

Boosting Freshman Engagement with Ice Breaking Sessions: An Empirical Investigation

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Abstract: Engagement during the first year is critical because it establishes the tone for student's academic achievement and personal growth throughout their college years. This study tackles that gap by looking at whether introductory sessions (such as ice-breaking activities) promote freshman (first year undergraduate) participation across a variety of factors, including social integration, academic engagement, interaction, and personal development.

The objective of this study is to provide insights into the role of such sessions in increasing student engagement, academic motivation, social integration, and personal development by comparing the outcomes of students who attended the icebreaking session to those who did not. The study comprised 61 first year undergraduate students from a senior college in Navi Mumbai, India. Participants were divided into two groups: those who attended the icebreaking session and those who did not attend. The experimental investigation was undertaken to better understand the practical outcome. Hypothesis testing was carried out using SPSS, and a conceptual model was developed based on the literature review. The ice-breaking session has a significant influence on student involvement, interaction and personal growth. Academic Engagement and Social Integration show no substantial variance dependent on attendance.

Keywords: Academic Engagement, Social Integration, Interaction, Personal growth

1. INTRODUCTION

Fresher's frequently experience a mix of anticipation and worry as they adjust to college life. For many, it marks a huge transition from familiar surroundings to a new and demanding situation. Engagement in the initial year is crucial because it sets the tone for student's academic performance and personal development throughout their college careers. One frequent technique for increasing participation is to provide introductory sessions, which are often structured as icebreaker events, to integrate students into the institution's educational and social environment. Ice breaking is utilized to shift the learning environment from passive to active, stiff to moving, and boring to joyous. The benefit of learning via ice breaking is that this activity can be done and learnt by everyone without the need for particular skills or materials (Kadek Bagus Rusman ., 2022). According to the study conducted by (Mahmud, A. F., Yusup, A., & Saban, A. H., 2023) revealed that 16 students felt the same way about the use of ice-breaking activities in English classes; all students thought these activities were great; they were essential and very needed for use in English classes; and students thought these activities helped students join the learning process, eliminated saturation, created a positive learning environment in the classroom, increased students' motivation and interest, and improved learning achievement. It determined that icebreakers helped teach English and encourage students in the 1st grade at school Jadid. Thus, this study encourages students to enjoy, be active, energised, and happy, participate in the classroom, stay in class during the learning process, and focus on the content. (Adi, M. S., Susanti, R. A., & Jannah, Q., 2021). The advantage of learning via ice breaking is that this activity can be done and learnt by everyone without the need for particular skills or materials. It may create an environment of joy and closeness, as well as sentiments of enjoyment among students and educators (Bagus Rusman, K., 2022).

According to Chowdhury, S. (2022), English language instructors throughout the world employ a variety of icebreaker exercises that are suited to their student's situations, levels, and requirements. However, (Chowdhury, S. 2022) stated that ice-breaking events related to the teaching and learning of English at the university level continue to be a source of contention, as university students are believed to be more self-driven than those in high school and college. While (Chowdhury, 2022) claims that university students are intrinsically self-motivated, implying that ice-breaking sessions are unnecessary, this viewpoint may neglect the larger elements of student participation and integration, especially in diverse or big academic environments. The idea that all students are self-motivated ignores individual variances in social skills, confidence levels, and capacity to adjust to new surroundings. Furthermore, Chowdhury's study may not completely account for the transitional issues that first-year students confront as they acclimatise to college life, which may be stressful and unpredictable.

This study addresses that gap by looking at whether introductory sessions (such as ice-breaking activities) improve freshmen involvement across a variety of variables, including social integration, academic engagement, interaction and personal development. Unlike the belief that self-motivation is a universal quality, this study investigates if planned socialization methods may improve the college experience for all students, especially those who may struggle with initial involvement.

This study intends to give insights into the function of icebreaking session in boosting student engagement, academic motivation, social integration, and personal development. In order to understand the importance of introductory session in boosting the student's confidence and improving engagement level we have considered the factors such as level of engagement, social integration, personal development and academic engagement. The objective of the study is to compare the level of engagement, social integration, personal development and academic engagement among those who attended and not attended the session.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research on icebreaker sessions and their influence on student involvement is substantial, encompassing a wide range of themes including interaction, academic engagement, social integration, and personal development.

2.1 Engagement and Interaction:

According to research, student involvement is a strong predictor of academic achievement and retention in higher education. Tinto's (1993) model of student retention promotes engagement via academic and social integration, which makes students feel more connected to their school. Introductory sessions, which frequently include icebreaker activities, have been routinely used to aid this integration. A. W. Astin (1999) has emphasized the relevance of early engagement programs in assisting students in developing a feeling of belonging, which is critical for their persistence in college. These sessions frequently help students to make peer relationships, interact with teachers, and become acquainted with campus resources, all of which lead to a more engaging and successful college experience.

However, the success of these sessions varies according on their structure, content, and integration into the overall orientation process. While some studies have demonstrated considerable good results related to involvement in introductory sessions Bray, N. J. (2006). Others have emphasized that the advantages may be temporary if not reinforced by continued engagement opportunities Kitchel, T. (2008).

2.2 Academic Engagement

Academic engagement refers to students' investment in their academic pursuits, such as attending courses, completing assignments, and engaging in academic conversations. Ice-breaking activities, while largely social, have been found to improve academic participation by lowering fear and providing a supportive learning atmosphere.

Kuh, G.D. (2009) contends that the first few weeks of college are crucial for developing academic habits that will last throughout a student's academic career. Ice-breaking sessions can help ease the tension and anxiety that are

common throughout the move to higher education. These sessions can help students feel more at ease in academic situations by developing a feeling of community, encouraging them to actively participate in their schoolwork.

However, not all research agree on the importance of ice-breaking activities for academic engagement. For example, Chowdhury (2022) states that self-motivated pupils do not need these sessions to participate academically. This viewpoint emphasises a possible vacuum in the research, as the effect of ice-breaking sessions in increasing academic engagement for various student demographics has received little attention.

2.3 Social Integration

Social integration is crucial for student retention and success, especially during the college transition. It refers to the process by which students integrate into their institution's social fabric and form relationships with classmates, instructors, and staff. Ice-breaking workshops are especially designed to improve social integration by encouraging students to introduce themselves and interact (Argyle, M., 1969).

Tinto's (1993) model of student withdrawal highlights the role of social integration in reducing student attrition. According to Tinto, students who do not feel socially linked to their school are more prone to withdraw, especially in their first year. Ice-breaking sessions create an organised setting in which students may make these important relationships early on, lowering the likelihood of isolation and disengagement.

Astin (1999) found that social integration is important for student achievement. According to Astin's participation hypothesis, the more engaged students are in campus life, the more likely they are to endure and thrive academically. Ice-breaking workshops help to increase student participation by encouraging them to interact with their classmates and participate in campus events.

2.4 Personal Development

Personal development is an additional essential component of the student experience, which includes things like communication skills, confidence, and emotional intelligence. Ice-breaking workshops, which encourage contact and participation, can help students acquire these important abilities, therefore contributing to personal growth (McCroskey, etal (1985).

Goleman, D. P. (1995) research on psychological intelligence argues that social skills and self-awareness are important components of personal growth, both of which may be improved through planned social activities such as ice-breaking exercises. These workshops allow students to practise communication and teamwork in a low-pressure setting, which can help them gain confidence and prepare for more difficult social and academic settings.

Ice-breaking sessions, which promote personal growth, can thus play an important role in encouraging academic and social success.

3. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Independent Variable

Participation in the Ice-Breaking Session: This variable have two levels

- ◆ Students who participated in the ice-breaking session

- ◆ Students who did not participate in the ice-breaking session

Dependent Variables

1. Engagement and Interaction:

- ◆ Engagement in class activities
- ◆ Connection with classmates
- ◆ Likelihood to participate in group discussions
- ◆ Comfort in interacting with others
- ◆ Making new friends

2. Academic Engagement:

- ◆ Motivation to attend classes
- ◆ Interest in the course material
- ◆ Ease of approaching professors
- ◆ Overall engagement with academic activities
- ◆ Connection to the academic community

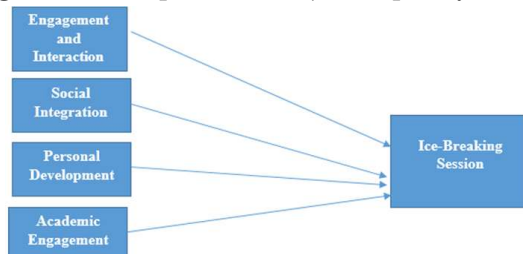
3. Social Integration:

- ◆ Integration into the college community
- ◆ Awareness of campus resources
- ◆ Likelihood to participate in extracurricular activities
- ◆ Understanding of college culture
- ◆ Sense of belonging to the college community

4. Personal Development:

- ◆ Improvement in communication skills
- ◆ Confidence in social settings
- ◆ Development of teamwork skills
- ◆ Preparedness for group projects
- ◆ Overall personal growth

Figure 1: Conceptual Model (Developed by author)



4. METHOD AND MATERIAL

The research included 61 freshmen from a senior college located in Navi Mumbai. Participants were separated into two groups: 36 students who attended an introduction session during the first week of the semester (Group A) and 25 who did not attend any such session (Group B). The selection process was random, ensuring that both groups were comparable in terms of demographics, academic background and beginning involvement levels. Procedure. The ice breaking session was a two-hour event aimed to assist students get to know one another, expose them to campus resources, and develop a sense of belonging. Activities included small group talks and participatory games.

To examine the four dependent variables, a structured questionnaire was used, with Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) included. The questionnaire items were modified from validated scales used in earlier studies. Engagement and Interaction: Based on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (Kuh, 2001). Social integration is measured using the Student Social Integration Scale (Tinto, 1998). Personal development is

measured using aspects from Chickering's Theory of Identity Development (Chickering, 1969). Academic Engagement: Adapted from the Academic Engagement Survey by (Fredericks et al., 2004).

4.1 Hypothesis

4.1.1 Engagement and Interaction:

H_{01} : There is no notable difference in the levels of engagement and interaction between students who participated in the ice-breaking session and those who did not.

H_{11} : There is a significant difference in the levels of engagement and interaction between students who participated in the ice-breaking session and those who did not.

4.1.2 Social Integration:

H_{02} : There is no notable difference in social integration between students who attended the ice-breaking session and those who did not.

H_{12} : There is a significant difference in social integration between students who attended the ice-breaking session and those who did not.

4.1.3 Personal Development:

H_{03} : There is no measurable difference in personal development between students who participated in the ice-breaking session and those who did not.

H_{13} : There is a measurable difference in personal development between students who participated in the ice-breaking session and those who did not.

4.1.4 Academic Engagement:

H_{04} : There is no meaningful difference in academic engagement between students who attended the ice-breaking session and those who did not.

H_{14} : There is a meaningful difference in academic engagement between students who attended the ice-breaking session and those who did not.

4.2 DATA COLLECTION

This study's data were obtained using a cross-sectional design at Sterling College in Navi Mumbai. Two sets of students were surveyed: one that attended the introduction session and one that did not. Following the introduction session, students were given one week to complete the questionnaire, which was delivered online for convenience of access and responses. The questionnaire had 20 items scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." The poll aimed to measure five critical variables: engagement, interaction, social integration, personal development, and academic engagement. Each variable was represented by five questions, which allowed for a thorough insight of the students' experiences and degrees of participation. This strategy enabled a direct comparison of the two groups, providing useful insights into the influence of introduction sessions on freshmen participation. These findings might help institutions modify their approach, resulting in more thorough and inclusive freshmen orientation programs.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

The data for this investigation was analysed using SPSS software. Initially, descriptive statistics were used to summarise the major variables, providing information about the means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis. A normality test was used to examine the data's distribution,

which found that the data did not follow a normal curve. As a consequence, a non-probability sampling strategy was used to test the hypotheses, guaranteeing that the correct methodology was used based on the data characteristics. Cronbach's alpha was also determined to determine the questionnaire's internal consistency and reliability, demonstrating that the assessment instrument was reliable. Finally, inferential statistics, including non-parametric tests, were used to test the hypotheses and make meaningful inferences regarding group differences and the effect of introduction sessions on student involvement.

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

ICE BREAKING SESSION ATTENDED		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
		Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
2 (No)	Engagement and Interaction	25	2.00	3.60	2.6240	.54870	.180	.464	-1.278	.902
	Academic engagement	25	2.00	3.20	2.4720	.49288	.219	.464	-1.861	.902
	Social Integration	25	1.80	3.40	2.5040	.53889	.212s	.464	-1.630	.902
	Personal development	25	1.40	3.60	2.5040	.65095	.098	.464	-1.141	.902
	Valid N (listwise)	25								
1 (Yes)	Engagement and Interaction	36	1.00	3.20	1.9222	.45426	-.091	.393	1.133	.768
	Academic engagement	36	1.00	3.60	1.9556	.48782	.611	.393	3.292	.768
	Social Integration	36	1.00	3.40	2.1056	.49335	-.132	.393	1.619	.768
	Personal development	36	1.00	4.60	2.0444	.64871	1.619	.393	6.229	.768
	Valid N (listwise)	36								

5.2 Interpretation:

Means: The average scores for all variables are lower compared to the group that attended the session, ranging from 1.9222 to 2.1056. This indicates that participants who did not attend the session reported lower levels of engagement, integration, and personal development.

Standard Deviations: The variability is moderate, similar to the first group, with standard deviations ranging from 0.45426 to 0.64871.

Skewness: The skewness values vary more widely in this group (range: -0.132 to 1.619). Notably, Personal Development shows a high positive skewness (1.619), indicating a longer tail on the right side of the distribution.

Kurtosis: The kurtosis values are generally positive (range: 1.133 to 6.229), indicating distributions that are more peaked (leptokurtic) than normal, especially for Academic Engagement and Personal Development.

5.3 Normality Assessment

Group 1 (Attended) shows minimal skewness and a flatter distribution due to negative kurtosis, indicating a fairly normal distribution, while Group 2 (Did Not Attend) presents greater skewness, particularly in Personal Development, and higher kurtosis, indicating more peaked and less normal distributions, especially in Academic Engagement and Personal Development. Hence we have considered the data as non-normal and conducted the non-probability hypothesis test as Mann-Whitney test

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.968	20

5.4 Inferential Statistics

Table 3: Mann-Whitney U Test

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of Engagement and Interaction is the same across categories of ICE BREAKING SESSION ATTENDED	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.020	Reject the null hypothesis.
2	The distribution of Academic engagement is the same across categories of ICE BREAKING SESSION ATTENDED	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.060	Retain the null hypothesis.
3	The distribution of Social Integration is the same across categories of ICE BREAKING SESSION ATTENDED	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.137	Retain the null hypothesis.
4	The distribution of Personal development is the same across categories of ICE BREAKING SESSION ATTENDED	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.030	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Engagement and Interaction:

Null hypothesis was rejected as the p-value is .020. Hence, that attending the ice-breaking session has a major impact on engagement and interaction.

Academic Engagement:

The Null hypothesis was accepted at the p value .060. Hence, there is no substantial difference in academic engagement depending on attendance at the ice-breaking session.

Social Interaction

The null hypothesis was accepted at .137, hence, the ice-breaking session has no meaningful impact on social integration

Personal Development:

The null hypothesis was rejected at .030. Hence, that attending the ice-breaking session has a major impact on personal growth. The ice-breaking session has a tremendous impact on student's engagement and interaction, as well as their personal development whereas academic engagement and social integration indicate no variation among the students attended the session and non-attende.

6. CONCLUSION, LIMITATION AND FUTURE STUDY

The study offers insight on how important introductory sessions are in improving freshmen participation in college settings. Empirical investigation revealed that such sessions greatly increase social integration personal growth among students. According to the findings, students who engaged in icebreaker and introduction events were more likely to build meaningful peer relationships, report better levels of involvement in academic activities, and have easier transitions to university life. These findings confirm that planned introduction sessions can be effective treatments for reducing the sensation of alienation that many freshman experience, eventually leading to increased engagement and retention. The report strongly encourages universities to implement and develop these introduction approaches as part of their orientation programs.

While this research provides useful information, it is not without limits. First, the study was done at a single college, which limits the findings' applicability to other educational institutions with distinct cultural, academic, or institutional settings. Furthermore, the study focused

primarily on the short-term benefits of introductory sessions on engagement; consequently, the long-term consequences on student retention and success are unknown. Another disadvantage is that the data is self-reported, which may have been influenced by response bias, since participants may have over- or under-reported their involvement levels. Finally, this study did not account for other external factors, such as teacher contact or extracurricular activities, which might impact student engagement.

Future research might address the limitations identified by expanding the study to different colleges with various cultural and academic backgrounds, providing a more comprehensive perspective on the impact of introduction sessions. Longitudinal studies are needed to determine the long-term impact of these sessions on student retention, academic achievement, and general happiness throughout their academic careers. Researchers might also investigate the influence of other variables, such as faculty-student interaction, participation in extracurricular activities, and the usage of digital platforms, in boosting engagement. The efficacy of various sorts of introduction programs, such as virtual icebreaker meetings or peer mentorship, might also be investigated to determine the most effective means to promote involvement.

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