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Enhancing Students' Learning Motivation through Responsive Ice-Breaking Activities in Islamic Religious Education: Quasi-Experimental Evidence from Indonesian Senior High School

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Abstract

Learning motivation in Islamic Religious Education and Character Building often declines when classroom instruction relies heavily on one-way explanation and offers limited space for student participation. This study examined the effect of responsive ice-breaking activities on students' learning motivation at SMA Negeri 5 Mandau, Indonesia. A quantitative quasi-experimental design with a non-equivalent control group was used. The participants were 58 tenth-grade students, consisting of 30 students in the experimental group and 28 students in the control group. The experimental group received Islamic Religious Education lessons integrated with responsive ice-breaking activities, while the control group followed regular instruction. Data were collected using a learning motivation questionnaire and documentation, and were analyzed through descriptive statistics, the Shapiro–Wilk normality test, Levene's homogeneity test, and an independent-samples t-test. The study was informed by Self-Determination Theory and the ARCS motivational model. The results showed that the experimental group achieved a higher post-test mean score than the control group. The t-test confirmed a significant difference between groups, $t(56) = -2.589$, $p = .012$, with a moderate effect size. These findings suggest that responsive ice-breaking activities can help restore students' attention, reduce classroom fatigue, and support learning motivation during Islamic Religious Education lessons.

Keywords responsive ice breaking, learning motivation, Islamic Religious Education, quasi-experiment, senior high school

INTRODUCTION

Learning motivation is not a minor classroom issue. It determines how students enter a lesson, how long they stay attentive, how willing they are to ask questions, and how seriously they connect learning materials with their own lives. In Islamic Religious Education and

Character Building, motivation has an even wider function because the subject does not only aim to transmit religious knowledge. It also seeks to cultivate moral awareness, self-control, social responsibility, and religious values that students are expected to practise beyond the classroom. When students are physically present but mentally detached, the teaching of values easily becomes a formal routine rather than a meaningful learning experience.

Recent studies in educational psychology show that motivation develops through the interaction between students' personal needs and the learning environment created by teachers. Self-Determination Theory explains that students are more likely to show stronger and more autonomous motivation when their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are supported in the classroom (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This view is supported by meta-analytic evidence showing that autonomous forms of motivation are consistently associated with more positive learning outcomes, while controlled or passive forms of motivation tend to be less beneficial for students' persistence and academic adjustment (Howard et al., 2021). A further meta-analysis by Bureau et al. also confirms that teacher support, students' perceived competence, and relational classroom experiences are important antecedents of student motivation (Bureau et al., 2022). In this sense, motivation should not be treated merely as a fixed characteristic of students; it is also shaped by the way instruction is designed and experienced.

In Indonesian secondary classrooms, this issue is closely related to teacher support and classroom interaction. Maulana et al. (2016) found that Indonesian senior high school students' autonomous motivation was associated with perceived teacher support for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This finding is important because it suggests that motivationally supportive classrooms are not only relevant in Western educational contexts, but also meaningful in Indonesian classrooms where teacher-student relationships, togetherness, and classroom climate play important roles in learning. Therefore, efforts to improve motivation in Islamic Religious Education need to move beyond advice, reminders, and moral instruction. Teachers also need practical strategies that help students feel involved, capable, and socially connected during the lesson.

The problem observed in Islamic Religious Education and Character Building at SMA Negeri 5 Mandau reflects this broader concern. Preliminary observation found that some students were less active during discussion, rarely asked questions, became bored easily, and had difficulty maintaining focus during learning activities. The learning process was still frequently dominated by teacher explanation, while student participation was not yet optimal. These conditions indicate that low motivation in Islamic Religious Education is not only related to students' individual interest, but also to the rhythm of classroom activities. When lessons continue in a long, one-way pattern, students may lose attention even when the material is important. This problem provides a strong reason to examine a simple, classroom-based strategy that can restore students' readiness to learn.

One strategy that can be used for this purpose is ice-breaking activity. In many classrooms, ice breaking is often understood narrowly as a short game to make students laugh.

Such an understanding is incomplete. When planned properly, ice-breaking activities may function as brief pedagogical interventions that reduce classroom fatigue, refresh attention, and rebuild interaction between students and teacher. This argument is consistent with the ARCS motivational model, which explains that learning motivation can be strengthened through attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction (Göksu & Bolat, 2021). Ucar and Kumtepe also showed that motivational strategies based on the ARCS-V model can influence learners' motivation, volition, course interest, and academic performance (Ucar & Kumtepe, 2020). From this perspective, ice breaking can be positioned not merely as entertainment, but as a strategy to recover attention, create achievable participation, and provide positive emotional experience during learning.

Empirical studies on classroom activity breaks support this argument. Daly-Smith et al. (2018) reported that classroom movement breaks and physically active learning tend to contribute positively to students' physical activity, cognition, academic performance, and classroom behaviour, although the effects depend on the design and implementation of the activity. Schmidt et al. (2016)further demonstrated that classroom-based physical activity breaks involving cognitive engagement can improve children's attention. Graham et al. (2021) found that classroom-based physical activity breaks were followed by more positive mood, higher motivation, and greater self-efficacy among students aged 11 to 14 years. Although ice breaking is not identical to a formal physical activity intervention, these findings provide a useful basis for understanding why short, structured, and engaging activities may help students return to the main lesson with better attention and readiness.

The role of emotion should also be considered. Learning does not occur only through the transfer of information; it is influenced by students' affective states. Fredrickson argues that positive emotions broaden individuals' thought-action repertoires and help build intellectual, social, and psychological resources (Fredrickson, 2013). Pekrun also explains that emotions are closely related to achievement processes during adolescence (Pekrun, 2017). In the classroom, a brief positive experience can reduce tension, increase willingness to participate, and support social connection. Ice breaking may therefore become meaningful when it is inclusive, age-appropriate, and not embarrassing for students. This point is especially important for senior high school students, who are more sensitive to peer perception and classroom image than younger learners.

Several recent studies in Islamic Religious Education also indicate that innovative learning strategies can improve students' motivation. Felgiansyah et al. found that the Student Teams Achievement Division model significantly influenced students' motivation in Islamic Religious Education at the senior high school level (Felgiansyah et al., 2026). Fauziah et al. also reported that mindfulness-based learning improved students' motivation and academic achievement in Islamic Religious Education through a quasi-experimental design (Fauziah et al., 2026). These findings show that student motivation in Islamic Religious Education can be improved when learning is designed to be more participatory and responsive to students' psychological needs. However, the available evidence still focuses mostly on broader learning

models, while empirical studies on responsive ice-breaking activities in senior high school Islamic Religious Education remain limited.

This limitation becomes the main research gap addressed by the present study. First, many studies on ice breaking still place the activity as an opening routine or general classroom variation, while fewer studies examine it as a responsive strategy used when students begin to show fatigue, boredom, or reduced concentration. Second, previous classroom activity break studies have often been conducted in general education settings, physical education, language learning, or primary school contexts, whereas evidence from Islamic Religious Education at the senior high school level is still scarce. Third, existing research rarely connects ice-breaking practice with established motivational theories such as Self-Determination Theory and the ARCS model. As a result, the pedagogical mechanism through which ice breaking may influence motivation has not been sufficiently explained.

The novelty of this study lies in the use of responsive ice-breaking activities in Islamic Religious Education and Character Building for senior high school students. The activity used in this study was not designed as a childish game or a routine opening activity. It was applied as a short, structured, and responsive intervention when students showed signs of reduced attention. The selected activity, "Responsive Letter Line," required students to listen carefully, respond quickly to letter cues, coordinate with classmates, and engage in brief physical movement. This design combines attention recovery, cognitive response, social interaction, and achievable participation. These elements are theoretically relevant to the needs for competence and relatedness in Self-Determination Theory, as well as the attention and confidence components of the ARCS model.

Based on this gap, the present study aims to examine whether responsive ice-breaking activities significantly influence students' learning motivation in Islamic Religious Education and Character Building at SMA Negeri 5 Mandau. The study uses a quantitative quasi-experimental design with a non-equivalent control group. The research is expected to contribute theoretically by extending the application of Self-Determination Theory and the ARCS model in the context of Islamic Religious Education. Practically, the findings may provide teachers with a simple, low-cost, and context-sensitive strategy to maintain students' motivation during classroom instruction. The hypothesis proposed in this study is that students who receive Islamic Religious Education lessons integrated with responsive ice-breaking activities will demonstrate higher learning motivation than students who receive conventional instruction without structured ice breaking.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design. A quantitative approach was used because the study examined the effect of a classroom treatment through numerical data and statistical testing. Creswell and Creswell (2022) explain that quantitative research is appropriate when a study seeks to test an objective relationship between variables using measurable instruments and statistical procedures. In this study, the

independent variable was responsive ice-breaking activities, while the dependent variable was students' learning motivation in Islamic Religious Education and Character Building.

The research used a non-equivalent control group design. This design was selected because the study was conducted in a real school setting where students had already been grouped into existing classes. Therefore, assigning students randomly as individuals was not possible without disrupting the regular learning schedule. In educational research, quasi-experimental designs are commonly used when researchers need to compare treatment and comparison groups in natural classroom conditions, especially when full randomisation cannot be applied (Cohen et al., 2017). The design involved two groups: an experimental group that received responsive ice-breaking activities and a control group that received regular instruction without structured ice-breaking activities.

The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 5 Mandau, Riau Province, Indonesia, during the 2025/2026 academic year. The population consisted of all Grade X students. Two intact classes were selected as the research sample. Class X.5 was assigned as the experimental group with 30 students, while Class X.3 was assigned as the control group with 28 students. Thus, the total number of participants was 58 students. This sampling procedure followed the classroom structure used in the school while still allowing comparison between two groups with different learning treatments.

The intervention in the experimental group was a responsive ice-breaking activity called Responsive Letter Line. The activity was conducted during Islamic Religious Education and Character Building lessons, particularly when students began to show signs of boredom, reduced attention, or classroom fatigue. Students were grouped according to seating rows, and each row was assigned a specific letter. When the teacher mentioned a letter, students in the corresponding row had to stand up immediately, while other groups remained seated or returned to their seats. The activity lasted around five to seven minutes and was designed to restore students' attention, encourage quick response, and create a more active classroom atmosphere before students continued the main lesson.

Data were collected through questionnaires and documentation. The learning motivation questionnaire was administered before and after the intervention. The pre-test measured students' initial motivation, while the post-test measured students' motivation after the treatment. The questionnaire used a Likert scale and was developed based on indicators of learning motivation, including desire to succeed, learning needs, persistence, interest in learning activities, and a supportive learning environment. Documentation was used to support information about the research setting, class distribution, and student data.

Before the main data collection, the instruments were tested for validity and reliability. The reliability test showed that the learning motivation instrument had a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.921, while the ice-breaking instrument obtained a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.842. These values indicate that both instruments had strong internal consistency and were suitable for collecting research data.

The data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 29. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the students' learning motivation scores. Before hypothesis testing, the Shapiro–Wilk test was used to examine data normality, while Levene's test was used to examine the homogeneity of variance between groups. Pallant notes that assumption testing is necessary before conducting parametric analysis because it helps determine whether the selected statistical test is appropriate for the data structure (Pallant, 2020). After the assumptions were fulfilled, an independent-samples t-test was used to compare the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups. The level of significance was set at 0.05. The hypothesis was accepted when the significance value was lower than 0.05, indicating a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the school before the intervention was implemented. Students' responses were treated confidentially, and the data were reported in aggregate form. The ice-breaking activity was designed as a short classroom strategy that supported the learning process without reducing students' opportunity to receive the main instructional material.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings are presented in three parts: descriptive statistics of students' learning motivation, assumption testing, and hypothesis testing. The analysis focused on comparing the learning motivation scores of students in the experimental group, which received responsive ice-breaking activities, and the control group, which received regular instruction.

Descriptive Statistics of Learning Motivation

The pre-test was administered to determine the initial level of students' learning motivation before the treatment. The control group obtained a higher initial mean score than the experimental group. The mean pre-test score of the control group was 145.11, with a standard deviation of 13.658, while the experimental group obtained a mean score of 137.80, with a standard deviation of 11.580. The lowest score in the control group was 116 and the highest score was 169. In the experimental group, the lowest score was 113 and the highest score was 157. These results show that the two groups did not begin from the same motivational level before the intervention.

Table 1. Pre-test Scores of Students' Learning Motivation

Group	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Control	28	116	169	145.11	13.658
Experimental	30	113	157	137.80	11.580

After the treatment, the post-test results showed a different pattern. The control group obtained a mean score of 139.71, with a standard deviation of 14.399. Meanwhile, the experimental group obtained a higher mean score of 148.63, with a standard deviation of 11.790. The post-test score range also differed between the two groups. The control group had

scores ranging from 113 to 161, while the experimental group had scores ranging from 131 to 174.

Table 2. Post-test Scores of Students' Learning Motivation

Group	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Control	28	113	161	139.71	14.399
Experimental	30	131	174	148.63	11.790

The comparison between pre-test and post-test scores shows that the control group experienced a decrease in mean score, from 145.11 to 139.71. In contrast, the experimental group showed an increase, from 137.80 to 148.63. Thus, the mean change in the control group was -5.40, while the mean change in the experimental group was +10.83. This descriptive pattern indicates that students who received responsive ice-breaking activities showed a more favorable score movement than students who followed regular instruction.

Table 3. Mean Change in Learning Motivation Scores

Group	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Mean Change
Control	145.11	139.71	-5.40
Experimental	137.80	148.63	+10.83

The descriptive results show that the experimental group started with a lower pre-test mean than the control group, but obtained a higher mean score after the intervention. The increase in the experimental group was also accompanied by a higher maximum post-test score. The highest score in the experimental group increased from 157 in the pre-test to 174 in the post-test, whereas the highest score in the control group decreased from 169 in the pre-test to 161 in the post-test.

Implementation of Ice-Breaking Activities

The implementation of ice-breaking activities was measured in the experimental group. The descriptive statistics showed that the ice-breaking score ranged from 43 to 62, with a mean score of 51.70 and a standard deviation of 5.760. The frequency distribution showed that 11 students were in the low category, 12 students were in the moderate category, and 7 students were in the high category. The largest proportion was therefore found in the moderate category.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Ice-Breaking Implementation

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Ice-breaking implementation	30	43	62	51.70	5.760

Table 5. Category Distribution of Ice-Breaking Implementation

Category	Score Interval	Frequency	Percentage
Low	42–48	11	36.7%

Moderate	49–55	12	40.0%
High	56–62	7	23.3%
Total	—	30	100%

These findings indicate that students' responses to the ice-breaking implementation were concentrated in the moderate category. The activity was therefore implemented as a short classroom strategy without dominating the overall learning process.

Assumption Testing

Before the hypothesis test was conducted, the data were tested for normality using the Shapiro–Wilk test. The results showed that all significance values were higher than .05. The significance value was .553 for the control pre-test, .133 for the control post-test, .428 for the experimental pre-test, and .245 for the experimental post-test. These results indicate that the learning motivation scores in all groups were normally distributed.

Table 6. Shapiro–Wilk Normality Test

Data	N	Shapiro–Wilk Statistic	Sig.
Control pre-test	28	.969	.553
Control post-test	28	.943	.133
Experimental pre-test	30	.966	.428
Experimental post-test	30	.956	.245

The homogeneity test was then conducted using Levene's test. The output showed a significance value of .169 based on the mean. Since the value was higher than .05, the variance between the control and experimental groups was considered homogeneous.

Table 7. Levene's Test for Homogeneity of Variance

Basis	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Based on mean	1.938	1	56	.169
Based on median	1.582	1	56	.214
Based on trimmed mean	1.879	1	56	.176

Based on the normality and homogeneity tests, the data met the assumptions for parametric analysis. Therefore, the hypothesis was tested using an independent-samples t-test.

Hypothesis Testing

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference in post-test learning motivation scores between the experimental and

control groups. The result showed that the difference between the two groups was statistically significant, t(56) = -2.589, p = .012. The mean difference was -8.919, with a standard error difference of 3.446 and a 95% confidence interval ranging from -15.821 to -2.017. The negative value appears because the SPSS output compared the control group against the experimental group. In practical terms, the experimental group obtained a higher post-test mean score than the control group.

Table 8. Independent-Samples t-Test of Post-test Scores

Comparison	t	df	One-sided p	Two-sided p	Mean Difference	SE Difference	95% CI
Equal variances assumed	-2.589	56	.006	.012	-8.919	3.446	[-15.821, -2.017]
Equal variances not assumed	-2.571	52.297	.007	.013	-8.919	3.470	[-15.880, -1.958]

Because the two-sided significance value was lower than .05, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there was a statistically significant difference in learning motivation between students who received responsive ice-breaking activities and students who received regular instruction. The effect size reported in the thesis was Cohen's d = -0.680. For interpretation, the absolute value was used, indicating a moderate effect size.

Discussion

The findings indicate that responsive ice-breaking activities had a positive effect on students' learning motivation in Islamic Religious Education and Character Building. The experimental group showed an increase from the pre-test mean score of 137.80 to the post-test mean score of 148.63, while the control group decreased from 145.11 to 139.71. The independent-samples t-test also showed a significant difference between both groups, indicating that the learning motivation of students who received responsive ice-breaking activities was higher than that of students who followed regular instruction. This pattern suggests that a short, structured, and well-timed classroom activity can help students recover their willingness to participate when their attention begins to weaken. The thesis data also show that the intervention was applied to Class X.5, while Class X.3 served as the control group, with a total of 58 students included in the analysis.

This finding is consistent with Self-Determination Theory, which explains that students' motivation develops when the classroom environment supports their needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In the present study, responsive ice breaking may have supported competence because the activity was simple, achievable, and did not require students to perform difficult academic tasks. It may also have supported relatedness because students responded together in row-based groups, interacted with classmates, and

experienced a shared classroom moment. Howard et al. (2021) similarly found that more self-determined forms of motivation are associated with better learning-related outcomes, including persistence and positive academic adjustment. Therefore, the increase in students' motivation in the experimental group can be interpreted as the result of a learning environment that temporarily reduced pressure, increased participation, and strengthened classroom connection.

The result also supports the view that motivation is shaped by instructional context rather than by students' internal disposition alone. Bureau et al. (2022), through a meta-analysis of antecedents of autonomous and controlled motivation, showed that teacher support and students' basic psychological needs are important predictors of motivation. This is relevant to the present study because responsive ice breaking was not merely a game, but a teacher-initiated classroom strategy used to respond to students' fatigue and declining attention. Wang et al. also reported that interventions based on Self-Determination Theory can improve students' intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and perceived competence (Wang et al., 2024). Although the present study did not separately measure autonomy, competence, and relatedness, the intervention contained elements that are theoretically connected to those needs.

The findings can also be explained through the ARCS motivational model. This model emphasizes attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction as key elements in motivational design. Göksu and Bolat (2021), in a meta-analysis of the ARCS model, found that ARCS-based strategies can improve students' motivation, attention, confidence, satisfaction, and academic achievement. In this study, the strongest ARCS element was attention because the "Responsive Letter Line" activity required students to listen carefully, respond quickly, and follow changing verbal cues. The confidence element was also present because students could participate successfully without the fear of giving a wrong conceptual answer. Ucar and Kumtepe (2020) similarly showed that ARCS-V-based motivational strategies can strengthen motivation, volition, course interest, and learning performance.

The responsive nature of the intervention appears to be an important factor behind the result. The activity was conducted for approximately five to seven minutes and was used flexibly when students began to show boredom, sleepiness, or reduced concentration during the lesson. In practice, students were divided by seating rows, each row was assigned a letter, and students had to stand up immediately when their group letter was mentioned by the teacher. This mechanism combined listening accuracy, physical movement, quick response, and group coordination. The procedure described in the thesis shows that the activity was designed to restore classroom attention without replacing the main instructional process.

The result is also in line with research on classroom activity breaks. Graham et al. found that classroom-based physical activity breaks can improve positive mood, motivation, and self-efficacy among students (Graham et al., 2021). Chesnais et al. also found that classroom physical activity breaks can support students' behavioural and emotional self-regulation (Chesnais et al., 2023). These findings help explain why responsive ice breaking may influence

motivation: the activity does not only provide movement, but also gives students a short opportunity to regulate fatigue, reorient attention, and re-enter the lesson with a more prepared emotional state. In the context of this study, the physical and cognitive elements of the activity worked together to reduce passivity during Islamic Religious Education learning.

The cognitive aspect of the activity is equally important. Schmidt et al. (2016) showed that classroom-based activity breaks are more beneficial for attention when they involve cognitive engagement, not merely physical movement. This is relevant because the ice-breaking activity used in the present study required students to process auditory cues, identify their group, respond quickly, and coordinate action with peers. The intervention therefore functioned as a short cognitively engaging break. Daly-Smith et al. also emphasized that classroom movement breaks and physically active learning can support classroom behaviour and cognition, but their effects depend heavily on design quality, duration, and instructional fit (Daly-Smith et al., 2018). This supports the interpretation that responsive ice breaking is useful when it is short, structured, and aligned with classroom needs.

The social dimension of the intervention also helps explain the improvement in motivation. Responsive ice breaking required students to act as part of a group rather than as isolated individuals. This group-based format may have reduced hesitation, encouraged participation, and created a safer classroom atmosphere. Tao et al. found that perceived teacher support is positively related to student engagement and academic achievement, with engagement serving as an important mechanism in classroom learning (Tao et al., 2022). In this study, the teacher's use of a light, inclusive, and non-threatening activity can be viewed as a form of support that invited students back into the learning process without using pressure or reprimand.

The decline in the control group deserves careful interpretation. The control group started with a higher pre-test mean, but its post-test mean decreased after regular instruction. This finding shows that learning motivation can fluctuate during the instructional process and may decline when the classroom rhythm remains too predictable or teacher-centred. Urhahne and Wijnia argue that motivation in education is influenced by the interaction of goals, values, emotions, interests, and perceptions of the learning environment (Urhahne & Wijnia, 2023). In Islamic Religious Education, the importance of the subject matter alone is not enough to maintain students' motivation. Students still need classroom experiences that help them stay attentive, emotionally ready, and socially involved.

For Islamic Religious Education and Character Building, the findings have practical significance. The subject aims not only to develop religious knowledge, but also to encourage reflection, moral awareness, and the internalization of values. These aims are difficult to achieve when students are passive, sleepy, or psychologically distant from the lesson. Responsive ice breaking can help teachers create a brief transition from fatigue to readiness, making students more willing to listen, respond, and participate. Reeve (2013) argues that student engagement includes behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and agentic dimensions.

From this perspective, responsive ice breaking may serve as an entry point for rebuilding behavioural and emotional engagement before students return to deeper learning activities.

However, the findings should not be understood as evidence that every form of ice breaking will automatically improve motivation. The thesis itself notes that ice breaking may become less effective when it is used excessively, takes too much instructional time, or is not suitable for students' characteristics. This point is consistent with Daly-Smith et al. (2018), who emphasized that the effectiveness of classroom breaks depends on their design features. Therefore, responsive ice breaking should be short, inclusive, age-appropriate, and clearly connected to classroom needs. For senior high school students, activities that feel childish or embarrassing may reduce participation rather than strengthen motivation.

This study contributes to the literature by positioning ice breaking as a responsive motivational strategy rather than merely as a classroom game. The contribution is theoretical because the findings extend the use of Self-Determination Theory and the ARCS model into the context of Islamic Religious Education. The contribution is also practical because the intervention is simple, low-cost, and applicable in ordinary classrooms. Nevertheless, several limitations need to be acknowledged. The study involved only two intact classes from one school, and the experimental and control groups had different initial pre-test scores. Future research should consider using ANCOVA or gain-score analysis to control baseline differences more precisely. Future studies may also combine questionnaires with observation or interviews to examine whether increased motivation is reflected in actual classroom behaviour.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the effect of responsive ice-breaking activities on students' learning motivation in Islamic Religious Education and Character Building at SMA Negeri 5 Mandau. The findings show that students who learned through responsive ice-breaking activities demonstrated better learning motivation than those who received regular classroom instruction. The experimental group showed a more positive movement from pre-test to post-test, while the control group did not show the same pattern. The hypothesis test confirmed a significant difference between the two groups, indicating that responsive ice breaking contributed positively to students' learning motivation.

The findings suggest that ice breaking can be more than a classroom game when it is used purposefully. In this study, the activity helped restore attention, reduce fatigue, and encourage students to participate again in the learning process. Its contribution is especially relevant in Islamic Religious Education and Character Building, where successful learning depends not only on students' cognitive understanding, but also on their willingness to engage, reflect, and internalize religious and moral values. The intervention used in the experimental class was implemented as a short activity to create a more active and enjoyable learning atmosphere, and the thesis data show that students' motivation improved after the treatment.

Theoretically, this study supports the view that students' motivation is shaped by classroom conditions and instructional strategies. Responsive ice breaking can be understood as a practical strategy that supports attention, confidence, classroom interaction, and students' readiness to learn. Practically, the findings provide an accessible strategy for Islamic Religious Education teachers. Teachers can use short, inclusive, and age-appropriate ice-breaking activities when students begin to show boredom, sleepiness, or reduced concentration, as long as the activity remains connected to the learning process and does not reduce the substance of the lesson.

This study also has limitations. It involved only two intact classes from one school, so the findings should be interpreted within that context. The experimental and control groups were not randomly assigned at the individual level, which is common in quasi-experimental classroom research but still limits the strength of causal claims. In addition, learning motivation was measured through self-report questionnaires, so future studies should combine questionnaires with classroom observation, interviews, or teacher assessments. Further research may also use ANCOVA or gain-score analysis to control initial group differences more precisely and examine whether different types, durations, and timing of ice-breaking activities produce similar effects in other Islamic education settings.

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