



# ICE BREAKING METHODS TO REDUCE INITIAL TENSION AMONG OFFICER STUDENTS OF THE INDONESIAN NATIONAL ARMED FORCES

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## Article Info

### Keywords:

Ice Breaking,  
Indonesian Military Officer,  
Military Psychology,  
Preliminary tension,  
Training.

## ABSTRACT

Military cadets who are about to begin their education experience tension caused by the hierarchy and seniority that still exists, adaptation to a new environment, and the cognitive burden of academic tasks that they will face in the coming months. This study aims to eliminate the initial tension experienced by cadets. The method used in this study is descriptive qualitative research, and the data collection techniques used are semi-structured interviews, observation, and literature study. The results of the study show that ice breaking methods are effective in reducing initial tension. The use of ice breaking can reduce tension, creating a more relaxed atmosphere. By conducting ice breaking activities, there was a noticeable change in group dynamics, with cadets feeling much more relaxed, comfortable with other participants, communicating spontaneously, and experiencing reduced tension. Ice breaking plays an important role in creating a pleasant and motivating atmosphere during training.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian Armed Forces Staff and Command College (Sesko TNI) is responsible for educating and training officers in leadership. In Indonesia, Sesko TNI is the highest educational institution in the Indonesian Armed Forces. Sesko TNI's main task is to prepare senior officers who will lead military operations and formulate national defense strategies. The role of Sesko TNI is very important in educating, training, and qualifying Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) personnel to meet the demands of national defense and security. According to [1] the educational objective of Sesko TNI is to prepare mid-level TNI officers who will be appointed as TNI leaders at the strategic level in the future. The main focus of this institution is to conduct education and training programs to prepare TNI officers to have the leadership skills needed in various conditions, as well as to conduct research in the fields of strategy and national security.

According to [2] training is a series of activities aimed at educating individuals with new skills and abilities so that they can achieve their goals efficiently and effectively, be prepared to face various challenges that may arise, and meet future demands. Training in the military not only prioritizes physical elements, but also emphasizes the importance of discipline, a sense of responsibility, cooperation, and leadership skills [3]. Training can broaden horizons and introduce the latest techniques, which can provide new challenges and spark curiosity and interest in their work [4]

According to Arief Furchan [5] training is a structured and planned educational process aimed at improving the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of participants so that they are able to perform their duties better and more efficiently. Ivancevich and Lorenzi [5] describe training as a planned and systematic learning process to improve the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of participants.

Meanwhile, according to [6], this training is a simulation of behavior in the form of a game with a number of advantages. The game is designed as a representation of complex life presented in a simpler form. When carrying out tasks in the form of games, participants can directly experience success and failure when completing these challenges. This game is not only a training tool but also a means to strengthen relationships. In addition, it can be made more varied and innovative. In the world of military training, psychological training is also needed to help improve the performance of TNI members. One method to make learning and training more enjoyable is the ice-breaking method [7]

Ice Breaking is an activity that changes the atmosphere from boring, tedious, and tense in the classroom to more relaxed, enthusiastic, and generates interest and happiness in listening to or paying attention to the person speaking in front of the class or in a meeting. According to Musyafa [8] ice breaking can be understood as a change in atmosphere from one that is monotonous, tense, stressful, and boring to one that is more relaxed, comfortable, full of enthusiasm, and evokes feelings of happiness. Meanwhile, according to Fanani [9] ice breaking is an activity that can help eliminate tension, confusion, boredom, and fatigue in an atmosphere, so that the atmosphere becomes warmer and returns to a better (more comfortable) state.

Ice breaking is a game or activity that aims to change the passive atmosphere in a meeting [10] Ice breaking is part of field psychology activities that are very practical and applicable, aiming to help individuals and groups face psychological challenges in real situations. Ice breaking is part of field psychology activities that are very practical and applicable, aimed at helping individuals and groups face psychological challenges in real situations. By combining psychological theory and field practice, field psychology provides real solutions to improve performance, mental resilience, and well-being in various challenging contexts. According to Mi and Baten [11] ice breaking is a learning method that involves simple activities to change a normal or boring learning atmosphere. Ice breaking aims to change the learning atmosphere from passive to active, from rigid to dynamic, and from boring to fun. Ice breaking aims to create a fun learning environment and increase students' interest in lessons [12].

[11] also stated the same thing, that ice breaking is a warm-up activity that can change a cold, frozen, and stiff atmosphere into a warmer, more fluid, and relaxed one. This is reinforced [13] who revealed that ice breaking serves as a tool to overcome confined conditions, both in the minds and physically, of participants. It is used to change the learning atmosphere from passive to active, from rigid to dynamic, and from boredom and tension to enthusiasm. Ice breaking consists of activities that involve participants getting to know each other, which can help reduce initial tension between them, so that they can be more comfortable interacting and working in teams [14]

In the world of military education, if tension is not managed properly, it can have a long-term negative impact on the quality of interactions both participants and facilitators. Prolonged tension can reduce open communication, create defensiveness, and reinforce rigid hierarchical differences, thereby hindering cohesiveness and trust within the group. In a military environment that requires cooperation and leadership, this situation can reduce team effectiveness and weaken the collective learning process.

Training using ice breaking methods is a fun way to showcase innovative, creative, and futuristic elements. According to [15] in their book, "Ice Breaking" is a change in atmosphere from boring, sleepy, and tense to cheerful and fun through various simple games. These games are activities that are enjoyed by all groups, regardless of age, because everyone experiences boredom when learning and then wants a more enjoyable learning atmosphere. Ice breaking activities are very effective in refreshing participants' minds and increasing their enthusiasm for learning again [16]. In addition, this activity aims to develop soft skills, such as effective communication, teamwork, and the ability to analyze situations. Ice breaking also plays an important role in developing participants' social and emotional skills, such as communication, collaboration, and leadership skills [17]. This activity can motivate cadets to be better prepared to face challenges and develop flexibility in their social skills during their education. Therefore, by understanding and applying the principles of ice breaking in field psychology, they can be better prepared to face operational challenges. Before conducting training activities, preparations are required, from module development to evaluation of activity implementation. Smaldino [18] states that a module is a comprehensive teaching component that can be used by individuals or small groups of students without the need for a teacher to be present. In line with this, Wiyoko [18] emphasizes that modules are learning resources that are organized in a systematic manner using language that is easily understood by participants, tailored to their level of knowledge and age, so that they can learn independently with little or no guidance from a facilitator. Munadi [18] considers modules to be learning resources that participants can use to learn independently and with little help from others.

Previous research on the ice breaking in increasing student' focus and interest in learning [19] found that ice breaking successfully created a livelier and more enjoyable atmosphere, making students more enthusiastic and focused. This study shows that ice breaking can be an effective method for creating more interactive and enjoyable learning, especially at the elementary school level. Previous research on the ice breaking in increasing student' focus and interest in learning [19] found that ice breaking successfully created a livelier and more enjoyable atmosphere, making students more enthusiastic and focused. This study shows that ice breaking can be an effective method for creating more interactive and enjoyable

learning, especially at the elementary school level. Previous research on the ice breaking in increasing student' focus and interest in learning found that had a very positive impact because it restored the classroom environment, making it more conducive for students to concentrate on the teacher's lesson [20]

Previous research on the ice breaking in increasing student' focus and interest in learning [21] found that the average pretest score of fourth-grade students at SDN 89 Palembang was 53.50.

Based on the above description, the researcher was interested in investigating the effectiveness of ice breaking methods in relieving initial tension among TNI student officers by developing an ice breaking module.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative research method with a descriptive research type that focuses on the module development process. This method allows researchers to understand phenomena in their natural environment, where social interactions, meanings, and personal experiences are the main focus. Qualitative research is considered more appropriate than experimental methods because it provides freedom to explore social dynamics in a contextual and reflective manner. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña [22] the advantage of descriptive research in qualitative research is that it provides interpretation of data obtained from interviews. With this approach, researchers can examine the understanding, meaning, and various factors that influence the information obtained from sources. This method is particularly suitable for examining phenomena such as informant perceptions, as it allows researchers to summarize their experiences.

According to Sari [23] the qualitative approach emphasizes a deep understanding of social phenomena or human behavior, utilizing non-numerical data such as observations, interviews, documentation, and emphasizing subjectivity and context. Research using a qualitative approach focuses more on analysis through the process of drawing conclusions, both deductively and inductively, as well as on analyzing the dynamic relationship between the phenomena being studied, using scientific logic [24]. As a research technique that produces descriptive data in written or oral form about individuals or observable behavior [25].

Descriptive research is a research approach that attempts to describe all data or objects being studied or the situation surrounding the research object, analyze and compare them based on current facts, and try to provide solutions to existing problems so that they remain relevant. The data obtained is useful for the development of science and can be applied to various problems. In general, descriptive research is a research activity that attempts to describe or explain events or phenomena in a systematic, factual, and accurate manner [25]. The data collection techniques used were semi-structured interviews with one of the training facilitators, observation, and literature study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a guide of questions that could be adjusted.

This means that researchers have a number of questions or main topics they want to analyze, but still provide opportunities for informants to share freely and in greater depth. In practice, interviews are generally conducted in person, but they can also be conducted via online platforms such as video calls or telephone, depending on field conditions and the informant's readiness. The interview process is generally recorded (with the informant's permission) so that researchers can review the discussion and transcribe it accurately for further analysis. During this process, ethical aspects such as maintaining confidentiality, obtaining informed consent, and respecting the informant's right to withdraw from the research at any time are very important [26].

The training module development process took place at a military institution in Bekasi. Interviews for this study were conducted with one informant who was an ice-breaking facilitator at the highest level of military education. These interviews were conducted at different locations convenient for the informant via online media such as video calls or zoom.

## 3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

### Ice breaking module

Modules are one of the learning resources that are often used in learning activities [27]. According to the Department of Education [28] the development of effective modules is a key factor in the success of a training program, which will help improve efficiency and effectiveness in training design, including time, costs, facilities, and human resources. According to Vitello et al. [14] ice breaking is often used as a method applied before lessons begin.

In developing this ice-breaking activity training module, there are several sections such as background, activity objectives, technical implementation, activity structure, and details of the training activities using fun games (post-to-post). The background of this training module was developed to explain the context of the training activities, namely at the highest military officer school. It also focuses on the importance of psychological readiness in facing challenges and dynamics during education. By combining psychological theory and field psychology practice, it provides solutions to improve performance, mental resilience, and well-being in various challenging contexts. Ice-breaking activities for TNI student officers are very strategic in character building and readiness in facing education and leadership tasks. This module is designed with the aim of eliminating initial

tension, where participants can feel more comfortable in a competitive and formal environment. It builds teamwork through simulation games that teach coordination, mutual support, and overcoming challenges together. It increases motivation and enthusiasm for learning, with fun and interactive activities that can generate enthusiasm and commitment to undergoing education.

In addition, it can develop creative and innovative thinking skills. These ice-breaking activities encourage participants to think outside the box, seek solutions, and dare to take initiative in dynamic situations. It encourages experiential learning, where participants learn directly from activities rather than just theory, so that they are better prepared to face real challenges in military tasks. This activity is an important part of shaping the character of military leaders who are adaptive, communicative, and collaborative. This activity is carried out at the Military Higher Education School. There is a series of training activities starting from preparation, opening, ice breaking and group formation, training activities using the post-to-post method, coffee breaks, unity games, activity evaluations and closing. The module includes details of ice breaking activities divided into three sessions:

- a. First session: personal warm-up to equalize energy  
This game is called red light and jin jun, using the codes jin and jun, which means that when jin jumps forward, jun jumps backward, and jin jun jumps sideways.
- b. Second session: pair interaction as initial collaboration  
This game is called the red and blue game.
- c. The third session is group formation.

This game is called the squirrel and tree game, using the storytelling method. In its implementation, the facilitator will give certain cues, and then participants are asked to respond. For example, if there is the sound of rain and flooding, participants are asked to become trees and squirrels.

In forming groups through squirrel and tree games, the facilitator acts as a tree and directs the participants to split into two groups. Then the facilitator prepares two brown folders containing team equipment. The equipment consists of brown envelopes, route maps, raincoats, poles for the finish line, and chest numbers (group leaders). Before starting, each group is asked to come up with a slogan.

Station A features a game called Crazy Bamboo, which is played by moving large bamboo sticks through obstacles with increasing levels of difficulty. The winning team is the one that finishes first and has the fewest points deducted for violations. Station B features a game called Escape Ball, which is played by removing balls from a basket, where different types of balls (plastic and ping pong) have different point values. The winning team is the one that manages to get the highest score based on the number of balls collected. The game at Post C is Waterfall. This game is played where several team members pull water up into a container and try not to spill it, which would get the other team members wet. The water remaining in the container is collected in a water reservoir. The winning team is the one that collects the most water.

At post D, the game is called Save the Bomb. To play this game, participants must move an egg using a prepared tool (a rope-covered pipe). The winning team is the one that collects the most eggs with the fewest broken eggs. The next activity is a unity game called Reach the Horizon. Each post has an evaluation or reflection session that is conducted after the activity is completed. Participants and facilitators discuss their experiences. This module is designed as a reference for conducting field psychology ice-breaking activities. These ice-breaking activities are expected to contribute to the development of psychological competence, leadership, and resilience among student officers so that they are better prepared to face challenges in the field.

Ice-breaking activities have been proven to improve the teaching and learning process for several reasons, including motivating students, strengthening relationships between students, reducing tension, and helping facilitators understand group dynamics. This is in line with what subject M said, that this ice-breaking module was designed to break the ice, break the silence, and unite the group so that the atmosphere would be more relaxed, comfortable, and trustworthy, and the cadets would be ready to carry out their education for the next few months.

Suyono[28] states that the preparation of this ice breaking module serves as a guide for facilitators in preparing a Training Needs Assessment, which is important to do before conducting training. This is part of designing training to obtain a comprehensive overview of the material, the time required for each material, and the teaching methods that should be adjusted during training in order to benefit the participants. Subject M revealed that the process of developing this ice-breaking module was adapted to military culture, which was manifested in the form of a module that would certainly be adapted to the ice-breaking participants during its implementation. In this context, the participants were leaders and commanders in their respective units, so the module had to be adapted accordingly. In addition, when implementing instructions, they must be clear and firm without losing respect for the participants. Although as facilitators, we have the right to manage the course of these activities. In developing this ice-breaking module, there is an element of competition to encourage healthy challenges and stimulate the ability to find strategies, think practically, and cooperate between groups. Avoid frivolous activities and incorporate elements of strategy, problem-solving, solution-seeking, and leadership simulation packaged with enjoyable activities.

The practical implications of this study can be extended to a broader level in various other military education contexts. Ice breaking techniques are not only applied at the initial stage of education for senior officers,

but are also highly relevant for planned use in formation education, development education, and inter-unit training involving hierarchical structures and high psychological pressure. Based on observations showing increased cohesion and openness among participants, this module can be part of a group dynamics management strategy in every phase of educational transition, especially when there are changes in role status, task environment, or group composition. Implementation on a larger scale can be carried out through standardization of modules according to the needs of each level of education, training of internal facilitators, and pre-test and post-test evaluations to ensure that the effectiveness of the intervention remains measurable. In addition, ice breaking serves not only as an opening activity, but also as a strategic psychological tool that supports the formation of adaptive leadership, effective communication, and mental preparedness in continuing military education.

### **Initial Tension**

Before the activity began, the atmosphere was still somewhat stiff, formal, and cautious. In addition, the participants in the highest level of military education were senior officers who were advancing toward star rank, so they still held authority and maintained their dignity, resulting in initial interactions that seemed closed and an atmosphere that was not yet completely relaxed. This is in line with the research by Dwi and Puspitaningrum [29] that the use of ice breaking can reduce tension, boredom, and drowsiness, so that the atmosphere becomes more relaxed and enthusiastic.

Subject M revealed that the tension that usually arises is in the form of selfishness, non-compliance with rules, and inflexibility. Then, the student officers still carry the burden of their unit, which can cause tension at the beginning of their education. This is in line with Farika's research [29] ice breaking activities are activities carried out by a teacher to create a more relaxed atmosphere or reduce tension between the facilitator and students during lessons. By involving students in interesting activities such as games or physical activities, ice breaking can help overcome awkwardness between facilitators and students, and through these activities, students can increase their self-confidence [29]. This is reinforced by subject M, who stated that if ice breaking activities are carried out optimally, a sense of comfort will be created in a supportive, relaxed, and trusting environment when conducting Sesko TNI education.

Subject "M" revealed that factors that could influence the emergence of initial tension among participants, such as hierarchy and seniority, still remained. In addition, the student officer participants were concerned that their authority would decline. The process of adapting to a new environment, where they were originally commanders in their respective units but upon entering the TNI Staff College education program, their status is the same as that of a student, can be a factor that contributes to tension. The student officer participants also experience cognitive load, as they are concerned about the academic burden of the curriculum they will face in the coming months. This is reinforced by Holmes' research [30] which states that everyone feels anxiety about various things that they consider to be bad. This condition makes it difficult for individuals to focus, causes confusion, prevents them from making the right decisions, and often leads to forgetfulness.

### **Ice breaking module to overcome tension**

Subject M said that the main purpose of conducting an assessment before an ice breaking activity is to map out how ready cadets are to carry out the initial activities of their education. In addition, it ensures that the intervention provided is on target and in line with the needs of the TNI Staff College education program. This is done by breaking the ice at the beginning of the education program when the student officers do not know each other yet. Therefore, the main objective is to break the ice and build group cohesiveness so that they can adjust during the education program. In line with Sunarto's research [15] he agrees that ice breaking serves as a way to overcome situations where participants experience mental blocks. This can create a pleasant, enthusiastic, and exciting learning environment. The principle of ice breaking techniques in learning is to eliminate stiffness, or in other words, this method is used to create a more relaxed atmosphere during the learning process. The goal is to make the activity more relaxed, less tense, and less boring.

Subject M revealed that the main requirement for participants in the early stages of the activity was for them to interact and let go of their job titles or educational backgrounds so that they could be treated equally as students, regardless of their unit background, thereby creating psychological safety. This allowed the student officers to feel secure and more comfortable and open in participating in ice-breaking activities. In addition, there is a need for connection, because even though they come from different units, a sense of trust is needed among their own units. This is in line with Puryana and Andriana [31] that a sense of psychological security arises in relation to the creation of a good working atmosphere, where both aspects are very crucial elements to be applied in an organization. Innovations that are developed and implemented in the workplace play a role in facilitating readiness to acquire knowledge, so that they can subsequently make positive contributions and be willing to take risks in carrying out tasks within the organization.

Robert and Brown [7] Ice breaking has a very important function, especially to refresh participants so that they do not feel bored, tense, or other conditions that are not conducive to the learning process. This is supported by subject M's statement that changes in atmosphere or group dynamics that occur before the activity is carried out should be accompanied by a pre-test and post-test to measure the extent of the program's success after the activity is carried out, followed by a post-test. However, so far, as discussed at the beginning of the question, they tend to be rigid, formal, highly alert, and still in the process of getting acquainted.

In developing this ice-breaking module, there is an element of competition to create a healthy challenge and stimulate the ability to find strategies, think practically, and cooperate between groups. The effective use of ice-breaking can reduce tension, boredom, and drowsiness, creating a more relaxed and enthusiastic atmosphere. The development of ice breaking is not just a matter of changing the atmosphere from tense to relaxed and comfortable. It must be tailored to the characteristics of the needs, such as adapting to military culture. This ensures that training is optimized in accordance with the characteristics of the military environment. By conducting this ice-breaking activity, there is a noticeable change in group dynamics where the cadets are much more relaxed, feel comfortable with other participants, engage in spontaneous two-way communication, and formal boundaries and tension are reduced. Ice breaking plays an important role in creating a pleasant and motivating atmosphere for cadets during learning activities. Therefore, ice breaking can be effective in easing the tension at the beginning of education.

At the end of the ice breaking activity, based on observations made by the facilitator, there was a noticeable change in the group dynamics, with the cadets appearing much more relaxed, feeling comfortable with other participants, communicating spontaneously, and with fewer formal boundaries and less tension. Therefore, the initial objective of this module, which was to reduce tension and lighten the mood by participating in ice breaking activities, was achieved. Ice breaking can be done before the activity begins to break the ice at the start of learning. Ice breaking plays an important role in creating a pleasant and motivating atmosphere for cadets during learning activities. Thus, ice breaking can be effective in breaking the ice and reducing tension at the start of education [7]

In addition, subject M also recommended that the development of this ice breaking module focus more on evaluating the appropriateness of game selection or modifying training games. Time management is necessary for the implementation of activities, and the success of this training activity can run well according to the initial plan because the synergy of the venue organizers is a supporting factor in the achievement of a program. This activity makes greater use of experiential learning, focusing on leadership and strategy, as the cadets are future leaders with higher ranks than before. It is hoped that ice breaking can be carried out at the beginning and end of the training to measure the extent to which cadets have completed their training comfortably and to gauge their enthusiasm at the end of the training.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Training is a simulation of behavior in the form of a game with a number of advantages. The game is designed as a representation of complex life presented in a simpler form. When carrying out tasks in the form of games, participants can directly experience success and failure when completing these challenges. Ice breaking is part of field psychology activities that are very practical and applicable, aiming to help individuals and groups face psychological challenges in real situations. Ice breaking is a warm-up activity that can change a cold, frozen, and stiff atmosphere into a warmer, more fluid, and relaxed one.

Ice breaking consists of activities that involve student officers getting to know each other, which can help reduce initial tension between them, so that they can be more comfortable interacting and working in teams. Training using the ice breaking method is a fun way to showcase innovative and creative elements. Therefore, before conducting training activities, preparation is required, starting from the creation of modules to the evaluation of the implementation of activities. The ice breaking method has proven to be effective in eliminating initial tension among TNI cadets who will undergo several months of education in the future.

This study still has several limitations, including the fact that the researcher was unable to directly observe the participants because the participants in this ice-breaking activity were TNI officers who were undergoing their highest level of military education. There was also limited access, as the researcher did not come from a military background. Due to this limited access, the researcher was unable to directly observe the ice-breaking activity to see how the dynamics of change were unfolding in the field. Another limitation is that the informants in this study were limited in terms of analyzing research needs. Therefore, future studies are expected to involve more informants in order to analyze and obtain a more in-depth picture.

It is recommended that future researchers apply a longitudinal approach to observe in-depth changes in the level of engagement, group cohesiveness, and psychological tension among participants in a more comprehensive manner. A longitudinal design provides researchers with the opportunity to analyze the dynamics of change from the early stages of education to the end, so that the effectiveness of ice breaking is not only assessed based on its short-term impact but also its lasting influence on motivation, readiness to lead, and adaptability. Future research may consider the use of a quasi-experimental design by comparing groups of participants who underwent ice breaking interventions with those who did not, so that the results obtained are more objective regarding the

application of ice breaking methods to reduce tension and improve group dynamics. In this way, it is hoped that future research results can strengthen empirical evidence regarding the application of ice breaking modules in the context of military education in a more comprehensive and structured manner.

Technically, this module can be made a mandatory activity in the first week of training to build a sense of togetherness, align understanding of roles, and reduce initial tensions caused by differences in unit backgrounds and rank levels. Ice-breaking activities can be carried out periodically at the beginning or end of intensive training sessions, especially for material that requires high focus and teamwork to maintain motivation, emotional stability, and group dynamics. As a form of support for the program's continuity, facilitators need to receive special training on ice-breaking facilitation techniques that are appropriate for military culture, so that during implementation, they remain disciplined but are able to create a safe psychological atmosphere. With structured and continuous integration, this module not only serves as an activity to break the ice but also as a strategic element in developing mental resilience, leadership, and teamwork effectiveness in the context of military education.

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