025/2026 academic year. With the total number of the student population was 288 students. Sugiyono (2020) states that "a sample is a part of the total number and characteristics of the population." The sample was selected using non-probability sampling (purposive sampling), the researcher selected one class (around 31 students) as the research subject. The selection of this class was based on certain aspects, such as recommendations from English teachers regarding the class that was considered most representative in showing low motivation.

Instruments

In collecting the data, this study used a motivation questionnaire. The motivation questionnaire was adopted from (Purmama et al. 2019). Questionnaires were distributed to students before and after the treatment to measure learning motivation. There were ten items in the questionnaire, and for each, there were four possible response result categories: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

Data analysis

Data analysis in this study uses descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The entire statistical calculation process will be assisted by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The stages of data analysis that will be carried out include descriptive statistical analysis, assumption tests and hypothesis tests.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Before conducting hypothesis testing, the first step in data analysis is to present descriptive statistics. This analysis aims to provide an overview or summary of the distribution of student motivation scores at the pre-test and post-test stages (Sugiyono, 2020). The measures to be calculated include central tendency (mean, median, mode) and measures of dispersion (standard deviation, minimum value, and maximum value). This analysis is important for understanding the basic characteristics of the data before further analysis is conducted.

Mean (Average): Used to determine the average score obtained by students.

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} X_i}{n}$$

Where $\bar{X}$ is the average, $\sum X_i$ is the sum of all scores, and n is the number of students.

Standard Deviation: Used to determine how widely the data is spread from its mean value. A small value indicates that the data tends to cluster around the mean.

$$S = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(X_i - \bar{X})^2}{n - 1}}$$

Where S is standard deviation, X_i is the individual score, $\bar{X}$ is mean, n is the number of students.

Assumption Test Analysis

Before conducting hypothesis testing, the research data must go through an assumption test to ensure that the data meets the conditions underlying the use of parametric

statistics. For a one-group pretest-posttest design, the main assumption test is the normality test.

The normality test aims to determine if the data difference (gain) between the post-test and pre-test scores comes from a normally distributed population. According to Sugiyono (2020), normal data distribution is one of the important requirements for parametric tests such as the t-test. Considering that the sample size of this study is likely to be less than 50 (one class), the most appropriate test is the Shapiro-Wilk test. The formula for the Shapiro-Wilk test is as follows:

$$W = \frac{(\sum_{i=1}^{n} a_i \, x_{(i)})^2}{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(x_i - \bar{x})^2}$$

Where:

n = *Sample size*
$x_{(i)}$ = *i −th order statistic (sorted data values, $x_{(1)} \leq x_{(2)} \leq \ldots x_{(n)}$)*
x_i = *Original (unsorted data values)*
$\bar{x}$ = *Sample mean*
a_i = *Constants (weights) derived from the expected values of order statistics of a standard normal distribution, dependent on n*

Decision Criteria:

The basis for decision making is the significance value (p-value) of the Shapiro-Wilk test results.
If the significance value is > 0.05, it can be concluded that the score difference data is normally distributed, and parametric analysis can be continued.
If the significance value is < 0.05, then the data is not normally distributed, so a non-parametric statistical test (e.g., Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test) must be used as an alternative.

Hypothesis Test

After the data is stated to meet the assumption of normality, hypothesis testing is conducted to answer the research question. The hypothesis test used is the Paired-Samples t-Test. This test is used to compare the means of two measurements (before and after) taken from the same group of subjects (Field, 2018). The t-test formula for paired samples is as follows:

$$t = \frac{\bar{\mathcal{D}}}{\frac{S_D}{\sqrt{n}}}$$

Where:
t = *t value*
$\bar{\mathcal{D}}$ = *The average different between the post-test and pre-test scores for each student (D = x_{post} - x_{pre})*
S_D = *Standard deviation of the difference in scores (D)*
n = *Number of students*

Decision Criteria:

Decision-making is based on a comparison of the significance values obtained from the SPSS output with the predetermined significance level (a) of 0.05.
If the significance value (2-tailed) < 0.05, then Ha is accepted and H0 is rejected. This means that there is a statistically significant difference in the mean between before and after the treatment. It can be concluded that the application of digital ice-breaking has a significant effect.
If the significance value (2-tailed) > 0.05, then Ha is rejected and H0 is accepted. This means there is no significant difference in the mean, so it is concluded that digital ice-breaking does not have a significant effect.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings of this study are presented in two parts: the descriptive statistics that summarize the central tendency and variability of the scores before and after the treatment, and the inferential statistics that determine the statistical significance of the observed differences.

Descriptive Statistics to understand the basic characteristics of the data

descriptive statistics were calculated for both the Pre-Test (before the treatment) and the Post-Test (after the treatment).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

		95% Confidence Interval Mean				
	Mean	Upper	Lower	Std. Deviation	Shapiro-Wilk	P-value of Shapiro-Wilk
Pre-Test	30.290	31.788	28.792	4.084	0.978	0.761
Post-Test	33.355	34.857	31.853	4.095	0.941	0.089

As illustrated in table above, the mean score on the Pre-Test was 30.29, with a standard deviation of 4.084. Following the treatment, the mean score on the Post-Test increased to 33.36, with a comparable standard deviation of 4.095. The observed mean difference between the Pre-Test and Post-Test is 3.07 points, providing initial evidence of a positive change. Furthermore, the p-values for the Shapiro-Wilk test were 0.761 (Pre-Test) and 0.089 (Post-Test), both of which are greater than 0.05, indicating the data was normally distributed.

Paired Samples T-Test to determine whether the observed increase in mean scores from Pre-Test to Post-Test was statistically significant and not due to random chance, a Paired Samples T-Test was conducted.

Table 2. Paired Samples T-Test

								95% CI for Cohen's d	
Measure 1		Measure 2	t	df	p	Cohen's d	SE Cohen's d	Lower	Upper
Pre-Test	-	Post Test	-2.790	30	0.009	-0.501	0.285	-0.871	-0.123

Note. Student's t-test.

The results from the Paired Samples T-Test, as shown in Table 3, reveal a statistically significant difference between the Pre-Test and Post-Test scores. The t-value is -2.790 with 30 degrees of freedom (df). The key finding is the p-value of 0.009. Since this value is less than the conventional alpha level of 0.05 ($p < 0.05$), the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected. This allows us to conclude that the observed improvement in scores is statistically significant. Furthermore, to quantify the magnitude or practical significance of this difference, Cohen's d was calculated. The effect size was found to be d = -0.501. According to Cohen (1988) conventions, this result indicates a medium effect size. This suggests that the treatment did not only produce a statistically significant result but also had a substantial and meaningful impact on the participants' outcomes.

Discussion

The Pre-Test results, with a mean score of 30.29, established a crucial baseline for this study. This initial score reflects the participants' standing on the measured variables prior to the administration of the treatment. The standard deviation of 4.084 indicates a moderate dispersion of scores around the mean, suggesting a varied but not extremely divergent level of initial capability among the participants.

The Post-Test results demonstrate a clear shift in the participants' performance. The mean score increased to 33.36, representing a gain of 3.07 points. This upward movement in

the central tendency is the most direct evidence of a positive change following the treatment. The consistency in the standard deviation (Post-Test SD = 4.095) compared to the Pre-Test suggests that while the overall performance improved, the relative variability among participants remained stable.

The core of this research inquiry was to determine whether the observed increase in scores was statistically significant. The results of the Paired Samples T-Test provide a definitive answer. The p-value of 0.009 offers strong evidence against the null hypothesis. In practical terms, this means that the probability of observing a mean difference of 3.07 points (or larger) due to mere random sampling error is only 0.9%. Consequently, we can be highly confident that the treatment was the driving force behind the observed improvement. Beyond statistical significance, the Cohen's d value of 0.501 (a medium effect size) is of paramount importance. The medium effect size found in this study confirms that the treatment's impact was not merely a trivial statistical artefact but a substantial and educationally or practically meaningful improvement. In conclusion, the synthesis of findings from both the descriptive and inferential analyses lead to a robust and coherent conclusion: the treatment implemented in this study was effective. It successfully led to a significant and meaningful improvement in the participants' scores from the Pre-Test to the Post-Test. These findings strongly support the research hypothesis that the treatment would have a positive effect. The researcher asserted that the treatment by using digital ice breaking was surely beneficial for increase students' motivation in learning English at class VIII C of SMP Negeri 1 Diwek.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and the discussion, the researcher concluded that using digital ice breaking was effective to increase students' motivation in learning English at class VIII C of SMP Negeri 1 Diwek. It was proven from the result of students' motivation level which showed that there was a significant difference between students' pre-test and post-test and also the t-test value was higher than t-table value. So, it could be stated that giving treatment by using digital ice breaking could help students to increase their motivation.

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