The Effectiveness of Cognitive Engagement-Based English Learning through Ice Breaking Activities on Student Engagement at SMAN 2 Banjit Way Kanan

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Abstract : English language learning at the secondary school level still faces the problem of low student engagement, which leads to suboptimal learning outcomes. This condition indicates that the instructional approaches used have not fully activated students' cognitive engagement. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of English learning based on cognitive engagement through ice breaking activities in improving students' abilities. The research employed a quantitative approach with a one-group pretest-posttest design. The participants consisted of 30 students. The instrument used was an English proficiency test administered as pre-test and post-test. Data were analyzed using normality tests, paired sample t-test, and N-Gain to determine the level of improvement. The results showed a significant improvement in students' abilities, as indicated by the paired sample t-test significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05). In addition, the average N-Gain score of 0.41 was categorized as moderate, indicating that the implemented learning strategy was fairly effective. Therefore, it can be concluded that English learning based on cognitive engagement through ice breaking activities is effective in improving students' English proficiency and promoting more meaningful learning engagement.

Keywords : Cognitive Engagement, Ice Breaking, English Learning, Learning Outcomes, N-Gain

Abstrak *: Pembelajaran bahasa Inggris pada jenjang sekolah menengah masih menghadapi permasalahan rendahnya keterlibatan siswa, yang berdampak pada belum optimalnya hasil belajar. Kondisi ini menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan pembelajaran yang digunakan belum sepenuhnya mampu mengaktifkan keterlibatan kognitif siswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis efektivitas pembelajaran bahasa Inggris berbasis keterlibatan kognitif melalui aktivitas ice breaking dalam meningkatkan kemampuan siswa. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain one-group pretest-posttest. Subjek penelitian terdiri atas 30 siswa. Instrumen penelitian berupa tes kemampuan bahasa Inggris yang diberikan sebelum (pre-test) dan sesudah (post-test) perlakuan. Data dianalisis menggunakan uji normalitas, uji paired sample t-test, dan N-Gain untuk mengetahui tingkat peningkatan kemampuan siswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya peningkatan kemampuan siswa yang signifikan, sebagaimana ditunjukkan oleh nilai signifikansi uji paired sample t-test sebesar 0,000 (< 0,05). Selain itu, nilai rata-*

rata N-Gain sebesar 0,41 termasuk dalam kategori sedang, yang menunjukkan bahwa strategi pembelajaran yang diterapkan cukup efektif. Dengan demikian, dapat disimpulkan bahwa pembelajaran bahasa Inggris berbasis keterlibatan kognitif melalui aktivitas ice breaking efektif dalam meningkatkan kemampuan berbahasa Inggris siswa serta mendorong keterlibatan yang lebih bermakna dalam proses pembelajaran.

Kata kunci : *Keterlibatan Kognitif; Ice Breaking; Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris; Hasil Belajar; N-Gain.*

INTRODUCTION

English language learning in the 21st century holds a highly strategic position in the global education system. English serves not only as a tool for international communication but also as the primary means of accessing rapidly evolving science, technology, and various information sources. In the context of modern education, English language proficiency is one of the essential competencies students must possess to compete globally. Therefore, English learning at the secondary school level is expected to focus not only on mastering language structure but also on developing communication skills, critical thinking, and other 21st-century skills. The success of this learning is greatly influenced by the level of student engagement in the learning process (Bond et al., 2020). Student engagement is a crucial concept in education, reflecting the extent to which students actively participate in learning activities. This engagement encompasses three main dimensions: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. In recent research, cognitive engagement has become a primary focus because it is directly related to the mental processes students undergo in understanding learning material. Cognitive engagement reflects the level of effort and strategies students employ in processing information, including the use of higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Hiver et al., 2021). Students with high cognitive engagement tend to demonstrate deeper understanding and improved critical thinking skills compared to students who are passively engaged.

In English learning, cognitive engagement is crucial because the language learning process requires not only memorizing vocabulary or grammar rules, but also the ability to understand, interpret, and use language in various communication contexts. Furthermore, student engagement in English learning is also heavily influenced by emotional factors. Many students experience anxiety or a lack of confidence in using a foreign language, which can ultimately hinder their participation in learning. Research by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2019) shows that a positive and enjoyable learning environment can increase student confidence and reduce anxiety in learning a foreign language.

To create a conducive learning environment and support student engagement, innovative and interactive learning strategies are needed. One strategy that can be used is icebreaker activities. Icebreakers are activities aimed at relaxing the classroom atmosphere, increasing student attention, and fostering positive social interactions among students. These activities can take the form of language games, quizzes, light discussions, or other communicative activities that actively engage students. The use of icebreakers in English learning serves not only as a distraction but also as a means to increase student engagement, both cognitively and emotionally. Research shows that interactive learning strategies that actively engage students can significantly improve the quality of learning. Martin and Bolliger (2018) stated that activities involving interaction between students and teachers and between students can increase participation and motivation to learn. This suggests that active and communicative learning is more effective in increasing student engagement than passive learning. However, various studies indicate that the level of student engagement in learning remains a significant challenge. A report from the OECD (2021) indicates that approximately 30% to 40% of students in various countries experience disengagement in the learning process. This condition is characterized by low student participation, lack of attention to learning materials, and minimal motivation to learn. This indicates that there is still a gap between the ideal learning conditions and the reality on the ground.

Other research also shows that many students do not demonstrate optimal cognitive engagement in learning. Hiver et al. (2021) explain that most students are still engaged at a surface level, where they simply follow the lesson without truly understanding the material in depth. This condition certainly impacts low learning outcomes and the underdevelopment of students' critical thinking skills. In the context of English language learning, the problem of student engagement becomes even more complex. Research by Oga-Baldwin (2019) shows that student motivation and engagement in language learning are heavily influenced by the teaching methods used by teachers. Methods that are less varied and uninteresting can cause students to become passive and lose interest in learning. Furthermore, the use of teacher-centered learning methods is also a contributing factor to low student engagement. Lecture-dominated learning tends to leave students as mere recipients of information without the opportunity to actively participate. However, active student engagement is a key factor in creating meaningful learning. Research by Bond et al. (2020) shows that student engagement is significantly related to learning outcomes and overall learning quality. On the other hand, although various innovative learning approaches have been developed, the implementation of approaches that emphasize cognitive engagement remains suboptimal. Much learning still focuses on memorization without engaging students in higher-order thinking processes. Research by Wimpenny (2021) shows that cognitive engagement has a significant impact on improving student learning outcomes and learning quality. Therefore, a learning approach is needed that integrates cognitive engagement with engaging and interactive learning activities. One approach that can be used is cognitive engagement-based learning combined with ice-breaking activities. This approach is expected to create a fun learning atmosphere while encouraging students to think actively and deeply.

However, research specifically examining the effectiveness of cognitive engagement-based English learning through ice-breaking activities on student engagement is still limited, especially at the high school level. Most previous studies have focused on only one aspect, either cognitive engagement or interactive activities, without integrating the two comprehensively. Based on this description, it can be concluded that there is a gap between the ideal learning conditions that require active student engagement and the reality in the field that still shows low student engagement. Therefore, this study is important to conduct to analyze the effectiveness of cognitive engagement-based English learning through ice-breaking activities on student engagement. This research is expected to contribute to the development of more effective and innovative learning strategies, as well as serve as a reference for teachers in increasing student engagement in English learning.

METHODS

This study used a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental method. The quantitative approach was chosen because this study aims to test the effectiveness of a treatment on student engagement through statistically analyzed numerical data. The research design used was a one-group pretest-posttest design, namely a research design involving one group of subjects who were given treatment and measured before and after the treatment was given. Through this design, researchers can determine the changes that occur as a result of the implementation of cognitive engagement-based English learning through ice-breaking activities. Initial measurements were carried out through a pre-test to determine the initial conditions of students, then after being given the treatment, a post-test was conducted to see the changes that occurred. The difference between the pre-test and post-test results was used as a basis for assessing the effectiveness of the treatment given in this study.

The population in this study were all tenth-grade students at SMAN 2 Banjit Way Kanan in the current academic year. This population was selected because students at that level are in the phase of strengthening basic English skills which is very important for developing their communication skills at the next level. The research sample was taken using a purposive sampling technique, namely a sampling technique based on certain considerations relevant to the research objectives. The sample selection was based on the suitability of student characteristics with the research needs and ease of access in conducting the research. The sample used in this study was

one class consisting of approximately 30 students. The class was used as an experimental group that would receive treatment in the form of cognitive engagement-based learning through ice-breaking activities during the research process.

This study involved two main variables: the independent variable and the dependent variable. The independent variable in this study was cognitive engagement-based English learning through ice-breaking activities. This variable was a treatment given to students with the aim of increasing their involvement in the learning process. The learning in question was designed by integrating ice-breaking activities as an initial stimulus or learning interlude aimed at increasing student focus, motivation, and participation. Meanwhile, the dependent variable in this study was student engagement in English learning. Student engagement in question focused on the cognitive aspect reflected in students' ability to understand the material, think actively, and demonstrate participation in the learning process. This variable was measured through test results given before and after the treatment.

Data collection in this study was conducted using a test technique. The test was used as a tool to measure the level of student engagement as reflected in their learning outcomes in English. The instruments used were pre-test and post-test questions designed based on the material taught during the study. The pre-test was administered before the treatment to determine students' initial abilities, while the post-test was administered after the treatment to determine changes that occurred after the implementation of cognitive engagement-based learning through ice-breaking activities. The questions used in both tests were designed with an equivalent level of difficulty so that the results obtained could be compared objectively. In addition, the instruments used were adjusted to the learning indicators so they were able to accurately measure student abilities.

The data obtained in this study were analyzed using quantitative statistical techniques to determine the effectiveness of the treatment. The first step was a normality test to determine whether the data were normally distributed. This test is important for determining the type of statistical analysis to be used next. If the data were normally distributed, the analysis continued with a paired sample t-test to determine whether there was a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. This test was used because the data being compared came from the same group before and after the treatment. Furthermore, to determine the level of improvement in student learning outcomes, an N-Gain calculation was performed. The N-Gain value is used to determine the extent of improvement after the treatment is administered, thus providing an overview of the effectiveness of the applied learning. The results of this analysis were then used as a basis for drawing research conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of this study are presented to examine the differences in students' English language abilities before and after the implementation of *cognitive engagement-based learning through ice-breaking* activities. Data analysis began with descriptive statistics to provide a general overview of the characteristics and distribution of the data, followed by inferential analysis to test the effectiveness of the treatment. The data analyzed consisted of pre-test and post-test scores obtained from 30 students.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Students' English Proficiency

			Statistics	Std. Error
Pre-test of English language proficiency	Mean		60.1667	0.54050
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	59.0612	
		Upper Bound	61.2721	
	5% Trimmed Mean		60.1667	
	Median		60.0000	

			Statistics	Std. Error
Post-test of English language proficiency	Variance		8.764	
	Std. Deviation		2.96047	
	Minimum		55.00	
	Maximum		65.00	
	Range		10.00	
	Interquartile Range		5.25	
	Skewness		-0.003	0.427
	Kurtosis		-1.152	0.833
	Mean		76.4000	0.76804
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	74.8292	
		Upper Bound	77.9708	
	5% Trimmed Mean		76.3519	
	Median		76.0000	
	Variance		17.697	
	Std. Deviation		4.20673	
	Minimum		70.00	
	Maximum		84.00	
	Range		14.00	
	Interquartile Range		7.25	
	Skewness		0.194	0.427
	Kurtosis		-1.101	0.833

Source: Primary data processed using SPSS, 2026.

The results of the descriptive statistical analysis on *the pre-test of English language proficiency* showed that the average score (mean) of students was 60.17 with a standard deviation of 2.96. The minimum score obtained by students was 55.00, while the maximum score was 65.00, so the range of scores obtained was 10.00. The median score was at 60.00, which indicates that the distribution of students' initial abilities was relatively centered on that score. In addition, the skewness value of -0.003 indicates that the data distribution tends to be symmetrical, while the kurtosis value of -1.152 indicates that the data distribution tends to be flatter than a normal distribution. Furthermore, the results of the descriptive statistical analysis on *the post-test of English language proficiency* showed an increase in students' abilities after being given treatment. The average score (mean) increased to 76.40 with a standard deviation of 4.21. The minimum score on the post-test was 70.00 and the maximum score was 84.00, with a range of 14.00. The median value was 76.00, indicating an overall increase in student ability. A skewness value of 0.194 indicates that the data distribution is slightly skewed to the right, but still within the normal range. A kurtosis value of -1.101 indicates that the data distribution tends to be flat.

Based on a 95% confidence interval, the average pre-test score ranged from 59.06 to 61.27, while the average post-test score ranged from 74.83 to 77.97. This interval range indicates a clear difference between the conditions before and after the treatment, indicating an increase in student abilities. Overall, the results of the descriptive analysis indicate that students' English skills improved after the implementation of *cognitive engagement-based learning* through *ice-breaking*

activities. This increase is evident from the increase in the average, median, and minimum and maximum scores in the post-test compared to the pre-test. In addition, the increase in value variation indicated by the standard deviation also indicates that students experienced more diverse developments in their abilities after the treatment was given. Thus, descriptively, it can be concluded that the applied learning had a positive impact on improving students' abilities in learning English.

Next, a normality test was carried out to determine whether the data obtained are normally distributed as a requirement for carrying out parametric statistical analysis.

Table 2. Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov [a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistics	df	Sig.	Statistics	df	Sig.
Pre-test of English language proficiency	0.101	30	0.200*	0.954	30	0.213
Post-test of English language proficiency	0.097	30	0.200*	0.954	30	0.212

Source: Primary data processed using SPSS, 2026.

The results of the normality test show that the significance value (Sig.) for *the pre-test of English language proficiency data* is 0.213, while for the *post-test data* it is 0.212. Both significance values are greater than 0.05, so it can be concluded that the pre-test and post-test data are normally distributed. In addition, the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test also show a significance value of 0.200 for both variables, which indicates that there is no significant deviation in the data distribution. Thus, the data in this study meet the assumption of normality and is suitable for analysis using parametric statistical tests. Next, to determine the level of improvement in students' abilities after the treatment, an analysis was conducted using the N-Gain calculation. This analysis aims to determine the extent of improvement in student learning outcomes after implementing *cognitive engagement-based learning through icebreaking* activities.

Table 3. Results of Student N-Gain Calculations

No	Student Code	Pretest	Posttest	N-Gain	Improvement	% N-Gain
1	S_1	55	70	0.33	Medium	33.00
2	S_2	60	75	0.38	Medium	38.00
3	S_3	58	72	0.33	Medium	33.00
4	S_4	62	78	0.42	Medium	42.00
5	S_5	57	73	0.37	Medium	37.00
6	S_6	59	74	0.37	Medium	37.00
7	S_7	61	77	0.41	Medium	41.00
8	S_8	63	80	0.46	Medium	46.00
9	S_9	56	71	0.34	Medium	34.00
10	S_10	64	82	0.50	Medium	50.00
11	S_11	58	74	0.38	Medium	38.00
12	S_12	60	76	0.40	Medium	40.00
13	S_13	57	72	0.35	Medium	35.00

No	Student Code	Pretest	Posttest	N-Gain	Improvement	% N-Gain
14	S_14	65	83	0.51	Medium	51.00
15	S_15	62	79	0.45	Medium	45.00
16	S_16	59	75	0.39	Medium	39.00
17	S_17	61	78	0.44	Medium	44.00
18	S_18	63	81	0.49	Medium	49.00
19	S_19	56	70	0.32	Medium	32.00
20	S_20	64	82	0.50	Medium	50.00
21	S_21	58	73	0.36	Medium	36.00
22	S_22	60	76	0.40	Medium	40.00
23	S_23	57	72	0.35	Medium	35.00
24	S_24	65	84	0.54	Medium	54.00
25	S_25	62	79	0.45	Medium	45.00
26	S_26	59	75	0.39	Medium	39.00
27	S_27	61	77	0.41	Medium	41.00
28	S_28	63	80	0.46	Medium	46.00
29	S_29	56	71	0.34	Medium	34.00
30	S_30	64	83	0.53	Medium	53.00

Source: Primary data processed, 2026.

Based on Table 3, all students experienced improved learning outcomes after receiving the treatment. The N-Gain scores ranged from 0.32 to 0.54. Overall, these scores fall within the moderate category, indicating that the applied learning was able to improve students' abilities quite effectively.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of N-Gain

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Gain	30	0.32	0.54	0.4119	0.06413
Valid N (listwise)	30				

Source: Primary data processed using SPSS, 2026.

Based on Table 4, the average N-Gain value of 0.4119 indicates that student improvement is in the moderate category. The minimum value of 0.32 and the maximum value of 0.54 indicate that the improvement occurred relatively evenly across all students. Thus, it can be concluded that *cognitive engagement-based learning* through *icebreaking activities* has a fairly good level of effectiveness in improving students' English skills. Next, to determine whether there was a significant difference between students' pre-test and post-test scores, a *paired sample t-test was conducted.* This test was used because the data being compared came from the same group, namely students before and after being given the treatment.

Table 5. Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	PRETEST - POSTTEST	-16.23333	1.35655	0.24767	-16.73988	-15.72679	-65.544	29	0.000

Source: Primary data processed using SPSS, 2026.

Based on Table 5, the results of *the paired sample t-test* show that the significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.000 is smaller than 0.05. This indicates that there is a significant difference between students' pre-test and post-test scores. The mean difference value *of* -16.23333 indicates that the post-test score is higher than the pre-test score. This indicates an increase in students' English skills after being given treatment in the form of *cognitive engagement-based learning* through *ice-breaking activities.* In addition, the calculated t-value of -65.544 with a degree of freedom (df) of 29 indicates that the difference that occurs has a very strong level of significance. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a significant influence of the implementation of *cognitive engagement-based learning* through *ice-breaking activities* on students' English skills.

Discussion

Cognitive engagement-based English learning through *ice-breaking activities* has a significant impact on improving students' abilities. However, this finding cannot be understood solely as an increase in grades, but rather as an indication of a transformation in students' cognitive processes during the learning process. In other words, the improvement in learning outcomes as measured by scores is not the ultimate goal, but rather a reflection of the increasing quality of students' mental engagement in interpreting the learning. From a theoretical perspective, *cognitive engagement* refers not merely to students' physical activity but more deeply to how students allocate their cognitive resources to understand the material. This includes the ability to elaborate on information, connect new concepts with prior knowledge, and reflect on the learning process. Thus, the success of learning in this study can be interpreted as success in activating students' higher-order thinking processes, not merely increasing superficial participation.

These findings reinforce the argument that student engagement in English learning is inseparable from the pedagogical strategies employed by teachers. Research by Hasanah et al. (2025) shows that student engagement is influenced by a variety of learning activities, teacher-student interactions, and the use of engaging strategies. However, it should be emphasized that not all engaging activities automatically result in deep cognitive engagement. These activities must be designed to encourage students to think, not simply react. In this context, *icebreaking activities* play a more complex role than simply "icebreakers." Critically analyzed, *icebreaking* in this study functions as a *cognitive trigger,* an initial trigger that activates students' mental readiness to learn. This aligns with the findings of Christyowati and Dewi (2025) who stated that *icebreaking* can improve students' concentration and motivation. However, its primary contribution lies not in increasing motivation alone, but in its ability to shift students' cognitive state from passive to active.

Furthermore, when examined through a social constructivist perspective, *icebreaking activities* can be understood as an interactive space that allows for collaborative knowledge construction. When students engage in interactive and enjoyable activities, they not only receive information but also construct meaning through social interaction. This is reinforced by research by Nurbani et al. (2026), which shows that game-based learning and physical activity can increase student engagement and understanding. Thus, *icebreaking* functions not only as a pedagogical strategy but also as a medium for knowledge construction. Furthermore, the results of this study also indicate that student ability improvement is in the moderate category based on the N-Gain

value. When analyzed critically, this finding actually opens up space for deeper reflection. The moderate category indicates that although learning is effective, there is still potential that has not been fully explored. This can be caused by several factors, such as time constraints, heterogeneity of student abilities, and the level of adaptation to new learning methods. Time constraints, for example, are a significant factor in influencing the depth of students' cognitive engagement. Simanjuntak (2025) emphasized that limited learning duration can hinder in-depth interaction in the learning process. In this context, although *icebreakers* can improve student focus, their effectiveness in fostering deep understanding still depends on how optimally learning time is managed. Furthermore, the results of this study also indicate that *icebreaker activities* contribute to increased student motivation and self-confidence. However, upon further analysis, this increased motivation not only impacts the affective aspect but also has direct implications for cognitive processes. Syajida et al. (2025) stated that a pleasant learning atmosphere can increase student activity and participation. In this context, motivation can be viewed as a prerequisite for deeper cognitive engagement.

Furthermore, the findings of this study can also be linked to the concept of *deep learning,* where students do not simply memorize information but are able to understand and apply knowledge contextually. Appropriately designed *icebreaker activities* can be a bridge to deeper learning, as they are able to connect learning experiences with contexts relevant to students. Furthermore, research by Sofiana et al. (2025) shows that a gamification-based learning approach and interactive activities can significantly improve English language skills. However, the critical point is that success is determined not only by the method, but also by how the method is integrated into a systematic learning design. In this context, *icebreaking activities* should not be viewed as an additional element, but rather as an integral part of the learning strategy. If designed systematically, *icebreaking* can serve as a bridge between the opening activities and the core learning activities, thus creating a coherent and meaningful learning flow. Other findings also emphasize that *icebreaking activities* also contribute to improving students' thinking skills. Wulandari et al. (2025) showed that game-based activities can improve students' critical and logical thinking skills. This suggests that *icebreaking* has the potential to be further developed as a learning strategy that not only increases motivation but also higher-order thinking skills.

Thus, the results of this study not only provide empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of *cognitive engagement-based learning* but also provide broader theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this study reinforces the importance of cognitive engagement as a key factor in learning. Practically, this study shows that *icebreaking activities* can be an effective strategy if designed and integrated appropriately into the learning process. Overall, this study shows that effective learning is not only determined by the method used, but also by the extent to which the method is able to activate students' thinking processes. Thus, the success of *cognitive engagement-based learning* through *icebreaking activities* in this study can be understood as the success in shifting the learning paradigm from passive to active, from superficial to in-depth, and from instructional to transformational.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the success of English learning is determined not only by the delivery of material, but also by the ability of learning strategies to meaningfully activate students' thinking processes. A *cognitive engagement-based approach* combined with *ice-breaking activities* demonstrates that students' mental engagement can be built through learning designs that integrate emotional, social, and cognitive aspects. The main implication of this finding lies in the shift in learning paradigm, from one oriented toward information delivery to one that emphasizes the active construction of knowledge. In this context, *ice-breaking* is no longer positioned as a supplementary activity, but rather as a strategic part of creating learning conditions that support higher-order thinking processes.

Furthermore, this study also emphasizes that learning effectiveness is contextual, meaning that the success of a strategy is strongly influenced by how it is designed, integrated, and tailored to the characteristics of the learners. Therefore, learning innovation cannot simply focus on method

variations but must also be directed at deepening the quality of student engagement in learning. Therefore, the contribution of this study lies not only in its practical aspects as an alternative learning strategy, but also in strengthening the conceptual understanding that effective learning is learning that can transform the way students learn, think, and interpret their learning experiences.

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